

Welcome to the second edition of the Disability Equality Partnership (DEP) Bulletin

This bulletin is intended to inform those working to embed disability issues in all aspects of higher education about relevant activities and events taking place over the next few months. Since the last bulletin in October 2006, the three DEP partners – Equality Challenge Unit, Action on Access and the Higher Education Academy – have achieved a high level of engagement with the sector to improve provision for disabled students through publications, presentations and workshops, the helpdesk and other resources. Further information about this work is outlined here.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England funds the DEP to raise awareness of issues faced by disabled students and staff, to identify and disseminate good practice, and to promote disability equality at all levels within higher education institutions (HEIs). The Council has written to the DEP that it is 'looking forward to continuing to support the DEP in achieving these aims over the forthcoming year'.

This May bulletin extends the range of information in the previous bulletin. The DEP welcomes feedback on the content, and suggestions of other information that would be useful.

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Update from partners

As well as aiming to add value through joint partnership working, described in more detail on pages 9–13, each of the DEP's partners has a current programme of work relating to disabled students, summarised below.

Equality Challenge Unit – promoting equality and diversity

The ECU disability team is approaching its 2007 programme of activities with the aim of reaching senior managers and professional networks in different sections of HEIs. ECU is focusing on the removal of barriers throughout the sector, necessary to implement Disability Equality Schemes and to promote opportunities for disabled students. It hopes to help develop a shared responsibility for making changes happen that is not over-reliant on equality & diversity officers and disability officers.

Engagement with key professional groups, for example those linked to admissions, marketing, finance and careers, learning and teaching and estates, is essential to this process. ECU aims to work with these groups to identify and eliminate discriminatory policies and practices. This process will, crucially, be informed by new initiatives to involve disabled students and national disability organisations in dialogue to identify equality issues and examples of inclusive practice. These strategies will provide the basis for guidance materials and other dissemination mechanisms to be published in autumn 2007.

Higher Education Academy

The focus of work at the Higher Education Academy within the DEP is on the student learning experience, or more specifically, teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment. The Academy is undertaking a programme of work to support the HE sector on these themes.

An extensive programme is planned for 2007, including a conference on '**Developing an inclusive curriculum**'; revised

Disability Legislation: Practical Guidance for Academics; and clearer signposting of disability-related organisations, projects and activities on the website (www.heacademy.ac.uk). The Academy has convened an interest group on inclusion, involving those running large-scale national projects, to enhance dissemination of key messages about inclusion through collaboration. It has also commissioned workshop materials focusing on embedding inclusive practice as a potential tool for HEIs. Finally, it has initiated an intensive **programme of work with HEIs** interested in embedding inclusive policy or practice. The Academy will be researching and disseminating the lessons learned from participating HEIs.

The Higher Education Academy has recently launched the **Widening Participation Research Service** to include a focus on diversity. There are a number of directories: **organisation directory**, **practice directory**, **reference directory** and **research directory**, which you can search for material specific to disability, or on generic diversity or widening participation.

Higher Education Academy Subject Centres – A Brief Guide

The Higher Education Academy comprises 24 Subject Centres providing discipline-based support to individual academics, subject departments and communities of practice. The Subject Centres are hosted by HEIs, in a mix of single-subject and multidisciplinary centres. Many Subject Centres have provided or commissioned discipline-specific information and resources on disability. Many of them engage with their community and act as broker and collaborator with practitioners and innovators on disability issues in response to demand in a subject area.

To find out more about activity in your discipline, please visit the relevant Subject Centre website – accessible through a drop-down list on the Academy’s home page, www.heacademy.ac.uk. Alternatively, contact Academy York to be put in touch with the centre for your discipline area: email: inclusion@heacademy.ac.uk

Action on Access

AonA aims to embed disability into the widening participation agenda, and continues to work within its team and within the sector to promote this concept. Work with institutions in 2007 is targeted at groups of staff such as admissions and marketing units. Action on Access will be attending the national conferences of the Higher Education Liaison Officers' Association (HELOA) and the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC), among others, and working with groups of staff to raise awareness of disabled learners.

Aimhigher Partnerships (see page 5) have been proactive in developing disability-related projects, and aim to draw together examples of good practice and disseminate initiatives across the sector through joint working with institutions. AonA organises a programme of events each year into which they seek to embed disability wherever appropriate. It is also important to provide disability-specific events, and AonA has organised regional forums to bring together widening participation and disability staff in the sector. It also plans to hold a national event later in 2007 to bring together practitioners from all widening participation initiatives.

As a national team, AonA is trying to spread the message that disability is an important part of widening participation work to as many stakeholders as possible. The ***Rough Guide to Disability for Widening Participation Practitioners*** has been distributed to all widening participation offices in HEIs and relevant organisations, and work is continuing on a toolkit/pack that will be sent to special educational needs coordinators, Connexions staff and other information, advice and guidance workers.

The ***Disability Resources Directory*** continues to be the most visited section of the website, and AonA is working with Library Services at Edge Hill over the next year to provide the sector with open access to resources through inter-library loans and digitisation of publications.

Aimhigher Partnerships – A Brief Guide

The government funded the Aimhigher initiative in order to meet the objective to increase participation in higher education by 18–30-year-olds to 50% by 2010. The Disability Rights Commission estimates that disabled learners are only 40% as likely to enter HE as their non-disabled peers, so it is important that Aimhigher supports this group of learners.

Each geographical region and area has a team, often based within HEIs, to implement a plan of action. Current plans (2006/08) contain statements regarding widening participation and disabled learners. Many regions have produced resources specifically for disabled learners, and have reviewed their activities to ensure they are accessible. There are also activities specially designed for disabled learners, such as mentoring schemes and summer schools – some areas even have disabled learners' development officers. To learn more about activity in your area, please contact Mike Wray at Action on Access, or your regional team. Contact details are available on the [Action on Access](#) website and the [Aimhigher Practitioners'](#) website.

Web resources

Most disability-related resources on the [Action on Access](#) website can be navigated from Areas of Work → Disability on the left-hand side of the home page. This section contains the [resources directory](#), [information about past projects](#), and the [checklists to inclusion](#). A number of information sources are also searched regularly for disability-related [news](#) and [events](#): Information → Resources on the left-hand side of the home page.

The Action on Access website now contains resources previously on the National Disability Team's website. Any links to the old NDT

website should be updated with the current links to www.actiononaccess.org. Recently updated information includes the '**Issues and Barriers**' identified from the widening participation and disability forums as well as a number of entries in the **resources directory**.

Helpdesk

The DEP answers questions relating to higher education and disability through its **helpdesk**. To ask a question, email: help@actiononaccess.org, phone: 01695 650 870, textphone: 01695 650 874 or fax: 01695 585 098. Your query will be logged and sent on to one of the three partner organisations.

All three partners are currently working on developing frequently asked questions relating to their areas of expertise. There are a significant number already available online in the **FAQs section** of the Action on Access website (Information → Helpdesk → FAQs), and you may be able to find what you are looking for there.

FAQ Examples

There has been a lot of disability legislation in the last few years and I am confused about the law that now applies to universities and colleges.

It is possible to divide current disability legislation into two types:

- that which gives individual staff, students and visitors to your institution the right not to be discriminated against or harassed, and which therefore means that HEIs must prevent situations of discrimination or harassment from arising; and
- more positively framed legislation which does not give new rights to individual disabled people, but which places more proactive duties upon HEIs and other public bodies, such as the duty to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.

The first type of legislation is found in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995. Different parts of the DDA protect different groups of disabled people. Part 2 protects disabled employees, and Part 4 protects disabled students.

The second category of legislation came into force in 2006 and is known as the Disability Equality Duty (DED), or 'public sector'/ 'positive' duty on disability. During 2006 HEIs prepared their institutions' Disability Equality Schemes (known as DES, or Schemes) which had to be published by 4 December 2006. These include detailed action plans setting out what HEIs intend to do over the next 3 years to meet the DED. Read more about **disability legislation** on ECU's dedicated web pages.

How do you apply competence standards on laboratory-based science courses for blind students where observation skills might be required?

With reference to the Disability Rights Commission's Post-16 Code of Practice, there are guidelines for drafting competence standards that protect disabled students from discrimination. Competence standards must not be drafted in ways which directly discriminate, so to expect students to only 'observe visually' would be unlawful. It may be helpful to make it clear that observation can be done through a third party. Observation should be one of many learning outcomes and not a major part of any given module.

The Higher Education Academy Physical Sciences subject centre has produced an '**Accessibility in the Curriculum**' toolkit, covering ways to support disabled students in the laboratory.

Is there a list of impairments that institutions can use when deciding who is covered by the legislation?

No. However, in order for a student to be protected by the DDA they need to meet the definition of disability set out in section one of the Act. A disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. It will not always be clear to an institution whether or not a student meets this definition of disability and ultimately only a court can make the decision.

Further guidance on the definition is available from the Disability Rights Commission.

Statistics update

Statistical tables from data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) have recently been updated on the **Action on Access** website. Information is available for a number of variables including impairment, gender and subject studied. New tables have been added recently showing retention data, socio-economic class and geographic mobility.

Equality Challenge Unit is in dialogue with HESA about changes to the range of disability data gathered through HESA's staff and student records, which are returned by HEIs annually. ECU has proposed that HESA adopt the Disability Rights Commission's suggested data categories, which can be found in its publication **Guidance on Gathering and Analysing Evidence to Inform Action**.

HESA is currently considering this proposal, initially in relation to the staff record. We hope that, if adopted, the DRC's range of questions will encourage more staff to disclose a disability, impairment or health condition. This, in turn, should have a positive impact on disabled students in HEIs.

Work with HEIs

Higher Education Academy

The Higher Education Academy has recently launched a new programme of work for HE institutions across the UK to support them in embedding inclusive policies and practice. HEIs have been invited to participate by submitting a proposal by 18 May 2007, outlining an aspect of inclusive policy and practice that they wish to work on. They will come together as teams, to include students and staff in different roles, to participate in four events over 14-month period (one of which will be residential).

There will be an opportunity to work with specialist organisations and other HEIs, as an individual and as a team, to identify issues and solutions, plan ahead, and reflect on their changing practice. Participating HEIs have been asked to commit to sharing their experiences during the process in order for other HEIs to learn about the challenges and ways of embedding inclusive practice. For **further information** about the programme, please visit the Higher Education Academy's website or contact the Academy directly.

Action on Access

Forums and Events

- A further four widening participation and disability forums will be delivered during May in London, North East, South East and West Midlands. They aim to bring together staff in HEIs with responsibility for disability and widening participation, and to encourage and facilitate working together.
- A disability event for HEI marketing staff is planned for autumn 2007.

Support for small, specialist HEIs

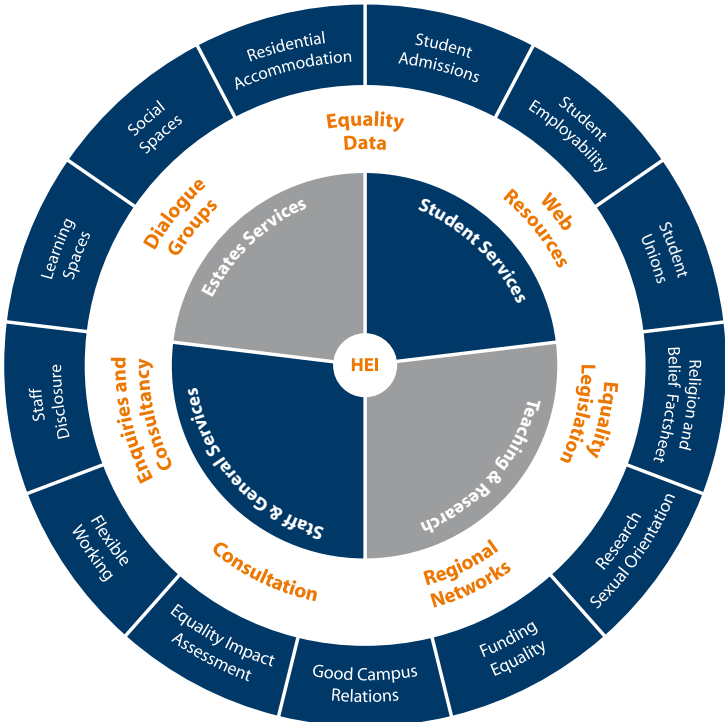
A questionnaire has been sent to small, specialist HEIs that benefited from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) disability project funding in 2003/05 to establish priority areas of work for these institutions.

Following analysis of the returned questionnaires, a series of individual visits is being implemented. In addition, the viability of offering a bespoke event in the early part of 2008 for small, specialist institutions is also being considered.

A publication is planned for 2007 to illustrate embedding disability issues in small, specialist institutions, based on the lessons learned from the HEFCE-funded projects.

Equality Challenge Unit’s 2007 Programme

ECU is developing a programme of work in collaboration with a range of professional networks in HE to produce relevant equality and diversity guidance for staff. The outer two rings in the model below give an indication of current ECU projects targeting HE functions in the centre. Please visit the [ECU website](#) for more detailed descriptions of these projects.



ECU’s 2007 programme: HEIs and their functional services form the hub of the circle, outer rings show the main ECU activities and projects

Work with national organisations

Disability Rights Commission on implementation of Disability Equality Duty

Equality Challenge Unit has been working closely with the DRC to develop a strategy to support institutions needing support to reach the required standard in producing their Disability Equality Scheme (DES). The DRC has written to public bodies, including HEIs, who have not produced a DES, or who have not involved disabled people appropriately. The DRC will give a deadline for remedial work that needs to be done on these Schemes, and will refer HEIs to ECU for support if appropriate.

The DRC will also check a random stratified sample of HEIs for compliance. Any HEI whose Scheme falls short of the requirements of the disability equality duty will be sent a letter from the DRC setting out required remedial action and a deadline. These letters will invite HEIs to take up specific support from ECU. The ECU Disability Team plans to hold initial individual discussions with HEIs that want support, and suggest a programme of assistance that should not only enable the HEI to reach appropriate levels of compliance by the DRC's deadline, but also to implement the DED effectively.

Other news from the Disability Rights Commission

- The new Post-16 Part 4 DDA Code of Practice will be published and available on the [DRC website](#) by May 2007.
- The DRC anticipates that the Green Paper on a Single Equality Act will be out for 3-month consultation at the end of May. It is likely that the Green Paper will have very little to say about anti-discrimination legislation in education settings. The DRC is considering its response and looking at the effectiveness of current disability discrimination legislation across the education system. It will then be contacting a range of stakeholders following the Green Paper's release and encouraging them to engage in the consultation process, looking both at disability and other equality legislation in relation to education.

- Newly published Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) guidance aimed at colleges, universities and adult education-providers throughout Great Britain will be launched in summer 2007. This will cover all aspects of the DDA, including implementation of the Disability Equality Duty (see page 6), the recent changes to Part 4, as well as duties in relation to disabled staff (Part 2) and other service-users (Part 3). The guidance encourages institutions to consider disability equality in the round, and to ensure all functions of the institution are aware of their responsibilities regarding the DDA. It includes many real-life case studies and practical checklists on a range of issues. The guidance will be available free of charge from DRC in a range of formats and will be promoted and distributed at a number of events throughout the summer.
- New DDA duties covering General Qualification Bodies come into force on 1 September 2007. The DRC is preparing a Code of Practice, which should be available from August 2007.
- By the end of September 2007, the DRC will close and the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) will open its doors for business.

Centre for Recording Achievement on Personal Development Planning

The Higher Education Academy is working in partnership with the Centre for Recording Achievement, an Associate Centre of the Academy, to support the implementation of personal development planning. An advisory group has met to discuss the particular needs of students with disabilities, and to examine the need for further dissemination or possibilities for further development of inclusive personal development planning practices. To have your say on any of these issues, please contribute to the online **discussion forum**. First-time users of the discussion forum need to complete a simple registration form, set up to help protect the site from misuse.

General Medical Council: encouraging disabled people into medicine

Since the implementation of the DDA Amendment Act of 2003, professional bodies have had a legal duty not to discriminate against disabled learners. The Gateways to the Professions scheme is a government initiative that supports this duty, and is designed to widen access to the professions so that more people consider a professional career. In response to this initiative, the GMC is leading a project to support medical students with disabilities. In 2003 there were 462 reported applicants to medicine with a disclosed disability, and 212 accepted.

The project, which is to be completed in March 2008, intends to produce advice to help medical schools determine if a student is capable of entering and working within the medical profession. It will provide more parity in decisions of different medical schools, and will help ensure that applicants and students are being dealt with transparently and fairly. It will also stress that, with support and assistance, many disabled students would be able to practise medicine safely and competently. Equality Challenge Unit has been invited onto the Project Board to guide and evaluate this project.

Several other projects have begun to address this issue, including the Disabled Teachers' Taskforce at the General Teaching Council for England. Also, perhaps most notably, the DRC is about to complete its **formal investigation** into fitness standards in teaching, nursing and social work. A report on findings and recommendations is due to be published in July 2007.

Funding for accessible technology available through TechDis

TechDis is running an HE Accessible Technology (HEAT) scheme to purchase technology for staff in HE to aid student learning. The scheme is open to all staff in HE from across the UK. Applications should be made through your relevant subject centre, and the second round closes on 31 May 2007. For more information or for full reports from round 1 funding, visit TechDis at: www.techdis.ac.uk/getheatscheme

New publications

Disability Legislation: Practical Guidance for Academics

Available at www.ecu.ac.uk or www.heacademy.ac.uk/disability.htm

Guidance was published in November 2006 by Equality Challenge Unit and the Higher Education Academy to help academic staff apply the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 to learning and teaching. We hope to modify and update this publication to include a section on curriculum design, and publish it as a hard-copy document later in 2007. We would be interested in hearing from you with any comments on the guidance, or with additional challenges, good practice examples or resources. Please contact Helen May (Helen.may@heacademy.ac.uk) or Sue Cavanagh (Sue.Cavanagh@ecu.ac.uk).

Information Advice and Guidance Pack

Action on Access has produced a resource pack for information advice and guidance staff, including special educational needs coordinators, in schools, sixth-form colleges and Connexions. The pack includes an introduction to the issues, as well as a number of other publications including the *Rough Guide to Disability for Widening Participation Practitioners* and the Skill publication *Into HE*. A copy of the pack will be sent to staff at the end of the summer term.

Diversity Journal

An online journal, *RESPONSE*, focusing on diversity, has been launched. It aims to encourage debate and exchange about responding to learning and teaching needs arising from diversity in the wider learning community. *RESPONSE* has been developed by colleagues at the University of Derby and is funded through the HEFCE's Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund. Issues 1 and 2 of the journal can be viewed at: www.derby.ac.uk/response. Contributions to the next edition are now being welcomed from students or staff from HE and FE institutions. A short piece on work on progress, a short report on a project outcome, or a full academic paper can be submitted. The next issue is published in December 2007 and will focus on the diversity of learners. The closing date for submissions to this edition is 15 October 2007. For further details, please email Isabel.jones@derby.ac.uk or h.leo@derby.ac.uk

Towards a Business Case for Diversity Publication

Research to identify the potential benefits of embracing greater student diversity and embedding widening participation in HEIs across the UK, commissioned by the Higher Education Academy, will be released shortly. The research was conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Bradford, York St John University, Aimhigher North Yorkshire and Higher York. The research builds on existing research evidence and involves case-study research, based in eight HEIs, to identify the different stakeholders in a position to influence widening participation and diversity as well as exploring the principles underpinning the development of a business case for embracing widening participation and greater student diversity. The report identifies the stakeholders for widening participation and diversity within HEIs, and discusses the evidence, drivers and issues for these roles. The report will be available to download, from the end of May, on the Higher Education Academy's website at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/5056.htm

Forthcoming events

European Access Network conference

Date: 27–29 June 2007

Location: National University of Ireland Galway, Ireland

Theme: Access to Success: The Student Experience from Pre-Entry to Employment

The 16th European Access Network annual conference aims to celebrate the success of under-represented groups in higher education, including those with disabilities. The conference will explore the 'quality' of the student experience, equality in employment, and policies on diversity, among other issues. For further information see the [European Access Network's](#) website.

Sixth International Conference on Higher Education and Disability

Date: 24–27 July 2007

Venue: Innsbruck, Austria

Theme: Milestone 2007: Sharing International Resources on the Road to Inclusion

Action on Access, Equality Challenge Unit and the Higher Education Academy have all had papers accepted for this conference, which aims to equip participants with resources to build successful programmes and develop networks with international colleagues. The DEP will report back on highlights of this conference in the next Bulletin.

Developing Inclusive Curriculum Conference

Date: 7 September 2007

Venue: York University

The Higher Education Academy is running a second annual one-day conference, to be held at York University. The conference aims to provide a space for lecturing staff, curriculum developers and heads of department to share practice, discuss and debate issues about developing an inclusive curriculum, and explore discipline-specific practices in conjunction with some of our subject centres. For [further information](#) see the Academy's website.

Embedding Disability?**Date: 13 September 2007****Venue: The Lakeside Centre, Aston University, Birmingham**

This free-to-attend conference will provide delegates with the opportunity to debate the extent to which disability is embedded within the widening participation agenda. It will begin with keynote speakers offering their views on participation and opportunities for progression for disabled people in education, followed by workshops demonstrating good practice examples of where disability is being embedded, plus other current issues. More details will be available soon on the [Action on Access](#) website.

NADP Annual Conference**Date: 3–4 July 2007**More details from [NADP annual conference](#).**NADP One-day Autumn Conference****Date: 7 November 2007****Venue: Manchester Conference Centre, Manchester****Theme: Perspectives on Deaf Support**More information and booking forms from [NADP](#).

We welcome any constructive feedback to inform future issues of the DEP Bulletin.

Please let us know if you would like the bulletin in an alternative format.



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