



## **Disability Equality Scheme**

December 2006

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## **Preface**

Celebrating diversity and working to achieve the creative potential in all our students is at the heart of the work of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama. We know that disabled people have not always been given an equal chance to develop their talents and skill in the performing arts and through the work of our groundbreaking disability project, we have come a long way in welcoming applications from disabled students and promoting equality during their time with us.

We see the new disability equality duty as a positive encouragement to continuing our effort to become the kind of institution where individual difference is respected and valued. This new duty will enable us to make a lasting difference to the experience of disabled people within the Conservatoire; not only to the lives and future careers of our disabled students, but also for our disabled employees.

Writing our disability equality scheme has given us the chance to prioritise the key actions and outcomes we want to achieve over the next three years in promoting equality for disabled people, and to plan some exciting and innovative ways to actively involve disabled people in helping us to achieve these ambitious, but realistic goals. A key area for us, is to consider how we can attract and retain a diverse staff community that reflects our goals and to create an atmosphere where all staff are comfortable in declaring themselves as disabled people

We feel that the new Disability Equality Duty will be a positive force in breaking down some of the barriers that disabled people have traditionally faced.

Nicholas Barter  
Veronica Lewis MBE

Joint Principals

## **ONE: PROMOTING DISABILITY EQUALITY**

### **Principles and aims of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama's Disability Equality Scheme**

- 1 The Conservatoire is committed to promoting a culture which fosters and actively promotes equality and diversity. Our aim is to be an inclusive institution where individual differences are respected and valued and where everyone is able to fulfil their potential. We wish to foster a culture of equality of opportunity which goes beyond simple compliance with the legislation.
- 2 In 2006, the Conservatoire established an Equality and Diversity Working Group. The remit of this group is to steer the development of best practice in equality and diversity across the Conservatoire and its affiliate schools.
- 3 Although our ultimate intention is to develop an Equality Scheme that covers the three duties: race, disability and gender equality (and any forthcoming duties on age, religion and sexuality), the Conservatoire acknowledges the Disability Rights Commission's concern that single equality schemes can sometimes result in only a superficial consideration of the distinctive experience of equality as well as the distinctive legal requirements of the three duties. The Disability Discrimination Act's requirement to make reasonable adjustments recognises that equality of opportunity for disabled people cannot be achieved merely by treating disabled and non-disabled people in the same way. The Disability Equality Duty clarifies this position by requiring public authorities to give due regard to the need to treat disabled people more favourably. This is distinct and unique to disability discrimination in equality law.
- 4 As a newly established Higher Education Institution comprising eight affiliate schools, we acknowledge that there is still a lot of work to do in developing and publishing our scheme.
- 5 This first scheme will provide the essential framework for promoting and embedding disability equality in all areas of our work. This will enable us to provide a positive and lasting difference to the experiences of current and potential disabled students and those disabled people who currently are, or who would like to join us as employees. It will assist us in our aim of attracting and retaining talented staff and students and enhance our diversity and competitiveness in the changing and dynamic field of the performing arts.

### **Equality and Diversity Working Group**

- 6 The Conservatoire has established Equality and Diversity Working Group (E&DWG) comprising representatives from all eight affiliate schools and Conservatoire staff. This group has led on developing the Disability Equality Scheme. It is a consolidation of the former Race Equality Working Group and Disability Project Monitoring Group. The working group reports directly to the Principals' Management Group and to the Conservatoire's Academic Board. As with other working groups, it is chaired by an affiliate principal.

- 7 Within the terms of reference for E&DWG, provision has been made to co-opt individuals to the group to ensure appropriate representation. It is through this mechanism that other disabled people will be actively involved in overseeing the development of policy and practice.
- 8 The Equality and Diversity Manager is a disabled person with considerable experience in this field. Such expertise is particularly important in assisting the E&DWG in drawing up, monitoring and reviewing our Disability Equality Scheme. The terms of reference for the group are attached as Appendix 1.

## TWO: CONTEXT

### Legislative framework

- 9 The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 (and subsequent amendments effective from October 2004) and the DDA 2005 have brought in measures to prevent discrimination against disabled people in employment and services. The Special Educational Needs Act 2001 (SENDA) amended the DDA 1995 to cover education and has been further amended, effective from 1 September 2006, under the DDA 1995 (Amendment) Act (Further and Higher Education) Regulations 2006.
- 10 Discrimination against disabled people can take place by treating them 'less favourably' than other people and by failing to make a 'reasonable adjustment' where they are placed at a 'substantial disadvantage' compared with other people for a reason relating to their disability. The DDA uses a wide definition of a disabled person as having a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day duties (see Appendix 2 for further definitions).
- 11 The DDA 2005 introduced a new duty for the public sector effective from December 2006. This new Disability Equality Duty is also known as the Public Sector Duty or 'positive duty'. As an education provider, under the DED, we have both a general duty and specific duties.
- 12 The general duty applies to all public authorities. In carrying out their functions, they must have due regard to the need to:
  - promote equality of opportunity between disabled and non disabled people
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination
  - eliminate (disability related) harassment of disabled people
  - promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
  - encourage the participation of disabled people in public life
  - take steps to remove barriers which prevent disabled people from achieving equality, even when this involves treated disabled people more favourably.
- 13 The Conservatoire's Board of Governors are responsible for ensuring that the institution meets these duties. The specific duty requires us to demonstrate how we intend to intend to fulfil our general duties and to produce, publish, implement and review a Disability Equality Scheme (DES). This is because education providers are regarded by the Government as having a particularly significant role to play in promoting equality.
- 14 The initial scheme needs to be published now and we will report annually on its progress. It will be revised within three years of the initial date of publication.
- 15 This duty is similar to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act in that it requires us to take an approach that shows that we are not only seeking to avoid discrimination but are actively promoting equality of opportunity for disabled

people. However, the new duty goes beyond other duties in that it requires us to clearly demonstrate that we have actively involved disabled people in all aspects of the design and development of our scheme. Involvement is an active process whereby 'stakeholders' have visible influence on the development of this scheme. Stakeholders include disabled staff and students, governors, 'friends' of the schools, audiences, visitors and participants on short courses.

- 16 There are four different aspects to developing a DES. Higher Education Institutions need to:
- **Establish ways to actively involve disabled people** in both the key elements of the development of the scheme and in the continuation of the work.
  - **Gather and analyse data and information** in order to inform our policies. HEIs need to demonstrate that there are plans in place to collect data: both quantitative information such as HESA returns and qualitative information through, for example, interviews with disabled staff and students or focus groups.
  - **Assess the impact of current and proposed policies, procedures and plans** by conducting a detailed and systematic analysis to see whether these might have a (differential) impact on disabled people.
  - **Develop an action plan** with realistic dates for development, completion and review.

### **The social model of disability**

- 17 The concept of the social model of disability is central to the Conservatoire's Disability Equality Scheme.
- 18 The social model was developed by disabled people in opposition to what came to be known as the medical model of disability. The key difference between these two models is the location of the 'problem'. The medical model takes the view that the problem is located in the individual as a result of their impairment. The social model approach argues that society creates barriers that 'disable' people from participating fully and on an equal basis and that wherever possible the barriers that exclude or limit the life chances of disabled people need to be removed. The responsibility is on the authority or institution to remove these barriers and to provide appropriate support so that disabled people can achieve their full potential.
- 19 The social model approach has influenced a rights-based view of equality for disabled people and is a key tool in understanding and implementing the Disability Equality Duty. Those commissioning research and gathering information in relation to disability equality therefore need to have a solid understanding of the social model of disability.

## **Distinctive characteristics of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama**

- 20 The Conservatoire is one of the newest higher education institutions in the country, established in 2001 to secure the future of conservatoire-level vocational training in dance and drama in England. It has a unique structure, made up of eight affiliate schools. All are small, specialist, vocational training institutions with international reputations for high quality training in dance, drama or circus arts. Through the Conservatoire, all the affiliates receive funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which helps to ensure that the most talented students benefit from vocational training, to which access can be given regardless of background or financial circumstances. The eight affiliate schools are:

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (BOVTS)  
Central School of Ballet (CSB)  
The Circus Space (TCS)  
The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA)  
London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS)  
Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD)  
Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance (RSBCD)  
Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA)

- 21 Students are trained by immersion in the practice of their art forms and through the embodiment of technical skills, engagement with creative processes and the experience of performing in professional conditions with its attendant preparation. This involves consistent and intensive daily practice, face to face with teachers and visiting professionals. It equips students with the skills and artistic understanding to address the diverse demands of traditional repertoire, seminal pieces and new work.
- 22 The Conservatoire itself has a small team of nine full- and part-time staff. All other staff are employed directly by affiliate schools. Students are registered jointly with the affiliate and with the Conservatoire. The Conservatoire has approximately 1,077 students of whom 1,000 are UK/EU students. The majority are registered on undergraduate programmes.
- 23 Access for the most talented students was a founding principle for the Conservatoire and remains one of its four priorities: “to secure long-term access to training for the most talented students from diverse backgrounds”. Further information about the Conservatoire’s aspirations may be found in its corporate plan summary ([www.cdd.ac.uk](http://www.cdd.ac.uk)).
- 24 The Conservatoire endeavours to ensure fair and open access to its programmes by auditioning all applicants for the performing courses and interviewing all applicants for technical courses. The process may involve up to three stages and comprise classes, workshops, solo performance, physical examination where appropriate, and interviews. Admission of students is the responsibility of each affiliate. The combination of intensive training and strong student support has led to excellent retention rates and outstanding

employment rates. Applications for programmes is very high, sometimes with over 70 applicants for each place.

- 25 Conservatoire affiliates have strong traditions of student support and commit considerable resources to them. We have begun to share best practice in student support services amongst our affiliates.
- 26 The student-recruitment philosophy is reinforced by the desire to meet and where possible exceed legislative requirements regarding equality and diversity. The Conservatoire's first major project improved provision for disabled students and the corporate plan makes it clear that there is a commitment to placing similar emphasis on other areas of equality and diversity to ensure that students from ethnic minorities and other under-represented groups are recruited and supported. The Disability Project, funded by HEFCE between 2003 and 2006 attracted a high level of publicity within affiliates and led to substantial staff training, improved provision at all stages of application, selection, teaching and learning and an increased awareness of the support available for disabled students.
- 27 As a new HEI with affiliates who are relatively new to higher education, CDD recognises that it must do a great deal of work to actively involve disabled people in all aspects of its work and to ensure it complies with the enhanced legal requirements placed on public institutions.
- 28 The Conservatoire strives to improve public awareness and understanding of vocational training in dance, drama, technical theatre and circus arts. There is a desire to increase access to students who might not otherwise consider higher education. Affiliates are engaged in many activities designed to promote access to vocational training including: short summer courses, student performance tours to schools, subsidised classes for children and young people, and specific projects with local schools.

### **THREE: DISABILITY EQUALITY IN THE CONSERVATOIRE - WHERE WE ARE NOW**

#### **Disabled students: current provision**

- 29 The Conservatoire's disability project began at the end of April 2003 as part of a HEFCE-funded project. It concluded in the project form in July 2006.
- 30 The CDD disability project was set up to:
- review provision for disabled students;
  - support disabled applicants and students;
  - provide an inclusive and welcoming learning environment in each affiliate
  - carry out an ongoing programme of staff development with all affiliates in order to increase awareness of disability equality legislation:
  - work with affiliates to develop policy and practice in order to achieve these aims.
- 31 The project acknowledged that conventional academic work and written outcomes are only a small part of the training offered and this is an important distinguishing feature of the Conservatoire. It was essential to consider how the practical, creative and technique aspects of the course might (differentially) affect disabled applicants and students.
- 32 The project was praised by two external sources. First, in 2005 the Quality Assurance Agency, in its Institutional Audit, identified the work as an area of good practice and praised the project's effectiveness in "raising awareness in staff at all levels within affiliates." Second, the National Disabilities Team co-ordinator, Tina Elliot praised the project manager for the "extremely successful delivery of a complex and challenging project. My understanding is that the outcomes have created significant change in attitude and approaches to the inclusion of disabled students at all affiliate institutions. Along with this has run the development of institutional policies, procedures and practices which will embed these changes for the future."
- 33 As a result of the project, a number of practices and procedures have been set up to develop and monitor provision for disabled students. These include:
- regular reporting to the CDD Academic Board on the achievements and future targets of the disability project.
  - establishing of a Disability Monitoring Group (September 2005) which met at least three times a year with senior staff representatives from each affiliate. The group undertook ongoing monitoring of provision for disabled students including reporting on improvements, identifying areas for further work and ensuring that provision for disabled students was fully integrated with the affiliate's other policies and practice.
  - staff training, which included the general principles of disability equality; confidentiality and disclosure and developing learning agreements; working

with students with mental health difficulties; inclusive learning and teaching for dyslexic students; dance training for students with different physicalities and supporting deaf students in acting training;

- actively consulting and involving disabled students in developing policy and practice through focus groups and individual interviews to provide, amongst others, (anonymised) case studies for use in staff training, support needs of dyslexic students in performance training (eg 'over-learning' dance sequences); a footage available on DVD (and ultimately website) of the experience of eight disabled students.

34 Some of the improvements in policy, practice and procedure include:

- welcoming statements in all prospectus giving disabled students the opportunity to disclose information;
- procedures for contacting students and providing appropriate support at audition and interview;
- learning agreements to cover both the contextual and practical aspects of the course;
- improved support (including budget allocation) for dyslexic students;
- support with applying for the Disabled Students Allowance;
- funded counselling support for students with mental health difficulties.

35 The major written and website outcomes of the disability project are:

- *Initial Report on Provision for Disabled Students*, January 2004;
- *Monitoring Provision for Disabled Students: Summary of Responses, and Examples of Good Practice*, February 2006;
- *'You Can Always Surprise Someone Just by Being Yourself'*: DVD (and on Conservatoire website from January 2007) of eight disabled students in performance and talking about their experiences of studying at Conservatoire schools;
- *Support for Disabled Students: A Guide*, September 2006.

36 There are a number of significant challenges still facing the Conservatoire on developing and embedding provision for disabled students. Perhaps the most significant of these are:

- continuing actively to involve disabled students in developing this provision, particularly as our students are spread over eight affiliates and have up to 35 hours of training a week.

- providing continued assistance to individual affiliates to improve support for disabled students;
- the development of currently inaccessible or partly accessible buildings to meet our target of improving access for all members of the CDD community and ensure compliance with current disability discrimination legislation.

### **Disabled staff: current provision**

37 Although there is HR provision in all affiliates, most do not have specialist HR departments. As a relatively new institution and with affiliates new to the public sector, there are not formal policies and procedures in place in relation to disabled staff. We recognise the need to do more work in this area, in particular to develop good practice in relation to the recruitment, retention and progression of disabled employees. We wish to develop a climate where staff feel confident that if they disclose an impairment or condition they will be responded to in a positive manner and appropriate provision and support will be put in place. In developing policies and procedures in relation to disabled staff, our aim is to mirror the good practice that we have developed to support disabled students. This is a priority area and action is outlined in the plan below.

### **Current data on disabled staff and students**

38 As with other higher education institutions, the Conservatoire collects and returns statistical information about its students and staff to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). These data are collected usually during the summer about the previous year's intake and HESA produces summary statistics. As the Conservatoire has grown each year from 2001, its HESA data have lagged behind the size and scope of the actual institution.

39 The Conservatoire has collated information about its student population from the academic year 2005-6, which includes numbers of disabled students, but not collated by HESA categories of impairment-type. According to our data, 10% of the total student population are classified as disabled.

40 To date, the Conservatoire has not produced consolidated data on its staff population. HESA analyses do not reflect all eight schools (for the reasons mentioned above), but from 2005-06, the HESA data will reflect the Conservatoire in its current composition.

41 The lack of fully analysed Conservatoire data does not mean that this information is not collected and analysed at an affiliate level. Some affiliates do report on the progress of students from different groups following on from race equality legislation which came into force before the Conservatoire was established.

42 In order to obtain a better data set and to be able to analyse these data across the whole Conservatoire, we are currently putting in place a centralised database system. This will facilitate the collection, collation, distribution and

analysis of data about Conservatoire staff and students to inform all forms of equality monitoring. The database and first sets of data will be available early in 2007.

- 43 The Action Plan (see Appendix 1) outlines our proposals in relation to producing baseline data and then meeting our statutory requirements in relation to monitoring the recruitment, retention and progress of disabled staff and students.

### **Accessible buildings**

- 44 The Conservatoire and its affiliate schools occupy a variety of buildings which are used for teaching, administrative, performance and many other purposes. Some of these buildings are owned by the schools and some rented. Many schools have undergone extensive refurbishment in recent years with greatly improved access for disabled people. Others are currently involved in Appeals and other fund-raising efforts to improve the built environment for all.
- 45 In 2004, the Conservatoire's *Initial Report on Disabled Students* described a number of principles for the inclusion of disabled people in the built environment. These principles form the centre of our long term aim to provide inclusive facilities for all disabled people who study, work or visit any of these buildings. They include the following:
- that disabled people should have the same access to the physical environment in which they work, study, learn and live as their non-disabled peers.
  - That the CDD and its affiliates should have in place policies and procedures which take into account the needs of disabled people when any new building work or refurbishment of existing buildings is taking place.
  - That schools need to take flexible and imaginative approaches to enabling alternative means of participation where physical access is currently impossible or unreasonably difficult.
- 46 Detailed information about the Conservatoire's buildings is included as Appendix 3.

## **FOUR: INVOLVING DISABLED PEOPLE**

### **Principles of involvement**

- 47 The DRC's Code of Practice reminds us that involvement of disabled people is particularly important because of the under-representation of disabled people in positions which determine policies and priorities in public authorities.
- 48 Developing imaginative strategies for continuing to involve disabled students and finding ways of actively involving disabled staff is central to the next stage of our work. By involving disabled people we can work out what targets to set and in which areas. We recognise that our disabled staff and students are best placed to identify barriers to equal participation and to help us develop ways in which we can put our commitment to disability equality into action.
- 49 In order to provide effective ways of involving a diverse group of disabled people to assist us in planning and implementing our action plan, we need to ensure that this involvement is not superficial; is focused, efficient and influential, that participants know about the outcomes, that anonymity will be preserved if so desired and that it is based on the social model of disability outlined above.
- 50 Disabled people also need to feel that they can constructively criticise their organisation's way of working without feeling they will be penalised for doing so.

### **Involvement of disabled students**

- 51 We have a recent history of successful initiatives to involve disabled students in monitoring and developing policies and provision. For example:
- focus groups of dancers with dyslexia led to a real understanding of how specific learning difficulties impact on remembering and learning routines and sequences and this informed staff development and practice;
  - observation of audition procedures and discussions with applicants led to altering practices with regard to sight reading and form filling for dyslexic students. We are now better placed to: anticipate the needs of students with sensory impairments at audition, for example by providing BSL interpreters, giving information in alternative fonts and putting in place appropriate support in dance and drama audition workshops;
  - Interviews with disabled students about the most appropriate way to meet individual needs in performing arts training, led to the development of procedures to establish and review Individual Learning Agreements.

### **Involvement of disabled staff**

- 52 A key aim for 2007-2009 is to attract and retain a diverse staff community that reflects both the locations in which the CDD and affiliates are placed, and helps to enhance equality and diversity in our HEI.

- 53 With regard to the Disability Equality Duty, we want to ensure that:
- disabled people are encouraged to apply for jobs in the CDD and its affiliates;
  - procedures are robust enough to make employees feel that they are not discriminated against;
  - disabled staff feel comfortable within the organisation and confident that if they disclose an impairment or long term health condition, they will receive the support they need.
  - disabled people are reassured that their views are genuinely needed and will feed into the larger process

### **Involving the wider community**

- 54 We also wish to find strategies to involve other important stakeholders, for example affiliate governors, users of the affiliates' facilities and audiences in order to identify future action plan priorities.

## **FIVE: DISABILITY EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS**

### **What is an impact assessment?**

- 55 Most things that organisations do and the decisions that they make have an impact on the work, studies and experiences of disabled people and the opportunities available to them. This impact might be positive, negative or neutral.
- 56 The term ‘impact assessment’ has become used in equality legislation as a shorthand for assessing the impact that policies and practice may have on people from different groups. The purpose of disability equality impact assessment is to enhance the experience of the Conservatoire’s disabled staff, students, visitors and members of the wider community.
- 57 Formal impact assessment is a way of systematically thinking through what this impact might be and then acting on the results of the assessment to ensure that any negative impact is eliminated and wherever possible, positive experience is enhanced.
- 58 The process of carrying out impact assessments is not an end in itself but a starting point to enable us to identify the policies and practices that require development and change. Effective impact assessments require a team approach. Senior management, operational staff, teachers, disabled people and all other key members of an organisation need to be part of this process. This will help to ensure that disability equality impact assessments are part of the core business of the Conservatoire and each affiliate school.

### **How will impact assessments be carried out?**

- 59 Informal impact assessments have been taking place throughout the Conservatoire’s disability project and many positive changes to improve the teaching and learning experience for disabled students are now embedded in policy and practice. Our Scheme will build on this informal approach and develop a more systematic method of carrying out impact assessments in order to include disabled staff and other stakeholders.
- 60 A high priority for the E&DWG is to establish a thorough and systematic methodology for disability impact assessment. This is likely to require staff training. The Learning and Skills Council suggest a clear seven steps approach:
- map all policies, procedures, plans and practice
  - screen to determine priority
  - consider the evidence
  - assess the likely impact
  - explore options and make decisions
  - identify monitoring processes
  - publish the results

## SIX: ACTION PLAN

- 61 The Conservatoire's Action Plan is the most important part of its Scheme. It sets out key actions for the next three years. These actions are designed to actively involve disabled people and to work towards meeting the requirements of the new Disability Equality Duty. We will report on the achievements in our first annual review.
- 62 The CDD is a relatively new HEI and much of the groundwork required in order to develop the Scheme and its Action Plan is not yet in place. For this reason, there are two distinct parts to the action plan:
- 63 **Part one contains ground-work objectives for the first year.** These will enable us to set specific targets for years 2 and 3 through:
- the active involvement of disabled people
  - baseline data collection
  - development of a methodology for impact assessments
- 64 **Part 2 are specific objectives to be achieved by the end of the first year of our Scheme.** These include:
- a thorough review of recruitment procedures in all schools in order to promote inclusion of disabled employees;
  - impact assessments on student audition procedures and assessments in practical/performance aspects of student courses;
  - review of access for disabled people in performance venues used by affiliates;
  - development of a detailed Action Plan for years 2 and 3 of the Scheme
- 65 A budget has been allocated to allow these objectives to be fulfilled.