

To: Heads of higher education institutions in
Wales
Reference: W06/13HE
Date: 12 May 2006
Further Information: Celia Hunt
Tel: 02920 682224
E-mail: celia.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk

A New Disability Coordination Service for HEIs in Wales

Introduction

This circular reports the outcome of the above consultation (HEFCW W05/34HE refers) and attaches a job description for a new HEFCW post of Disability and Diversity Coordinator. A report on the outcome of the consultation is attached at Annex A.

Background

We sought views on future arrangements for a service to co-ordinate disability matters in Wales' university and colleges through Circular W05/24HE. The circular drew attention to the statutory duties now placed on HEIs in the area of disability, including the specific duty to produce a Disability Equality Scheme by December 2006.

The circular reported in addition on HEFCW funding to HEIs in Wales to support disabled students. It also noted the support provided in other parts of the UK, acknowledging that in both England and Scotland arrangements had been or were under review.

We proposed establishing a service for three years initially, to commence in the academic year 2005/06, to work alongside HEIs to ensure they are equipped to meet the requirements of disability legislation.

Outcome of the Consultation

The Council considered the outcome of the consultation at its meeting in late September 2005. The Council agreed that a disability coordination service should be established. Subsequently, in response to the consultation and taking account of developments in other parts of the UK and the needs of HEFCW as an organisation, it was proposed that a new post of Disability and Diversity coordinator should be established, incorporating the disability coordination service. Rather than appoint a part-time administrator, as proposed in the consultation, the coordinator will be supported by a Learning and Teaching Officer within the Council.

Job Descriptions

I attach a copy of the job specification and details of the new post, which was advertised in national publications last week. Secondment applications are welcome. I should be grateful if you would advertise the post to those of your staff who might be interested.

Involving disabled people

The Council is developing a Disability Equality Scheme and will be involving disabled people in this process. It would be very helpful if we were able to meet with institutional disabled students' and staff groups/fora about the scheme. We expect the new Disability and Diversity Coordinator to make contact with relevant officers within your institution, once in post, to set up meetings and we would welcome your cooperation in this matter.

Please address any queries regarding this circular to Ms Celia Hunt, Head of Learning and Teaching at HEFCW (02920 682224) celia.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Gummert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

PHILIP GUMMETT

**Responses to Circular W05/34HE:
A new disability co-ordination service for HE:**

(I) List of Respondents:

- University of Glamorgan
- University of Wales, Aberystwyth
- University of Wales, Bangor
- Cardiff University
- University of Wales, Lampeter
- University of Wales Swansea
- University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
- North East Wales Institute of Higher Education
- Swansea Institute of Higher Education
- Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama
- Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
- Disability Rights Commission
- Teacher Recruitment Adviser, Wales (Training and Development Agency for Schools, formerly the Teacher Training Agency)
- Coleg Menai
- Gofal Cymru
- HEFCW Director of Estates
- Dr Caroline Davies, consultant in disability provision in HE

Summary of the Responses

Consultation Issue 1: Please offer views on the proposed remit of the service. We would also welcome suggestions for possible additional duties and comments on the weighting or importance that should be given for each or any of the proposed duties. [Text from consultation circular is in bold, below.]

The remit of a service to support HEIs in Wales in their duties in respect of disabled students should be wide-ranging. The suggested remit, below, is intended as a guide and may be widened.

- i. **Setting up a database of auxiliary aids and services provided and used by HEIs in Wales and helping HEIs work through the recommendations of the report *Taking Away the Strain - Auxiliary Aids and Services for Students in Post-16 Education in Wales*, in order to facilitate the sharing of specialist resources between institutions. Facilitate links with other national (UK) resources, as appropriate;**

Generally, this was not felt to be as important as the other advisory or liaising duties suggested in the remit. Although it was accepted that this might be helpful, and indeed achieve an aim from *Taking Away the Strain* (which has been discussed at length in *Skill Wales* meetings), institutions urged

caution as the database would need clear definition and be fully maintained. There should not be undue burden on institutions and the value that such a database would add at this point in disability legislation was questioned. The purpose of the database would need to be clearly defined and other resources should be investigated. Practical steps forward, which would not involve the maintenance of a full database, might be the deployment of the database on a regional basis, for the service to co-ordinate setting up a database by HEIs, acting as a central point for sharing resources or simply to set up a 'good practice' database.

ii. Acting as a first point of contact for HEIs in Wales to obtain advice on planning and preparing the curriculum, estate, services and policies for disabled students;

Respondents suggested that this could practically be an early focus for the service, providing it did not create additional bureaucracy or duplicate the work of other organisations or individuals. The service could disseminate guidelines to ensure consistency in the HE sector. It was also suggested that the service could facilitate the establishment of a Wales-focused support or advisory network, and could indeed act as a 'sounding board' on reasonable adjustments, the legal implications of this permitting.

iii. Advising HEIs on how to effectively direct their funding on anticipatory and strategic rather than reactive and ad-hoc developments for disabled students, and through this encouraging collaborative working between HEIs to optimise the application of funding;

Respondents saw merit in the co-ordinator helping to secure vital funding, including for buildings and applying for grants, as well as facilitating the strategic use of funding. The service could assist in collaboration for bids. Credibility and contact with senior members of staff within HEIs was felt to be key in making the service a success. The postholder would need a thorough knowledge of the issues relating to provision for disabled people in higher education in order to provide timely, clear, and relevant advice.

iv. Helping key contacts in HEIs create meaningful links with, and within, their respective Reaching Wider Partnerships and advising on the sorts of activities for disabled people the Partnerships could engage with;

Respondents were generally content that the service would need to link into and use established Reaching Wider networks and expertise in Wales. This could be helpful in assisting with a wider remit of work associated with transition and help make links with the voluntary sector and other statutory agencies. However, it was paramount that any work in this area should not shift the focus from existing students.

v. Meeting with senior managers and other key players in HEIs to discuss and provide guidance on the practical implications of disability legislation and assisting with or advising on staff training requirements;

Meetings with senior managers were thoroughly welcomed by respondents, as their involvement was crucial in embedding the disability agenda in HEIs. However, it was generally agreed that, on a day to day basis, contact should be filtered through a single institutional contact for consistency and clarity. In order to undertake work with senior managers, the appointee would need to have a clear understanding of disability legislation and have credibility, status and influence within the sector. One respondent suggested that HEIs could be encouraged by the disability co-ordination service to develop their own communications strategies with senior managers in this area. Training for senior managers was felt to be crucial, but should not duplicate the work by Skill Wales; rather, the two should work in partnership.

vi. Working, as appropriate, on collaborative ventures, such as UK-wide seminars, with, for example, other UK Disability Teams;

This was welcomed as it was generally felt that HEIs needed to ensure they benefited from collaboration. It was suggested that the service could participate in joint projects and should make links with the National Disability Team in England in its new incarnation. The postholder would benefit from an ability to apply an understanding of the UK-wide picture to Wales.

vii. Moving forward with the points made above by promoting the sharing of good practice through email groups, meetings and seminars and promoting the work being done in the HE sector in Wales;

Respondents agreed that sharing best practice would benefit the sector. The service should work with Skill to provide *additional* support for HEIs, and should work with groups such as HR staff, HEW and the University of Wales. It was suggested that opportunities for the sector in Wales to discuss new approaches and ideas would be valuable.

viii. Liaising with colleagues in the Equality Challenge Unit to collaborate, where appropriate, on developments in respect of the expected future duty on HEIs to promote equality of opportunity for disabled staff;

Respondents generally agreed that a working relationship with the ECU was crucial in order to ensure the sector was engaged with its work.

ix. Liaising with the DRC and Skill Wales;

It was agreed that the service would complement the work of and be in close contact with Skill and Skill Wales. Other joint agency liaison, such as with the DRC, would also be important. The postholder would need to work with other disability sector organisations in order to facilitate the involvement of disabled people in formulating institutional disability equality schemes.

x. Working with the appropriate disability organisations in order to help the sector meet the requirements of existing and forthcoming disability legislation, mainly with regard to HEIs' duties in respect of disabled students;

Respondents felt that the postholder would support institutions in helping them to understand and carry out their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act. The service should promote a wider, inclusive approach, which should include disabled people. It should also assist with HEIs involving and establishing meaningful contacts with disabled people to minimise 'consultation fatigue' and could look at innovative consultation methods, for example, through cross-sector consultation.

xi. Keeping abreast of developments in disability policy and working with HEFCW on widening access/disability issues, capital funding and estates matters, human resources (HR) etc to help the Council take forward its equality and diversity agenda.

Respondents felt that this was a significant duty, which would be of great benefit in bringing HEIs together and keeping them in line with internal equality and diversity agendas. Indeed, one respondent suggested that this could 'make or break' the effectiveness of this post. The service would facilitate linkages between disabled people, practitioners and policy developers, which could include advising HEFCW as necessary.

A number of respondents listed the duties in what they felt to be in order of priority.

One HEI suggested that the duplication of tasks could be avoided by adding the resource to an existing body. Certainly, it was generally felt that the remit of the service should not be too

ambitious in the early stages, and should, accordingly, focus on the most pressing duties. Other duties could be weighted and added in due courses, following HEFCW monitoring and sector feedback. Only one respondent was concerned that the service *per se* would not provide added value or anything different.

One additional suggestion by a respondent was that the effectiveness of the service would be enhanced by its promotion and co-ordination of HEI/collaborative research projects or funding dedicated projects, which could be prestigious. A wealth of knowledge could be harnessed and shared, for example, through undertaking research in reasonable adjustments and alternative assessment methods, which could in turn lead to guidance for teaching staff.

Consultation issue 2: Do you agree with the proposal that the co-ordinator will focus initially on HEIs and their duties in respect of students, whilst acknowledging that the benefits afforded by the service should be felt across the institution and will help HEIs make the linkage between those charged with equality of opportunity for disabled students and with equality of opportunity for disabled staff?

Respondents agreed that it would be realistic, at least in the first year, for the service to deal with student matters, although it was appreciated that the service would inevitably help with the legislative requirements in terms of staff and visitors. It could include facilitating the sharing of good practice between student support and HR. After all, the public service duty did not distinguish between staff and students. It was suggested that a wider staff remit could be considered for the second year of the service. Respondents did not want to detract from the work on students or confuse its initial remit in its infancy, and the postholder could build upon the considerable expertise already built up in the sector.

There were some suggestions that the service could take account of broader student issues such as HE in FE, transition, and Reaching Wider targets. Workforce progression issues could be examined as part of the post and disabled postgraduates and academic careers for disabled students should be examined. It was suggested that the service should work to increase the general culture of equality awareness and provide a co-ordinated approach across HEIs.

Consultation issue 3: Should the service be located: a) within an HEI; b) with another organisation involved in disability matters and higher education; or c) within the HEFCW structure.

There was an overall feel from respondents that HEFCW would need to assess its own situation and requirements and some do not see this as a major issue. Following consultation with the disability teams in England and Scotland, one respondent suggested that locating the service in HEFCW would be the most suitable. If the post was located in HEFCW, which emerged as the most favoured option, it would be need to be influential and it would be important that the service was not detached from the sector and from other organisations.

A small number of respondents suggested the service should be located in another organisation involved in disability matters and higher education. Others maintained that locating the service in another organisation could confuse its identity. It was suggested that locating the service in a HEI could provide the postholder with good sense of institutional operational issues and knowledge, but could be too close to sector. One suggested a single, strategic, autonomous body with a chief officer of high status. Wherever the service was located, it would need to remain fully engaged with policy developments.

Consultation issue 4: *The Council welcomes views on the service's relationship with HEIs. We welcome comments on both the range of connections which the co-ordinator will need to make within HEIs as well as views on the main areas which would benefit from such a resource, and how.*

Several respondents pointed to the need for one key HEI contact to disseminate advice and information throughout the organisation. This would ensure consistency and co-ordination between and within HEIs. Senior managers and key players could then be sought through the contact. Institutions offered a range of departments and individuals within HEIs with whom the co-ordinator would liaise through the one contact, including senior managers, planning officers, equal opportunities officers, the quality unit, student welfare, estates, HR., strategic planning and so on.

'Making the links' would be essential for the success of the post. One institution suggested that a Welsh speaker in the role would be useful. The service should act as an effective communication mechanism between practitioners and the Council to enable informed policy decisions. The service would need to continue the relationship already developed through HEFCW by attending Skill Wales network meetings. The role should complement and draw on existing organisations, but should not act as auditing service.

Consultation issue 5: *How should the service best work in partnership with other key players in the area of disability and higher education? [We will also welcome contact information from key individuals and organisations with whom the co-ordinator will need to make contact once in post.]*

The overwhelming majority of correspondents deemed working in partnership crucial, particularly with Skill Wales. The respondents suggested that the service would need the endorsement and support of Skill and the DRC. The postholder would need to work closely with the ECU and, possibly, consider the NDT model of partnership working. A number of other examples of organisations with which to liaise closely was provided, for example the DfES QAG group, LEAs, AMOSSHE Wales, NADO, and Wales-based voluntary organisations.

There was general agreement amongst respondents that the service should complement the work of other organisations to give added value to Wales. The postholder could act as an intermediary between all parties and should have a clear strategic focus and could be the true channel between HEFCW, HEIs and disability organisations. As a minimum, all partners should work on the shared goals of helping HEIs meet legislative requirements. The service could arrange a forum for Wales-based disability organisations to discuss their work relating to HE. In terms of working with Skill, where there is great expertise, the service could help publish guidance, research and project work and, organise events. However, clear lines between Skill and the service should be maintained in order to ensure Skill retained its independence.

The service should be properly resourced, as travel and attendance at conferences were likely to be considerable. Further, funds might need to be earmarked for any additional costs of engaging with voluntary organisations and communicating with groups of disabled people. One respondent suggested that there was a need to harness and promote sector knowledge and research activities in order to ensure the long-term success of the disability and diversity agenda.

Consultation issue 6: *How can work being undertaken by existing bodies in Wales or further afield be complemented by the work of the proposed HEFCW disability service?*

Most respondents agreed that the service would complement existing work and organisations, as it would provide sector-specific support. It was felt that it would differ in that there would be a dedicated service to help HEIs with the practical implementation and strategic development of policy and legislation in line with HEFCW requests and circulars and the DDA. The service would act as an 'umbrella' to make the link between existing organisations, and work through

existing networks. The postholder would have an overview of the work of existing bodies, and be able to disseminate information and create a co-ordinated approach. Further, the co-ordinator could raise issues with HEIs directly and act as an intermediary between different organisations.

Respondents suggested that a key role for the postholder would be consultation with disability organisations in light of disability equality duty. The co-ordinator would be able to identify approaches and best practice models to help HEIs develop strategies in this area.

Consultation issue 7: Comments are invited on how to ensure that the remit of the service does not unnecessarily duplicate the work already being undertaken in Wales, or in the UK, by other representative bodies.

The service would be different to, and therefore complement, the work being undertaken by Skill – although it would be important for both to work together. The service would need proper consultation, regular contact and partnerships with other bodies to avoid duplication. This should be helped by the specific role of the service in supporting HEIs, which must be clearly defined. One respondent suggested that this could be avoided if the service was located within another disability organisation.

General comments

The respondents generally agreed that the service would be a positive, timely, and welcome development and step forward for HEIs in Wales, providing it was given the right resources to do so. It would have a role in ensuring the minimum duplication of effort in the sector in Wales and will help ensure at least a minimum standard of provision for disabled people in higher education. The postholder's overarching view of the sector would help facilitate and monitor institutional developments and would support staff in achieving their disability equality goals. The co-ordinator could be involved in joint agency training, particularly for senior managers, which would be useful for all staff.

The service should be monitored independently and by stakeholders as well as by HEFCW, and should not be an administrative burden on institutions. The delivery of and outcomes produced by the service should be reviewed regularly to reflect best practice. Respondents have offered to help develop the service in more detail, and have pointed to the need to ensure that the expertise already in the sector is harnessed. One respondent suggested that the co-ordinator could often work as a 'critical friend'.

The focus for this particular post should be on disability matters, rather than on equalities more generally; as one respondent pointed out, 'there is already a lot of ground to be made up' in this area. A number of responses underlined the importance that the post would need to be pitched at the right level and the postholder would need to have a sound understanding of disability issues in HE in order to have sufficient influence within HEIs.

One respondent reminded the need to ensure that franchise students were equally entitled to specialist services, and that these should be in-built to the development of the new service. One asked that the service be mindful to mental distress experienced by students in implementing the service. Another pointed to an increasing need for specialist estates technical advice in HEIs.

One respondent did not feel that there was adequate justification for the service, stating that HEIs had already achieved a great deal in this area and that funding would be better allocated directly to HEIs, particularly in the light of further required physical adjustments.

External Advertisement Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

Job Title:	Disability and Diversity Co-ordinator
Pay Zone:	£29,045 - £35,696
Location:	Llanishen, Cardiff
Closing Date:	11th May 2006
Interview Date:	22nd May 2006
Number of Posts:	1
Vacancy Reference No:	HE0090/580
Other relevant information:	Fixed term for 3 years, suitable for secondment

Background

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales is responsible for administering funds from the National Assembly for Wales (currently about £350 million per year) in support of higher education teaching, research and economic outreach in Wales. It is leading a major programme of change in Welsh higher education, under the Assembly's Reaching Higher strategy.

Equal Opportunities

HEFCW warmly welcomes applications from all sections of the community. Appointments will be made on merit.

Further Information

If you would like to discuss this post informally, please contact the line manager, Celia Hunt, on 029 2068 2224.

How to apply

Applications must be in the form of a completed application form addressing the requirements of the post and should be returned to:

Human Resources Department
HEFCW
Linden Court
Ilex Close
Llanishen
Cardiff
CF14 5DZ

Tel: 029 2068 2207

Fax: 029 2068 2220

E-mail: hrdepartment@hefcw.ac.uk

Job Description

1. PARTICULARS OF THE JOB

Jon Title: Disability and Diversity Co-ordinator
 Grade: F
 Title of Line Manager: Head of Learning and Teaching
 Section: Learning and Teaching
 Location: HEFCW Llanishen, or secondee's institution
 Date of Description: 23 February 2006

STATEMENT OF OVERALL PURPOSE

- ◆ To provide advice and guidance to higher education institutions (HEIs) on their duties towards disabled students and staff, and for equality and diversity more generally
- ◆ To support HEIs in directing their funding effectively and in collaborative activities to optimise support for disability and equal opportunities more generally
- ◆ To foster the development and dissemination of good practice and innovation in equal opportunities and particularly in the policies and provision for disabled students.,
- ◆ To contribute to sector development and Council policy on disability and equal opportunities in higher education, working closely with the Equality Challenge Unit.

So that HEFCW can support the strategic development of policies and provision for disabled people in higher education in Wales and equality and diversity in the sector. This will enable HEFCW to contribute to the maintenance and development of a strong higher education sector in Wales which can meet the requirements placed upon it by equalities legislation.

2. KEY ACTIVITIES DIRECTLY LINKED TO OVERALL PURPOSE

Advice and Guidance

- To establish and maintain effective working relations with key contacts working on disability and diversity matters and senior management in HEIs in Wales
- To give guidance to HEIs on implementing equality policies through being a 'critical friend' or 'sounding board' and through appropriate publications
- To advise HEIs on directing funding effectively on anticipatory and strategic developments for disabled students.
- To provide guidance on the practical implications of disability legislation and advise on staff training requirements.
- To act as a first point of contact for HEIs in Wales seeking advice on developing services and policies for disabled people.

45%

<p>Collaborative activities and sharing good practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To undertake activities to build collaboration between HEIs on disability and diversity matters. • To facilitate the sharing of experience, good practice and specialist resources in disability provision, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing central sources of information, such as a database of auxiliary aids and services provided and used by HEIs in Wales and facilitating links with other Wales and UK resources; • networking and organising seminars, attendance at pan-Wales meetings and joint work with the sector on events in Wales. • To support HEIs in involving disabled people in formulating institutional disability equality schemes. • To develop and maintain effective working relationships and partnerships with a range of key players in disability and diversity in Wales and the UK. 	35%
<p>Policy development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To contribute to HEFCW’s thinking and strategy development on disability, widening access and equal opportunities in higher education, taking forward work in the HE sector; • To link disability and other equality agendas. • To keep abreast of developments in disability and equality policy and any implications for HEFCW policy; • To attend meetings on behalf of and with the sector or HEFCW, as appropriate; and • To facilitate links between disabled people, practitioners and policy developers. 	15%
<p>Professional development</p> <p>In order to fulfil the above effectively, the postholder should maintain their own professional development and strengthen their own knowledge of sources of good practice, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developments in Welsh, UK and international equality and diversity policies; • innovation in developing provision and policies for disabled staff and students; and • making the links between disabled people in HE and broader issues relating to disability equality and with other areas of equal opportunities. 	5%
<p>In all these matters the postholder should liaise closely with the Equality Challenge Unit, which is funded by the UK Funding Councils and sector representative bodies to provide support to HEIs in equal opportunities matters.</p>	

3. **RESOURCES IMPACTED ON (i.e. Budgets, People, Turnover)**

The postholder is likely to determine expenditure against a small budget for activities related to the post (<£15K) with some input into expenditure on equalities more generally (<£80k). The postholder will not be responsible for the allocation of HEFCW disability premium funding within individual HEIs, although they may have an advisory role in this area. The postholder will line manage one of the Learning and Teaching Team Officers.

4. MINIMUM CAPABILITIES REQUIRED TO FULLY MEET JOB REQUIREMENTS or EQUIVALENT LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE

4.1 Qualifications:

Degree or equivalent

4.2 Work Experience

Detailed and current knowledge of higher education policy, particularly for disabled people and on equality and diversity in higher education.

Likely to be an experienced professional who has worked in the higher education sector or similar organisation in the development, management or delivery of policies relating to equal opportunities including disabled students, for **a minimum of five years** prior to appointment.

Self-motivated to be able to organise and carry out own programme of work with relatively little direction from the centre.

Excellent organisational skills to manage a range of activities in a timely manner.

- Highly effective communication skills, including the ability to
- ◆ negotiate and persuade, interacting with people in HEIs from senior management to key contacts such as staff in student services, and
- ◆ present policy and good practice issues succinctly and coherently.

Strong analytical ability, with a matching capacity to synthesise with sensitivity to context.

Ability to relate confidently to individuals at a variety of levels, including the highest in public sector or academic circles;

IT literate and numerate.

4.3 Competencies

Focusing on performance

- Ensures achievement of operational targets through delegation and own caseload projects.
 - Determines use of resources and works within a framework of compliance.
- and / or
- Directly manages a team.

Communicating

- Communicates the importance of the teams's contribution to organisational plans.
- Ensures staff have sufficient organisation wide information and keeps internal and external partners up to date with relevant information.

Working with others

- Manages cross team and external relationships, working with established partnerships.
- Represents HEFCW positively internally and externally showing an understanding of political sensitivities.

and / or

- Leads and directly manages a team.
- Conducts performance reviews and agrees performance and development plans.

Continuously Improving

- Promotes, implements and manages change.
- Formulates 1 to 3 year strategies and contributes to longer-term departmental strategy.
- Subscribes to a personal discipline of looking for continuous improvement and enables and encourages continuous improvement in others.

Problem solving and creativity

- Encourages creativity and experimentation.
- Selects and implements new ideas that fall within delegated area of authority.
- Develops and presents ideas for new initiatives demonstrating a clear appreciation of risk management.

Developing and applying expertise