

Disability Equality Scheme

Annual Report and Action Plan

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A number of new initiatives, developments and changes have been introduced in 2007 in the light of the University's Disability Equality Scheme and associated Action Plan.
- 1.2 In terms of physical access, the University has made significant progress in respect of its programme of works and special projects. These are aimed at providing reasonable anticipatory adjustments and, also to respond to needs and issues raised by groups and individuals as they arise during the year. A number of other developments, which demonstrate the University's commitment to promoting disability equality and enhancing the experiences of disabled staff and students, are highlighted below.

2. The Student Experience

- 2.1 We have introduced a number of significant changes in 2007, from pre-application stage to careers advice and guidance. Colleagues responsible for marketing and the production of prospectuses, have undertaken staff development on disability awareness and have discussed editorial issues with colleagues involved in disability support. As a result of this, it was agreed, with effect from 2008 prospectuses, to move towards an inclusive-mainstreamed approach, with information relevant to disabled students provided in each section, e.g. information about accommodation for disabled students is now included in the housing pages as opposed to being grouped within a discrete disability-related section. It is also worth noting that in terms of visual representation, Sussex has selected images of students with visible disabilities on the front and back covers of recent prospectuses.
- 2.2 Moving on to the application stage, it is now the case that the vast majority of applicants, both undergraduate and postgraduate, to whom we make an offer are sent information about the disability support that we have available, regardless of whether or not they have declared a disability. We have also reviewed our admissions processes and they are now fully inclusive. No offer of a place is held up pending further information, regardless of the severity of the disability, although applicants declaring a disability are actively encouraged to visit the University before accepting an offer.
- 2.3 We have extended financial support for international students with disabilities and have introduced a mentoring scheme specifically for students with mental health difficulties.
- 2.4 There have been some significant improvements to our sports facilities which will, of course, be of benefit to staff as well as students. Both facilities now have disabled

shower and toilet facilities. A ramp is also available which has improved access to the artificial turf pitch. New fitness equipment installed in September 2007 has increased the range of options for people with disabilities and plans have been confirmed to install two stair lifts in the Sport Centre by March 2008, improving access to the upstairs area and Hall One.

- 2.5 In respect of teaching and learning we have introduced a pilot scheme, whereby a number of academic departments are providing the reasonable adjustments generally recommended for students for SPLDs for all students taking their courses. It is intended to roll this out across the University in 2007/8, thus obviating the need to access information specifically relating to disabled students and to foster a more inclusive approach.
- 2.6 Our assessment practices have also been reviewed and for the first time, we are enabling extensions on assessed coursework for certain categories of disabled students who may have particular difficulties with meeting deadlines.
- 2.7 Looking ahead to the world of work, our Career Development and Employment Centre has developed a new booklet to outline accessibility to the service and the services for students with disabilities. It has also set up an email network for disabled students who wish to hear about schemes and opportunities and, in partnership with a local voluntary sector organisation, produced an audio pack for visually impaired students which won the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services Diversity Award in September 2007.

3. The Staff Experience

- 3.1 At the beginning of December 2006, Human Resources staff were trained on the Disability Equality Duty and the University's DES and Action Plan, and are fully aware of their responsibilities in terms of the positive duty to promote disability equality.
- 3.2 Disability awareness training is a core part of our staff development annual programme, and sessions continue to be well attended. We also offer deaf awareness workshops for academic staff. Our recruitment and selection training has been revised and a new 'blended learning' approach introduced, involving a workshop and web-based learning. The disability equality duty is covered in this.
- 3.3 Equality training was given to members of the RAE 2008 Strategy Group and Vice-Chancellor's Executive Committee, and guidance was issued to staff in accordance with our RAE 2008 Code of Practice, to encourage staff to submit any individual personal circumstances which may have impacted on an individual's research output, including disability.
- 3.4 Equality training has also been given to the new Students' Union Executive. This covered our disability equality duties.

- 3.5 We have started the process of impact assessment in relation to new policies, procedures, plans and processes. So far, this has been limited to Human Resources carrying out the work, but we are about to embark on the training of policy holders/managers across the University in impact assessment. This training will be completed in early 2008.
- 3.6 We have undertaken the preparatory work in order to apply for the two ticks symbol and hope to apply for accreditation within the next six months.
- 3.7 We have improved the monitoring of our job applicants significantly over the last 12 months. We are now in a position to start analysing the data with a view to identifying any areas of concern. Limitations will remain however until the HR database and management information system are replaced which is planned over the lifetime of the Action Plan.
- 3.8 An equal pay review was undertaken on our new pay and grading structure in March 2007. This included an analysis of any pay gap for disabled staff which identified that there was no systematic pattern of low or high pay for disabled staff.
- 3.9 Our IT Services Division has improved our on-line self-reporting facility (Sussex Direct) where staff can record any disabilities.
- 3.10 The University has reviewed its structures for Equality and Diversity and has established an Equality and Diversity Committee of Council for strategic, governance and compliance issues and an Equality and Diversity Forum for consultation and promotion of equality issues across the University.

4. Action Plan

- 4.1 Information on all of the above, and on a range of other improvements to services and facilities, are detailed in the updated Action Plan (Appendix 1, attached).

28 November 2007