**Action Framework for Disability Equality**

**Introduction**

1. Disabled people are significantly underrepresented in both our staff and student teams compared with the local community, and previous surveys have suggested that not only do they experience discrimination or harassment within the University, but that they are less likely to trust the University to fully address the issue.
2. Unlike Gender & Gender Identity (Athena SWAN) and Ethnicity & Nationality (REC) there is no AdvanceHE Charter Mark to guide universities who wish to enhance disability equality within their institution. Likewise, unlike LGBT+ Equality (Stonewall Workplace Equality Index), there isn’t a general benchmarking scheme that guides best practice on Disability Equality in a holistic way.
3. The advantages of such charter marks or benchmarking schemes, is that they provide a structure to undertake a rigorous analysis of how a particular protected characteristic impacts the University experience, identify examples of disadvantage experienced by a particular group, and then put in place measures to address that problem. It is felt that conducting such an exercise with regards to Disability will help ensure our work on Disability Equality is more strategic and evidenced-based.
4. In recognition of the inclusion of several targets related to Disability Equality amongst undergraduate students in the Access and Participation Plan, the Action Framework would be primarily focused on issues experienced by staff and postgraduate students.

**Action Framework for Disability Equality**

1. The Disabled Staff Network has worked with the Head of Equality and Diversity to develop a proposed approach to developing an institutional Disability Equality Action Plan.
2. At the Disabled Staff Network’s meeting on the 26th April the proposal to investigate the Disability Equality within the University and develop an Action Plan was discussed. From these discussions a proposed Statement of Principles and Terms of Reference for a Self-Assessment Team were developed, inspired by Athena SWAN and the Race Equality Charter.
3. These proposals were shared with all Disabled Staff Network members by email. They were then amended based on feedback and then approved at the Staff Network’s meeting on the 28th May.
4. A reviseddraft Statement of Principles and Terms of Reference were also taken to the meeting Equality and Diversity Working Group on the 27th May. The draft proposals were accepted without amendment. The proposals have also been endorsed by the Director of Human Resources, the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Regional Development and the Vice-Chancellor.
5. It is anticipated that the work of the Self-Assessment Team would begin no later than September 2021, and be completed no later than September 2022.

**Recommendations**

1. For CMT to note the objective of developing an institutional Disability Equality Action Plan
2. To provide any feedback to the Head of Equality and Diversity and Disabled Staff Network about how the self-assessment should be conducted.

**Appendix A**

Principles of the Action Framework for Disability Equality

Purpose

The purpose of the framework is to ensure that all Disabled people are valued during their time at the University of Wolverhampton.

Introduction

The Action Framework for Disability Equality is underpinned by 7 fundamental guiding principles that must be reflected in the University of Wolverhampton’s strategy, policies, practice, behaviour, action plans and culture. These are in line with the University’s Vision 2030 goal to be a “driving force for inclusivity”.

We commit to the following 7 principles:

1. UK higher education cannot reach its full potential unless it can benefit from the talents of the whole population and until disabled and neurodiverse individuals can benefit equally from the opportunities it affords. In particular, addressing
   1. Disclosure
   2. The loss of disabled people across the career pipeline
   3. The absence of disabled people from senior academic, professional and support roles.
2. Disability discrimination is an everyday facet of UK society and inequalities manifest themselves in everyday situations, processes and behaviours. Within Higher Education, it can only be tackled by addressing both the direct and indirect discriminatory treatment experienced by disabled and neurodiverse staff and students. Furthermore, higher education has a civic duty to act as an advocate for disability equality in broader society.
3. Tackling the disability pay and employment gaps.
4. Disabled and neurodiverse people understand the issues they face, which are predominantly caused by the barriers erected by society, and therefore must be at the heart of developing solutions to these issues.
5. Openly acknowledge that disabled and neurodiverse staff and students are not a homogenous group. People living with different disabilities and ways of thinking, have varying experiences and outcomes within higher education, and that complexity needs to be considered in analysing data and developing actions.
6. Honour the intersection of disability or neurotype and other factors wherever possible. All individuals have identities shaped by several different characteristics.
7. Acknowledge that advancing disability equality and inclusion demands active commitment and action from all levels of the organisation; in particular visible leadership from those in senior roles.

The Action Framework for Disability Equality covers:

* All staff
* Procurement and external partners
* Pathways Into Academia
* Reasonable adjustments for staff
* Diversity and inclusion within the curriculum

Context

Negative assumptions and stereotypes around disability are pervasive in UK Higher Education and wider society. In developing this framework an affirmation approach has been adopted, where disability is anticipated as “a relatively common and ordinary part of human life” (Cameron, 2011, p.19).

“It is a non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people grounded in the benefits of lifestyle and life experience of being impaired and disabled.” (Swain & French, 2010).

This model of disability challenges the notion that having a physical or mental condition that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ impact on your ability to do normal daily activities is negative. We believe that disability should be considered as difference that can have a positive impact on life which can be celebrated. The affirmative model states that disability can have benefits and the natural extension of this is that the life experience gained from living with disability can significantly benefit an organisation. Disabled people will have a unique skillset in comparison to those who have not had such profound life experiences. Living with a disability necessitates ‘out of the box’, creative thinking and problem solving; trying to find alternative ways of managing day-to-day tasks. An example of this is enhanced people skills developed as a consequence of managing carers in the home.

The disability employment gap has slightly decreased in 2020. In 2019, the employment rate for disabled people was 51.8 per cent, compared to 81.6 per cent for non-disabled people. This an employment gap of 29.8 percentage points (ppt). While the disability employment gap has slightly narrowed the disability pay gap has increased drastically compared to last year. In 2019, non-disabled workers earnt £1.65 (15.5 per cent) more per hour than disabled workers. In 2020, this has increased to £2.10 (19.6 per cent).  (TUC, 2020)

UK higher education cannot reach its full potential unless it can benefit from the talents of the whole population that is inclusive of individuals of all neurotypes and can benefit equally from the opportunities it affords.

Disability Definition: Disability is the terminology used by the Equality Act 2010 (Government Equalities Office 2010 s6.1) for a person who has a physical or mental impairment that impacts on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

**Appendix B**

University of Wolverhampton

Action Framework for Disability Equality Self-Assessment Team

Terms of Reference

**Chair:** Pro-Vice Chancellor for Regional Development or nominee

**Secretary:** Head of Equality and Diversity

**Membership:** Director of Student and Academic Services or nominee(s)

Dean of the College of Learning and Teaching or nominee(s)

Director of Human Resources or nominee(s)

Dean of Research or nominee(s)

Academic Lead for Mental Health

Head of Student Support and Wellbeing or nominee(s)

Eight Staff Members nominated by the AFDE Chair

Three Representatives of the Disabled Staff Network

Students’ Union Diversity Officer

**Remit:**

The Action Framework for Disability Equality Self-Assessment Team is a Task and Finish Group that is responsible for managing the development of a University Disability Equality Action Plan. The Action Framework for Disability Equality Self-Assessment Team will provide updates on the progress made to CMT and Joint Committee for Equality and Diversity through the University Equality and Diversity Working Group. It shall have completed its work by September 2022.

In doing so, it ensures that the University acts in accordance with its Vision 2030 goal to be a “driving force for inclusivity” and its commitment to the Action Framework for Disability Equality’s 7 guiding principles:

1. UK higher education cannot reach its full potential unless it can benefit from the talents of the whole population and until disabled and neurodiverse individuals can benefit equally from the opportunities it affords. In particular, addressing
   1. Disclosure
   2. The loss of disabled people across the career pipeline
   3. The absence of disabled people from senior academic, professional and support roles.
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6. Honour the intersection of disability or neurotype and other factors wherever possible. All individuals have identities shaped by several different characteristics.
7. Acknowledge that advancing disability equality and inclusion demands active commitment and action from all levels of the organisation; in particular visible leadership from those in senior roles.

**Tasks**

1. To approve the Action Framework for Disability Equality Project Plan and ensure that project is delivered according to the agreed timelines.
2. To develop a Disability Equality Action Plan based on these actions, and submit to CMT for approval.
3. To agree governance structures that ensure that the Disability Equality Action Plan is successfully delivered and its impact is evaluated.

**Frequency:** Monthly

**Quorum:** 50%

**Reports To:**Equality and Diversity Working Group**,** CMT, Joint Committee for Equality and Diversity Committeeand Board of Governors