

# SABHAL MÒR OSTAIG (SMO) DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

Date of creation: November 2006

Date of next review : November 2009

Responsibility : Chair: Equal Opportunities Committee

Approved by Chair of Board of Trustees: December 2006

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## **1. Introduction**

We at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO) are committed to implementing the ethos of our Equal Opportunities Policy so that people with a disability can fully participate in College activities. We have improved many aspects of the estates of SMO in recent years, and we are grateful for the input of people with disabilities who have shaped the decisions that have been made. We are aware that we need to do more, and this Scheme sets out what we intend to do, and the planned implementation process. Key to that implementation is consultation and involvement with disabled people.

We are aware of the meaning of “disability” in terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. In the Act it is defined as “a physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long term adverse effect on (a person’s) ability to carry out day to day activities.”

SMO has a good reputation for embracing all parts of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. The main focus of these pieces of legislation was to encourage institutions to make “reasonable adjustments” to existing facilities or procedures.

We now move on to welcome the challenges of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which places a general duty on institutions to ensure that we become proactive by eliminating any prospective discrimination before it has an opportunity to cause barriers. In this we are committed to fully involving people with experience of disabilities.

The 2005 Act requires that we should produce a Disability Equality Scheme, and is specific about what has to be included in that Scheme. The essential element that is new is that that SMO must now involve people with disabilities in the development of the Scheme, and in monitoring its implementation. We welcome this opportunity to identify the barriers that people with disability face on a day to day basis.

The Scheme covers three years from 2007 to 2009, and will be renewed on a three yearly period. The Scheme will be monitored throughout this period with reviews as necessary. It is very much a work in progress which will develop as we are guided by disabled people.

The Action Plan brings together all the improvements SMO intends to make and indicates who is responsible for carrying out those tasks and the timescales that are involved. The Action plan will be reviewed in September each year, and revised as necessary. This annual process will make an important contribution to the development of future schemes.

If you have any comments on SMO’s Disability Equality Scheme please contact Alison Dix, Chair of Equal Opportunities Committee on 01471 888216.

## **2. Director's Statement**

We at SMO are committed to ensuring that everyone in the College's community should be able to access education. The College mission is as follows:

*Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is committed to being a centre of excellence for the development and enhancement of the Gaelic language, culture and heritage, by providing quality educational, training and research opportunities through the medium of Scottish Gaelic; and by interacting innovatively with individuals, communities and businesses, to contribute to social, cultural and economic development.*

We warmly welcome our new legal duties to promote disability equality and to take account of the needs of people with disabilities in our decision-making across the whole organisation.

We aim to demonstrate best practice in recruitment and retention by providing support to staff and students with disabilities. Through UHI's partnership with the Wellbeing Alliance we have also committed ourselves to addressing inequalities and discrimination more generally by tackling the barriers that prevent individuals and communities from achieving their full potential. Our first Disability Equality Scheme builds upon these achievements. However, we have much to do if we are to demonstrate our commitment is being translated into effective action.

We now have a clear set of priorities for action from disabled people themselves, including improving access to our buildings and resources, improving communication with people with disabilities; and doing much more as a College to support staff, students and other users of the College with disabilities.

**Prof Norman Gillies**  
**Director**  
**Sabhal Mòr Ostaig**

### **3. DES Policy Statement for SMO Staff and Students**

SMO's staff<sup>1</sup> and students recognise they have a responsibility to create and build an environment in which all are equally valued and treated with respect, recognising that in order to achieve equality we may often have to give more favourable treatment to people with disabilities. In order to achieve this, SMO has a range of policies and practices and procedures designed to promote equality of opportunity for all.

SMO will promote opportunity for all, particularly for study, employment and involvement in its community without discrimination on the grounds of gender, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, colour, ethnic or national origin, language or nationality.

SMO requires its staff and students to behave and communicate in non-discriminatory ways and to support, implement and develop policies and practices which allow for equality of opportunity, and fair treatment, for all.

SMO requires its associated organisations to implement the provisions of the relevant acts. We also require any sub-contracted agent to comply with our scheme

### **4. SMO's Duties**

#### ***4.1 The Legislation***

Our duties are derived from the:

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995, amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Regulations 2005

#### ***4.2 The General Duty***

The general duty (the Disability Equality Duty) requires public bodies to give due regard to the following when carrying out their functions:-

1. Promote equality of opportunity between disabled people, and others
2. Eliminate discrimination which is unlawful under the legislation
3. Eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disabilities
4. Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
5. Encourage participation by disabled people, in public life, and
6. Take steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other people.

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<sup>1</sup> SMO Staff are persons who are employed by the Board of Trustees of SMO.

### **4.3 The Specific Duties**

in addition, there are also specific duties that have to be carried out to achieve the general duty. These specific duties are:-

1. To publish a Disability Equality Scheme demonstrating how we intend to fulfil our general and specific duties
2. To involve disabled persons in the development of the Scheme
3. To include the following in the Scheme:
  - The way in which disabled people have been involved in the development of the Scheme
  - SMO's methods for impact assessment
  - Steps SMO will take towards fulfilling the general duties, i.e. the Action Plan
  - Arrangements for gathering information in relation to employment, and to the delivery of education and support services
  - Arrangements for putting the information gathered to use, in particular in reviewing the effectiveness of the Action Plan and in preparing subsequent Disability Equality Schemes.
4. Within three years of the Scheme being published, take steps set out in the Action Plan, and put into effect arrangements for gathering and making use of information
5. Publish a report containing a summary of steps taken under the Action Plan, the results of the information gathering and the use to which the information has been put.

## **5. Involving Disabled People**

### **5.1 The Position in Autumn 2006.**

SMO has an Equal Opportunities Committee which deals with staff employed directly by the College and with students. This Committee continually monitors College policies, and recommends updating of those that require it. Working groups from that committee assess the impact of these policies, on a rolling programme. We recognise that we need to widen our experience of disability to make informed decisions.

Within the student support systems there are a number of avenues open for students with a disability to make representations to the College if they perceive any barriers to full participation. These avenues include SMO Students' Association, SMO Student Support Services, SMO's Equal Opportunities Committee, UHI's Student Support Services Committee and UHI's Student Affairs Committee, where students and Academic Partners are able to raise issues of concern.

The remits and memberships of all the above committees are presently being reviewed in light of the Disability Duty

There is a Disability Sub-group of the Equal Opportunities Committee. This group meets regularly and will draw on the issues and concerns raised to inform future policies. We will seek the continued involvement of disabled people in the work of

the group and the Committee, in particular in the review and audit of SMO's existing and future policies.

SMO, as an Academic Partner within UHI, has benefited from the consultation undertaken by Highland Wellbeing Alliance who have collectively consulted with focus groups to establish what level of involvement they would be comfortable with in regard to our schemes going forward. Advice for UHI from a consultant has ensured that the organisation as a whole has reached a wide range of disability experience ( disabled people, advocates, and carers) The result of this is that we now have data to examine, evaluate and act upon.

SMO has also initiated a process of consulting with our disabled staff and students. The feedback from that will inform how we can involve them in the scheme.

## **5.2 *Development plans relating to involving people with disabilities***

- Review remits and membership of Equal Opportunities Committee, with a view to fully involve and engage with disabled people.
- Establish a mechanism to ensure that the members of Board of Trustees and Management Team work together with disabled people so that disability equality is mainstreamed at every level of SMO.
- Ensure that the Equal Opportunities Committee and Student Support Services have appropriate reporting mechanisms in place to ensure that both committees so that issues raised by disabled people are acted on.
- Consult with appropriate organisations in the SMO community, to identify areas for improvement in policy and practice relating to disabled people..
- Ensure that the Action Plan takes account of our learning from disabled people, and is updated and monitored on a regular basis.
- Improve communication for disabled people and offer training to staff and students to ensure that we are communicating effectively.

## **6. Impact assessment**

SMO aims to identify where policies and procedures could cause barriers to disabled people, and amend them accordingly.

SMO will continue to review existing policies, practices and procedures and develop new ones.

The existing Disability Sub-group will undertake the work of assessing the impact of existing and new policies, practices and procedures. This group will take advice from appropriate disabled people as necessary, and will build on existing links with community planning groups, and Highlands and Islands Equality Forum..

For this group to work successfully it will

- Set clear aims for consultation with and involvement of disabled people.

- Set out a timetable for impact assessment, taking account of the advice received from disabled people, and the areas that have been identified as having the greatest impact on them.
- Use results to inform the decision making process
- Use learning from impact assessment to further inform our DES and action plan, and recommend amendments to policies, practices, and procedures as appropriate.
- Develop a programme of information and training for managers to inform the development of policy and practice, in order to mainstream this activity into the organisation. It will be essential that disabled people are a continuing part of that process.

## **7. Action plan 2007-2009**

The action plan is the appendix to this document. It is anticipated that all agreed developments arising from the initial consultation will be included over the three years of the plan. We will review the action plan three months after publication to take account of initial urgent actions.

Progress against the tasks in the Action Plan will be monitored by the Equal Opportunities Committee, and reported to the Board of Trustees in November each year.

## **8. Gathering information**

### ***8.1 Students.***

People who apply to join a SMO course are invited to disclose a disability and/or additional support needs. Students are also given opportunities to make such a disclosure once they have started their course of study. The application and enrolment processes generate statistical information about the number of students who disclose a disability. Individual students are then given the opportunity to discuss appropriate support needs, and with their permission, this information is shared with relevant staff.

Consultation with disabled students will also provide information to facilitate change and development.

### ***8.2 Staff and Students***

Monitoring data on staff and students is produced for the Equal Opportunities Committee.

It is recognised that there is a need to raise awareness among staff and students of the benefits of collecting and monitoring data relating to disability and other aspects of inclusiveness.

### ***8.3 Complaints and appeals***

There are established policies and procedures in place to deal with student and staff grievances and academic appeals. Any evidence relating to disability identified

within these systems will be used to inform the future development of our Disability Equality Scheme.

#### **8.4 Developments for the future for gathering information**

##### **Students**

- A new software package has been purchased by UHI which will enable disabled students to be tracked throughout their period of study, and support to be recorded.
- Systems will be established to gather evidence covering course transfers, student achievements, work placements, harassment relating to disability
- SMO will strengthen its links with academic partners and institutions to improve the sharing of relevant information.
- SMO will consider the introduction of an incident monitoring form relating to disability.
- SMO students will be consulted in order to identify what barriers they face, relating to their studies, and to discuss appropriate actions to remove these barriers.

##### **Staff**

- The College's job application form will be reviewed to ensure that appropriate information relating to disability is collected.
- SMO will conduct a survey of its staff to establish which of them are disabled in terms of the legislative definition.
- Disabled staff will be consulted to identify any barriers faced in their work for the College.
- Systems will be established to gather evidence on selection methods for candidates; types of contracts offered; the grade of these posts; promotion within the College; and length of service of disabled staff,.
- Equality and diversity training will be offered to staff on a regular basis.

#### **8.5 General Complaints**

SMO has an established grievance procedure and policy. Users of the College will have the opportunity to complain if they feel that they have not been dealt with in accordance with SMO's policies, practices and procedures. Any disability issues will inform the development of our Disability Equality Scheme.

### **9. Using Information**

Our aim is to enhance the mechanisms which inform the review and monitoring process and contribute to the progress of our action plan. SMO recognises that disabled people should continue to be involved on a regular basis.

### **10. Implementing the Disability Equality Scheme**

It is apparent that the implementation of the legislation falls across a number of SMO Committees and Groups. The Equal Opportunities Committee will oversee the implementation of the legislation, reporting to College Senior Management.

## **11 Annual reporting**

SMO will prepare an annual report for the Board of Trustees in November each year. This report, which will be made available on the College's web-site and in print format, will include:

- An updated action plan to illustrate the progress made against targets and timescales.
- Summary information gathered relating to disabled people, conclusions drawn, and action taken or planned in the light of the information and conclusions.
- A list of individuals and organisations which have been involved in the preparation of the annual report

Alternative formats may be made available for those who require this.

## **12 Responsibility for preparing the Disability Equality Scheme**

The present Scheme has been drafted by SMO's Disability Sub-Group.

The Chair of the College's Equal Opportunities Committee is responsible for this activity, and reports directly to the Director who has overall responsibility for the scheme.

The Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan are approved by SMO's Board of Trustees.

## **13. Publishing the Scheme**

The Scheme will be published on 04/12/06 in the following formats:

- In print. (Alternative Formats, fonts, sizes and colours will be made available, on request).
- On SMO's web-site. This allows individuals some flexibility in presentation to meet their needs.
- On the staff and student intranets. Again this allows individuals some flexibility in presentation to meet their needs.

The Scheme will be published as a single document, to include the Action Plan. Where the Scheme refers to other SMO documents these will be cross referenced.

**Alison Dix**  
**Chair of EOC**