Disclosure and Support Issues for Disabled Staff in Higher Education
Report 2008
Equality Challenge Unit supports the higher education sector in its mission to realise the potential of all staff and students whatever their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief or age, to the benefit of those individuals, higher education institutions and society.

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# Equality Challenge Unit

Disclosure and Support Issues for Disabled Staff in Higher Education

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Executive summary

This report summarises the findings of an Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) project undertaken in 2007 to examine issues affecting the disability disclosure decisions of staff in higher education. From the data collected for this project, the following issues were identified as influencing the incidence of staff disclosure of disability. It is recommended that these issues are addressed through institutional policies and practices.

Disclosure

- Disclosure depends on staff identification with the term ‘disabled,’ which, for a number of reasons, may not be a term adopted by all staff with disabilities. Clearer information needs to be made available for staff about what constitutes a disability and what support is available.

- Confusion may persist about what constitutes a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act. This may be addressed by appropriate information from the higher education institution (HEI) at the point of monitoring, and by training for all staff.

- The social model of disability encourages different methods of supporting staff that are not reliant on them meeting legal definitions of disability. This needs to be understood by all staff, and adopted when developing policies and practices.

- Opportunities for staff to be able to disclose their disability status need to be available at all stages of their career, not just when they join an organisation. Methods of disclosing disability status whenever they wish to do so need to be made clear to all staff.

- Forms used to invite disclosure of disability status could usefully provide a clear definition of disability, including examples of long-term health conditions. Support mechanisms and key members of staff could also be identified.

Reasonable adjustments

- Clarification of procedures for arranging individual adjustments, and the provision of a key support individual or team, may assist disabled staff to reduce some of the frustration experienced.

- Effective monitoring of reasonable adjustments will ensure they remain fit for purpose and are being implemented in all aspects of an individual’s work, and at all sites where the staff member is working.

- The provision of training for all staff on the effective delivery of reasonable adjustments and a more inclusive environment would help to change perceptions of disabled staff as having a ‘problem’ for which the staff member is wholly and uniquely responsible.
Executive summary

Supportive environments

- A commitment is needed at the highest levels to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all staff.

- Adequate and visible support mechanisms for disabled staff can help reduce the perceived stigma of disability, and the practical impact of needing to repeatedly request adjustments.

- Good communication between functions within an organisation can help ensure that disabled staff feel supported.

- Increased visibility of disabled staff, and the encouragement of disabled staff groups and networks, may help others to disclose an impairment.

- Support for disabled staff could be provided indirectly through training for all staff, and through targeted support for line managers. This could help to promote inclusion of disabled people across the organisation.

- Groups of disabled staff can provide useful practical and emotional support to their peers, as well as important sources of expertise for the organisation, either as self-support networks or as networks led by equality and diversity staff. For example, they can be encouraged to act as a conduit for conveying concerns to human resources and senior management.

- A supportive and welcoming environment within an HEI can help to encourage disclosure. This welcoming environment can be communicated through the information provided to people considering applying for posts at the HEI, and by offering appropriate support for existing staff.

- Integration of support across different areas of the institution could assist staff who have become disabled during their employment, and who need assistance.

- Mechanisms that may initially support disabled staff, such as loans of equipment, may also prove helpful to other groups of staff. These may be useful to staff with temporary as well as permanent disabilities or impairments.

- Institutions could consider coordinating support for their disabled staff, including centralised help for Access to Work applications and support for the line managers of disabled people. This support could be made available to staff on all types of contract. For example, flexible working practices that will benefit all staff could be encouraged.

This project has identified some key areas that may influence individual HE staff members in their decision about whether to disclose a disability to an employer. The recommendations of this project will be taken forward in ECU’s 2008 programme. It is anticipated that:
ECU will work with a small sample of HEIs that have indicated they are willing to implement some of the recommendations of this report as a pilot project, with a view to improving the institution’s disclosure rates.

The implementation of initiatives will be monitored to measure their impact on disclosure rates.

A final report will be published summarising the lessons learned from the initiatives and any further recommendations to the sector.

Further information on ECU’s 2008 programme and follow-up activities to this report can be found on ECU’s website.
1. Introduction

1.1. Background

This report summarises the findings of an Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) project undertaken in 2007 to examine issues affecting the disability disclosure decisions of staff in higher education (HE). The project involved a small survey of disabled staff at one higher education institution (HEI), the full findings of which are reported in a separate publication, Disclosure and Support Issues for Disabled Staff in Higher Education: Survey Findings 2007. In addition, interviews were conducted with a number of key HEI staff at 15 institutions to capture an institutional perspective on the subject, and an analysis of email information about disabled staff networks was undertaken. The recommendations of this project will be taken forward during 2008 by recruiting HEIs to pilot some key interventions, with the aim of increasing the level of disclosure of disability at their institutions.

The level of staff disclosure of disability within the HE sector is important for several reasons. First, disclosure allows for more accurate monitoring of the recruitment, retention and promotion of disabled staff and the collection of statistical information required both for the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA), and as part of HEIs’ Disability Equality Schemes. More generally, disclosure of disability can be seen as an indicator of the impact of policies and practices on an HEI’s disabled community: this study has found that disclosure of disability is more likely to take place if staff have confidence in their employer’s commitment to disability equality, and that their progression in the post will not be affected. Lastly, steps that HEIs can take to encourage disclosure of disability may reap additional benefits both for staff and for the organisation as a whole, for example through more effective communication and increased staff retention.

This project has been undertaken in response to the fact that the number of staff who have declared their disability status to HE employers is lower than would be expected from the proportion of disabled people in the UK population, and also lower than the numbers of disabled staff working in HE as recorded in the 2004 census. Figures from the HESA for 2004/05 showed 2.34 per cent of disabled people working in HE, while the 2004 census indicated that 9 per cent of people working in HE have disabilities. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has stressed the importance of increasing the representation of disabled staff in the HE sector, and while acknowledging that the number of disabled staff in the sector is increasing over time (HEFCE, 2007), it has included in its Strategic Plan for 2006–11 a goal to monitor and increase the proportion of disabled people holding senior positions in HEIs (HEFCE, 2006).
This project builds on a number of investigations that have recognised the importance of disclosure of disability within the HE sector, listed below.

- An Institute of Employment Studies report (IES, 2005), *Non-disclosure and Hidden Discrimination in Higher Education*, which discusses disclosure of disability among other non-visible attributes of HE staff. This reports on project two of the research programme ‘Equal Opportunity and Diversity for Staff in HE’, jointly funded and commissioned by HEFCE, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (now the Scottish Funding Council) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).
- The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education’s Commission for Disabled Staff in Lifelong Learning collected a range of evidence from staff, including information relating to disclosure decisions, during 2007, published as *From Compliance to Culture Change* (NIACE, 2008).

This project complements these studies by providing additional primary research into factors that might affect an individual's decision whether or not to disclose their disability status to their employer. Information has been gathered from disabled staff, disabled staff networks, HR managers and equality and diversity practitioners in order to place disclosure decisions in the context of HEI structures and cultures.

The findings of this investigation will be of particular interest to members of the HE community with responsibilities for the recruitment and retention of staff and increasing opportunities for staff with disabilities or long-term health conditions. The report is also relevant to senior managers, strategic managers and policymakers within the sector as they consider interventions to increase the proportion of HE staff who feel able to disclose disability status to their employers. This will require ensuring that all staff are contributing towards creating an inclusive environment in which disclosure of disability is not avoided through fear of stigma or discrimination.

Based on the analysis of data collected, potential interventions are suggested that may help to encourage disclosure among HE staff, which HEIs may wish to implement as part of existing projects to boost the disclosure rates in their institution.
The findings of this report, and of the project work it summarises, will be used by ECU to develop a list of key interventions to be piloted by a small group of HEIs in 2008. The results of this pilot will be reported as part of ECU’s 2008 programme.

This report uses the definition of disability found within the **Disability Discrimination Act 1995**, as amended:

‘A disabled person is someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.’

*(Secretary of State, 2006)*

For the purposes of this report, the terms ‘disabled staff’ and ‘staff with disabilities’ refer to individuals employed by HEIs, and who meet the definition of disability given above. These individuals may be academic or professional/support staff and may work at any level within the HEI.

There are different public perceptions of disabled people, two main differences being embodied in the medical and social models of disability.

- The medical model of disability suggests that difficulties experienced by disabled people as a result of their disabilities, impairments or long-term health conditions are caused directly by the limitations of those disabilities.

- The social model of disability asserts that the barriers experienced by disabled people are the result of how the physical and social environment is structured, not by any inherent lack of ability on the part of the disabled individual.

This report is written from a social model perspective that supports the former DRC’s view that:

‘The poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people is not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical health conditions, but rather stems from attitudinal and environmental barriers.’

*(DRC, 2007a)*

In this report, the terms ‘disclosure’ and ‘declaration’ are used synonymously to indicate a statement by a disabled person to an employer that could identify them as being disabled. Equality Forward (2007) has produced a useful definition of disclosure:

‘the process of an employee informing their employer of a disability/impairment. This may happen in several ways, including anonymously, for example through a staff disability/impairment survey, or ‘openly’, for example for the purposes of achieving reasonable adjustments or specific support at work.’
2. Research methods

Four methods of investigation were used to collect data:

- desktop research, examining the websites of selected HEIs for information about support for disabled staff
- telephone interviews with human resources (HR) and equality and diversity practitioners at selected HEIs
- an online survey of disabled staff of one HEI
- analysis of information collected by email from equality and diversity practitioners.

2.1 Desktop research

Desktop research was carried out in early June 2007 to provide background data for the project. This research was intended to inform further research with selected HEIs, and provide a steer for the development of research questions for the project. The websites of seven HEIs of medium staff size (3000–5000 staff) with differing levels of disclosure (three relatively high, four relatively low) were selected from HESA 2004/05 reports for this investigation. These sites were selected so that size of institution would not be a significant factor, and to provide types of information applicable to both larger and smaller institutions. Information was sought in the following areas.

- Were there any support departments or support mechanisms in place for disabled staff?
- Was there integration with other service providers (e.g. Jobcentre Plus)?
- Was there any evidence of the Positive About Disabled People/Two Tits scheme? (see Appendix D)
- Was there any promotional information for disabled people (e.g. about applying to work at the HEI?)
- Was there integration of equality and diversity work within the HEI structure?

These questions were selected by the ECU disability team to explore the cultural identity of the organisation, its ‘disability-friendliness’, and the level of integration between disability support units and other parts of the HEI structure. The accessibility of the websites themselves was not assessed in this study, although it is recognised that this would be an important additional indicator of disability awareness.

In terms of statistical information, a limitation of this research was that data were collected at different times. HESA statistics about staff disclosure at the time of the research related to the academic year 2004/05, and information was collected from
Research methods

university websites in June 2007. In most cases, it was difficult to know the date at which the support structures or policies listed on the websites were instigated, so it was impossible to make a causal link between these structures and policies and the level of staff disclosure shown in the HESA data. Further limitations were that the HEIs may have had more support available to disabled staff than was presented on their public websites, or they may have had other ways of supporting staff that were not identified. However, the collection of data from these seven institutions did provide some information about the type of support available to disabled staff in the sector.

2.2 Telephone interviews
The HESA data for the academic year 2004/05 were used to identify a small number of HEIs for potential participation in the investigation.

Again, HEIs of similar staff size and with differing rates of disclosure of disabilities were selected, and approached with a view to collecting information about their procedures concerning disclosure of disability status. Contact was also made with institutions that had indicated they were addressing staff disclosure of disability status.

Semi-structured telephone interviews were then carried out with one HR manager, one data manager and five equality and diversity practitioners from five different institutions.

Core questions asked were:

- What are the issues around disclosure, as you see them, at your HEI?
  - Have these changed over the past three years?
  - What impact do you think the University’s culture has on disclosure?
- Please talk me through the ways that data on disabilities are collected from staff.
  - What are the current methods?
  - Are you introducing anything new? If so, what and why?
- What support is available for disabled staff?
- Has the Disability Equality Scheme had any impact on disclosure?

Interviews were kept open to allow issues to be raised by interviewees, and in response to the different periods of time respondents had available. Staff were not asked to disclose to the interviewer whether they were themselves disabled, as this was not considered to be appropriate to the nature of the interview.

Information was collected about the policies and procedures used to encourage disclosure, and the issues that had arisen to influence disclosure at that institution. Interviewees were encouraged to give opinions about how they believed disclosure could be encouraged at their institution.
2.3 Online survey
A small-scale survey of disabled staff working in HE was carried out between May and July 2007. This online survey was sent to a network of disabled academic staff, and was completed by 66 individuals. Full details of the findings of this survey have been published as a separate document, *Disclosure and Support Issues for Disabled Staff in Higher Education: Survey Findings*. A copy of the survey questions used can be found in Appendix A.

2.4 Analysis of email information
Data concerning staff groups for disabled people in HE were collected from 15 institutions in answer to a request for information about networks and groups for disabled staff, which was posted to the Jiscmail lists Dis-Forum and Admin-EO. A copy of the email request can be found in Appendix B.
3. Research findings

3.1 Findings from website research
The following information was collected from the websites to address the research questions set.

Were there any support departments or support mechanisms in place for disabled staff?
Examples of support mechanisms found included:
- two HEIs offered assessments to identify staff support requirements
- one offered the loan of equipment
- one allowed time off for staff to adjust to recently acquired disabilities
- two provided comprehensive information or training for managers to assist them in supporting disabled staff
- three of the HEIs examined did not list any procedures that could easily be identified as offering tailored support to disabled staff.

Was there integration with other service providers (e.g. Jobcentre Plus)?
Four of the HEIs noted the existence of the Jobcentre Plus Access to Work scheme, either directly on their web pages or within documents, but three made no obvious mention of this service. Where Access to Work was mentioned, the methods of accessing its support varied, with HR often cited as playing a key role. A further link to external support services was the funding from TechDis received by one institution for its hardware loan scheme.

Was there any evidence of the Positive About Disabled People/Two Ticks scheme?
The information provided to people applying for jobs at the HEIs was considered as an indicator of the level of commitment to recruiting disabled staff, and possibly, by extension, the level of organisational support for disabled people already employed.

For example, the Positive About Disabled People/Two Ticks scheme is operated by Jobcentre Plus, and is designed to give disabled people an indication of the level of support available to them in an organisation (see Appendix D for a summary of the scheme). The presence or absence of information about this scheme was therefore regarded as an indicator of the ‘disability-friendliness’ of the organisation, as the scheme is designed to indicate a continuing commitment to support for disabled individuals. Of the HEIs sampled, four out of the seven websites indicated that their university is a member of the scheme; three made no identifiable mention of the scheme.
Was there any promotional information for disabled people (e.g. about applying to work at an HEI)?

While general Equality of Opportunity statements were visible on the websites of all the sample institutions, only three of the HEIs linked their job vacancy sites to the institution’s Equal Opportunities policy. Similarly, only two institutions provided information to prospective staff about how to obtain job application materials in alternative formats – another indicator of support being provided for disabled people who might wish to apply.

Was there integration of equality and diversity work within the HEI structure?

This question proved difficult to answer through the information provided on the universities’ websites. However, there was some useful information on the relationship between disability-related or Equal Opportunities policies, services and practitioners and the other functions of the organisation.

- One HEI provided an organisational chart that showed how its Disability Action Group, Disability Strategy Group and Disability Research Group fits into the University’s structure.
- One HEI linked disability support into the Equalities and Diversity management of the organisation.
- Two HEIs noted the existence at their institution of Disabled Staff Forums, although little detailed information was available; it is likely that the forms and functions of these groups were varied.

The small size of the investigation did not allow any clear link between the level of disclosure and the information provided on the websites, although the three HEIs with the highest levels of disclosure all demonstrated three positive indicators:

- clear mechanisms for supporting disabled staff publicised
- integrated with external support providers such as Jobcentre Plus
- signed up to the Two Ticks scheme and its continued levels of support.

This investigation revealed a range of approaches to providing online information to disabled people on equality and support issues, which could be interpreted as an early signal as to whether an institution is seriously incorporating an inclusive approach towards disabled staff. Institutions need to carry out impact assessments on their websites, to ensure that any positive support and information provided by the institution is being communicated.

3.2 Issues raised in telephone interviews

All the interviewees agreed that the rates of disclosure shown for their institution did not reflect the actual number of disabled staff present. Reasons discussed for influencing this decision-making are grouped under five headings:
Research findings

- personal motivation for and against disclosure
- data collection issues
- support mechanisms
- funding
- information.

Interviewees were asked to identify any specific examples of practices they thought were contributing to disclosure. Some of these are included below as brief case studies.

**Personal motivation for and against disclosure**

There was a general consensus among respondents about the main reason why disabled staff would be motivated to disclose that information to their employer – to access reasonable adjustments. There was further agreement that it would be unrealistic to expect that all disabled staff in an HEI would choose to disclose this information to their employers, whatever support was provided.

Several interviewees raised the issue of difficulties staff might have in identifying with the term ‘disabled’. It was noted that not all staff who met the legal definition of disability would know this, and that others may not choose to use this term as part of their identity. In both cases, this would affect the rate of disclosure. More than one interviewee suggested that some staff who do not self-identify with the term ‘disabled’ have disabilities that do not affect their day-to-day professional activities. These observations support research conducted by the DRC (now EHRC) indicating that around half of disabled people do not feel this term best describes them (DRC, 2004).

Variations in how staff were asked about their disability status were also reported by interviewees from different institutions, and the impact of these differences on disclosure rates is considered here.

The need for reasonable adjustments was raised as a potential motivator for disclosure by interviewees, and it was noted that some disabled staff may view obtaining reasonable adjustments as the main benefit of disclosing their disability status. A tension was also noted between the need to disclose disability status to gain adjustments, and the social model of disability, which encourages organisations to remove any barriers experienced by their staff so that working arrangements and facilities do not need to be adjusted for individuals. As one equality and diversity practitioner remarked:

*’Like many organisations, we ask people if they consider themselves to be disabled – which is a subjective question. Many people who come under the legal definition*
do not consider themselves to be disabled, and this is the difficulty we have, as we promote the social model of disability but continue to use a medical model approach in the definition.’

The role of peers and colleagues in an individual’s decision to disclose disability status was also cited by interviewees. One equality and diversity practitioner stated that the role of line managers was crucial in creating an atmosphere within their team that encouraged disclosure; another noted that the response of all colleagues was crucial in this respect.

Another issue raised was the fear or anxiety that disabled staff may experience when considering disclosing their status to their employers, in relation to possible negative consequences. Interviewees suggested that staff may be concerned that their job prospects may be damaged. One equality and diversity practitioner believed that such anxieties may be particularly prevalent among staff who experience mental ill-health. These comments echo the findings of Equality Forward’s (2007) report on disclosure in Scottish universities and colleges, which suggests that conditions to which social stigma is sometimes attached are likely to be under-reported to employers due to fear of negative consequences.

Data collection issues
As well as it being generally recognised that disclosure of disability relies on the member of staff self-identifying as disabled, the manner in which staff are asked about their disability status was also regarded as important.

Interviewees reported a variety of methods by which staff at their HEI are invited to disclose disability status. These methods include:

- pre-employment questionnaires
- annual reviews of personal data
- irregular information audits
- informal updating via line managers or HR staff.

In September 2006, the University of Exeter carried out an exercise to verify the personal data held about each member of staff. Disability status was included in this review, and each staff member received an individual form containing their personal data as held on the HR system at that time. Staff were invited to update their information where necessary and, where appropriate, disclose disability status. The form included the statement that Occupational Health would be advised if a member of staff disclosed a disability, and appropriate support would be put in place if required. In response to this exercise, the University’s disclosure rate rose steeply.
Disclosure and support issues for disabled staff in higher education

Several interviewees mentioned that data had been collected as part of ongoing work for their institution’s Disability Equality Scheme, and one equality and diversity practitioner felt that this had led to more disclosures than other, more established methods, due to the higher profile given to activities related to the Scheme.

Where institutions used a monitoring form to collect information relating to disability status, the methods for prompting disclosure also varied. One equality and diversity practitioner thought that requesting data at the start of employment would be effective where an incoming member of staff wished to request adjustments. However, an HR manager saw a disadvantage in this approach, as new staff have a lot of paperwork to complete when they start in post, among which the monitoring form may be seen as low priority.

One equality and diversity practitioner reported that their HEI provided on its monitoring form an explanation of disability derived from the Disability Discrimination Act’s definition of disability as having a substantial and adverse affect on the person’s ability to carry out day-to-day activities. They directly related the simple wording of the question to the relatively higher rates of disclosure at that institution. This interviewee felt that providing examples of disabilities beside the question would only confuse staff, and that changes to HESA data collection requiring the type of disability to be indicated would be an unwelcome personal question.

By contrast, other interviewees reported that their staff monitoring forms included examples of disabilities and information about reasonable adjustments, and provided the name and details of someone to speak to about support.

Newcastle University frames the question about disability status with examples of different impairments to help clarify what is meant by the term ‘disabled’. The name and contact details of someone who can discuss support and reasonable adjustments are also provided.

The contextual information provided on the monitoring form was also seen by some interviewees as a way to explain to staff the reasons for requesting disclosure of disability. It was recognised that institutions had different motivations for collecting data about disabled staff – for example, the need to return statistics to the HESA, and the desire to identify staff who may need further support. One data manager expressed the view that allowing anonymity when collecting statistics could encourage staff to disclose disability.

It is clear that data received through monitoring forms often have only limited
reliability, due to both lack of clarity in how questions are asked, and the way that answers can be selective. Findings from the Equality Forward (2007) research indicate that many disabled staff choose only partially to disclose their impairments/health conditions – sometimes minimising them through fear of stigma and damage to career advancement – so using a subtle form of under-disclosure.

Support mechanisms

Interviewees suggested that one reason staff may choose to disclose a disability is to request support, and various examples of different methods of supporting disabled staff were provided by institutions.

One equality and diversity practitioner reported that their institution has a dedicated member of staff to provide support to disabled colleagues; another said that their HEI had previously had such a post. It was suggested that these posts had greatly improved the visibility of disability support for staff and the trust with which employees viewed the university, but no hard evidence was provided to support this, which would be a useful intervention to monitor.

Leeds Metropolitan University employs a member of staff to work with disabled colleagues and to provide a central resource of information and support. This post is described in its job description as follows:

‘To undertake the role of Disabled Staff Liaison Officer as described in the ‘Disability Employment Policy: employing, supporting and working with disabled staff’ and to liaise with HR, Occupational Health, Disability Support and Access to Work regarding adjustment to work practices and patterns and the monitoring and review of the policy.’

In practice, this has involved liaising with disabled staff and taking on cases where there is a need. This means working with various agencies both within and outside the University to ensure that support and/or a reasonable adjustment is in place.

Other interviewees noted that support for disabled staff was provided across roles in HR and equality and diversity, and by line managers. One equality and diversity practitioner reported that their HR department felt it was more beneficial to train all advisers in disability equality, rather than placing all responsibilities for disability support on one member of their team.
Mechanisms through which appropriate reasonable adjustments could be identified varied across the institutions contacted. One equality and diversity practitioner mentioned that reasonable adjustments were made after discussion with Occupational Health staff, who may act in an advocacy role for disabled staff. Another interviewee reported the use of a ‘case conference’ approach to bring together the member of staff and others to discuss adjustments.

Despite the expertise in supporting disabled people found in HEIs’ disabled students’ units, interviewees reported that often this expertise was not shared. However, one equality and diversity practitioner hoped that staff would soon be able to benefit from the level of advice and support already provided for students, for example in dyslexia screening, although this was not yet in place. Interviewees generally agreed that support for disabled students was superior to that provided for disabled staff.

All respondents thought that members of staff who required disability-related reasonable adjustments should contact their line manager for support. Follow-up questions were asked about support for line managers to enable them to respond appropriately.

Routine support for line managers was provided at all the HEIs by HR departments, and in some cases by the Diversity Office. Other support mechanisms for line managers included:

= a toolkit of information
= details about Access to Work
= online training systems for all staff
= a series of training workshops for managers on issues such as mental ill-health and reasonable adjustments
= drama-based equality and diversity training.

Leeds Metropolitan University has produced a **Toolkit for Managers**. This contains details about particular disabilities, as well as suggested strategies for reasonable adjustment in an occupational context. This is not an alternative to open discussion/reviews by line managers with disabled staff.
Funding
The method of funding any reasonable adjustments required by disabled staff varies across the institutions. Some interviewees reported that devolved budgets at their HEIs meant that any costs associated with reasonable adjustments (and which could not be covered by Access to Work) would need to be met by individual departmental funds. By contrast, another equality and diversity practitioner reported that their HEI had set up a loan scheme of small pieces of equipment that could be borrowed by staff with permanent or temporary impairments. Centralising the funding of reasonable adjustments was also being considered at the HEI of a further interviewee.

The University of Exeter has a centralised budget that can be used to fund reasonable adjustments, removing the pressure on departmental budgets.

Newcastle University has a central store of small pieces of equipment that can be borrowed by staff, either those with a temporary impairment (such as a broken wrist) or those wishing to try out equipment before purchasing it for longer-term use.

Information
Information available for disabled staff, and methods of communicating with them, were also raised by interviewees as having an impact on rates of disclosure. One equality and diversity practitioner stated that they were in the process of writing a handbook for newly disabled staff, outlining the support available and what the individual can expect from, say, an Occupational Health review. Interviewees also noted the role of networks of disabled staff at their institutions. In some cases these networks had formal links to HR departments or other university committee structures. In several cases, interviewees reported that these networks pre-dated the work done for the university’s Disability Equality Scheme, or had built on pre-existing structures.

The disability network at Manchester Metropolitan University feeds into a Diversity and Equality of Opportunity Committee.

Several interviewees mentioned the positive messages about disability that they felt came from their HEI. These included use of the Two Ticks/Positive About Disabled People scheme, and links with organisations such as Shaw Trust and Remploy. One equality and diversity practitioner noted that their HR department works with DisabledGo to promote employment at the university to disabled people.
Disclosure and support issues for disabled staff in higher education

Information provided about the university, and the support systems available for disabled staff, were also mentioned by interviewees as ways in which their organisations send positive messages about disabled people. This supports similar conclusions drawn by the LSC with respect to students and prospective students: ‘Learners and prospective learners do not receive information solely from written marketing materials. They also gain it from the whole ethos and ambience of an organisation’ (LSC, 2003). One equality and diversity practitioner stated that their HEI’s policy for disabled staff was published on their internet site, and more than one interviewee noted that publicity surrounding their Disability Equality Scheme had also helped raise the profile of disabled staff at the university.

Telephone interviews revealed that many initiatives are taking place to encourage staff disclosure, but that often these initiatives are not monitored, so their exact impact is unknown. This indicates a need for some controlled experiments in order to measure the degree to which interventions and initiatives are effective.

3.3 Online survey recommendations
The full findings of this survey, Disclosure and Support Issues for Disabled Staff in Higher Education: Survey Findings, have been published separately and form a major part of this investigation. It is important to refer to this survey to receive direct insights from a small sample of academic staff about their experiences and their decisions on whether or not to disclose an impairment/health condition. Key findings from the survey are reproduced below.

All percentages provided are relative to the number of responses received for each question, and cannot be taken out of this context. For a full breakdown of the figures used, refer to the detailed analysis for each point provided in Section 3 of the Survey Findings.

- Sixty-six responses were received from respondents in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Respondents were drawn from a small, self-selected group of lecturers, all of whom described themselves as disabled.
- Respondents were working over a wide distribution of locations: Wales (1), Northern Ireland (2), south-east England (11), East Midlands (6), London (5) and West Midlands (5).
Of 38 respondents, 72 per cent (23) indicated that they worked solely for their main HEI, and 21 per cent (8) worked for between one and three other institutions.

Twenty-nine per cent (9 out of 31) of respondents indicated that they worked either solely at home, or at home in combination with other locations.

Sixty-three per cent (20 out of 32) of respondents indicated that they were associate lecturers.

All but four of the 32 respondents who indicated their pattern of work stated that they worked part-time. Varying working patterns and frequencies were also seen.

The majority of impairments listed by respondents were physical (15 selections), with the next largest groups being long-standing health condition and ‘other’ (10 selections each).

The three most commonly cited barriers were:
- access to buildings, streets and transport vehicles (12 out of 58, 21 per cent)
- organisation of internal spaces (11 out of 58, 19 per cent)
- lack of reasonable adjustments (9 out of 58, 16 per cent).

Other issues were working hours and electronic resources.

Teaching resources (27 out of 112, 24 per cent) and central services such as HR and administration (22 out of 112, 20 per cent) were seen to be most accessible.

Social activities were shown to be least accessible (9 out of 112, 8 per cent)

Twenty-five out of 30 respondents (83 per cent) indicated that they had disclosed their disability to their employer(s).

Four respondents indicated they had not disclosed their disability status to their employer(s). The reasons given for not disclosing included:
- fear of discrimination and stigma
- disability not felt to be relevant
- fear of adverse affect on career prospects.

Twenty respondents suggested improvements that institutions could make to increase disclosure. These included:
- improved initial response by HEI staff at the point of disclosure
- improved provision of reasonable adjustments.

Some specific concerns mentioned by respondents included issues relating to impairments that were not visible, or the effects which varied over time, and to individuals with multiple disabilities. For example, one respondent stated that:

‘fluctuating health conditions don’t fit neatly into identifying how services can meet my needs – the needs are not constant and they vary.’
Research findings

One respondent strongly indicated their desire to keep control of their information in the face of external pressures to disclose.

‘[I] have chosen not to disclose it officially to the University so I always say I don’t consider myself disabled on job applications, etc. – I am wary of positive discrimination to tick boxes!’

Suggestions were made for improvements to the procedures used by employers. For example, one respondent advocated an annual review of reasonable adjustments; another, improved evacuation procedures for staff with sensory or mobility impairments. Both of these improvements would provide additional opportunities for staff to disclose.

Although this was only a small-scale survey limited to a sample of academic staff, the findings indicate that, although much good work is being done by the sector to promote opportunities for disabled people, much more needs to be done to transmit the purposes and importance of disclosure to all staff and to address the anxieties of individuals who could disclose disability status. Issues over part-time working, and working across multiple sites, were also raised as factors affecting disclosure. For example, working part-time could help staff avoid the need to ask for reasonable adjustments; working on multiple sites meant that adjustments were not always coordinated across sites, so the benefits of disclosing were reduced.

Findings from email information

Those HEIs who chose to inform ECU about networks and groups for disabled staff reported a number of different methodologies and approaches to the organisation of such groups.

= Groups are often set up as one of a number of special interest groups for different staff at the HEI. Alternatively, one diversity group may consider issues relating to disabled staff, black and minority ethnic staff, and other under-represented groups within the staff.

= Disability or diversity specialists within the HEI may chair the group, although this role may be replaced if the group decides to elect its own chairperson from its members. Senior management figures also chair groups.

Manchester Metropolitan University’s Diversity and Equal Opportunity Committee has been regularly chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. Staff diversity forums – including a disabled staff forum – feed into this committee, and a disabled student network was set up at the end of 2007.
The majority of groups described to ECU met face-to-face, often several times a term (although termly and six-monthly meetings were also reported). Use of electronic communication was also reported, either to share notes and minutes, or via blogs or emails.

All the groups described to ECU had some mechanism of conveying their views and concerns to the management of the HEI. In some cases, groups were linked to existing committee structures and passed information via that route to more senior managers. In other instances, the presence of a senior manager at the group’s meetings, either as the chair or in another capacity, acted as a conduit for information. Many groups had become involved in the development of the HEI’s Disability Equality Scheme. The sharing of minutes with HR or other departments was also a method of influencing management.

Various methods were reported of allowing staff to participate in the group without revealing their disability status more widely within the HEI, including the use of emails and blogs, and instances of closed meetings where non-disabled staff were not present.

From the information received, it is clear that a mixture of disabled staff groups operate within the HE sector. Some of these have been established to provide self-support; others were established by equality and diversity practitioners and other professionals to provide support and gather information to change policies and practices. Both these models, and variations on them, are likely to help support disabled staff in different ways. The option to contribute to a group anonymously until sufficient confidence is raised to become more open about disability status appears to be a useful first stage in moving towards disclosure.
4. Recommendations

From the data collected for this project (including those from the online survey, Disclosure and Support Issues for Disabled Staff in Higher Education: Survey Findings, and the discussions that took place, the following recommendations to institutional policies and practices have been identified as influencing the incidence of staff disclosure of disability.

4.1. Disclosure

Disclosure depends on staff identification with the term ‘disabled’, which, for a number of reasons, may not be a term adopted by all staff with disabilities. Clearer information needs to be made available for staff about what constitutes a disability and what support is available.

Confusion may persist about what constitutes a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. This may be addressed by appropriate information from the HEI at the point of monitoring, and by training for all staff. The social model of disability encourages different methods of supporting staff that are not reliant on them meeting legal definitions of disability, and therefore needs to be understood by all staff and adopted when developing policies and practices.

Opportunities for staff to disclose their disability status need to be available at all stages of their career, not just when they join an organisation. Methods of disclosing disability status whenever they want to need to be made clear to all staff.

Forms used to invite disclosure of disability status could usefully provide a clear definition of disability, including examples of long-term health conditions. Support mechanisms and key members of staff could also be identified. (An example of a disability disclosure form to encourage open disclosure is provided in Appendix C.)

4.2. Reasonable adjustments

Clarification of procedures for arranging individual adjustments and the provision of a key support individual or team may help to reduce some of the frustration experienced.

Effective monitoring of reasonable adjustments will ensure they remain fit for purpose and are being implemented in all aspects of an individual’s work, and at all sites where the staff member is working.

The provision of training for all staff on the effective delivery of reasonable adjustments and a more inclusive environment would help to change perceptions of disabled staff as having a ‘problem’ for which the staff member is wholly and uniquely responsible.
4.3. Supportive environments

- At the highest levels, commitment is needed to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all staff.
- Adequate and visible support mechanisms for disabled staff can help reduce the perceived stigma of disability, and the practical impact of repeatedly needing to request adjustments.
- Good communication between functions within an organisation can help ensure that disabled staff feel supported.
- Increased visibility of disabled staff, and the encouragement of disabled staff groups and networks, may help others to disclose an impairment.
- Support for disabled staff can be provided indirectly through training for all staff, and through targeted support for line managers. This could help to promote inclusion of disabled people across the organisation.
- Groups of disabled staff can provide useful practical and emotional support to their peers, as well as being an important source of expertise for the organisation, either as self support networks or as networks led by equality and diversity staff. For example, they can be encouraged to act as a conduit to convey concerns to HR and senior management.
- A supportive and welcoming environment within an HEI can help to encourage disclosure. This welcoming environment can be communicated through information provided to people considering applying for posts at the HEI, and by the mechanisms for appropriate support for existing staff.
- Integration of support across different areas of the institution could assist staff who have become disabled during their employment and who need support.
- Mechanisms that may initially support disabled staff, such as loan schemes for equipment, may also prove helpful to other groups of staff, including those with temporary disabilities or impairments. The adoption of the social model of disability encourages all staff to seek support as is it required, and does not necessarily limit this support to individuals meeting legal definitions.
- Institutions could consider coordinating support for their disabled staff, including centralised help for Access to Work applications and support for the line managers of disabled people. This support could be made available to staff on all types of contract. For example, flexible working practices that will benefit all staff could be encouraged.
5. Next steps

The 2007 ECU staff disclosure project has identified some key areas that may influence individual members of HE staff in their decision whether or not to disclose a disability to an employer. The findings of the project are based on data collected from disabled staff and from equality and diversity practitioners at a number of different HEIs, and are therefore felt to be a valid expression of issues of concern.

The recommendations of this project will be taken forward in ECU’s 2008 programme. It is anticipated that:

- a small sample of HEIs will be identified who are willing to implement some of the recommendations of this report as a pilot project, with a view to improving their institution’s disclosure rate
- the implementation of initiatives will be monitored to measure their impact on disclosure rates
- a final report will be published, summarising the lessons learned from the initiatives and any further recommendations to the sector.
6. Resources and sources of further information


Appendix A: ECU Disclosure and Support Survey for Disabled Staff

This appendix reproduces the online survey used in this study.

Background to survey
This short survey (only 17 questions with estimated completion time of five minutes) has been developed by Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) with the involvement of disabled staff in higher education. It is based on staff concerns about the lack of awareness of disability issues, lack of access, and lack of support provided to disabled staff in some higher education institutions (HEIs). There is also national concern over the low staff disclosure rate of disability in higher education, which averages 2% (HESA statistics), although the British Labour Force Survey 2004 calculated that 9% of staff working in higher education are disabled, according to census data.

Disability definitions
When referring to ‘disabled’ staff, ECU means staff who are likely to meet the definition of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). This notion of disability is a broad one. Over 50% of people who meet this definition of disability are not aware that they do so, and would not necessarily describe themselves as disabled. It includes people with a range of long-term health conditions that have been acquired, as well as people who were born with a health condition or impairment. It includes mental as well as physical health conditions. People who meet the definition of disability in the DDA will not necessarily be eligible for disability benefits, which are generally awarded on narrower criteria. To read more about the DDA’s definition of disability, visit the DRC website [the Disability Rights Commission is now part of the Equality and Human Rights Commission].

Survey findings
Equality Challenge Unit intends to use the findings from this survey to develop guidance materials for institutions. These materials will help institutions to develop safe and positive environments in which staff feel more confident to disclose an impairment, medical condition or disability, and will advise on removing barriers that hinder disabled staff in doing their job.

Equality Challenge Unit
Equality Challenge Unit promotes equality and diversity in higher education. Equality Challenge Unit is funded by Universities UK, GuildHE and the UK higher education funding bodies (HEFCE, HEFCW, DEL-NI) and by the Scottish Funding Council to work in collaboration with Equality Forward in Scotland.
1. Contact details

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Confidentiality: ECU will not divulge the identity of any individual responding to this survey, or use information in ways that could lead to the identification of individuals. However, we would like your contact details in order to be able to contact you in regard to further research and activities in this field. If you would prefer, you could provide non-work-related contact details.

2. Main location that you work in:

- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- North-west England
- North-east England
- West Midlands
- East Midlands
- South-east England
- East England
- London

3. Please state which higher education institution(s) you work for.

4. Please state your job title.

5. Which sites do you work on?

6. Do you work full-time or part-time?

7. If part-time, how often and frequently do you work?

8. Please identify if you have any of the following impairments (these monitoring categories are suggested by the Disability Rights Commission [now the Equality and Human Rights Commission]):

- physical impairment, such as difficulty using your arms, or mobility issues that mean using a wheelchair or crutches
- sensory impairment, such as being blind/having a serious visual impairment or being deaf/having a serious hearing impairment
- mental health condition, such as depression or schizophrenia
- learning disability/difficulty such as dyslexia, or cognitive impairment such as autistic spectrum disorder
Appendices

- long-standing illness or health condition, such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy
- other (please specify).

9. Do any of the following present barriers to achieving what you want to in your job?
- access to buildings, streets and transport vehicles
- organisation of internal spaces
- inappropriate equipment
- written information or communication
- verbal or audible information
- people's attitudes to you because of your impairment, health condition or disability
- lack of reasonable adjustments
- policies or procedures, such as fire evacuation procedure.

10. Please describe in more detail any particular issues with these or any other barriers or discriminatory policies or practices that you have experienced.

11. Are you able to access the following?
- teaching resources
- central human resources services
- central administrative services
- local/on-site administration
- research facilities
- social activities.

12. Please describe the support you would like to be made available with these or other services/facilities.

13. Have you disclosed your impairment, health condition or disability to your institution?

14. Could you please tell us why you have not disclosed your impairment, health condition or disability to your institution?
15. What changes could your institution(s) make that would encourage you to disclose your impairment, health condition or disability?

16. Would you be willing to participate in any of the following in the future:

- a regional dialogue group to discuss these issues further
- an online dialogue group
- a national focus group
- become a member of the ECU disabled staff advisory panel.

17. Are there any other issues you would like to raise?
Dear colleagues

ECU is drawing to a conclusion its project looking at the issues affecting the disclosure of disabilities by staff in higher education. As part of this research, colleagues at a number of HEIs have very helpfully described the procedures for collecting disclosure information at their institutions, as well as indicating whether any other support for disabled staff is provided.

To help me put this information into context, I would be very grateful if any equality and diversity practitioners or managers would like to let me know about support for disabled staff at their HEI. Specifically, I would like to hear about:

• whether your HEI has a group for disabled staff
• if such a group exists, where it fits into your HEI’s organisational structure
• how the group is organised, for example whether it meets face-to-face or virtually.

Any other information about support for disabled staff, or issues raised by disabled staff groups, would also be very welcome. If you would like to share information about the support for disabled staff at your institution, please email me off-list at honey.lucas@ecu.ac.uk

I am hoping that ECU will be able to publish in the next few months some guidance for HEIs about encouraging disabled staff to disclose, and any further information about support that exists for staff will help to ensure that the guidance is grounded in the real experiences of colleagues.

Many thanks for your help,

Honey Lucas
Projects Officer – Disability and Age
Equality Challenge Unit
Appendix C – Sample format for staff disability disclosure form

Higher education institutions may find it helpful in encouraging open disclosure to include in any request forms the following information:

- a clear definition of disability
- examples of disabilities and long-term health conditions
- details of any support staff.

One example of how a staff disability disclosure form could be structured is given below.

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**Sample form**

**Do you have a disability?**
This form asks you to update the information that the University holds about you. This section asks whether or not you have a disability.

All information you provide will be held confidentially. It will *not* be passed to your line manager.

**Why is this information being collected?**
There are three reasons to collect this information.

- Each year all universities have to provide statistics about their staff to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). These statistics help to indicate what needs to be done to encourage more people with disabilities to work in the sector.
- To help the University to find out how well it is doing in recruiting and supporting disabled staff. Without an idea of how many staff have disabilities, it is difficult to know whether our policies and practices are really providing equal opportunities for disabled people.
- The third and most important reason is to give you some more information about the types of support available to disabled people working at the University.

**What do we mean by ‘disabled’?**
The term ‘disabled’ covers a wide range of impairments and long-term medical conditions.

So, what is a disability? As you would expect, a person who is a wheelchair-user would be considered to be disabled. What you might not know, however,
is that conditions such as diabetes, depression, multiple sclerosis (MS) and dyslexia are also considered to be disabilities.

Did you know?
52 per cent of people with a disability do not consider themselves to be disabled.
(Disability Rights Commission, now Equality and Human Rights Commission)

Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment or health condition?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Please read the following list carefully, and tick as many boxes as you feel apply to you.

- Physical impairment, such as using a wheelchair to get around and/or difficulty using your arms.
- Sensory impairment, such as being blind or having a serious visual impairment, or being deaf or having a serious hearing impairment.
- Mental health condition, such as depression or schizophrenia.
- Learning difference or disability (such as Down's syndrome or dyslexia) or cognitive impairment (such as autism or head injury).
- Long-standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy.
- Other, such as disfigurement.

If you selected ‘Other’, please tell us more here:
So what now?
If you have a disability, then you may need some support – either now, or in the future. There is a range of support available to disabled staff at the University.

- **Disabled Staff Support Manager**: the Equality and Diversity Manager supports disabled people at the University. They can discuss your needs with you, and advise you on making changes that might help. For example, they may be able to give you an adapted chair, or software that enlarges the text on your computer. If you would like to speak to the Equality and Diversity Manager in confidence, please ring 1234 or email: 
  equality.diversity.manager@university.ac.uk

- **Disabled Staff Network**: the University has a network of disabled staff who provide support and advice to each other, and who advise the University management about making this a welcoming place for disabled people to work. You can contact the network by emailing disabled.staff@university.ac.uk – if you want to remain anonymous then you can email from a non-work account such as Google or BT Internet.

- **Diversity Forum**: the University has a Diversity Forum that is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The Forum meets once a term and discusses how the University can become a really diverse and welcoming organisation that reflects our local and national community. Diversity Forum meetings are advertised in the staff newsletter and on the website: 
  www.university.ac.uk/diversityforum

Please return this form
Thank you for completing this form. Now please return it to:
  Equality and Diversity Manager
  The University

We hope you find this information helpful. If you have a disability and would like the Equality and Diversity Manager to contact you to talk about any support that you need, please tick here:

☐ I would like the Equality and Diversity Manager to contact me.

One last tip
If you would like to know what the University is doing to promote disability equality, read our Disability Equality Scheme: www.university.ac.uk/des
Appendix D — Positive About Disabled People/Two Ticks Scheme/Guaranteed Interview Scheme

Jobcentre Plus gives the following summary of the scheme.

Employers who use the symbol have agreed with Jobcentre Plus that they will take action on these five commitments:

- to interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and consider them on their abilities
- to ensure there is a mechanism in place to discuss, at any time, but at least once a year, with disabled employees what can be done to make sure they can develop and use their abilities
- to make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure they stay in employment
- to take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make these commitments work
- each year to review the five commitments and what has been achieved, plan ways to improve on them and let employees and Jobcentre Plus know about progress and future plans.
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