



DISABILITY ACTION PLAN for

The Open University (in Northern Ireland)

1.	Introduction 1.1 Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Open University is required when carrying out its functions in Northern Ireland to have due regard to the need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and• encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties'). Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Open University is also required to submit to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) a Disability Action Plan showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to its functions.
1.2	Acting in my capacity as National Director, responsible on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor of the Open University for the University's operations in Northern Ireland, I wish to confirm that the Open University is committed to implementing effectively the disability duties and this disability action plan in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, we will allocate all necessary resources (in terms of people, time and money) in order to implement effectively this plan and where appropriate, build objectives relating to the disability duties into our strategic priorities and annual operating plans.

	<p>We will also put appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and this disability action plan effectively implemented. We will ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and to providing all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.</p> <p>In line with the approach taken nationally by the Open University in implementing its UK Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan 2006-2009, progress in achieving the objectives and actions in its Disability Action Plan for Northern Ireland will be monitored annually and revised in the light of outcomes to this Annual Review <i>and</i> in response to proportionate and appropriate internal and external consultation and involvement of staff, students and stakeholders.</p> <p>Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan and the point of contact within the Open University in Northern Ireland will be:-</p> <p>Name: Gary Sloan Title: Assistant Director (Development) and Equality Officer Address: The Open University in Ireland 40 University Road Belfast BT7 1SU Telephone number: + 44 (0) 28 9024 5025 Extn 72162 Fax number: + 44 (0) 28 9023 0565 Email: W.G.Sloan@open.ac.uk</p> <p>If you would like to receive this plan in a different format to meet your needs, please contact the above person to discuss your requirements.</p>
1.3	<p>We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual progress report on the implementation of this plan to the ECNI and carrying out a five year review of this plan, or plans submitted to the ECNI over the five year review period.</p>

	<p>A copy of this plan, our annual progress to the Equality Commission and our five year review of this plan will be made available on the University’s equality and diversity website at http://www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity</p> <p>Please note that a copy of our first annual progress report on disability was submitted in September 2008 to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland together with our Section 75 progress report for 2007-2008.</p>
<p>1.4</p>	<p>Functions</p> <p>The Open University is a body incorporated by Royal Charter.</p> <p>The objects of the Open University as embodied in the Article of the Charter are the advancement and dissemination of learning through teaching and research by a diversity of means such as broadcasting and technological devices appropriate to higher education, by correspondence tuition, residential courses and seminars, and in other relevant ways.</p> <p>The Open University is also required to provide education of university and professional standards for its students, and to promote the educational well-being of the community generally.</p> <p>The Mission of the Open University is to be “Open to people, places, methods and ideas.”</p> <p>It promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high quality university education to all who wish to realize their ambitions and fulfill their potential.</p> <p>Through academic research, pedagogic innovation and collaborative partnership it seeks to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open and distance learning.</p> <p>Two of its 10 strategic priorities encapsulate its commitment to equality and diversity i.e. “To promote fair access to all” and “To diversify and develop our staff base.”</p>

	<p>It has a UK wide Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan which informs the operation of its N.I. Disability Action Plan in compliance with Section 49A Northern Ireland.</p>
<p>1.5</p>	<p>Public Life Positions</p> <p>The range of public life positions over which the Open University has responsibility, are as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • part-time higher education students registered with the Open University • academic and academic support staff of the University. <p>With regard to its student community the Open University has one of the highest participation rates of students with disabilities in comparison to other UK universities. It monitors and reviews on a continuous basis the extent to which disabled enquirers find the OU accessible and from point of registration how it can continue to enhance its support for students with disabilities. This is carried out on a personal basis in Northern Ireland – refer to Section 3 measures 3 and 4 in this document.</p> <p>With regard to OU staff in N.I. with disabilities, the University encourages applications from people with disabilities and is in the process of analysing the results of its EQIA of OUNI staff recruitment and selection policies to assess and then take action upon any adverse effects identified with regard to OU staff with disabilities in Northern Ireland.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Previous Measures</p> <p>Outlined below are the key measures which the Open University has already taken nationally and which apply in Northern Ireland to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.</p> <p>Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The delivery of the University’s strategic priority to “Promote

fair access for all” encourages and enables a more culturally, socially and economically diverse student group to learn, achieve and prosper through the OU.

- The delivery of the University’s strategic priority to diversify and develop its staff base creates a broader and more diverse staff profile equipped and developed to meet the changing needs of the University and prospective students.
- The University has established an infrastructure to enable a UK Disability Advisory Team (for staff issues) and a UK Disabled Student Advisory Group (for students) to assess progress of the University’s UK Disability Equality Scheme - this includes assessment of the University’s Disability Action Plan 2006 - 2009 and will now encompass its Disability Action Plan in Northern Ireland.
- In doing so it has established reporting mechanisms to monitor and review progress of University’s Disability Action Plan required in Northern Ireland in compliance with Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the ‘DDA 1995’), (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006
- It submitted an annual progress report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in September 2008 on ‘Disability Duties’ Questions in compliance with Section 49A.
- It has carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of Open University staff in Northern Ireland and as a result of which it has obtained more accurate information about the needs of OU staff in Northern Ireland with disabilities.

Specific to the University’s operations in Northern Ireland the following measures/actions have been taken:

- Development of a Disabled Students’ database as management/support tool in Northern Ireland.

- Development of a support framework to assist students decide upon and arrange any non-medical help award they have received as part of their Disabled Students' Allowance.
- The production of an 'In-house' publication 'Disability Matters' which provides in one place all the information an Open University Assistant Lecturer requires to know to support OU students in Northern Ireland with disabilities. This important publication is also available on-line (copy attached to this report as Appendix).
- Production of a directory, to be made available to both staff and students, giving local contact details of a wide range of organizations providing information, advice and/or support to people with a variety of disabilities and health issues.
- Visit of Open University Access Bus which toured Northern Ireland to highlight the availability of a Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) to prospective and registered OU students.

Encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

- The University takes a proactive approach to attract people with disabilities into its workforce. The effectiveness of this approach as delivered by its Recruitment and Selection policies in N.I. has been subject to an EQIA the results of which are being analyzed in relation to any adverse effects.
- Similarly the University takes a proactive approach to the recruitment of students with disabilities – the effectiveness of this approach will be subject to an EQIA in 2009/10 of its Student Recruitment and Admissions policies in N.I. from which any adverse impacts will be considered and rectified.
- The University's commitment to take account of the needs of disabled students in the design (including learning outcomes), presentation and development of new courses and the embedding of alternative formats at the outset and to involve disabled students in developmental testing of new courses.

3	<p>Action Measures</p> <p>Outlined below are the measures which we propose to take over the review period 2009 - 2010 of this disability action plan, together with performance indicators.</p>
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Measures to promote positive attitudes ('PAs') towards disabled people and encourage the participation ('PDs') of disabled people in public life

Measures	Timescale	Performance Indicators/target
(1) 'PAs' - Ensure relevant OU staff and office holders in Northern Ireland continue to attend disability awareness training and guidance and receive up to date information regarding disability as mainstream activity.	Continuous, throughout year of review.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of staff attending • Range of programs/ sessions offered • Impact on student admissions, retention and percentage of students with disabilities
(2) 'PAs' - Further development of Student Disability database as Management/ Support tool in Northern Ireland.	Continuous, throughout year of review.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on admissions and retention numbers and satisfaction ratings of students with disabilities in NI.
(3) 'PDs' - Proactive support to enable students to make the most of their non-medical help award from DSA.	Continuous, throughout year of review.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on student admissions and retention numbers and satisfaction ratings of these students.

<p>(4) 'PDs' - Associated projects such as proactive learning support telephone calling of students with disabilities e.g. telephone calling selected target groups of vulnerable students including those with a range of mental health issues.</p>	<p>Continuous, throughout year of review.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on student retention numbers and satisfaction ratings of these students.
<p>(5) 'PAs' and 'PDs' – carry out EQIA of OU Student Recruitment and Admissions policies in Northern Ireland and address any adverse impacts arising for OU enquirers /students with disabilities.</p>	<p>2009/2010</p>	<p>Following analysis of Student Recruitment and Admissions EQIA – actions taken to address any adverse impacts on OU enquirers/ students with disabilities in N.I.</p>

Signed by:

National Director

OUNI Section 75
Equality Officer