



Working Together

Annual Review of Disability Equality Scheme



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Introduction

This is the first annual report on the College's Scheme, which was developed in partnership with disabled individuals and groups throughout the Scottish Borders, and published with availability in a variety of formats in December 2006.

Borders College continues to maintain organisational commitment to fulfilling and promoting the rights of disabled people at all levels across and throughout the College. This includes commitment at Governance and Senior Management levels, across support and academic staff teams, and in partnership with disabled students, staff and external stakeholders.

We are pleased to report that most of the actions in the College Action Plan for the three-year period saw significant progress. Many of course are ongoing areas for activity in terms of continuous improvement of quality in the services we provide for individuals with a disability. We have also been responsive to key national policy developments, such as 'Removing Barriers – Creating Opportunities' (Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee 2006).

A major initiative in the life of the College over 2006-07 has been the intensifying strategic developments which will lead to our co-location with Heriot-Watt University at the new Scottish Borders Campus in Galashiels in early 2009. This new and unique FE-HE platform will build additional partnerships with Universities in order to increase the choices of education available in the Borders. With this in mind the College has paid particular attention to the paper '5 'Disability Equality Scheme' Principles for Producing Better Information for Disabled People' (Office for Disability Issues February 2007). As a consequence we will add a major action-point for next year, which will take forward the five principles to ensure that disabled citizens are fully aware, and can take advantage of, the exciting new opportunities for learning and inclusion which the Scottish Borders Campus will offer.

In preparing for the above partnership we have this year created links with the services for disabled people which Heriot-Watt University have in place. Their Disability Advisor and their Equality and Diversity Advisor attended the College's Disability Working Group in Spring 2007, and we have exchanged and compared our respective Disability Equality Schemes. The aim is that once co-location is complete we will have built together a single DES which will treat and support all disabled people in the community of Scottish Borders Campus with parity of esteem.

We have further extended our community partnerships this year through developing joint services with the Gala Youth Project and with Penumbra. These voluntary organisations are assisting with the work of our Student Mental Health Support service.

In 2007 the College also took up membership of Equality Forward, and their organiser gave presentations to our Board of Management and other key groupings. We continue membership of Inclusion Scotland, and in all these various ways seek to ensure our work in the field of disability is part of the greater whole, lending strength to the endeavours of the College itself.

During the last year there have been some changes to the structures in the College, and these we feel will improve our responses and services. Hitherto our work groups involved separate forums – the Disability Working Group, the Inclusiveness Committee, and the Equal Opportunities Committee. Between them, these groups dealt with all 6 of the 'equalities strands' – Race, Disability, Gender, Faith and Belief, Age and Sexual Orientation. We have now formed a single 'Equalities Committee' which will be the over-arching strategic group which will commission, where relevant, time-limited working groups to take forward initiatives, policy or practice developments concerning any of the 6 'strands'. This will not diminish our focus and efforts in the field of disability; rather it recognises and takes a holistic approach to the reality that a given individual may possess a number of features in the range.

The creation of a 'Supporting Learners' function, led at senior management level, has allowed us to integrate a range of related services which were, however, previously managed separately. This team now comprises Student Funding, Student Welfare, Admissions, Community and Open Learning, Mental Health Support and Extended Learning Support. This integrated structure provides much more of a 'one-stop' shop for people with a disability and through which a variety of their needs can be met in a closely co-ordinated way.

This report will turn in due course to describing progress on the Action Plan. However, it will be informative to note a number of additional aspects which have received attention over 2006-07 –

- The Supporting Learners Team will devote significant time in exploring how the research report 'Barriers in FE and HE for Disabled Students' can deliver lessons to improve our practice.
- The team has developed a range of specialised questions to use in interviews with disabled applicants
- We engaged with Fife Society for the Blind Social Enterprises with a view to using some of their audit and training provisions
- The College commercial company (BC Consultants) is now represented on the Equalities Committee
- Two disabled members of the Committee have agreed to act as auditors of our key policies relating to disability
- We have developed a College policy on Bullying and Harassment based on the new legislation Protection of Adults at Risk (Scotland) Act 2007. This offers protection to disabled people who may be especially vulnerable for a variety of reasons, not solely disability itself
- The college has set up an Employability Sub Group which will explore how best to secure employability experiences and skills for disabled people, and will work with our New Ways partners in the Borders to create a range of work experience opportunities across the range of public service organisations

- Heriot-Watt University was given a copy of the QELTM guidelines to establish if they are able to apply the benefits to their learners in Galashiels and elsewhere
- A disabled student on the Equalities Committee presented an idea for a 'virtual walk-through' of the new Scottish Borders Campus, which will be of value to a range of disabled users
- A college class for visually-impaired adults won a Scottish Adult Learners Award in 2007
- The college Mental Health Support Service was nominated at the Scottish College's Awards ceremony in November 2007
- The college has now developed and is delivering BSL 2
- We received feedback from a signer who has worked in a number of colleges that in his experience Borders College was outstanding in terms of deaf-support
- Our expertise in working with students in the Autistic Spectrum is now recognised in developments in SFEU

‘Removing Barriers And Creating Opportunities’

Borders College has explored the recommendations relating to FE and HE and is developing the following positions on these.

Recommendation 39

We will continuously seek ways to gain stakeholder feedback, especially in advance of co-location at the Scottish Borders Campus. Recently we have set up a dialogue with a sight-impaired person and his worker in order to find ways of improving our services

Recommendation 40

We intend to exceed the minimum requirements of Disability Discrimination Act by developing information for disabled people about their legal rights in a variety of formats. We have legal expertise both in our curricular staff teams and on the Board of Management

Recommendation 44

The SFC Toolkit will form a major part of our self evaluation in 2009

Recommendation 46

The College has a very strong school-links set of programmes and a well-developed partnership agreement with the education authority. We intend to develop joint and complementary approaches to disability

Recommendation 52

We will consider how best to provide Summer Schools for disabled entrants. This will need early knowledge of disability in potential entrants, which may mean early start and familiarisation cannot happen until August. However the Supporting Learner Team will explore best methods before recruitment begins in February 2008

Recommendation 67

We have noted the Government’s interest and concerns about courses and facilities for complex needs. Our Access to Learning Department has successfully provided for increasing numbers of students with complex needs for some years. This has been affordable through a partnership with the Social Work Department, the service level agreement yielding additional support by way of seconding their staff into the work alongside College staff

Progress with the DES Action-Plan During 2006-07

Actions for 2007

Action 1 – All key meetings in the College have a standing item on Disability Equality on the agenda

Outcome – Achieved in almost all cases. Needs extended to SMT and Board of Management

Action 2 – College Strategic Plan describes how the College positions itself in relation to Disability Equality

Outcome – Achieved

Action 3 – Twice yearly the Board of Management will receive an update on the progress of the College's Disability action-plan

Outcome – An annual report will be provided

Action 6 – College policies, guidelines to be impact assessed

Outcome – some have been assessed. The remainder will be done in 2008

Action 7 – in June conduct an interim review of the action-plan and an annual review in December

Outcome – annual review achieved

Action 8 – In December produce an annual report in a range of formats and circulate to key internal and external stakeholders

Outcome – Achieved

Action 10 – Review how curricular departments ensure that learner work placements recognise and promote disability equality

Outcome – Access to Learning department have a statement on the form employers sign which confirms they are DDA compliant and an Equal Opportunities Employer. Organiser health and safety checks all placements, shares information on learner needs and carries out risk assessment where mobility is an issue. Department have a short DVD for employers giving insight into learners on the autistic spectrum. Remaining departments to be reviewed in 2008

Action 15 – Research disabled applicants who did not enrol and the reasons why disabled learners did not complete/left their course

Outcome – Partially achieved. 374 applicants with a disability applied, 250 full offers made and accepted. Concern that with the 124 who did not enrol, 51 applications were withdrawn; 32 did not attend their interview and 22 applications were unsuccessful. Further research required in 2008 to understand the reasons for these results

Action 18 – To introduce a second year of the life Skills course

Outcome – Achieved

Action 19 – To monitor the outcomes of the Assistive Technology post and provision

Outcome – Positively evaluated and the post continues to be funded in 2007-08

Action 22 – Ensure that at least 80% of staff on significant contracts have attended DDA and Disability Awareness training

Outcome – Almost all staff attended this training (95%)

Action 23 – Review the take-up and outcomes of the Student Mental Health Support Service

Outcome – Achieved. The service doubled its users in 2007 compared to 2006 and a report on reasons for referral and outcomes is available

Action 25 – Ensure staff complete evaluation forms on events attended

Outcome – Achieved. Comments include –

“Greater understanding of our obligations as staff”

“Will improve the quality of my service when dealing with disabled individuals”

“I have increased awareness of equality issues and barriers experienced”

“An understanding of disability and appropriate words to use”

“Reinforced prior skills, understanding and knowledge”

Action 27 – Publicise the Disability Scheme in a variety of ways

Outcome – Mostly achieved, some extensions of publicity needed in 2008

Action 28 – Aim to increase the number of disabled employees by 5% by 2009

Outcome – Good progress. In the year December 05-06 college employed 11 people with a declared disability. In the year December 06 to 07 15 people were employed

Action 29 – Over 2007 and 2008 promote consistency and alignment between the DES of the College and Heriot Watt University

Outcome – Good progress

Evaluation

Of the 30 action-points in the College 2007-10 Disability Equality Scheme more than half (16) were progressed in the first year of the 3-year timescale. Almost all of these 16 were achieved or made good progress.

We believe progress has overall been good in the context of a 3-year timescale. There has been a good response to new policies and developments which took place in 2007. These, and additional areas of work accomplished, are described earlier in this report.

The formation of the Supporting Learners team in the Autumn of 2007 will enable a more integrated and shared approach to work demands within the Action Plan. The intention is to install the Action Plan onto the college Operational Planning Data Base, which is a highly effective tool, well-regarded by HMle. This will enable regular updating on the progress of actions by those team members responsible.

Activity in 2008 will seek to do the following –

- Improve or complete the progress made on the 16 actions tackled in 2007
- Make significant progress on at least half of the remaining points for action
- Review the Action Plan to add actions required by new developments through 2007 and as further appear during 2008
- Install the Action Plan on the College's Operational Planning data base

Promotion and Publicity for this Annual Report

The report will be made available in a variety of formats as appropriate and as required by internal and external stakeholders. Copies will be sent to all the disabled individuals and groups who helped the college formulate its Disability Equality Scheme in 2006.

Internally, copies will be given to all staff and publicised on the College website. Reports will be verbally given to all key College meetings and Boards.

We will ask disabled people who receive the report for their comments and feedback, and also their views on new priorities and issues in the next year.

We will also share our report with our University colleagues in order to gain from our mutual experience in ensuring our Disability Equality Schemes are 'living' documents which make a difference.

