

(THIS SCHEME AND ASSOCIATED ACTION PLAN IS IN DRAFT FORMAT PENDING FORMAL APPROVAL OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE.)

DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME (2009 – 2012)

Executive Summary

On the 4th December 2006, Loughborough University published its first Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan, which outlined the steps that the University aimed to take to promote equality for its disabled students, staff and visitors. The University has regularly reviewed its progress against this Scheme, by providing reports and updates to the Equality & Diversity Sub-Committee and the Human Resources Committee.

In line with legislative requirements, the University has reviewed the existing Disability Equality Scheme and produced a revised document with an updated action plan for the next three years, to reflect the outcome of the review and associated consultation.

The first section of this document provides information on related legislation and the duty to promote disability equality. The second section provides a review of current University policies, support and initiatives, relating to disability, including changes made as a result of the first disability equality scheme. The third section details the steps taken to produce this updated disability equality scheme, including the involvement of disabled people in determining the future priorities. The final section is the action plan for the period 2009 – 2012 (Appendix A)

It is anticipated that the Disability Equality Scheme, will be incorporated into a single equality scheme, covering several strands on equality, during 2010, following the likely implementation of a new Equality Act.

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Section 1 Context

1.1 Legislation

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (amended 2005) was introduced to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people and ensure that they are not discriminated in employment and the provision of services. This Act was amended in 2005, to place a further duty on all public bodies, including universities, to promote disability equality.

Public bodies are required to publish a Disability Equality Scheme to show how they intend to fulfil their general duty and specific duties. As part of this process, the organisation must ensure that people with disabilities are involved in the production of the scheme, and remain involved throughout its implementation.

Public bodies should report annually on: the steps taken in the action plan, the results of their information gathering and how this information has been used.

1.2 Duty to Promote Disability

The overarching aim of the duty to promote disability equality, places an obligation on Loughborough University, in all its activities, (e.g. as an employer, provider of services, educator, research body, purchaser and active member of the community) to have due regard to the following:

- Promotion of equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons

- The elimination of unlawful discrimination
- The elimination of harassment of disabled persons, that is related to their disabilities
- Promotion of positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- Encouraging participation by disabled persons in public life; and
- Taking steps to account for disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons.

1.3 An introduction to Loughborough

Loughborough University is a single site campus with a population of some 16,500 students, and approximately 3,200 substantive staff. The University has committed to providing “a fair, supportive and cohesive environment that promotes equality of opportunity for staff and students and values diversity”¹.

The University recognises that the promotion of equality of opportunity for disabled people is crucial in influencing the economic and social development of individuals, businesses, professions and communities. In its Strategic Plan ‘Towards 2016’, the University commits to undertaking this promotion in all of its activities.

Since the launch of the first Disability Equality Scheme in 2006, the University has made progress in promoting equality for disabled people. In autumn 2008, the University undertook its first staff survey, the results of which were very encouraging, showing a high level of staff satisfaction. In 4 out of 5 equalities questions, the University received more positive indicators than all other comparator institutions.

The Labour Force Survey, January to March 2009, suggests that 1 in 5 people of working age has a disability and that 2% of the working age UK population becomes disabled every year. One in five disabled people in the UK are unemployed, but want to work, compared to one in fifteen of non-disabled.

On 1st November 2009, Loughborough University employed 3203 staff, of whom 47 had declared a disability. This equates to 1.4% of staff but the number is significantly lower than the percentage respondents to the staff survey who declared themselves disabled (3%). The University is undertaking work to understand the differences in these figures.

This revised scheme and the associated action plan will set out the priorities for the next 3 years in promoting equal opportunity for disabled people. Progress against the action plan will be monitored regularly and reported annually through the Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee to the Human Resources Committee.

¹ “Towards 2016”: The Strategic Plan

Section 2 – Current Situation

2.1 Staff

Since the launch of the Disability Equality Scheme in 2006, the University has continued its efforts to promote disability equality. In the 2008 staff survey, which had an overall response rate of approximately 65%, 96% of all respondents felt that the University respected people who were disabled and not disabled equally.

The University has a formal Equality and Diversity Sub Committee, which reports directly into the University's Human Resources Committee. This Committee's broad function is to support the University in complying with its statutory responsibilities and developing best practice. The Committee is consulted about proposed changes to policy and receives reports on HR activity, such as the Reward Review process, to identify areas where equality concerns exist and improvements can be made.

The University aims to embed equality of opportunity for disabled people throughout the organisation. To help achieve this aim, all current staff have undertaken Respecting Diversity training and this training is mandatory for all new staff.

A staff support group for Disability has been formed. This provides disabled staff, as well as those with responsibility for the care of disabled dependents, with a forum to discuss issues that affect them and to report any concerns to the Equality and Diversity Sub Committee. New policies and procedures are sent to this group for consultation, before being considered by the Equality and Diversity Sub Committee.

The University remains committed to the 'Two Ticks' scheme (Positive About Disabled) managed through Job Centre Plus and has incorporated this into the Recruitment and Selection training. Under this scheme, all disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria for a vacancy, are guaranteed an interview.

The University has actively offered work placement opportunities to students from the RNIB College, with which it has close links, to help them to overcome any barriers they may experience when seeking employment. This has also helped to promote a more inclusive culture within the University. *Imago*, the hospitality section of the University, has been awarded the RNIB's Employer of the Year, following work in this area.

Disability Co-ordinators have been identified in each Department and they are responsible for disseminating best practise. These Co-ordinators are responsible for working with Heads of Departments to develop action plans to promote disability and eliminate discrimination.

The University's Occupational Health Service has assessed over 400 staff in the past year and where required, has made recommendations for

adjustments to enable staff to contribute effectively in their roles, the vast majority of which have been accommodated.

Our intention is that all of our employment policies recognise and incorporate the diverse needs of the disabled population, recognising the variety of different impairments that exist. To assist in this process, a procedure for conducting equality impact assessments has been devised and training delivered. All new policies will undergo an impact assessment, before implementation, to eradicate direct or indirect discrimination. Work is underway to undertake impact assessments for all existing policies and procedures.

The University has embarked on an ambitious building programme, with the creation of new buildings and renovations of existing sites. The Estates strategy is driven by accessibility and inclusive design principles as well as cost.

The University has commissioned a Disability Discrimination Act audit of the Campus and in October 2009, the report was received, which identified the changes that need to be made for the University to be compliant with the Act. Some accessibility issues have already been addressed as part of this programme, including the installation of hearing loops in the University Council Chamber, automatic doors in the Haselgrave Building and the creation of a lift in Administration Building I.

There is still further work needed on the University Campus, however, and while this is progressed, efforts are being made to limit the impact of the inaccessibility of areas of campus. For example, the production of a map which provides the best routes to avoid obstacles for people with physical disabilities.

Given the above, the overall priorities for the next 3 years, in relation to staff, are:

- To create confidence in the accuracy of the data held about staff with disability (using the DDA definition)
- To continue to develop existing buildings to comply with the DDA
- To impact assess existing policies and procedures
- To expand work experience opportunities for disabled people
- To benchmark progress re the above and associated issues.

2.2 Students

The Disability and Additional Needs Service (DANS) takes a lead in providing support, advice and guidance to disabled students and to staff working with disabled students. The service works collaboratively with other areas, based within Student Services, to ensure a holistic approach to support.

Since 2006, DANS has seen a marked increase in the number of disabled students accessing the service for support. The table below shows the

number of students accessing DANS by academic year and by disability (following UCAS disability codes).

UCAS Disability Code	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
1. Specific Learning Difficulty	775	859	767
2. Blind/ partially sighted	20	26	27
3. Deaf/ hard of hearing	18	18	27
4. Wheelchair user/ mobility difficulty	19	17	18
5. Autistic Spectrum Disorder/ Aspergers Syndrome	5	8	19
6. Mental Health Difficulties	257	343	248
7. Unseen disability (e.g. diabetes/ epilepsy)	101	106	119
8. Multiple Disabilities	87	63	174
9. Not listed above	97	119	119
Total	1379	1559	1518

As can be seen above, there has been an increase in the number of students accessing DANS since 2006, with a notable increase in the number of students with multiple disabilities. This would suggest that increasing numbers of students with complex needs are accessing the University. This is to be welcomed and is a positive indication of the success of the opening up of opportunities. However, it also suggests that further attention needs to be paid to this area in developing services for the future.

A wide range of services is available to support disabled students at Loughborough University, ranging from DANS, to the University Counselling Service, the Medical Centre and the Student Support Centre.

In addition to the structured support, each academic and service department has a nominated Departmental Disability Co-ordinator (DDC), who acts as a point of contact for disabled students and who can provide first line support. The role of the DDC has become increasingly important as the numbers of disabled students have increased. In recognition of this, the scope and nature of the role is being reconsidered at present, to ensure DDCs are supported appropriately in the valuable function they perform.

Until 2006, data on the outcomes for disabled students at university was collated and analysed. Data was analysed in two categories, i.e. for undergraduates and postgraduates; progression and degree class result. Data from the period 1999-2006 demonstrates that disabled undergraduates completed their courses at a broadly similar rate to their non-disabled peers. Withdrawal rates for disabled undergraduates were, however, higher than those for non-disabled students.

Postgraduate disabled students were typically more successful than their non-disabled counterparts over this period, with both completion and withdrawal rates more favourable for disabled postgraduates.

As far as degree outcome is concerned, it is possible to observe a marked 'bunching' of disabled undergraduates in the higher and lower second classes. This is more pronounced than amongst non-disabled students. Although the collation of these statistics has been discontinued, they seem to provide valuable indicators of the performance of disabled students and could act as measures of the successfulness of disability equality actions. For this reason, they will be reinstated and will be used as performance indicators in relation to the Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan.

The University is committed to ensuring that services are designed with full recognition of the diversity of disabled and non disabled people who might wish to make use of them and the need for flexibility to ensure satisfactory access and outcomes for all groups.

Given the points outlined above, the priorities for the next 3-year action plan, in relation to students, are summarised below:

- Ensure that appropriate and robust services and procedures are in place to support disabled students, particularly students with multiple disabilities and complex needs.
- Ensure the role of the DDCs is appropriately supported and developed.
- Take steps to reduce the withdrawal rates for disabled students.
- Take steps to address the 'bunching' of disabled students in degree classification.

Section 3 – Consultation

3.1 Aims of Consultation

The University has consulted widely in reviewing the Disability Equality Scheme, in order to gather information on the following:

- 1) Awareness of the Disability Equality Scheme amongst disabled people and Department Co-ordinators
- 2) Views on changes implemented in the past 3 years
- 3) Priority areas for action for the next 3 year period

3.2 Consultation Process

The following staff and students were invited to comment on the scheme:

- All staff with a declared disability
- All students with a declared disability

- All members of the Staff Group: Disability
- All Departmental Disability Co-ordinators (staff and student)
- All Departmental Equality and Diversity Co-ordinators
- The recognised trade unions (UCU, UNISON and UNITE)

Individuals were provided with the option of responding to the consultation in writing or by attending scheduled focus groups. The majority of respondents elected to provide comments in writing.

3.3 Consultation Outcomes

The responses received from disabled staff and students, indicated that both groups were broadly satisfied with the support they have received from the University and the positive attitude of the University towards disability. The responses indicate that the University is however felt to be more pro-active in promoting equality of opportunity for disabled students than disabled staff.

The following were highlighted as positive aspects by students:

- Disability services are accessible, responsive and staffed with knowledgeable professionals.
- There is an open attitude towards disability and disclosure and this is reflected in the personal contact which students have with staff.
- Information on courses and on services is readily available in accessible formats.

Staff provided the following positive feedback

- Support is provided when requested and adjustments made where possible
- Not all staff felt it necessary to disclose their disability, but those that did, felt that this disclosure did not disadvantage them
- Generally, staff commented that colleagues had been particularly supportive in accommodating any recommendations/adjustments.

There are, however, some issues which need to be addressed in order to continue and extend the positive work already undertaken. The respondents identified the following as priorities for the next three years:

- Improved accessibility of the campus, including academic buildings, halls of residence and routes between facilities.
- The provision of more practical support to help Departments achieve the Action Plan, including a move away from a focus on 'who' to 'how'.
- More support and guidance provided to Departmental Co-ordinators
- The provision and flexibility of alternative assessment arrangements, and in particular the anticipatory application of such approaches.

- Disabled students also felt more could be done by the University to seek their views and input.
These are incorporated into the action plan. (Appendix A)

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