

Lowestoft College Disability Equality Scheme

November 2006

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

Our Current Position

Lowestoft College is proud of its inclusive approach to people with disabilities. In the Ofsted Inspection of February 2005 the College was found to be an inclusive College

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. Links with the community, business and schools are well established. Courses are offered from entry level to HE. Participation of those who are under-represented in learning is encouraged. Success is celebrated and individual projects are successful in widening participation.

Systems to monitor and support vulnerable students are effective. The equal opportunities action plan is detailed. Policies and procedures have been updated. Satisfactory progress has been made in response to the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 and Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) legislation. Appropriate staff training is in place. Access to most areas is satisfactory for students with restricted mobility.

Appropriate policies comply with statutory requirements under disability discrimination legislation and the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. College staff have received training in equality and diversity.. Key members of staff have been trained in child protection and further training is planned.

*College accommodation is accessible to students with restricted mobility.
(Ofsted/ALI Report February 2005)*

There has been a long history at the College where issues around improving physical access and the development of additional learning support for learners with physical and /or learning disabilities, has been given priority and support by senior managers, staff and the governing body.

Our Disability Statement written by the Principal in 2003 was considered to be an example of best practice and while it has been revised each year it has now, in the light of the Disability Equality Duty, been re-written to address the changes.

Therefore, with this history of inclusion, and from the strengths of being a community focused College, it is very heartening to take the work towards our Disability Equality Scheme forward, to give a boost to the work that is already in place. We do not however, consider this to be an easy task, there are any challenges before us and these will be identified within the scheme. Not least is the need to re-vitalise our staffing policies in line with the new duties. We are 'Positive about disability' but still have an imbalance in the very small amount of people with disabilities within our staffing profile. See below;

Staff and Student Profile in Relation to Declared Disability

Staff		Part-time		Lecturers		Support		Managers	
Full-time		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
M	F	5	2	2	1	7	1	1	1
5	1	5	2	2	1	(including Skills Instructors)		1	1
Students		16-18		19-24		25-49		50+	
14-15		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
M	F	104	73	64	50	82	101	44	42
8	13	104	73	64	50	82	101	44	42

Culture of the organisation

As described above, the College culture is welcoming to students with disabilities and we have every year a growing number of disabled students included into the further education programmes of the College of all ages and genders. We also have several disabled students on our Higher Education who achieve successfully. We have well embedded processes and procedures which monitor and support the welfare and progress of staff and students with disabilities. We have actively sort feedback from students with disabilities and all staff participate in feedback which is anonymous.

There is much promotion of students on courses for students with learning disabilities and physical disabilities. They are high profile and access all parts of the college community with regular projects such as catering activities towards NVQ qualifications. They are responsible for running real working environment activities such as catering for external events. They were recently fund raising for Children in Need and appearing on the BBC website on the day. They are regularly featured in the College newsletter, as were the students with Severe Learning Difficulties and complex needs who wrote an Indian cookery book last year to celebrate diversity.

We have physical access to the accommodation through automatic doors, accessible disabled toilets, and a care suite. We have safety arrangements in place for those wheelchair users accessing course above ground floor. There are trained staff and learning support assistants who are updated regularly with the latest thinking on a wide range of disabilities. We have a co-ordinated support team which includes a Disability Co-ordinator who undertakes risk assessments and action plans for all disabled learners.

The College is positive about disability and a new build has been assessed for physical access. However, we have greatly improved our collaboration with disabled staff and students through the development of this scheme. The Equal Opportunities Committee consider the very thorough involvement of disabled staff and students and external stakeholders to be a real strength of our Disability Equality Scheme. We do not consider this activity to be simply concerned with compliance with the regulations but a celebration and promotion of the inclusion of people with disabilities within the college community.

The Legal Context

The College believes that all forms of prejudice and discrimination are unacceptable. In recognition of the fact that they can take a variety of forms, depending on the group against whom they are directed, the College will adopt/develop policies embodying the issues specific to discrimination on the grounds of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Race
- Religion
- Sexual Orientation

The College will seek to challenge inequality, prejudice and discrimination.

Legislative Framework

Key legislative requirements relating to equality are identified in the following:

- Disability Discrimination Act
- Human Rights Act
- Race Relations Act
- Race Relations Amendment Act 2000
- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- Protection from Harassment Act 1974
- SENDA 2001
- Sex Discrimination Act
- Age Discrimination

Links with Other Policies

The Disability Equality Scheme links directly to the College Disability Statement. The College's Governing Body sets SMART targets to which the following policies link; the Equal Opportunities Policy and the Equality and Diversity Action Plan. Latterly, the College is following the policy to develop a grass roots approach to disability equality with the formation of the DES working parties. (See Appendix A)

Self assessment and quality improvement have a strong focus on widening participation, inclusion and working towards excellence. Disability is considered to be an intrinsic part of equality of opportunity. It is embedded in the course review process and has been a part of this process for four years. This tracks learners at risk of dropping out and within the classroom observation process through the identification of differentiation in teaching and learning. The College has a "Recruiting with Integrity Policy" where all full time learners are interviewed and their learning needs and additional support needs are identified.

The Disability Co-ordinator, risk assessments, Learner Support and Review Panel and the inclusion of the Health and Safety Manager are fundamental to a consistent and positive approach to inclusion, enabling debate and achieving specific packages of individual support.

Development plans from self assessment identify changes that need to be made to address weaknesses or developments needs and these can include additional reasonable adjustments.

PART 2 – DISABILITY EQUALITY VISION VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

The Mission Statement

The Lowestoft College Mission Statement is as follows:

“Lowestoft College will work in partnership to deliver high quality education and training to enable individuals to gain the skills and qualifications to contribute to a successful economy.”

Core Values

The College’s Core Values are shown below:

- Learners come first
- Everyone is welcome
- Our priority is teaching and learning
- We expect the best of ourselves and others
- We will respect everyone as an individual
- We believe we can achieve more by working together
- **AND WE WILL LIVE BY THESE VALUES**

Strategic Aims and Objectives as they relate to the DES are underlined.

1. To recognise the diverse needs of individuals and embed equality of opportunity principles
2. To engage employers in the development of the skills of their current and future work force
3. To be a key player in a range of partnerships that influence the social and economic development of the economic sub region within the wider eastern region
4. To develop and deliver an appropriate curriculum framework in order to increase and widen participation and enable progression
5. To engender a College wide philosophy of continuous improvement which focuses on the learner
6. To become an employer of choice
7. To ensure financial stability in order that the College can continue to develop and improve the quality of the teaching and learning environment

Our Attitude Towards Disability Equality

We take both a social and to some extent a medical approach to disability equality. We believe as our core statement indicates that “Everyone is welcome”, therefore we believe it is our duty to live by that value. In the case of students, we endeavour to identify the disabled learner’s needs and wants and seek to make the reasonable adjustments necessary to make them possible. When we find that either the learners’ expectations or the ability of the College to fulfil that expectation is at odds in any way then a LSARP (Learner Review and Review Panel) is called, within a week or preferably less, of the problem being identified. We seek to address the difficulties and to solve the problem wherever possible. In many cases, the College “goes the extra mile” to include a wide range of learners with complex needs.

In some cases, the difficulties are due to the medical implications of the disability and where we find we have difficulty in meeting these expectations, following thorough risk assessment and discussion with professional bodies, we approach the family or support team of the disabled person, to see if they can help to provide the support needed to ensure safe inclusion into the College environment. We do not offer medical support on campus. We focus on the fact that we are a general further and higher educational establishment and we are proud of our inclusive approach. We endeavour to offer the best educational provision we can to every learner.

The Benefits Disability Equality Brings to our Organisation

One of the benefits that disability equality brings to our College is through a wider understanding of all people in our community and ability to live and teach inclusive approaches to life and work. Our disabled students have a voice, and add to the lively discourse encouraged by the College.

Disabled staff are invited to offer feedback through the newly formed working parties and have contributed in a positive manner to the Equal Opportunities Committee for many years. This is lively forum where opportunities for open debate enable diverse approaches to be embedded into the whole College approach.

Our Commitment

Our commitment to improving disability equality, elimination of all forms of discrimination, proactively promoting disability equality and creating an inclusive environment for all who learn and work in the organisation, can be seen through the active engagement of the all members of the College community.

The College Corporation sets SMART targets for equality and diversity (Appendix A,) and the development of the Disability Equality Scheme has seen an enthusiastic response by students, staff and managers through the setting up of working parties to address all aspects of a disabled person's experience in the College environment.

Vision

Our vision of disability equality for the next three years includes the following areas for development. These have been taken from the first staff and student focus groups and the working parties involved with the development of the DES.

Area for development	Action/s	By whom	By when	Outcomes
Improve consultation with disabled staff	Undertake staff focus groups and questionnaire	HR Manager	Aug 2007	To improve HR policies and practice
Impact assess HR Policies	Formation of an Impact Assessment group to review	HR Manager	Aug 2007	To ensure policies are non discriminatory
Initiate partnership arrangements with disabilities groups outside of the College	Undertake questionnaire approach with groups to assess options	HR Manager	Aug 2007	To improve communication and working conditions for disabled staff

Within the next three years we aim to complete areas for development in line with those identified in the action plan and then return to those not yet identified in line with the College's self assessment for improvement processes.

We wish to continue to identify the gaps in the experiences of disabled people compared with non-disabled people; we will continue to actively engage with disabled staff and students and key stake-holders in an effort to ensure the scheme is embedded into the College's culture and life.

Our Priorities

Priority 1 Improve consultation with disabled staff

Priority 2 Impact assess all college policies for staff and students.

Priority 3 Initiate partnership arrangements with disabilities groups outside of the College

Priority 4 Seek the views and act on their findings of disabled students and stakeholders

Priority 5 Continue to remove barriers wherever possible

Priority 6 Continue to promote and celebrate the successes of disabled staff and students

As referred to previously, our priorities are also to embed the disability duty scheme into the everyday running of the College to ensure sustainability.

PART 3 –ACTIVELY ENGAGING WITH DISABLED PEOPLE

Different Groups

1. Students.

The student focus group includes representatives from across the whole curriculum and highlights the diverse support needs of individual disabilities. The Student's Forum meets regularly and has a newsletter. The additional disabled student focus group assembled to address the wider ranging issues of the disability duty will also now meet on a regular basis and will contribute directly to the steering group. They will be invited to join the other college committees and steering groups. There will be further work on the promotion of "Positive about disability" with a poster campaign in which they will be fully involved.

2. Customer Care.

A cross-college group of staff and students with disabilities has been formed to address the customer experience. The group will fully investigate the disabled person's experience throughout the learner lifecycle, with a view to identifying and removing institutional rather than physical barriers. This will be achieved by looking carefully at all activities the student or prospective student would be involved in from the customer care point of view. This will include marketing materials, publications, circulars, booking forms, application and enrolment procedures, website design and communication with staff.

It is felt that the college already does a great deal to facilitate access to the college for disabled students. However, much remains to be done particularly in awareness raising amongst our entire student population in the same way that Equal Opportunities and Bullying have been addressed. Therefore awareness raising of the DES will be a priority for 2006-07 and will be repeated with each new intake of students.

3. Community.

The Community Cohesion Group is a large action group that addresses a wide range of issues linked to equality of opportunity. The College is a member and the Head of Student Services sits on the Steering Group. Many disabled support groups participate in the Community Cohesion Group. The College was instrumental in the development and support of and for this group. It was seen in May 2006 as an example of good practice by Charter Mark quality accreditation in terms of the College's pro-active links with community groups.

We will seek to involve the group more fully in the near future with regard to our scheme.

4. Lecturers and teaching and learning

Lecturers and managers acknowledge that awareness of disability and equality is integral to their work and that awareness is fully embedded into college life. We are as responsive to the individual needs of all our learners as is possible. We aim to address additional learning needs from application through to classroom experience and exam conditions where necessary.

The IT Support department recognise the diverse needs of individual users and are committed to being responsive to their requirements. It is our policy of the IT Support team to work closely with curriculum colleagues to ensure equality of access to College IT resources.

The College staff development team work hard to ensure that training sessions are implemented to keep lecturers informed about providing best practice for the whole college community.

In addition to the focus groups and working parties, the College will hold a student conference with Every Child Matters as a subject for discussion in December 2006, disabled learners will be able to give their opinions as a part of the conference activities.

We will exchange our scheme with other Colleges to obtain different view points and ideas for improvement. The development of the University Campus Suffolk has identified good practice at Lowestoft College with regard to the support for students with disabilities and members of the new undergraduate support team are seeking to include the good practice seen at Lowestoft College on a partner assessment visit in the University's Learner Support processes.

Barriers

We have identified the following barriers:

- One in-accessible area of the college which is being reviewed for an alternative approach. (This is an Engineering COVE area)
- Crush in the lift due to non disabled students and staff utilisation (addressed through information and signage)
- Aberrant use of parking spaces for disabled people (partly due to a new build project that will be reduced by January 2007)

Disabled people will continue to be invited by the Disability Co-ordinator and the Learning Support Co-ordinator to form focus groups to give their feedback

They will also be invited to make anonymous suggestions also on a regular basis.

In addition, disabled students and staff will be invited to monitor the impact of the scheme on the College working life and on the policies in place and to be a part of those to be developed in the future. They will form part of the Impact Assessment Team.

This will be included with the working party and steering group structure. See Appendix B.

Part 4 - Leadership and Management

The commitment of senior staff to inclusion of people with disabilities has been a feature of Lowestoft College for many years. The Equal Opportunities Committee has been chaired by a Vice Principal and has been attended by the Principal on many occasions for many years also. Currently, the Principal, who is one of very few disabled Principals, is a role model for disabled staff and students and offers a positive example of achievement for disabled learners and staff. The Vice Principal Quality and Students, a one time FEFC Inclusive Learning Facilitator, has a strong grounding and belief in the importance of the promotion and inclusion of people with disabilities and is Chair of the Equal Opportunities Committee. Also, there is close liaison with the Head of School for Essential Skills, who is the overall manager for the Additional Learning Support team, and the Head of School for Health, Social Care and Foundation Studies (also an ex-FEFC Inclusive Learning Facilitator). Both members of staff have high levels of expertise with regards to disability and inclusion. They work closely with Special Schools and community groups and are both involved with the development of the Scheme and form part of the steering group. They, in turn have a number of staff with high levels of expertise in the support of disabled learners.

Senior staff are involved in the development of the scheme with the DES Steering Group being led by the Vice Principal Quality and Students. The Human Resources Manager, the Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator, the Quality Manager and the Heads of Student Services and Management Information Services are all actively leading working parties. The inclusion of the Finance Manager and the support of governors for the work, strengthens the activities of the scheme and giving their time and support for the developments indicates the real commitment by the college as a whole.

Members of Corporation have received training and participation in development activities which have highlighted the importance of having College strategies which enable those with disabilities to access provision. Updating training is scheduled for Governors for the coming year. In addition, all agenda items at meetings incorporate a review of any implications which could impact on equality and diversity.

Key staff, such as the Disability Co-ordinator and the Learner Support Co-ordinator play significant roles in the guidance of the Scheme and scope of the activities needed to address the changes to be made. Also, as referred to previously, the Head of School for Essential Skills, who is the overall manager for the Additional Learning Support team, and the Head of School for Health, Social Care and Foundation Studies are both involved with the development of the Scheme and are part of the steering group.

All staff are required to live by the College's Core Values and to adhere to the College's code of conduct which expects staff to treat everyone with respect. In addition, the staff directly involved with the planning and support of both disabled staff and students are seen as the champions of disabled people and endeavour to bring to the attention of the Senior Management Team any perceived or actual discrimination for immediate action. The Learner Support and Review Panel is an example of this process in action.

Awareness raising of the Disability Equality Scheme is taking place through the college Staff Newsletter, through Students' Forums and through the staff development sessions planned for the year 2006-07. This will be in addition to the rolling programme of staff development sessions that address equal opportunities.

The scheme will be disseminated through the Managers Forum and through School, Centre and Team meetings.

On-going staff training is a part of the staff training plan and, although voluntary, this does become mandatory for those few staff who have not undertaken training by the summer term. At this point, each member of staff, either full or part time, are invited personally by the Vice Principal Quality and Students by letter and their attendance is monitored. However, participation at training is good, with X% of staff attending on a voluntary basis.

We will expand and improve our partnership working to include employers and work placements. The latter in the Care sector are up to speed in most cases and could be helpful when advising on employment possibilities and opportunities for the future.

Disability equality has been a part of course reviews, self assessment and quality monitoring for four years at Lowestoft College. We will seek to build on this work to ensure incremental improvement year on year.

We will seek to maintain disability equality as a high priority and to embed disability equality across the whole organisation.

PART 5 – CARRYING OUT IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Some of the policies, procedures, plans and practice that we have identified that will be assessed over the lifespan of the DES are; These will be prioritised by the DES working parties:

Activities and timescales will be as follows;

Policy to be assessed	By whom	By when
HR Policies	HR Manager & Staff working party	December 2008
Equal Opportunities Policy	HR Manager/VP Q&A	August 2007
Quality Improvement	VP QS & QI Manager	August 2007
Assessment for Learning	VP QS, QI Manager & TfL Co-ord	August 2007
Learner Support Fund	VP QS & HSS	June 07
Student Support Policy	HSS and DES working party	August 2007
Teaching and Learning Policy Progression Policy	VP QS & TfL Co-ord	August 2007
Health and safety Policy and procedures	H&S Manager and DES group	Aug 2007
Attendance and Punctuality Tutorial	HSS & working party	August 2007
Induction Policy	HSS & working party	August 2007
Student Disciplinary Procedure	VP QS & HSS	August 2007
IV Policy	QI Man & TfL Co-ord	July 2007
Work Experience Policy	DoF Service Industries	Aug 2007
Complaints Form and Procedure	VPQS & QI Man	
Child Protection Policy	VP QS,HSS & H&S Man	Aug 2007
Anti Bullying Policy	HSS & working party	Aug 2007
FE/HE Academic Appeals Procedure	VP Q&S & HE Admin/Co-ord	Aug 2007

Marketing Strategy and Plan	Marketing Manager	Aug 2007
Student Complaints	VPQ&S & QI Manager	June 2007

The Vice Principals Quality and Students and Finance and Resources will take overall responsibility for the process.

The Quality Manager will bring to the attention of the author of any new policy, the need to address the DES when formulating a new policy. The Quality Manager is responsible for the QA code prior to the policy being ratified by any sub group of Academic Board and/or following the agreement of the College Corporation where applicable.

PART 6 - GATHERING INFORMATION

- Information about the arrangements for gathering information

See Appendix C flow chart with regard to the DES working parties and referral process of the Lowestoft College Disability Equality Scheme. In addition a conference is being held to ascertain student's views on a range of issues associated with Every Child Matters, however the disabled students representative group, will be encouraged to participate fully.

- The recruitment, development and retention of disabled staff

Again (see Appendix C) the Human Resources lead working party of the DES will address all issues with regard to the member of staff's journey from application to retirement.

- The educational opportunities available to and the achievements of disabled learners

For four years all learner progress has been monitored and students at risk of dropping out or of not achieving their potential, are identified and strategies to address these difficulties are sought. The achievement of disabled students is also monitored by the Equal Opportunities Committee and at Senior Leadership level.

- The range of information that is currently gathered on disability equality, and what this existing information has revealed.

There is a need to improve the achievement rates of those receiving additional learning support as there has been a slight decline in the success rates of these learners. This will be addressed through the self assessment process and will be actioned for the next academic year, or in-year where identified as mentioned earlier. In addition, the disabled student's working party will be asked for their responses with regard to this issue.

Another issue is with regard to disclosure. Information gathered at interview with regard to disclosure of physical or mental disability is not yet perfect. While staff are trained in interview techniques and are sensitive to the needs of disabled people, there is still no imperative for either staff or students to disclose their disabling condition. Therefore, more commonly with students than staff we discover that an individual has a disabling condition only at the point of some difficulty he or she may be experiencing, we can then in most cases rectify this- however we seek to address this through our working parties.

- Further information that we plan to gather
We plan to ask and listen to disabled staff and students to determine just what further information we need to gather to improve our service and working conditions. Much information is of a personal nature and we pass this information on, only with the agreement of the disabled person, and on a 'need to know' basis. However, hopefully as people with disabilities feel empowered by the scheme they will help the College to determine exactly what is needed.
- The DES working parties and the steering group is responsible together with the College as whole for gathering information and for ensuring actions are taken and completed within a set time-frame.
- Arrangements for ensuring monitoring takes place at organisational and departmental level, and at appropriate sub groups is already in place. All monitoring information will be fed into the Equal Opportunities committee which reports to the Academic Board and to the College Corporation.
- Information gathered will be included into the College's Self Assessment Report and actions will be taken to address any weaknesses or areas for development on an annual basis and through the course review and quality system for support areas on a termly basis.
- Further to this, immediate actions can be addressed either through the LSARP-Learner Support and Review Panel or through a PIT, Process Improvement Team meeting, as a part of the quality improvement procedure. The self assessment process informs planning as well as quality improvement

PART 7 – PUTTING THE SCHEME INTO PRACTICE

- ❑ Very good progress and response to the scheme has been seen already and the working parties are set to expand and include even more disabled staff and students.
- ❑ The College has been kept informed of the development of the DES through the Staff Newsletter and the Students' Forum. The Managers Forum will be supplied with a copy following ratification.
- ❑ The Disability Equality Scheme for Lowestoft College will be published on the College's website and internally on the staff "sharepoint" portal. It will be sent to the Suffolk Learning and Skills Council and logged.
- ❑ The progress of the actions included in the scheme will be reported to the College Corporation on a regular basis and will be in response to the SMART targets set for Equality and diversity. Within these, the regular impact assessment of policies and procedures is included as is regular reporting on disabled learner achievements to the equal opportunities committee of academic board.
- ❑ The Equality and Diversity Action plan includes the following actions, those highlighted in blue are with regard to people with disabilities.

PART 8 – MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The action plan is reviewed on an annual basis but monitored on a termly basis by the Senior Leadership Group (SLG) and bi-annually by the Corporation. The DES too will be reviewed annually in line with all college policies. Each document is coded and flagged for annual revision. The quality manager prompts the author in advance of this date. On completion of the revision and ratification by the appropriate committee the revised DES will be added to the website, the old one removed and also added to the sharepoint portal.

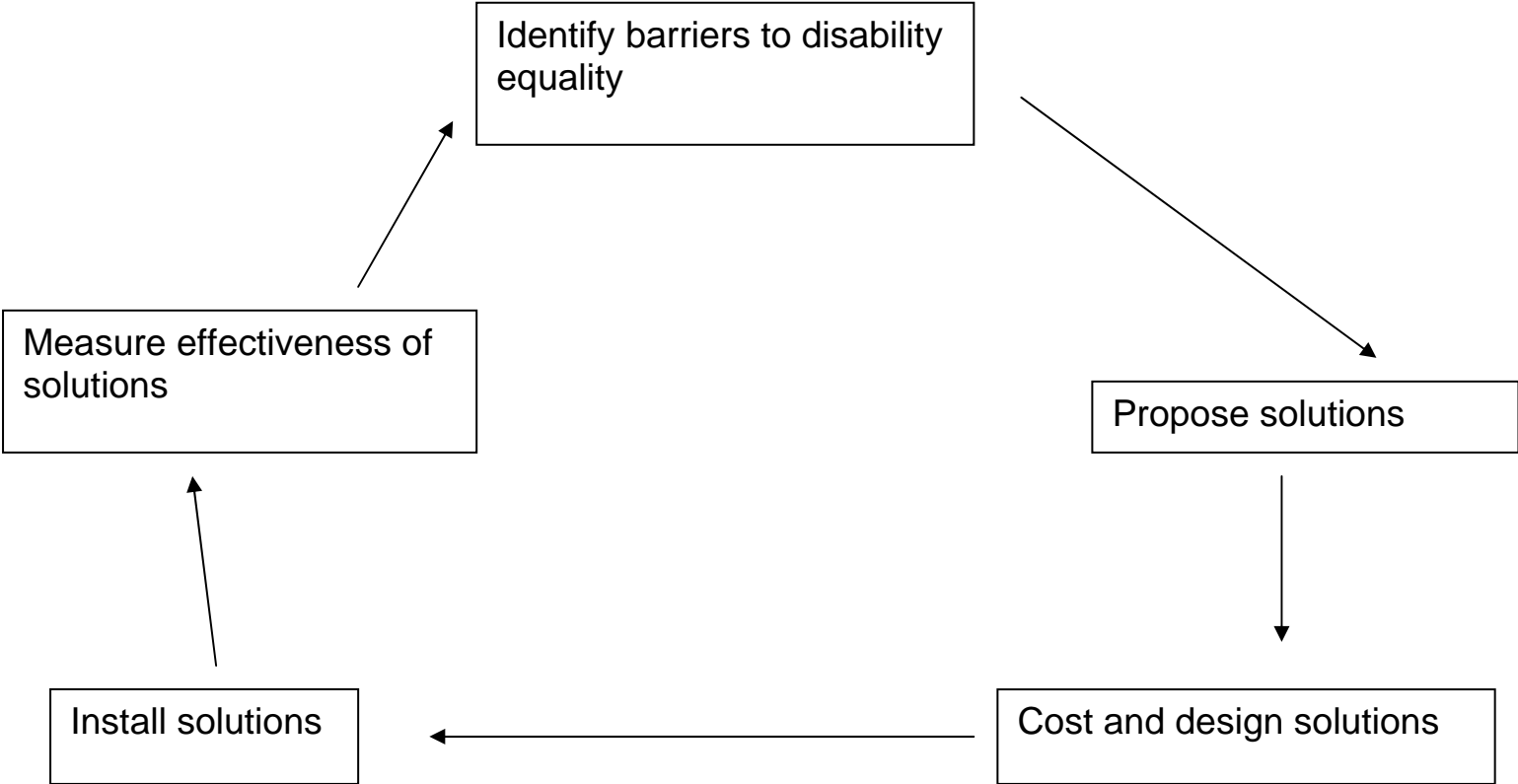
We have been supplied by the Learning and skills Council with a monitoring checklist to ensure compliance and to 'health check' our Disability Equality Scheme and related processes.

CONCLUSION

The LSC guidance suggests that “the legislation provides a catalyst for genuine organisation change. It builds on the principles of increasing inclusion and celebrating diversity, which many providers have already adopted”. This is true statement of Lowestoft College, and we embrace the changes that are to come and face the challenges with enthusiasm. We wish to improve choices for disabled people and wish to close the gap between the expectations, experiences, education qualifications and employment of disabled and non-disabled people.

We wish to create a sustainable scheme that is not reliant on a few determined and committed individuals but on a whole college understanding of the on-going importance of the challenges that will continue to face people with disabilities if this commitment is not shared by all.

Appendix 2 – Disability Equality Duty – Work Cycle



Appendix 3: Information Flow Chart for the Disability Equality Duty Improvement Process

