

RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT FOR INNOVATION, UNIVERSITIES AND SKILLS TO THE FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSION FOR DISABLED STAFF IN LIFELONG LEARNING.

Introduction

- 1.1 The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) welcomes the final report of the Commission for Disabled Staff in Lifelong Learning. We believe we should support the sector in its overall response and endorse the call from the Commission for the sector to move from compliance to culture change. We believe the sector needs this report in an area hitherto largely unexplored. We believe the report sets a new direction and should be seen as a potential catalyst to change the way we support disabled staff.
- 1.2 We are very aware from the report's findings that there are real problems. The findings are stark. The report identifies what is believed to be systemic failure and we need a system response to ensure rhetoric is turned to action. The overall conclusion of the report tells us we do a better job for disabled students than disabled staff. While it may be helpful to have confirmation we are changing the way we treat disabled students we should recognise that there is no room for complacency. Our disabled staff deserve far better.
- 1.3 It is helpful to acknowledge a 'no blame' starting point, so that we can reflect objectively on what needs to be done. The Commission has done the lifelong learning sector a great service in establishing a baseline from which to work. We now expect all to move from this baseline and accept the responsibility and real challenge to change our culture of support and, perhaps most importantly our attitudes towards disabled staff.

The Way Forward

Leadership

- 2.1 Leaders set the tone, create the right environment and provide the direction. In this case all leaders need to assume that responsibility unequivocally. It is not acceptable to hope that simple compliance with the law is good enough and somehow it will work out. All our organisations have compiled equalities schemes, diversity statements and policy intents but these are no good if the impact is not felt by all people these are intended for. Disabled staff deserve the respect of us all just as any other group and clearly we are failing to provide the fair access, the support and equal treatment that disabled staff need.
- 2.2 As employers, we recognise that we in government need to be exemplary. We need to set the highest standards and we in DIUS, accept that challenge. FE providers, Higher Education institutions need also to aim for the highest standards -role models for learners they serve. They can use their position in leading the challenge against prejudices about disability

and develop the best practice in supporting and nurturing disabled staff, some of whom can be enormously damaged by the experience of acquiring a disability or struggling with mental ill health. DIUS will become an exemplar employer in the treatment of its disabled staff as part of its Equalities and Diversity practice.

- 2.3 Our expectation is that all institutions take this most seriously and reflect where they are in relation to this report. Culture change is brought about by leaders and managers and we support fully the analysis in the report that culture change must be led from the top and this must be a visible lead.
- 2.4 We therefore accept the recommendation (number 38) of the Commission to encourage and support...lifelong learning organisations to commit to the eleven recommendations identified under recommendation 17.6. Further, Ministers and senior staff will lead in their duties and ensure that we assess impact appropriately on disabled staff and monitor remit letters from the Secretary of State to reflect disability equality objectives. We agree that any objectives should be realistic and objective.
- 2.5 We expect all our delivery partners and publicly funded inspection, quality improvement, and other bodies to be accountable for their performance and set out their expectations with learning providers.
- 2.6 In addition, we will look to our delivery partners, including LLUK and the new FE Learning and Skill Improvement Service, to take a lead in identifying and addressing issues raised by this report, in the course of delivering their business. To do this, we will support these organisations through our planning and funding relationships to fulfil this expectation.

Practical support

- 3.1 In the immediate term, we will support the establishment of an Implementation Group to develop and oversee an action plan agreed with stakeholders to follow up the report. We will look to LLUK to ensure this group is formed and managed effectively to develop the plan and progress the recommendations of the Commission. This will report to Ministers and reports will be made available, through LLUK and partner organisations. We will look to LLUK to consult with partners about this Group's longer term role, in the context of work they take forward on behalf of the FE sector in overseeing the FE Workforce Strategy.
- 3.2 We will discuss with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) issues arising from the Review of Disability Employment Services conducted by DWP and ensure any improvements to Access to Work will impact positively on disabled staff.
- 3.3 We will look to LLUK to work with partners in using the recently published FE Workforce Strategy for 2007 -2012 and the associated Strategy Implementation Plans to make a difference in the FE sector. In particular,

we will ask LLUK to ensure that under Priority 4 (Ensuring Equality and Diversity is at the Heart of Strategy, Policy Making and Training), there is collaborative effort to address the findings of this report and needs of disabled staff across the FE sector.

3.4 We will discuss effective training and development of leaders and staff, with LLUK and the new FE Learning and Skills Improvement Service. We will seek to review what is already in place and consider what more needs to be done to equip leaders and staff with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively support those with disabilities. At the same time, we will ensure that national standards reflect the behaviours we require and training and development is available and relevant to support those with disabilities.

3.5 We will determine ways of sharing effective practice in employment and support.

3.6 We will find ways of evaluating progress and agree measures of success.

Outcomes

4.1 We expect significant improvements **towards achieving the following within 5 years**

- staff will not be afraid to disclose a disability or mental ill health problem
- declaring a disability or mental ill health issue is not seen as a barrier to career prospects
- disabled staff report equity and fair access as the norm in their experience
- leaders and staff have effective training to help them in their roles for supporting disabled staff
- disabled staff have equal access to training and development to help them in their roles
- full compliance with the law as essential but going beyond this as the standard.
- clear evidence that staff are kept in the system and continue to lead productive lives
- evidence that the reputation of the lifelong learning sector has improved as 'excellent employers'
- agreement on what increase in the employment of disabled staff it is reasonable to accept
- people are not afraid to identify where weaknesses remain and where this happens, positive remedial action is taken immediately