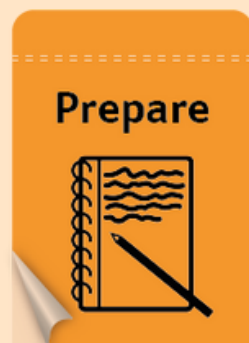


Explore



Decide



Prepare



Apply



Develop



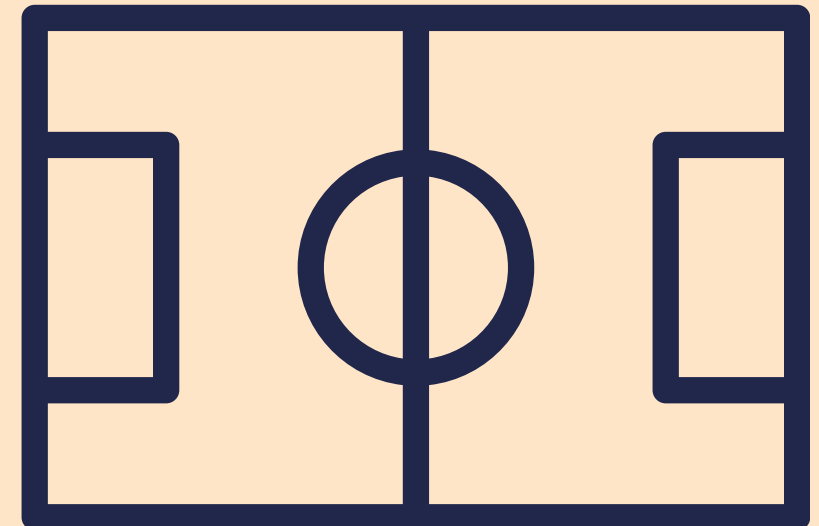
Reflection  
and  
Resilience

# Level Playing Field

A Self-help Tool

## Introduction

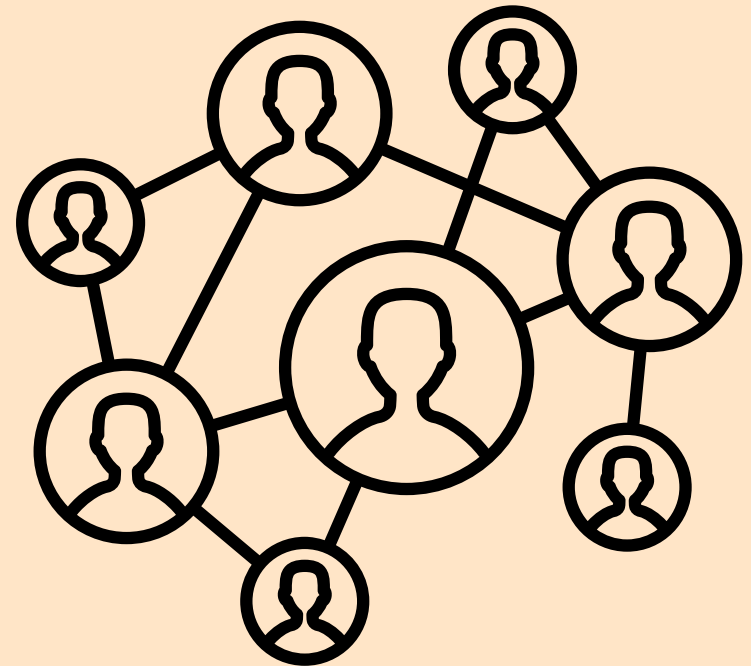
This exercise will help you identify the support you can use to fight discrimination and inequality. It uses the analogy of a sports pitch, or playing field, to think about factors that affect us in the 'game of life'. Regrettably, life isn't a 'level playing field'. Sometimes, the odds seem stacked against us. However, we believe that confronting inequality is a collective endeavour, and that by drawing on support you can go a long way to levelling things up.



The exercise uses the ideas of the French sociologist Bourdieu, who wrote about the way that power is unequally distributed. Bourdieu argued that society consists of different spaces (like the education system, or a profession) where action takes place. He used the term 'habitus' for this sort of space.

We can think of these spaces as being like a sports pitch where action takes place according to certain rules and conventions. Bourdieu argues that a person's ability to 'win' depends upon the amount and type of resources available to them (their 'capital' – that is, the assets at their disposal), and their ability to use the rules in their favour. He identified two sorts of resource:

- 'Cultural capital' – the things a person knows how to do. For instance, the skills from a degree; knowing how to use social media, or the ability to speak another language. This knowledge might be gained informally, as well as through formal education.
- 'Social capital' – the people we know and the networks we belong to, as well as the connections and help they bring.



## This tool is designed to...

- Help you identify and mobilise the support available to you through your personal networks and wider society.
- Help you acknowledge the challenges and be courageous in tackling them.
- Help you confront inequality and discrimination.

## Consider using this tool if you...

- Feel discrimination or inequality could affect your career plans.
- Feel that society undervalues who you are and what you can do.
- Need to be courageous and determined to claim your rights.

## How to use this tool

### Identify the challenges you face

These challenges might be overt discrimination, prejudice, misunderstanding, or unequal access to opportunities. These might arise from any part of society.

You don't need to spend too long on this. However, it is an important step. Often, we can be tempted to pretend that problems in society don't exist. However, to confront inequality and bring about change, we need to be honest.

In the 'Social Barriers' box, jot down any obstacles, barriers or inequality that could hold you back. This is the part of the 'playing field' which is stacked unfairly against you. We've drawn this as a smaller box, because we believe that while the problems are real and not to be minimised, in comparison to the resources you can mobilise, these problems are smaller than they might appear.

## 2 Identify all the sources of support you can draw on

**These are resources which can help move things in your favour. Include:**

- Existing resources – things you already have used (e.g. the Careers Service).
- Future resources – things you could use in the future (e.g. a work experience scheme for graduates).

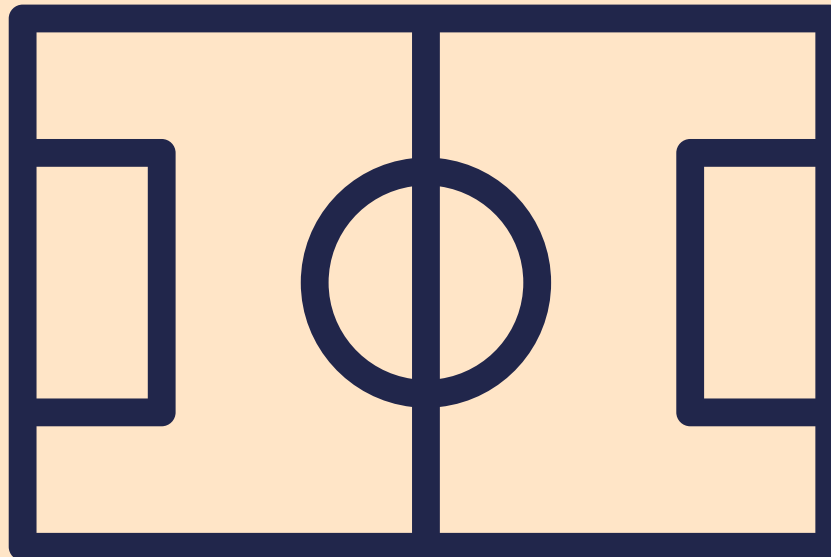
**In the Personal Resources box, note:**

- The names of people in your family or friendship group, who are particularly supportive and good at encouraging you.
- The things that your friends, immediate and wider family know that can help you.
- The contacts that your friends, immediate and wider family have that can help you.
- The type of encouragement and support available from your friends, immediate and wider family and how this can help you.
- The collective strength from your community and any organisations you belong to.
- The things you know how to do and the contacts you have made at University.
- The things you believe in: your identity, values and experiences that make you strong.
- The feelings you have about injustice, because these can fuel your determination.
- The goals you have that will take you to where you want to get to.

**In the Societal Resources box, note:**

- Legislation that gives you rights to resist discrimination.
- Government schemes (UK-wide, local or by the devolved nations) that can help you.
- Employers committed to relevant equal opportunities.
- Initiatives run by pressure groups, charities and employers to combat inequality (for example, diversity work experience programmes).
- Support available from the University.
- Inspiring examples of others who have overcome injustice (including This Student Can videos).

**N.B. You can find a list of relevant schemes and information about your legal rights on our Equalities page: [hud.ac/r8p](http://hud.ac/r8p)**



# Our 'Levelled-up Playing Field'

**Your Personal Resources**

**Social Barriers**

**Your Societal Resources**

The image above shows our 'playing field,' which, rather than being split 50/50, is weighted in your favour.

# Pause, Reflect, Act

- What do you notice about the number of resources available to support you?
- How does that support make you feel?
- What resources are available to you that you haven't tapped into so far?
- Which resources are likely to be most helpful?
- What conversations do you need to have, or actions to take, to mobilise these in your favour?
- Which of these are priorities for you to follow up?
- What actions do you need to take now to build on this exercise?
- Who could help you with this?
- Are there other, related Self-help Tools you'd like to use as well?

**NB: Because everyone is different, no one solution is a magic bullet, so please look at our other Self-help Tools as well, and use the ones that work best for you.**



# References and Resources

Habitus (2022). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habitus\\_\(sociology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habitus_(sociology)). (Accessed, 08/01/2023).

Stanbury, D. (2022). Huddersfield Model of Action in Context. Unpublished paper. University of Huddersfield Careers & Employability Service.

D. Stanbury, Jan, 2023



If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our Self-help Tools with your students, we would love to hear from you and share good practice. We would ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy, and acknowledge the other sources we have used. Thank you.