

Dietetics TODAY

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NOVEMBER 2026

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Handing over the baton – Join the Learning Disabilities Sub-Group Committee

Rachael Colley and **Daisy So** discuss their experiences of being on the BDA Learning Disabilities Sub-Group committee and encourage more members to get involved

The Learning Disabilities Sub-Group is a welcoming community of dietitians who want to improve nutrition and reduce health inequalities for people with learning disabilities. Through webinars, discussion forums, professional resources and activities such as Learning Disability Week, the committee brings people together to share knowledge, support colleagues and strengthen person-centred dietetic care.

What follows is a conversation between Rachael Colley, who is ready to pass on the baton, and Daisy So, whose journey is just beginning. Perhaps you could be the next person to carry it forward.

Daisy: Why did you join the committee, and what has being part of it meant to you?

Rachael: I joined initially as an ordinary member – although I always challenged the word 'ordinary' with a smile – and later became education officer. Having worked in the learning disabilities arena since 2004, I know that working as a dietitian in this field can feel lonely at a local level. I also know that, through the work of the committee, no dietitian should have to feel that way in the future.

D Why has remote working been so significant for you?

R As a dietitian living with MS, remote working has been a game changer for me. Remote participation, now considered the norm, enables people to contribute nationally in ways that might previously have been difficult or impossible – whether because of geography, family commitments or health challenges.

For me, it has meant being able to contribute to training, resources and wider professional discussions at a time when travelling to meetings was no longer possible. Most importantly, it has allowed me to continue contributing – and to feel that my experience and learning are heard and valued.

D What have been the highlights for you?

R Being present, albeit remotely, at the sub-group's first official meeting at the BDA was very significant. It felt as though I was receiving the baton – I do love an athletics analogy – from those who had gone before me.

Another highlight was co-presenting the BDA courses delivered remotely in 2024: Advanced Dietetics in Learning Disabilities and Assessing Capacity Regarding Diet, Weight and Health. Being able to share knowledge and experience with dietitians across the UK felt an important part of what the sub-group is there to do.

Then there is the satisfaction of seeing months of work come to fruition in published resources and knowing that I played a part. *Eating Well for People with Learning Disabilities*, produced by the Caroline Walker Trust, won the 2026 Complete Nutrition Award for Nutrition Resource of the Year.

Carly Atkinson RD, editor of the second edition, described the publication as testament to the dedication of "a small group of very passionate people who want better for the people they support". That last sentence moved me. It is powerful – and so true.

R What prompted you to find out about the committee?

D My previous degree in psychology gave me a lasting interest in mental health, reducing health inequalities and challenging stigma. As a dietetic assistant in Hong Kong, I also had some contact with people with learning disabilities and saw dietitians make reasonable adjustments to support them.

R How has it been so far, and how have you contributed?

D I joined feeling excited, but also a little nervous because I am still early in my dietetic journey. I need not have worried. People have been warm, kind and patient, generously answering questions, sharing resources and guiding me in the right direction.

Initially, I was happy to observe how the committee worked. Gradually, I began taking small steps, including helping to promote webinars, the members' newsletter and the committee itself.

I have also realised that being new can be a strength. A fresh pair of eyes can raise useful questions about where students or less experienced practitioners might look for support and resources.

R What would you say to someone thinking of joining the committee?

D Please get in touch. You do not need to wait until you feel completely 'ready'. Experience and expertise are valuable, but so are curiosity, enthusiasm, fresh perspectives and a willingness to contribute.

Wherever you are in your career, your contribution can matter.

The Learning Disabilities Sub-Group is currently recruiting for five roles: Events Officer, Education Officer and Website Editor for the regular term, plus Vice Chair and Secretary as 12-month posts. If you think you could contribute like Rachael and Daisy, email **learningdisabilities@bda.uk.com**



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Daisy So is Student Member of the BDA Learning Disabilities Sub-Group and a student dietitian at Manchester Metropolitan University.