



**Richmond Adult Community College**

Relaunch

**Disability Equality Scheme 2006-2009**

March 2008

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## **1. Introduction by Principal**

I am delighted to introduce our new Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan. It provides an assessment of where we are now and outlines our vision for the future. Richmond Adult Community College is committed to ensuring that disabled people have access to high quality training, education and employment opportunities. We believe all disabled people in our society have a right to full participation in their local communities. Our strategic plan outlines how we have formed three divisions in order to focus more closely on the needs of our learners to achieve this aim.

The Community College at Twickenham specialises in developing provision for people who have lacked opportunities to train or enter employment due to disability or social and economic disadvantage. We will be developing social enterprises at the Clifden Centre in Twickenham, in order to provide realistic workplaces for vocational training and accessible employment opportunities. We believe that by doing so we will be providing varied and relevant pathways into the local community, employment and challenging negative perceptions of disability.

The scheme and action plan will help us to make sure that we are actually doing what we set out to achieve. They were compiled by a team of staff who have actively involved learners and are continuing to develop forums and other ways of engaging learners' views on our services in order to help us to improve continuously. We will also seek the views of local and regional partners including disability organisations and members of the public.

The Scheme and Action Plan will be published on the College website and intranet. Printed copies in alternative formats will be available in our Learning Centres and from the Reception at all our main sites. We welcome all constructive comments on this scheme and believe that it will help us to ensure that discrimination and harassment are eliminated from all aspects of College life.

Christina Conroy OBE

## **2. Executive Summary**

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 extends the DDA 1995 and widens the definition of disability, extending legal protection to people with progressive conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis, HIV and all forms of cancer, from the point of diagnosis. It places new duties on all public bodies, including colleges, requiring them (amongst other duties) to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage their participation in public life.

There are new specific duties for listed bodies to produce and implement Disability Equality Schemes by December 2006. The Disability Equality Duty states that disabled people must be actively involved in formulating and developing the scheme. DDA 2005 is centred in the social model of disability, which states that the barriers faced by disabled people are created by the way society is organised and its attitudes. Organisations covered by the legislation have to now be pro-active in removing these barriers and negative attitudes.

RACC is committed to equal opportunities and diversity which are part of the core values of the College. The Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan will help us to make sure that we are doing what we set out to achieve. We are aware this scheme is the start of the journey towards disability equality and there is much to be done. The scheme will play a large part in influencing what we do and how we do it. One of the main areas we will be developing is ways in which we can best hear the views of disabled people themselves, including students and staff and disability organisations.

We welcome feedback from individuals, within and outside the institution and look forward to working with them to achieve our goals.

### **3. The Requirements of the Duty**

The College has a general duty to:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act
- Eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- Encourage participation by disabled persons in public life
- Take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons

#### **Specific Duty**

The College has a specific duty to:

- Publish the Disability Equality Scheme showing how the public body intends to fulfil its general and specific duties
- Prepare and review regularly the action plan detailing the steps taken to meet the duties

- Involve disabled people in the development of the Scheme
- Review, revise and publish the scheme every three years

The Scheme should include a statement of:

- The ways in which disabled people have been involved in developing the Scheme
- The College's arrangements for gathering information in relation to employment and the delivery of education
- The College's methods for carrying out impact assessments

## **4. The College**

### **Background**

RACC has been in existence since 1838 and has continuously maintained its purpose to provide for the diverse learning, social and economic mobility needs of adults and of young people with adult aspirations.

In 1996 the College gained self-governing status as a Further Education College through incorporation. Since then it has been one of the fastest growing and most successful colleges in the further education sector with around 15,000 students.

### **The Present**

Due to recent changes in Government policy on the strategy and funding for adult learning and skills, RACC has split its learning offer into three distinct branded Divisions. The Richmond Adult College provides leisure learning, the Community College provides vocational training and skills development for people who face social and economic disadvantage due to unemployment or disability and the Richmond Business School meets the needs of local employers and learners who are working across London in low paid jobs who require Level 2 and 3 qualifications in order to make career progress.

## **Curriculum Quality**

The standard of teaching and learning RACC is graded as 'outstanding' by OFSTED. The College also has Beacon College status and Centre of Vocational Excellence status in two areas Business and IT, and Digital Media and Design. The quality of other services has also been recognised by the award of a variety of kitemarks, including Chartermark Standard for public service.

## **Supporting Students**

### **Information, Advice and Guidance**

The College is committed to ensuring that everyone who wants to learn is able to do so and that access to appropriate programmes of study is made for all students regardless of their social and economic status, background or ability.

The College has a Matrix accredited Information, Advice and Guidance service. Learners are supported in finding the appropriate programme of study by qualified staff and specialist teachers who provide advice sessions within class groups or on a 1:1 basis within the College environment.

The Community College also offers this service within community venues such as extended schools, parents' evenings, community groups and Day Centres. It also makes good use of partnerships with Community Development Workers within the five wards of relative disadvantage to ensure that information is accessible, up to date and relevant to the needs of local people. Richmond Business School delivers Information Advice and Guidance in employers' premises and business networks and also offers on-line advice and support.

### **Financial Support**

The IAG service can also advise eligible students on what help is available for paying fees through the funds made available by College

Governors for student bursaries, through childcare grants, Educational Maintenance Allowances and the Adult Learning Grant.

In 2006/07 there was a 45% increase in the number of learners in targeted provision from disadvantage postcode areas. The College allocated £500,000 to create a bursary system that would remove financial barriers to learning encountered by learners who are unemployed, in receipt of means tested benefits or who have a disability.

## **Enrolment**

Access to learning programmes is facilitated by varied enrolment options. Learners can enrol in person at any of the College sites, by post or on-line. On-line enrolments have increased from 11% in 2005/06 to 25% in 2007.

Availability of on-line course information and screening and assessment tools and removal of the need for tutor approvals have helped to make the enrolment process more learner centred and accessible. In the 2006/07 academic year 92% of learners reported that they found the enrolment process good or better.

## **Disclosure**

Since 2003 the College has developed and extended its support services for Learners who have a disability or basic skills need and is currently the largest provider of education for this learner group within the Borough.

We ask all learners whether they have a disability or additional learning need prior to the start of programme, during their induction and while on the programme. Learners can refer themselves for an ALS assessment at any point on their course.

The disclosure rate of 6.4% is above the national average of 3%. However, we will seek to raise this figure by reviewing our admissions policies and procedures to reduce the numbers of “others” and “not

knowns” as well as increasing the numbers of learners declaring a disability.

**Summary of learners who have declared that they have a disability:**

**Disability Type 2006/07**

<b>description</b>	<b>Number of Learners</b>	<b>%</b>
Disability affecting mobility	98	<b>17%</b>
Emotional/behavioural difficulties	16	<b>3%</b>
Hearing impairment	99	<b>17%</b>
Mental ill health	50	<b>9%</b>
Multiple disabilities	30	<b>5%</b>
No physical disability, but a learning difficulty	61	<b>10%</b>
Not known/information not provided	16	<b>3%</b>
Other	71	<b>12%</b>
Other medical condition	59	<b>10%</b>
Other physical disability	27	<b>5%</b>
Temporary disability after illness	5	<b>1%</b>
Visual impairment	51	<b>9%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Learning Difficulty 2006/07**

<b>Learning Difficulty</b>	<b>Number of</b>	<b>%</b>
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	<b>Learners</b>	
Dyscalculia	1	<b>0%</b>
Dyslexia	58	<b>10%</b>
Moderate learning difficulty	58	<b>10%</b>
Multiple learning difficulties	4	<b>1%</b>
No learning difficulty, but a physical disability	205	<b>35%</b>
Not known/information not provided	81	<b>14%</b>
Other	140	<b>24%</b>
Other specific learning difficulty	9	<b>2%</b>
Severe learning difficulty	27	<b>5%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **Support for Learning**

Learners are encouraged to actively participate in assessing their learning needs and in planning their learning journey. Screening and assessment tools are available on-line so that learners can identify their Skills for Life levels and refer these to the entry requirements detailed on course outlines that are also available on the web. Further assessment and diagnostic testing is available to all learners either within group sessions or discrete or 1:1 interviews conducted by staff with appropriate specialist skills.

ALS interviews are conducted at a time and venue to suit the individual. Learners are invited to include the views and support of family, carers or professionals who work with them. Support is individually tailored to enable learners to access the learning environment, curriculum and feel a valued part of College and community life.

The Learning and Skills Council has been keen to support the College in developing services for disabled people and has allocated

funds for further projects that include increasing specialist resources in the Clifden Learning Centre. The College is also creating a Retail outlet for vocational training, a Travel Training and ICT project and developing new accreditation and learning pathways that begin at Pre-Entry Level and lead to Foundation Degrees and Higher Education. The College is working with the Learning and Skills Council to acquire Centre of Excellence status for its work in this area.

### **Current and Previous Work on Disability Equality**

RACC has a strong track record of providing post 16 education opportunities for disabled people. We have challenged negative perceptions of disability and restrictive models of education that focus on personal deficits and instead support local people to achieve their aspirations in the manner that most appropriately meets their abilities.

Since 2002, when we established Stepping on Out, a small, social enterprise, with a group of learners who had learning difficulties, we have explored ways in which we can enable our learners to progress to employment and play a greater role in the community.

To develop this work further and to create more work based learning opportunities RACC have appointed a Community Enterprise Manager to help disabled learners establish their own businesses and social enterprises and use them as a context for learning employment related skills.

The College has formed a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) Working Group which is chaired by Gabrielle Flint (Director of Adult and Community Learning) and which will report to the Equality and Diversity Committee. The Group will be responsible for monitoring the scheme and the associated action plan. The Group has representation from all areas of the College and includes senior management, Human Resources, Estates, Student Services, Marketing and Admissions and Curriculum and Quality. The Marketing Department will ensure that the Scheme is available in appropriate alternative formats and is widely available.

## 5. Meeting the General Duties

RACC intends to meet the general duties using the strategies detailed below.

- **To promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons**

RACC endorses the Government's vision set out in "Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People" (Strategy Unit, 2005): "By 2025, disabled people in Britain should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and will be respected and included as equal members of society".

We believe the RACC Disability Equality Scheme will be a vehicle to promote the Government's vision and further the social inclusion of our Learners. RACC is working towards Centre of Excellence status and its vocational skills curriculum implements the Learning and Skills Council's 2007 'Learning for Living and Work Strategy' for disabled people.

We produce positive images of disabled learners in our marketing materials and outline the ambitions and hopes of disabled learners in order to challenge stereotypical images. We will be placing these images and stories of individual learning journeys on our website.

RACC will engage disabled stakeholders within the College and also strengthen partnerships with relevant agencies and disability organisations to assist us in meeting the duties. We will continue to work closely with the Richmond Learning Partnership and develop strategies to reach learner groups that traditionally have faced barriers to education. We are also keen to identify ways in which we can address the needs of local young disabled people who are not in education, training or employment.

- **To eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act**

RACC will assess the impact of its policies and procedures relevant to disabled people. When conducting Impact Assessments, RACC will prioritise these into high, medium and low categories and involve disabled people in all stages of the impact assessment process. We will take account of the full diversity of disabled people because plans, policies, practices and procedures can, for example, present different barriers to people with mental health issues or Asperger's Syndrome compared to those who use a wheelchair.

RACC will consider all six parts of the General Duties of the Disability Equality Duty when making judgements. All managers involved in developing or reviewing policies, plans, practices or procedures are responsible for ensuring disability equality impact assessments are carried out. All staff are aware that they have a part to play in ensuring disability related discrimination is identified and challenged. Awareness of this duty will be strengthened by ensuring it is included in teaching practice, staff development, and highlighting policies to new staff.

- **To eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities**

As part of the DES Action Plan RACC will conduct an Impact Assessment of its Harassment and Bullying Policy, which will include the active involvement of disabled people. We will also involve partner organisations such as Richmond Aid (a charity of disabled people), the Local Authority and local transport companies because many of our learners have reported feeling vulnerable whilst using public transport. We will examine ways in which harassment can be prevented as well as ensuring it is properly recorded and dealt with.

- **To promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons**

RACC will introduce a rolling programme of disability equality training, including the Disability Equality Duty and advice and guidance on disability disclosure and confidentiality. We will produce case studies to highlight the achievement of our learners and work closely with employers and the local community to promote positive images of disabled people and develop further employment opportunities. We will post appropriate and positive images of disabled people on the

website and around the college. We will continue to challenge negative attitudes towards disabled people and introduce a variety of measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.

- **To encourage participation by disabled persons in public life**

We will encourage disabled learners to participate in public life by ensuring they are aware of opportunities within the community and will organise study trips and educational visits to community venues where appropriate.

The Labour Force Survey, Sept - Dec 2006 states only about half of disabled people of working age are in work (50%), compared with 80% of non disabled people of working age. The RACC curriculum focuses on employment related skills as unemployment often leads to isolation and social marginalisation. RACC is developing job clubs and careers guidance support for learners who have a disability in partnership with Power Employment and Connexions.

The Access to Work (AtW) Scheme will be promoted further within the College so all levels of management within the College are more aware of it and the six week ruling that states there is usually no cost sharing by the employer if AtW is applied for in this period.

- **To take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons**

RACC recognises that institutional discrimination can exist within organisations and that there are occasions where practices and policies could lead to disabled people being disadvantaged. In order to ensure that our policies and procedures do not discriminate unintentionally against people who have a disability we will carry out a full assessment of the impact our policies have on disabled people.

We will consider opportunities where we can treat disabled people more favourably than non disabled people. For example, we have

introduced a policy for when a person who has Dyslexia applies for a place on a course that requires an assessment test to be taken, a place will be reserved on the course whilst support arrangements are made for the learner to take the test.

## **6. Involving Disabled People**

RACC endeavours to involve disabled people in the planning and evaluation of its services. We actively seek feedback from disabled people who are current learners, those who have left a course without completing, those who apply but did not take up a place, leavers, ex students, Day Centre clients, members of the community, organisations of disabled people, disabled staff, those who applied unsuccessfully and disabled staff who have left the College.

The curriculum has been developed in response to learners' feedback. A number of learners with learning disabilities had expressed concern regarding the lack of employment opportunities. They told us they wanted better routes into employment with practical hands on experience to gain the necessary skills and experience required. RACC responded with a new Retail programme that involved disabled learners in the development of a shop that will provide accessible, vocational training and routes to social enterprises.

RACC recognises that we need to further develop the involvement of disabled people in the Disability Equality Scheme. We have included specific measures in the Action Plan that will help us to develop a range of involvement activities and methods. These include:

- Establishing a DES steering group
- Creating focus groups for disabled learners and employees
- Reviewing the processes and methods used for seeking Learner feedback
- Enrolment surveys

- Exit interviews for staff with specific disability related questions

The focus groups will include people who have disabilities in the following areas:

- Visual Impairments
- Hearing Impairments
- Mental Health issues
- Asperger's Syndrome
- Learning Difficulties, including Day Centre clients
- Physical Impairments

We will also seek the views of older learners as many older people are likely to acquire age related disabilities.

RACC recognises that there may be occasions where a person decides not to disclose. Therefore, we will provide opportunities for people to discuss organisational barriers anonymously.

## **Mental Health**

RACC recognises the particular barriers that people with mental health issues face. To this end we have developed a Mental Health Policy and practical guidelines for staff supporting these learners. We also introduced a rolling programme of mental health awareness training outlining RACC's mental health policy and practical guidelines.

## **7. Meeting the Specific Duty on Employment**

In September 2006 RACC employed 650 people and the number of employees declaring a disability was 6. We acknowledge that this

figure is below the national average and as disclosure is voluntary, it may not reflect the real number of employees who have a disability.

Therefore, as part of the work on the specific duty on employment we will analyse why the figure is low and devise strategies to increase the number of staff declaring a disability. We are committed to ensuring that our staff and prospective staff feel safe to disclose that they are disabled. This will be one of the priority areas within our three year action plan.

RACC was awarded the Two Ticks symbol in 2003 and we will review our application of the five commitments and ensure feedback of progress made to staff and Jobcentre Plus. We are also planning to put it on the job page with an outline of what our undertakings are in relation to it.

As detailed in the Action Plan, we will also be reviewing our employment policies and procedures and will conduct assessments of how they impact on disabled staff. This will be supported by disability equality training that relates to employment for managers with responsibility for interviewing and managing staff.

## **8. Gathering Information**

RACC will work alongside disabled stakeholders to choose appropriate mechanisms for gathering and making use of information on how we are currently performing on disability equality and to inform the Disability Equality Scheme.

We will undertake a mapping exercise of all policies, procedures and practices that impact on disabled staff, students and stakeholders.

As a starting point we will gather data on numbers of disabled people applying for jobs at the College, how well their skills are developed and the retention rates of disabled employees. We will also gather information on the effect of our policies and practices on the educational opportunities available to and on the achievements of disabled students, as well as the retention rates of disabled learners.

## **9. Impact Assessments**

RACC will work alongside disabled stakeholders in prioritising which activities, policies, practices or procedures should be impact assessed and to develop criteria to help decide the relevance of policies to disability equality.

RACC will deliver training to members of the Equality and Diversity Committee and other staff on impact assessment and produce a toolkit for assessing the impact of College policies. Where the relevance is deemed high a full impact assessment will be conducted. Where the relevance has been deemed low we will use the toolkit to identify what actions have been taken and record the findings in the Action Plan. The toolkit will also consider the issue of proportionality and record the impact on disability equality.

Staff responsible for the development of policies will be responsible for conducting impact assessments.

## **10. Publishing, monitoring, reviewing and reporting the Disability Equality Scheme**

The Disability Equality Scheme will be published on the RACC website with an easy read version also made available. We will ensure accessible copies are made available in Braille, other languages and large print etc.

Annual progress will be reported via focus groups, the website and other channels of communication. The report will include monitoring procedures, the results of impact assessments and information on the improved outcomes that have been achieved for disabled people.

## **11. The Action Plan**

In the first three years of the Action Plan will concentrate on the following:

- Involving Disabled People
- Developing a Toolkit to Conduct Impact Assessments and Gathering Information
- Access to the Built Environment, including the New Build
- Recruitment, Retention, Career Development and Promotion of Disabled Staff
- Support for Disabled Students and Visitors
- Raising Awareness of the Disability Equality Scheme
- Partnerships
- Monitoring, Reviewing and Reporting

### **Comments on the Disability Equality Scheme and the Action Plan**

RACC is committed to getting this right and welcomes comments and feedback on the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan. Please note that we will make every effort to take comment and feedback into account and provide feedback ourselves. Please send your comments or suggestions to Steve Davis at [steve.davis@racc.ac.uk](mailto:steve.davis@racc.ac.uk).

