



*The newsletter of The  
Standing Conference on  
University Teaching and  
Research In The Education  
of Adults – March 2004*

## **Disability Discrimination and SCUTREA**

The extension of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) to educational institutions from September 2002, has yet to be addressed in detail by SCUTREA. At their next meeting at the end of April, Council will look at the requirements of the Act and discuss how best we can implement the legislative requirements. This is not before time and provides a useful focus to an issue we have been aware of for some years. This edition of SCOOP will, I hope, add to this debate by offering members some initial information and thoughts, and the opportunity to add their voices to our on-going discussions.

Although the extension of the Act is focused on education providers and the needs of students, as a membership organisation we too need to comply with the Act. The impact of the DDA on our practice as educators has also focused our collective attention on disability issues and how they relate to SCUTREA. This is, of course, not to suggest that the needs of colleagues with disabilities have been ignored in the past: however, at best our practice has been piecemeal and well-meaning. To my knowledge, we have not scrutinized our practice in any systematic way.

The legislation embodied in the DDA aims to ensure that disabled people have equal opportunities to benefit from the services that are available in organisations.

The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people, and requires organisations to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure equality of opportunity. SCUTREA, as a small membership organisation with very limited resources, will not be expected to provide the range of support services provided by larger organisations.

However there are issues that can and should be addressed now. These would include access issues such as ensuring meeting venues were physically accessible and near to public transport. We might also provide papers for meetings in more accessible formats. Similarly, at conferences we need to ensure meeting rooms, residential accommodation and social venues are physically accessible, disabled toilets are near, that trips to other venues are planned with the needs of all participants in mind. Seminar rooms should be equipped with hearing loops, either fixed or portable, and materials such as handouts be made available in large print where necessary. Those presenting papers or chairing sessions might be offered guidelines that ensure disabled colleagues are not disadvantaged when they attend. We also need to ensure that our Website can be adaptable to the needs of those with sight related disabilities. These are only initial thoughts.

We all need to be vigilant in our practice: most of us need to be more vigilant in our everyday lives. Nor is it a simple issue. Working as I do with a team of Deaf colleagues and many Deaf students, I am very aware of the contested nature of disability as a term or label. However, it is incumbent upon Council to make a concerted effort to address these difficult issues.

We would welcome input from members, and would particularly ask institutional representatives to make this request more widely known amongst colleagues in their institutions. In this way we may make it possible for more people to take an active role in SCUTREA.

Two colleagues from Higher Education Institutions in the UK have kindly offered their reflections in the two pieces that follow. One is a current member of SCUTREA and a newly elected individual member representative on Council. She regularly attends our Conferences and she has a physical disability. The other is a potential member who has attended SCUTREA conferences in the past, and who has a 'hidden' disability. Both offer us useful insights into the experience of SCUTREA membership and I am grateful they agreed to write these pieces for SCOOP.

How do you choose which workshops you go to at conferences? Probably by the content. I'm often at a loss, unless I know the speakers and the space. From experience I usually look to see if there are any presenters from North America and go for that. They have been consistently good at presenting, they have clearly written material, which they know how to present. It's a great generalisation, but so far it has worked. My worst dread is entering a large space in which three large circles of chairs have been laid out. Add to this, the declaration by the workshop presenters that they want to make a few points and then throw it open for discussions means I leave. So what's my problem: an agoraphobic, inarticulate europhobe - no I have a hearing loss.

I'm lucky enough to have state of the art digital hearing aids and to have come to terms with my disability so that I can ensure that I get support for it, but this can be wearing and not everyone has these advantages. So what can you do to help? The following are not resource intensive and should be possible for any presenter or conference organiser.

Firstly a couple of remarks about the modern technology available. It is not enough to say there is a hearing loop. My hearing aids don't use hearing loops. When I did make use of them I found that generally they were only fitted in main auditoriums and often people had not bothered to find out how they worked or told the presenters that they needed to use them. The break off rooms aren't usually fitted with them and you can be offered a portable loop. Portable they maybe but discrete they are not. You find yourself sitting next to a plug, out of the circle, wired up and not able to take part effectively. So beware the machinery, make sure you have seen it and know how it works and give the person who will be using it an opportunity to decide if they want to use it. Also ensure that your presenters know how to use it.

Less resource intensive things are often more effective and actually make the person feel better.

Ensure that all your presenters are clear about equal opportunities and can present their material in a variety of mediums. Talk to them about how they arrange seating and how they enable all participants to be involved in the experience. Not every person with a hidden disability will want to declare it. It is the presenter's responsibility to make sure that they are doing their job. Be clear about what the purpose of the grouping is. Is it a workshop, seminar or presentation, each is different? If it is a workshop or seminar then 15 is too many anyway, small groups will be much more effective and easier to handle for the person with a hearing loss. Try not to put break out groups, whatever their purpose, in the same room. If this is unavoidable make it clear on the programme that this is the case so that people have an option. For main presenters to the whole group, ask them to think about their presentation and how they handle questions. I am not able to hear questions from behind me or if I can't see the speaker. The easiest solution is for the speaker to reflect the questions in some way. If I can't hear the questions the answers don't mean much and it has the knock on effect of making it impossible for me to join the debate in case the same thing has already be asked. When you are planning the programme remember it is very wearing dealing with a disability. I have to look and listen all the time if I am to take full part. Back to back workshops are exhausting and being allowed 10 minutes in a noisy coffee bar doesn't help, build in some activity or fresh air breaks that allow me to take a bit of quiet time or to network in a quieter space. I think the above things would make conferences a much more rewarding experience for everyone if they were put in place.

One last point if you find yourself seating next to someone you know has a hearing loss then don't whisper to them during the presentation, they won't hear you and will loose the flow of things. They will probably nod and smile sweetly at you. We are not daft just a bit deaf.

Julia Dinsdale.

### **The View from a Different Chair.**

You receive a call for conference papers, prepare the paper and then well in my case, pester conference organiser. "Hello, my name is Ann-Marie Houghton, I'm booked in to come to the conference I wonder if you could confirm that the venue is going to be accessible and if we could discuss access arrangements". As a result of my chair, I find that in addition to checking references and proof reading conference papers the task of sorting out the practical issues is one that is both a burden to me and whoever is organising the conference. This situation is primarily because changing the built environment and addressing issues of access takes time. It is perhaps for this reason that the number of people attending conferences who have different needs, remains regrettably small.

As a delegate to a number of conferences including SCUTREA the view from my chair is an interesting one. The view is dominated by bottoms and daily delights of bumps and barriers, accessible or should that be scenic routes to different venues, and an end seat on a table, often already pre-arranged which can bring an abrupt end to a conversation. There is however an opportunity resulting from my chair for me and those who may have offered to push to engage in a myriad of lifelong learning lessons and disability awareness. For the most part delegates at SCUTREA approach disability from a social model perspective, recognising that the physical obstacles are structural and related to the limitations of my chair rather than me. The Disability Discrimination Act, recent legislation, HEFCE funding to enhance accessibility of HEIs continues to bring about improvements. The journey in my chair remains an adventure, filled with uncertainty (courtesy of the trains); despite this the chair enables me to engage in academic debate and like those able to attend this year's SCUTREA conference to ask the question, 'Whose story now? (Re)generating research in adult learning and teaching' And the view from my chair is ...

Ann-Marie Houghton

### **View From the Chair**

Council is trying to make SCUTREA a more inclusive organisation. As a starting point, this edition of SCOOP is largely devoted to an exploration of the issues of disability and the implications of the new law for organisations like SCUTREA. This is the beginning of what we hope will be a wide-ranging and useful discussion that will improve the ability of SCUTREA to be a more representative organisation. We can hopefully learn from colleagues who experience discrimination on a daily basis, and ensure we improve the service we offer to them. We would therefore welcome member's views and suggestions concerning these issues. Council will be discussing this issue at our April meeting and will report back to members in due course.

Council would also welcome individual and institutional responses and reactions to the fees issue. It is important to keep this topic on the agenda.

We are in the process of re-introducing the joint seminar series. The first one will be with SRHE - the post-compulsory network - hopefully in May and focusing on FE. The second will be in the autumn term 2004 with ESCALATE looking at a research project undertaken by John Field at Stirling University. Further details will be available soon.

You may have noticed that the SCUTREA website has been redesigned. Please could you let us know your comments about the website and its usability and any suggestions for improvement.

A reminder that papers for the SCUTREA Annual Conference in Sheffield have to be written by 23 April and also importantly don't forget to register for your accommodation and attendance at the conference. It promises to be a very good conference with an opportunity for discussion with colleagues, not only from the UK and parts of Europe, but also from several other countries such as Australia, USA, Canada.

Barbara Merrill

## Notice Board

### Conferences and Events

#### **ESREA**

A reminder that ESREA is holding its triennial European conference in Wroclaw, Poland, 16-18 September, 2004. There will also be a pre-conference on 15 September 2004 focusing on the learning and teaching approaches in relation to adults in higher education. For more information about both conferences look at the ESREA website -

<http://www.esrea.org> or contact Barbara Merrill or Linden West.

#### **NIACE**

*Kennedy: Seven Years On*

It is seven years since the Further Education Funding Council published Learning Works, Helena Kennedy's seminal report on closing Britain's learning divide. Reflecting on the values and importance of further education, on widening participation and on the creation of a better-educated, fairer and more just society, Learning Works pointed the way for FE to become the inclusive service it needs and ought to be.

What has happened since? Have Kennedy's concerns been met? Are the values set out in her report still informing our work? What still needs to be done? At this NIACE conference, Baroness Kennedy and other leading speakers will explore the policy directives, the shape of the sector in the era of the Learning and Skills Council, and visions for the future. For further information : <http://www.niace.org.uk/conferences>

#### **SCOOP Conference Special**

## Contacts

### Chair

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### Secretary

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### Membership Secretary

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