

Introduction

West Suffolk College has followed a rolling programme/action plan which has set objectives for our work towards equality of opportunity for all, staff and learners. Work has progressed in all departments enabling unhindered access to all of our educational provision. Equality of opportunity is an integral part of our Self Assessment Process.

Our duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to promote disability equality involves the publication of our Disability Equality Scheme, which includes an action plan outlining the steps we wish to take so that all our staff and students with disabilities can be assured of equality of opportunity in every respect. Our support for and promotion of disability equality is underpinned by our value statement of RSVP&P (Respect, Support, Value, Praise and Pride.)

We have about 12% of our students who identify themselves, before or during their programme, as having a disability. 10 (1%) of our staff have declared a disability but we are in the process of raising disability equality awareness and encouraging more staff to declare their disabilities. We also recognise that we make effective adjustments within teams and that some staff may feel it is unnecessary to declare their disability.

Current Strengths

- The College was judged to have “outstanding” support for students at the last OFSTED / ALI inspection (May 2006). A significant proportion of this work is support for students with disabilities.
- We have “Excellent” specialist course provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (OFSTED, May 2006)
- We provide a wide range of flexible support to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD).
- We make available a wide range of equipment such as laptops and digital voice recorders and adaptive software such as TextHelp Read & Write to make reasonable adjustments for LLDD.
- Reasonable adjustments such as the provision of readers and/or extra time is made available in a timely manner where needed.
- The College plays a significant role in “Improving Choice” initiatives which aim to give learners with disabilities the same range of choices as other learners. We have included several learners with profound and multiple disabilities on flexible programmes of learning.
- We are represented on a range of partnerships which ensure an appropriate entitlement for all learners regardless of disability. This includes courses delivered by a variety of community-based, Partner Providers which enable and promote access to appropriate educational provision by adults with disabilities and learning difficulties. We are also involved in Eastern regional partnerships with other colleges to develop supported employment and employability provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD).
- Our courses are accessible to learners with mobility difficulties.
- We have application and interview processes which enable learner needs to be identified effectively at the application stage.
- 456 applicants indicating a learning difficulty or disability were contacted by Student Welfare and Guidance in 2008-09. This is an increase of 30% over 2007-08. These numbers have increased steadily year on year for at least the past 5 years.

- The number of our learners receiving additional support continues to grow. In 2008/09 it was 1446, although not all these learners had a significant disability or learning difficulty.
- Senior Managers including the Principal and College Governors attend and guide the Equality & Diversity Board and other related boards and committees.
- All new staff receive briefing on Equality and Diversity and Disability Support as part of their induction.
- Training on issues related to disability equality and inclusive practice in learning is delivered regularly on College Professional Development days.
- Student Welfare and Guidance regularly organise awareness raising events e.g. mental health.
- The College holds the current double tick standard for being Positive About Disabled People.

Mission and Values

The Disability Equality Duty is an integral part of West Suffolk College's Mission and Values. Our published Mission Statement and Values confirm that West Suffolk College is committed to equality of opportunity for all our learners and staff.

Engaging with Disabled People

This means a real and meaningful involvement of disabled learners and staff in assessing the impact of our policies and procedures, accommodation planning, policy making and development.

We do this in many ways already and we are committed to build on these and develop new ways of working over the planned three year life cycle of the scheme. We aim continually to develop new ways to involve disabled staff and learners.

Mechanisms for involvement of people with disabilities include:

- Anonymous questionnaires
- Promoting Staff involvement through WSC Briefs etc.
- Noticeboards and suggestions boxes on the StudentNet and StaffNet
- Using the Student Council & Learner Representatives
- Learner and staff surveys
- Special issue surveys
- LSA, Tutor etc. feedback

Possible further mechanisms for involvement include:

"Disability type" groups

Local specialist groups

Impact Assessments

We are required to conduct Impact Assessments on our policies and practices in support of this duty and the action plan continues to outline the three year timetable.

The College uses the Disability Rights Commission Code of Practice and other sources of best practice as the basis for this work.

There is an ongoing rolling programme of impact assessments. We are committed to developing a means of involving learners and staff with disabilities in meaningful and relevant ways without introducing unnecessary delays or pressure on these stakeholders. We are considering a referral system that includes further opportunities to feed back.

Gathering and Using Data

Data is important to ensure that we are meeting the requirements of this new duty. Data is gathered for staff and learners in a way which enables us to set, monitor and evaluate our actions but which is consistent with the ILR data set.

We endeavour to collect data representing learner/staff experience of College performance regarding disability equality and recognise that new or amended processes for gathering information may have to be established in response to changing national requirements.

Plan summary

- We have an action plan for our Disability Equality Duty and plan to include this in our Single Equality Scheme
- We will continue to develop and will clarify how we gather staff and student data on disability and develop new processes where appropriate.
- We will ensure clear communication, awareness raising and training for all people involved with our educational provision (stakeholders) and that this is done in an appropriately sensitive manner.
- We will impact assess all current processes and policies as they come up for review.
- We will implement further awareness raising to promote positive attitudes to removing barriers to learning for people Mental Health difficulties and other disabilities.
- We will further improve mechanisms to involve disabled staff and students in planning and decision making processes.
- We will keep our risk assessments and in particular Emergency Evacuation procedures carefully monitored and under review.
- We will ensure that all Common Inspection Framework (CIF) safeguarding requirements including the protection of vulnerable adults (POVA) are fully implemented

Three year Action Plan Outline

1. Identify staff who have a disability under the definitions of the Act

How

- Encourage all staff to identify if they have a disability.
- Write a new procedure for this.
- Review and revise recruitment pack.

Who

Human Resources Department

By when

February 2010

2. Ensure disability and support data is collected effectively

How

- Review current procedures.
- Develop the use of SpirALS database to track learners with disabilities and learning difficulties (LLDD) and to integrate with existing College data systems (and in particular the eILP tutorial record system) from application through to completion.

Who

By when

Disability Support, Student Welfare, Advice & Guidance managers, Tutoring & Learning Development team and Management Information System Manager.

April 2010

3. Ensure disability and support data is monitored effectively

How

- Review current procedures.
- Involve learners and staff with disabilities in reviewing, in particular, our Disclosure, Confidentiality and Student Welfare and Advice & Guidance procedures.

Who

Disability Support and Student Welfare, Advice & Guidance Managers, SMT

By when

January 2010 and ongoing

4. Raise awareness of disability issues and promote disability equality e.g. regarding mental health, autistic spectrum disorders.

How

- Provide regular awareness-raising events for learners and staff, using, where possible, community-based organisations.

Who

Student Welfare and Guidance, Disability Support and Professional Development staff

By when

May 2010 and ongoing

5. Continue to promote access issues within the College's Accommodation Strategy to include matters such as access to all teaching areas, suitable evacuation policies etc.

How

- Make suitable provision within new buildings
- Continue to adapt existing buildings as appropriate
- Ensure reports to Corporation Estates Committee to include updates on access issues.

Who

SMT and Governors with reference to stakeholders and people with disabilities

By when

December 2009 and ongoing

6. Continue to monitor, review and develop our risk assessments with particular reference to personal emergency evacuation procedures (PEEPs) but also covering individual risk assessments and activities such as work experience placements, trips and visits etc.

How

- Discuss with Emergency Services officers.
- Consider plans at Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity and Quality committees and boards
- Revise policies and procedures accordingly

Who

Disability Support Manager, Student Welfare and Health & Safety managers, Equality & Diversity Co-ordinator and Governors with reference to stakeholders and people with disabilities

By when

December 2009 and ongoing

7. Ensure safeguarding issues for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities including the protection of vulnerable adults (POVA) receive high priority

How

- Ensure appropriate information relating to CRBs etc is collected from Partner Providers and other partner organisations and is registered with Human Resources
- Revise policies, procedures and contracts accordingly

Who

Disability Support Manager, Head of School of Foundation Studies and Human Resources

By when

December 2009 and ongoing

Publication of the Disability Equality Scheme

This is a public document which is published on the College website and copies will be available in Local Learning Centres.

An annual report will be made to the Corporation and later published alongside the minutes of that meeting, in the above mentioned ways. This report will include the outcome of activities and impact assessments, what has improved and what still needs to be done.

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