

MINUTES OF THE DISABLED STUDENTS STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETING (2005/03): TUESDAY 31st MAY 2005

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

1.1 Two amendments were made at point 4.1 of the minutes of the last meeting. The phrase 'may be suffering from dyslexia' has now been changed to 'may be dyslexic'. In addition, the phrase 'pay for an assessment' has been amended to 'pay for a diagnostic assessment'.

1.2 The minutes were then agreed as an accurate record of the last meeting.

Toolkit of Quality Indicators for Needs Assessments

1.3 10 institutions have now been validated for academic year 2005-06, and FFL thanked everyone who participated in the validation session for their time and effort. The SAAS website has now been updated with the names of the validated institutions, and FFL are working towards confirming a date for the next validation session. This is expected to take place in late summer. In addition, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in England will issue guidance to LEAs on the validated institutions to ensure that assessments will be readily accepted.

2. Update: Non Medical Personal Help (NMPH) Allowance

2.1 FFL are liaising with the OU on the issue of voluntary tutorials, and have also drafted a questionnaire (Paper 03/03) to gather information from institutions on issues such as employment rights and National Insurance contributions. Comments were invited from the group on the draft questionnaire.

2.2 The group felt that some of the questions were a little vague, and wanted to see more specific questions on issues relating to the health and safety of the student, the helper and the institution.

2.3 At this stage, it will be difficult for FFL to take this issue further, as there is limited knowledge of employment law within the group. It was suggested that the group obtain some advice on employment law in order to develop a better knowledge and awareness of issues relating to employment rights legislation.

2.4 FFL proposed to redraft the questionnaire, taking on board the group's comments, and to distribute the revised version via email for comments.

3. Update: 'Provision for Students with Disabilities' Project

3.1 FFL thanked the group for their help in disseminating information on the project to colleges and HEIs across Scotland. Institutions have shown a strong interest in participating in case study visits, and FFL will shortly be hosting a consultation session with members of the group and interested colleagues.

4. Discussion: Table of Issues and Future Agenda Items

4.1 The table has been prepared for the information of group members, in order to keep track of the work of the group, e.g. which items have been completed, which have yet to be achieved etc. The group felt that the table would be a helpful tool for effective administration.

5. Introduction: Developing a needs-led Assessment model for students with Additional Learning Needs in FE

5.1 Funding Council introduced Paper 03/06, and outlined their intention to set up a working group to examine the possibility of developing a funding model based on need, as opposed to categorisation of disability. Interest has already been expressed by members of the group, but further volunteers will be welcome. The group are expected to hold 2 meetings in relation to this issue, and it should be noted that the remit of the group will not cover the financial implications of the reformed funding model.

5.2 Several group members asked whether this project relates to the project currently being carried out by FFL, outlined at point 3 above. The projects are separate and distinct, although the subject matter of each project complements the other. However, the FFL project can only be concerned with student support- FFL has no recourse to change institutional funding as this is the remit of the Funding Council.

5.3 The group discussed the wider context of the projects, and raised the point that improved institutional funding would lessen the need to fund individual students directly. Institutions should support students in a holistic way, and individual need might be reduced if institutions subscribed to a more inclusive approach.

5.4 Despite the fact that the two projects complement each other, institutional funding and direct student support are two distinct areas, falling under the remit of the Funding Council and Funding for Learners respectively. It will be possible, however, to link up and update on progress through the group, and group members' involvement with both projects will be welcomed.

6. Discussion: Toolkit of Quality Indicators, Monitoring & Evaluation

6.1 10 institutions have now been validated for the pilot, and it is important to ensure that appropriate monitoring and evaluation measures are in place in order to ensure the Toolkit is working effectively. The group discussed paper 03/07, which highlights the monitoring and evaluation techniques which have been suggested at previous meetings.

6.2 The Funding Council suggested that the paper focuses mainly on monitoring techniques, and commented that more direction is needed on the evaluation side. However, the group felt that the impact of the Toolkit on waiting lists and times will be quantifiable, and that the success of the Toolkit will be evaluated on the basis of the effect it has on these.

6.3 SDT commented that a number of the ideas outlined in the paper are closely linked, and that a combination of techniques might be preferable. Some element of institutional self-review might be desirable, for example, asking institutions to produce a report on their work during the pilot, which would be critically reviewed by the group. The group agreed that self-review would be desirable when considered in conjunction with other methods of review, but felt that institutional monitoring alone was unlikely to work, as some institutions may feel unsupported. The fact that institutional regulation is not necessarily a positive step for students was also raised, as students may have limited recourse to complain about aspects of the assessment process through internal procedures. The group agreed that students would benefit from having a point of contact outwith the institution, enabling them to go beyond internal processes and procedures.

6.4 Interest has been displayed by institutions in the idea of site visits, although this raises the questions of who would carry out such visits, and what kinds of evidence they would be looking for. BRITE stressed that the set-up for monitoring and evaluation will be important to institutional commitment to the Toolkit, and that it is important that the techniques selected support the institution while ensuring quality outcomes for the student and their learning experience.

6.5 The group felt that as informal shadowing between institutions already takes place, it may be possible to build on these existing links to formalise this network, although this will require some support from the centre, and formal mentoring is also cost and resource-intensive. Access Centres may also be able to take on a role in training, monitoring and evaluation, but again, there would be funding implications.

6.6 Overall, the group felt that a mixture of methods would be desirable, with some element of peer support (e.g. shadowing) employed in conjunction with one or more centrally-administered methods (e.g. site visits). The process should regard the student experience as central, although it should be noted that it will be difficult to impose another review in institutions in the manner of, for example, HMIE. It was agreed that FFL will draft a monitoring and evaluation strategy for comments from the group, and that that a more structured and specific discussion will take place at the next meeting. There is a time-factor associated with this issue, however, and it is important to develop and implement strategies for monitoring and evaluation as soon as possible to ensure institutional confidence in the Toolkit.