



## **NEON Working Group**

### **Access and outreach for disabled learners**

**Friday 20 November 2015 12.00noon – 2.00pm**

## **The University of Manchester**

Peter Riley	MMU (Chair)
Nahida Shabir	MMU
Laura Cragg	University of Manchester
Victoria Ball	Wigan and Leigh College
Amy Preston	Sheffield Hallam
Gillian Marshall	Sheffield Hallam
Kevin McMullan	Student Finance England
Mike Siddall	University of Cumbria
Trudy Ing	Oxford Brookes University
Michael Mohebbi	University of Liverpool
Dawn Parrington	University of Salford
Lauren Hedges	AccessHE

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Peter Riley (PR) welcomed everybody to the group and asked attendees to introduce themselves. Apologies were received from:

Stephanie Lee	University of Manchester
Catherine Shillito	Liverpool John Moores
Helen Cooper	University of Chester
Gail McKay	University of Sheffield

### **2. Minutes from the last meeting and matters arising**

It was agreed that the minutes from the previous meeting were a true reflection of what was discussed.

### **3. Update on changes to DSA**

Kevin gave an overview of application statistics. SFE are expecting 80,000 applications for 2015/6; this equates to approximately 1,500 applications per week.

Kevin commented that the first week in October usually sees a peak in applications. Kevin would circulate the figures discussed with the notes of the meeting.

Kevin updated the group as he now attends both the North and South NEON disabled learner group meetings.

The group discussed the use of taxis for students with disabilities. Kevin commented that SFE suggest students use taxi accounts, details of which Kevin will include with the minutes for members of the group to pass on to students.

Kevin updated the group on the assessment centre price freeze - SLC will now only pay the cost of the value of the last invoice From January 2016, the maximum amount that SLC will pay is £660.

Kevin highlighted that the quick start guides will be available from the end of November including the DSA guide.

**Action: PR to circulate Kevin's information with the minutes**

#### **4. Discussion on how institutions are responding to the changes**

There was a discussion on how individual institutions were preparing for the DSA changes. NS gave an overview of progress at MMU, where following the establishment of a steering group and task and finish groups a proposal has now been approved to provide additional funding for additional staff to provide more in house support. There was also a discussion on how different institutions were responding to the £200 student contribution for computers and whether the university is reimbursing some of these students from hardship funds.

Some group members voiced concerns around the changes to DSA and the timescales involved. Universities ideally need to have processes in place for the end of January in order for universities to be ready in February for the changes.

The group commented that there was no mention of finance in the recent green paper and as budgets have been set and access agreements have been arranged, this is a concern.

#### **5. Update on recent and planned activities from members**

Lauren informed the group that Access HE Disability Forum run practitioner events. In addition, London Metropolitan University hold a Festival of Dyslexia culture. She also informed the group about the AHEAD college fair which was held in Dublin in October.

*Note: Lauren has since sent a link to the AHEAD college fair: <http://ahead.ie/betteroptions#ex>. She says the first video, which is on youtube, is particular good and highlighting the benefits of the event and that students will have the opportunity to ask disability related questions to disability support services, making it different to a stand college fair.*

Trudy Ing commented that Deborah from the University of Brighton had attended the NEON South disabled learner group and delivered a presentation on her work supporting disabled students. It was suggested she could be approached to present at a future meeting of this group.

**Agreed: Peter to approach Deborah to see if she would be free to attend a future meeting.**

## 6. Update on HEFCE Networks of Collaborative Outreach

Laura highlighted that Greater Manchester Higher are holding the following events in 2016:

<i>Event title</i>	<i>Date</i>	
Prospective Student and Parent/Carer Evening	Tuesday 23 February 2016	UoM
Post-16 event for students with specific learning difficulties (Dyslexia/Dyspraxia)	Wednesday 10 February 2016	UoM
Pre-16 event for students with specific learning difficulties (Dyslexia/Dyspraxia)	Wednesday 27 April 2016	MMU
Pre-16 event for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder	Thursday 28 April 2016	MMU
Post-16 event for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder	Thursday 23 June 2016	University of Salford
Breaking Barriers	Wednesday 29 June 2016	University of Bolton

In addition there would be some Mentoring schemes involving learners with physical disabilities and learners with Autism which would be delivered in partnership with Brightside Mentoring.

## 7. NEON update

Peter informed the group that the NEON Symposium would be taking place at the University of Leicester from 9-10 June 2016. Further details would be circulated when available.

## 8. AOB

Peter noted that OFFA guidance around the monitoring return had been published. He noted that there was an expanded section around Equality and Diversity. Peter commented that in the latest Green Paper, there is a focus on quality of opportunity and the outcome of disabled students in comparison to others.

## 9. Topics for next meeting

It was suggested that the focus could be on measuring the impact of disability support and how institutions approach this.

## 10. Date of next meeting

Monday 14th March 2016 at the University of Liverpool