

LONDON SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

Foreword

London School of Theology values inclusiveness and confirms its continuing commitment to the principles of Equal Opportunities in Employment, Admissions, its Teaching, Learning and Research activities and its links to the general public through its services. LST endeavours to ensure that all members of staff, students, visitors and applicants for employment or study are treated on the basis of their merits and abilities and that no one knowingly suffers discrimination or disadvantage because of disability.

Although not a Public Authority as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), LST does strive for best practice in its activities and will continue to monitor and make adjustments/improvements to our policies and facilities.

Since the inclusion of the Education sector into the DDA, LST has made progress in establishing and developing a range of services and facilities, with and for students, staff and visitors with disabilities. We are not complacent, however and hope that we are continually on a journey of review and improvement. The Disability Equality Scheme gives us opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. It is hoped that in due time this Scheme will form part of LST's general Equality Scheme.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Steer', written in a cursive style.

Simon Steer
Principal

December 2008

Overview

London School of Theology's Disability Equality Scheme aims to promote equality of opportunity and positive attitudes towards people with disabilities; meet their needs where possible; achieve an environment where discrimination and harassment of people with disabilities cannot flourish and encourage their full participation within the LST community.

This will be achieved by addressing the key areas of:

1. Physical access and inclusion
2. Support for learning, study and employment
3. Awareness training
4. Communication

This Disability Equality Scheme will eventually form part of a wider Equality Scheme to be introduced over the next two years.

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1. Introduction

In order to meet the duty to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities under the new Disability Equality Duty, LST has produced this Disability Equality Scheme which was approved by LST's Board on 23rd January 2009 .

The purpose of this document is to promote disability equality by identifying the key issues, the progress LST has made to date and what further actions are needed to address any imbalances in equality of opportunity, or outcome for staff and students with disabilities. This document will change with time as progress is made against the Action Plan.

This document has been produced by a group of staff and students from LST. The group includes staff and students with a range of impairments and staff involved in disability issues at LST.

2. Statement on Disability

LST believes that it is primarily the attitudes, behaviour and environmental barriers that people with disabilities face which can disadvantage, exclude and marginalise them in society. LST wishes to create an enabling environment in which impairments do not become disabling and those with disabilities are enabled to carry out their work or studies as both they and LST would want, and to participate if they wish in other aspects of School activities. This would be an environment in which staff and students are encouraged to disclose the nature of their impairment or disability and this would apply equally at the time of appointment or taking up a student place or during the course of employment or studies at LST and whether the condition is permanent, temporary or fluctuating. For its part LST will strive to identify the needs of staff and students with disabilities and those with impairments which could become disabling, in consultation with such staff and students, with the aim of raising awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding disability, and providing appropriate support and reasonable adjustments to practices and premises.

3. LST's Current Provision

LST has a Disability Manager whose job it is to support students and staff members with special needs.

Disability awareness training has been provided for staff and students in the past, particularly when the DDA was first introduced and when deaf students were commencing studies at the School .

All plans for new buildings and the refurbishment and alteration of existing buildings are considered with access for people with disabilities in mind and significant physical accessibility improvements have been made in the past few years as much as finances have permitted. Access audits have been completed in the past and these inform decisions about the future use of buildings and refurbishment works. The Maintenance Department works closely with the Disability Manager, students and staff with disabilities and service providers to improve services.

Authors of LST's strategic and policy documents have responsibility to reflect our commitment to promoting equality of opportunity, including disability equality, in such documents.

Support for Staff with Disabilities

The Disability Manager supports all staff with disabilities by endeavouring to solve problems that may occur and offering advice as and when necessary. Advice is given on issues regarding disability and requirements to make

reasonable adjustments for all stages of employment, including recruitment, selection and interview. Use has been made of The Access to Work scheme to make staff with disabilities aware of available technology or aids which may help them with the performance of their duties while at work.

Support for Students with Disabilities

The Disability Manager supports all students with disabilities (including applicants and potential applicants) by offering advice. Information for students with disabilities can be obtained from the website at <http://www.lst.ac.uk/info/disabilities.php> and http://www.lst.ac.uk/documents/reference/lst_disability_handbook.pdf.

Students who need assessment for dyslexia are put in touch with an educational psychologist who visits the campus to carry out such assessments.

In some cases, students with disabilities are recommended special examination arrangements and these are given in written form by the Disability Manager to the Registrar who makes the necessary implementations.

LST recognises that students with disabilities may have additional costs in order to pursue their chosen academic programme. Eligible UK students are expected to apply for Disabled Student Allowances to fund their support. A small amount of financial support has been given from Bursary funds for students who need assessment for Dyslexia, the cost of which is not covered by the DSA and which would be prohibitive for them. Normally students are expected to pay at least half of this amount. International students are not eligible for UK Disabled Student Allowances.

From the academic year 2008/09 a visiting Dyslexia Study Skills tutor will be visiting the School weekly to help students who have been recommended such assistance.

The Watford Christian Counselling Service, which runs as part of the Theology and Counselling Course, is a source of counselling support for disabled and non-disabled students alike.

If recommended through the Disabled Student Allowance assessment, students with disabilities can be linked to a mentor who is usually a mature student who receives payment for giving advice and support for an hour a week.

LST provides an interpreter for the deaf members of their community for the weekly Chapel service and for occasions such as the Laing Lecture, Graduation Day and Training Day.

4. Current Disability Monitoring

Staff

LST's employment application form asks prospective employees to state whether they consider themselves to have a disability in order that assistance can be provided where necessary. The number of applicants for LST vacancies who declare a disability is very low.

LST's Equal Opportunities Policy includes commitment to non-discrimination of those with disabilities.

Students

The application forms for both undergraduate and postgraduate students have a section which asks applicants to disclose if they have a disability. If an applicant completes this section they are then sent a disability questionnaire by the Registry. When completed this is returned to the Disability Manager for action. When students who have indicated that they have a disability attend for interview, an appointment is made for them to meet the Disability Manager to discuss their needs and advice on applying for the Disabled Student Allowance.

5. The Experience of People with Disabilities at LST

Our desire to produce the Disability Equality Scheme has prompted specific information gathering both from staff and students which has not occurred in the past. This has been designed to create an understanding of what people with disabilities thought were the most important issues to address and to enable an action plan to be formulated.

As a result of the surveys people sent information about their experiences or suggestions for improving practice.

Summary of experiences of people with disabilities

a) LST's Staff Survey

Since monitoring in this area has not happened in the past, a questionnaire was sent to staff members who had been in touch with the Disability Manager. A second form was sent to all other members of staff asking them to disclose anonymously if they had some form of disability as well as asking questions about disability discrimination. Of the first category there was a 100% return. Sixty questionnaires were given out to

other members of staff and of the twenty-one forms returned, seven disclosed that they had some form of disability.

Staff members with disabilities were unanimous in rating the disability service as excellent. Only one third was familiar with the School's policy/services ensuring that staff members with disabilities have a positive experience while employed by LST. None had had problems accessing the service. Two-thirds of respondents felt that accessible services both for equipment and facilities were most important while a third ranked support from departments and administrative staff as most important.

Suggestions for improving the service were greater clarity over policies in writing particularly for those whose disability was newly diagnosed and the production of an introductory leaflet on how to access the service to be available on entering employment or when a disability is discovered.

The second staff survey form revealed that 50% were aware of the School's policy to ensure that staff with disabilities have a positive experience while employed at LST. 57% of staff were unaware of the government scheme, Access to Work, which assists people with disabilities with their employment.

Suggestions from this group for improving the service were Braille signage around the campus, improved DDA support for the website, lifts to the top floor of the Library, the second floor of Laing, the first floor of Mitchell and to the first and second floors of Aldis to make the site completely accessible, pagers for deaf students which are connected to the fire alarm.

b) LST's Student Survey

Questionnaires were sent out to the thirty-three students who are in contact with the Disability Manager. Fifteen forms were returned. The overwhelming majority of respondents thought that the Disability Service provided an excellent service. However, a concern for a number of respondents was a perceived lack of awareness of disability and how it affects students' studies, particularly on the part of academic staff. Some respondents stressed the importance of being able to have Power-point slides, handouts etc emailed to them in advance.

This information from people with disabilities at London School of Theology has informed the Action Plan for the Disability Equality Scheme.

This Scheme has been compiled with reference to the Schemes produced by University College, London and Brunel University with grateful thanks.