

# Yeovil College Disability Equality Scheme

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# Yeovil College Disability Equality Scheme

## General Duty

The Disability Equality Duty is a new legislative requirement (2005) placed on public authorities (including FE colleges) to deliver better disability equality outcomes. The DED requires Yeovil College to act proactively on disability equality issues, across the whole institution.

The College is expected to have an anticipatory, social model approach, towards disability equality. Yeovil College will therefore be proactive in ensuring that disabled people are treated fairly by building upon identified current good practice, together with improving participation, satisfaction, achievement and opportunities for all.

Reference to 'disabled people' includes disabled students, staff, users of the College and other visitors. The definition of a disabled person under the Disability Discrimination Act (Appendix 1.) covers people with a wide range of impairments, including physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A physical or mental impairment includes:

- sensory impairment
- impairment relating to mental functioning, including learning difficulties/disabilities
- long-term health conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy, HIV, Cancer or Multiple Sclerosis

(reference [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org))

## Requirements of the Duty

The duty requires Yeovil College to have due regard to:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people

*Yeovil College will aim to ensure that disabled people have full opportunities and choices to improve the quality of their lives and be respected and included as equal members of our community.*

- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)

*Yeovil College will build upon its existing duty to ensure that unlawful discrimination is eliminated by making anticipatory and reasonable adjustments in relation to its educational provision and access to goods and services.*

- Eliminate disability related harassment

*Yeovil College will review its current anti-harassment policies to ensure that they are effective and relevant to disabled people*

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

*Yeovil College will ensure that positive images of and attitudes in relation to disabled people and disability equality, are central to the whole institution's ethos*

- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life

*Yeovil College will seek to overcome the significant under-representation of disabled people within our community, It will also encourage disabled people to participate fully in College and local events, particularly within roles of responsibility.*

- Take steps to meet disabled people's needs, even if this requires more favourable treatment

*Yeovil College will recognise that equality of opportunity for disabled people cannot be achieved by simply treating disabled and non-disabled people alike. It will therefore endeavour to make reasonable adjustment and positively discriminate wherever appropriate.*

NB. The above statements apply to all sites and functions of the College, not just education provision, employment and service delivery but, for example, budget setting, course validation, procurement and strategic planning.

## **Yeovil College Disability Equality Scheme**

### **Context**

Yeovil College is a tertiary college working towards full inclusiveness for its learners, staff and service users. The College serves communities in South Somerset and North and West Dorset and works closely with Yeovil Federation, Bournemouth and Exeter Universities and Yeovil Vision. The College has a turnover of approximately £15m and provides learning opportunities for over eight thousand learners. Our core values and behaviours include:

- Valuing and celebrating diversity
- Valuing respecting and supporting each other
- Promoting equality of opportunity
- Communicating openly and honestly
- Treating staff, students and customers with respect

(Reference College Strategic Plan 2007-08)

We have qualified, specialist staff who are experienced in working with a range of disabilities. These may include specific, profound and moderate learning difficulties; sensory impairment such as hearing and visual disabilities; physical and mobility related disabilities and mental health difficulties.

### **Aims of the Scheme**

Yeovil College's Disability Equality Scheme seeks to create a positive whole college ethos towards disability equality. This will be achieved through direct links to the self-assessment reports, quality improvement and development plans, strategic plan, staff development plan and relevant policies.

The Scheme has been created from on-going qualitative and quantitative action research that focuses upon disability equality perceptions. It includes input from a cross section of the whole College community, i.e. people with a variety of disabilities including staff, students, key stakeholders, service users and relevant local organisations. The following questions have been considered:-

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be in three years?
- How will we get there?

This research enables us to produce:-

- A statement of the key outcomes
- An on-going, cross-College action plan

- On-going evidence for an annual report
- A tri-annual review process

### **Action Research Process**

In October 2005 the College Equality and Diversity Group,\* chaired by the Principal, agreed to create a Disability Sub-Group consisting of the Head of Centre Skills for Life & Learning and Learning Link Department Manager. The remit was for them to undertake the necessary research programme to inform the new College Disability Equality Scheme.

Using a variety of formal and informal information systems, a number of disabled and non-disabled students and staff were identified and offered the opportunity to take part in the on-going action research programme. Relevant local stakeholders and service users were also included within the information gathering process. Between November 2005 and November 2006 meetings with various focus groups and individuals were held where discussions were based on brief questionnaires (Appendix 3). The main action points from the research are shown in Appendix 4 and have informed the final Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan.

Information about the number of disabled students was gathered utilising the College MIS system. Full details are given in Appendix 5. No comparable official data currently exists about staff.

### **Opportunities for Disabled People**

Yeovil College promotes inclusiveness regarding curriculum offer, applications for courses, employment opportunities and general access to College properties. We actively and sensitively encourage people with disabilities and specific learning difficulties to disclose their individual needs in order that appropriate support can be offered where necessary. In addition, specialist courses are also available to meet the needs of students with profound or moderate learning difficulties, mental ill health, and basic skills needs.

Prior to enrolment, we work closely with our partner schools, Connexions and other agencies to identify students with potential individual support needs. Systems are in place to monitor, track and review a variety of support options for students on course. In order to ensure that anti-discriminatory practice is followed, the review process seeks to discuss and act upon the views of disabled people. Reviews also enable opportunities for effective support to be further discussed and altered if appropriate, to help ensure success on individual programmes.

\*Terms of reference -Appendix 2

Student and staff satisfaction surveys, including information from people with disabilities, are carried out regularly. (Details of student surveys are shown in Appendix 6.)

At present the College does not have access to extensive statistics regarding disability equality. However, this has been identified within our Action Plan and will be addressed as a matter of priority.

Yeovil College considers liaison with specialist outside agencies and service users to be vital in exchanging and gathering information regarding the provision for disabled people. Agencies will include NHS Trust Mental Health Team, Care & Residential Homes, Local Housing Projects, Women's Refuge, Headway, MIND, local employers, Social Services, Connexions, etc.

### **Impact Assessments**

All policies and procedures will be reviewed as part of Yeovil College Disability Equality Scheme. Impact assessments on identified policies and procedures will be carried out as detailed within the Action Plan. This will include both College and individual department assessments.

### **Leadership & Management**

The Senior Management Team and Governors support the continuing work to produce the first Yeovil College Disability Equality Scheme and relevant Action Plan. The Equality and Diversity Group have monitored the ongoing research programme and the development of the Scheme. It is considered important that this responsibility continues. In addition, a member of the Governing Body and The Principal should, in future, take an active part in disability issues and the promotion of the Scheme across the College, including the wider community.

Yeovil College will adopt a positive social model of disability, (Appendix 7) it recognises that it is the responsibility of all staff to eliminate discrimination and to promote disability equality. A mandatory training programme will be introduced to enable staff to acquire the knowledge and skills required to promote disability equality, to carry out the requirements of the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan and achieve identified improvements in disability equality. It will also raise awareness of the Disability Equality Duty and the benefits that this will bring to the organisation.

Yeovil College will ensure that disability equality is a key consideration in course reviews, self assessment and quality improvement processes. It will be the responsibility of all managers to embed disability equality across the whole organisation.

### **Putting the Scheme into Practice**

Following approval by the Senior Management Team and Governing Body, the Yeovil College Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan will be published and available to all staff, students and service users via the College Website. In addition hard copies will be located in every staff room, the offices of key managers, at College Reception and in all offsite centres. Alternative formats including Braille, taped and large font etc, will be available on request.

The mechanisms used to report progress will include feedback to the Governing Body, Senior Management Team, the Equality & Diversity Group, Student Executive, Employers' Forum and Parent Liaison Group. Team Brief will be used as the means of disseminating information to all staff. Tutorial bulletin will inform all sixth form students and the College Website will offer wider access for all other students, service users and other interested parties. If students/staff are unable to access these forms of information, it is expected that relevant managers/ lecturers/ tutors, will disseminate key points where appropriate.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

In accordance with statutory requirements, the Yeovil College Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan will be reviewed and revised every three years. An annual report will be produced which assesses the progress made in meeting targets within the Action Plan. The Disability Equality Scheme will be monitored and updated within the monthly Equality & Diversity Group meetings.

### **Conclusion**

This new legislation provides an opportunity for genuine organisational change within Yeovil College, where we will build upon the existing core values of increasing inclusion and celebrating diversity. It is anticipated this will lead to improved choices and opportunities which will help to close the gap between the expectations, experiences, education, qualifications and employment of disabled and non-disabled people.

The Yeovil Collage Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan enables us to further improve the experiences of ALL our staff, learners and service users by continually reflecting upon our practice, facilities and achievements. It offers genuine opportunities for positive action, allowing us to proactively break down barriers and prevent discrimination within our institution.