



# Disability Equality Scheme

December 2006

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## 1. Principal's Statement

The North Highland College Management and its staff recognises that they have a responsibility to create and build an environment in which all are equally valued and treated, as well as its wider responsibility in assisting in the creation of a fair and just society. In order to achieve this, the College has a range of policies and procedures designed to ensure equality of opportunity for all, of which this Disability Equality Scheme is a part.

*It is our belief that no discrimination on account of Disability, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religious or political beliefs, shall be shown towards any person in determining whether that person will be admitted as a student of the college, or appointed to its staff or shall hold any advantage or privilege thereof.*

The college will promote opportunity for all, particularly for study, employment and involvement in its community, without discrimination on grounds of gender, sex, age, disability, religion, and socio-economic background, sexual orientation, Disability, colour, ethnic or national origin, language or nationality.

The college requires its staff, students, clients and visitors to behave and communicate in non-discriminatory ways and to support, implement and develop college institutional policies, procedures and practices which promote and reinforce equality of opportunity and fair treatment for all.

Signature.....

Date.....

Chairman, Board of Management

Signature.....

Date.....

Principal, North Highland College

## **2 Introduction & Policy Statement**

The North Highland College is an incorporated Further Education College and an academic partner of the UHI Millennium Institute (UHI). The College provides Education and Training opportunities to the communities of the North Highlands and beyond. These opportunities are supported in an inclusive manner, and our core philosophy is to ensure that all members of the community regardless of Disability, geography, or any other irrelevant criteria, can access our programmes as appropriate and receive an effective, high quality, learning experience. We will consult with various stakeholders and external organisations to enable us to continue our community profiling, in order that we can further develop our Disability Equality Scheme (DES). We will also analyse our existing and past student profiles to ensure inclusivity.

The North Highland College believes that discrimination on grounds of Disability is unacceptable in Scottish Further & Higher Education, whether it affects treatment of students, staff, or any of the services or provision offered by the college. Everyone who has the ability and the desire to pursue education should have the chance to do so regardless of Disability. Discrimination is wrong whether it is deliberate and obvious or whether it is inadvertent or indirect. We believe that education can play a powerful role in the promotion of equality of opportunity. Through our functions we believe we have the potential to make a significant difference to Disability equality in the areas in which we provide our services. We welcome the duties introduced by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended

### **2.1 The College is committed to**

- actively tackling disability discrimination, and promoting disability equality,
- encouraging, supporting, and helping all students and staff to reach their potential,
- working with other institutions, local communities and others to tackle disability discrimination and to encourage and promote good practice in achieving Disability equality,
- making sure the Disability equality policy and its procedures are followed.

We look forward to playing our part in bringing these things about through our Mission Statement and College Aims & Values.

### **2.2 The College's Mission Statement**

The North Highland College primarily serves the North Highland area by providing inclusive and accessible high quality lifelong learning and research opportunities relevant to the needs of students, employers and communities.

## 2.3 The College Value Statement

The North Highland College will, in all activities, duly reflect the core values for which it stands: -

### ***EQUALITY OF ACCESS & PARITY OF ESTEEM***

The Board of Management believes that all members of the community are entitled to access lifelong learning opportunities, regardless of geographical location. The College values all its learners equally and is committed to the provision of learning, through all modes of delivery, thereby overcoming geographical and other barriers, where these exist.

### **QUALITY**

The Board of Management's ongoing commitment to continuous quality improvement through self evaluation underpins our philosophy and has been recognised by a number of external agencies. We have an on-going commitment to investing in our staff. We will maintain and continue to develop the systems and procedures which have been endorsed by various agencies. A client focused, open and transparent environment of mutual trust, honesty and respect will be maintained.

### **ADDING VALUE TO COMMUNITIES**

We serve and value all urban, remote and sparsely populated areas of the far north and are committed to empowering them both economically and socially through educational and training support. We are committed to work in partnership with all stakeholders and where relevant other providers from both the public and private sector.

### **THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The College is committed to providing a range of high quality learning environments. This will range from built provision in our core campuses to a virtual learning infrastructure through our web based delivery platforms.

### 3. College Duties

The Board of Management and College staff understand that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 - amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities)(Statutory Duties) Regulations 2005, place a general duty on the College to:

- ✚ promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons,
- ✚ eliminate discrimination which is unlawful under the Act,
- ✚ eliminate harassment of disabled persons which is related to their disability,
- ✚ promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons,
- ✚ encourage participation by disabled persons in public life; and
- ✚ take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons.

The College also has specific duties to prepare and publish a Disability Equality Scheme by 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006, showing how we intend to fulfill our duties in this area.

The Scheme will assess which of our functions and policies are relevant to our duties and will contain our arrangements for:

- assessing and consulting on the likely impact of our proposed policies on the promotion of Disability equality;
- monitoring our policies for adverse impact on the promotion of Disability equality;
- publishing the results of this assessment,
- consultation and monitoring;
- ensuring public access to the information and services we provide; and
- training our staff and students in connection with the new duties within the Act.

As an employer we have a duty to monitor our teaching/support staff, by reference to the disability groups to which they belong, and to publish the results annually.

We will also monitor our student profile by reference to the disability group to which they belong. In addition, we will analyse academic achievement by disability groups. The results will be included in our annual publication.

We fully understand the requirements of the DES and the objectives contained therein. We are confident that both the requirements and the objectives sit comfortably within the College's existing policies and performance, with respect to equality, inclusiveness and equality of opportunity.

We are required to review the assessment of our functions and policies by 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006 and every three years thereafter. This review will be led by the Assistant Principal, Student Services, and the findings reported to the Board of Management and the Audit Committee.

## 4. College Functions

In order to identify its relevant functions and policies from a Disability Equality perspective, the College will follow a 3 stage process, using the Commission for Disability Equality's suggested assessment grid. The College will determine relevance and allocate a level of priority by undertaking the following exercise:

- a) List all functions and policies (see appendices 2 & 3 )
- b) Assess the relevance of functions & policies in relation to the promotion of Disability Equality (see appendices 2 & 3 )
- c) Consult with staff and partners to determine relevance and priority rating.

## 5. Management: Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Management is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the institution stays within the Disability Discriminations Act 2005 and any amendment, and meets all its duties, including the general duty and the specific duties; and
- Ensuring that the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan is followed.

The Principal is responsible for:

- giving a consistent and high-profile lead on Disability equality issues;
- promoting the Disability Equality Scheme inside and outside the institution; and
- ensuring that the Disability Equality Policy and its procedures are followed.

Assistant Principals & Section Leaders are responsible for:

- putting the policy and its strategies and procedures into practice;
- ensuring that all staff know their responsibilities, and receive support and training in carrying these out; and
- following the relevant procedures and taking action against staff or students who discriminate for reasons of Disability,

All Staff are responsible for:

- dealing with equality issues, and being able to recognise and tackle disability bias and stereotyping;
- promoting inclusiveness, and avoiding discrimination against anyone for reasons of Disability; keeping up-to-date with developments on equality issues, and taking up training and learning opportunities.

## 6. Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of proposed policies on the promotion of Disability equality

We have developed a template to review existing policies and assess new policies. We are aware that this requires improvement to the process, in order for it to become a standard part of the way in which the College operates.

When we have refined our methodology of assessment, all staff will receive training, in order to ensure standardisation of the process. It will also help ensure that the results of all assessments are accurate and consistent across all College campuses. This is detailed in the College's Action Plan (See Appendix 4 )

We consult regularly with our staff on proposed new policies and changes to existing policies, practices and functions. We also consult through the various committees of the Board of Management prior to any final approval by the full board.

Like most public authorities, we will not have to assess the impact of every College policy. We will determine the level of assessment and consultation in each case. To decide whether we need to carry out a full impact assessment, we will make an initial assessment based on information we have. If this assessment shows that disability groups will not be affected differently by the policy, or that the policy has a very low relevance to Disability equality, then we will not move to the next level of assessment.

When carrying out a full impact assessment, we will:

- set clear policy aims and objectives;
- collect existing data and commission research if appropriate;
- use the data to decide whether the policy is likely to affect different disability groups, directly or indirectly, in different ways;
- consider changes to the policy to prevent any adverse impact or unlawful discrimination, while still delivering the aims of the policy;
- consult interested parties, service users, trade unions, and members of the public on the preferred policy;
- take account of all assessments and consultation before making a final decision on the policy;
- monitor and review the policy and its impact and publish the results of the impact assessment, consultation, and monitoring.

We consult a number of partners on policies as they evolve and are developed. Who we consult with depends on the policy. We will make sure that consultation on all relevant policies is thorough and targeted at all relevant parties.

We will decide how much we will consult in each case. We will take the following steps to consult on all relevant policies.

- Set clear aims for consultation.
- Set a consultation timetable linked to decision making process.
- Carry out consultation.
- Analyse consultation results promptly.
- Feed results into decision making process.
- Amend policy as appropriate.

## **7 Monitoring progress and updating the scheme**

7.1 The College, as part of its monitoring action, and its duty to promote Disability equality across our full range of activities, will ensure we cover the following:

- Staff recruitment
- Staff progression and promotion
- Staff resignations
- Staff complaints, grievances and formal disciplinary actions and dismissals
- Student admissions
- Student guidance and financial support
- Student achievement and progression
- Student dropouts
- Student complaints, grievances, appeals, formal disciplinary actions and dismissals.

7.2 We already inclusively monitor most of our employment and student recruitment functions and policies. We will review the outcomes of the actions described in this scheme annually, through the College's existing operational monitoring arrangements. Our Human Resource Section will continue to monitor our statistical collections on staff, including the monitoring required by our specific duty.

The Student Registrations, Admissions, and Student Services Sections will continue to monitor the student aspects of the duty.

7.3 In order to ensure the College meets the general duty to promote Disability equality and its specific duties, we will collect disability monitoring data for our relevant functions and policies.

To do this, we will:

- set up monitoring systems for all relevant functions and policies;
- analyse data from monitoring;
- decide what action is needed to deal with issues identified by the monitoring data;
- change policies or functions as appropriate; and publish the results of monitoring.

We will decide the best method for monitoring each function, policy, or sets of policies according to the circumstances in each case. If we find that the impact of a policy goes against any of the three parts of the general duty, we will fully investigate that policy,

and introduce alternatives or measures to stop the problem. If we did not originally give the policy high priority for review in our action plan, we will amend the timetable for reviews and action accordingly.

The annual review of the scheme will involve not only a review of progress against the actions described in the scheme, but will also involve reviewing and updating the contents of the scheme. Previous targets set will be reviewed with respect to achievement and new targets set as appropriate.

The first fundamental review of the scheme will be undertaken by December 2007.

In addition, we will undertake a more fundamental review of the scheme every three years commencing from the date above

## 8 Publishing

We publish a range of information, some of which is noted below:

- Strategic Plan
- Operational Plan
- Annual Accounts
- Student Attitude Surveys
- Employer Surveys

8.1 This scheme will be published on our website, and will be distributed widely to stakeholders. It will be made available in translation on request.

8.2 We will publish annually a report on progress in relation to the scheme, together with an amended version where appropriate. The outcomes of the annual review of the scheme will be available publicly on our website and College intranet. We will also report on progress in the College's annual report.

8.3 We will endeavour to make sure that the information we publish is accessible and freely available using diverse formats.

## 9 Access to information

We provide a range of information to staff, students, members of the public, employers, government, and other organisations. We have developed numerous formats for presenting this information, including the following.

- The College Annual Report
- Staff newsletter
- \*~\* ☒●●~\* website, which is regularly updated and provides information about the College, as well as links to other useful sites
- Answers to general enquiries provided by our administration team.
- Use of the media for advertising and press articles.

### Access to services

With 4 College campuses distributed across the North Highlands, we are able to give people wider access to our services.

Our services include:

- Education and training opportunities
- Commercial activities
- Individual advice and guidance
- Education and training advice to employers

To be as accessible as possible, we provide our services,

- by email, letter and telephone;
- through face to face contact in meetings and seminars;

We work in partnership with other organisations, such as UHI, ASC, CITB, Employers, Highland Council and the local enterprise companies to improve access to our services.

We will monitor the functions and policies listed in appendices 2 and 3 to make sure that information and services are accessible. If monitoring shows that there are barriers to accessing information and services, those barriers will be identified and action taken. The timetable for introducing monitoring systems, and reviewing particular policies and functions is set out in the action plan (Appendix 4).

## **10. Raising Staff Awareness and Staff Development**

It is essential that all our staff have a good, basic knowledge of the Act. They should also have the chance to acquire the additional specialist knowledge they need to carry out their work. In this regard;

- 10.1 We will put in place mandatory training for all staff, including Board of Management representatives, in order to raise awareness of the requirements of the Act and the duties it imposes on the College as an employer.
- 10.2 We will put in place training for staff involved in recruitment and selection, which will address issues relating to Disability equality.
- 10.3 We will ensure that, where appropriate, training will address the issues of diversity and equality.
- 10.4 The Disability Equality Scheme will be included in the induction for new staff and our actions and commitment to diversity and Disability equality will be highlighted

The College has achieved Investors in People (IIP) accreditation, which assists us to monitor whether the training we offer is properly targeted and accessible to all staff. This also formally demonstrates our commitment to our employees' continuing professional development (CPD).

In addition, we will develop and offer training on the general and specific duties in the following ways.

- General training for all staff to make sure they are aware of the general and specific duties, and how these affect them and their work. This will be part of our staff development compulsory training sessions, such as induction training, for new staff.
- We will also run sessions for current staff to make sure they are familiar with the duties and how these affect their work.

The training programme will embed Disability:

- monitoring systems, both for employment related and service functions;
- carrying out impact assessments; and
- consultation arrangements

We will review our training programmes, to make sure that Disability equality is mainstreamed into programmes as appropriate. The action plan sets out the main tasks and timetable for implementing this training programme.

## **11. Who is responsible and how we will deal with complaints**

11.1 Responsibility for our Disability Equality Scheme is shared by the Board of Management of The North Highland College, The College Principal and by all staff at the College.

11.2 This document has set out our aspirations in meeting the general and specific duties of the Act. If you believe that any of our actions fall short of these aspirations, we would welcome your comments or complaint. This scheme will be an evolving one. We would therefore welcome comments at any time. Please contact Marcus Mennie, Assistant Principal, The North Highland College, Ormlie Road, Thurso, Caithness KW14 7EE, Direct Dial (01847 889301), [marcus.mennie@thurso.uhi.ac.uk](mailto:marcus.mennie@thurso.uhi.ac.uk) in the first instance.

## **12 Meeting our Employment Duties**

The College is bound by the general duty and we must meet the specific duties for employers. This duty requires us to monitor, by disability group, the number of:

- staff currently working for us;
- applicants for employment, training, and promotion;
- staff who receive training;
- staff who benefit or suffer from performance appraisals;
- staff who are involved in grievance procedures;
- staff who are the subject of disciplinary action; and
- staff who end their service with us.

We must also publish the results of this monitoring annually and discuss this with the trade unions who represent our staff.

We will analyse any patterns of inequality shown by our monitoring of employment, and take action as appropriate. This may include taking 'positive action'. For example, if our continued monitoring of the disabilities of staff shows that a particular disabled group is unjustifiably under-represented, we may focus our recruitment efforts on that group.