

**NEON Disabled Learner Working Group Meeting
22 October 2019
Manchester Metropolitan University**

1. Welcome and introductions

Peter Riley – Manchester Met (Chair)
Clare Zilka – Manchester Met
Steve Lee- Manchester Met
Fiona Garner - Lancaster University
Hannah Barton – University of Salford
Victoria Ball- Wigan and Leigh College
Alison Jones- University of Sheffield
Jamie Bytheway- GM Higher
Kevin Hornblower – Shaping Futures
Kevin McMullan - SFE
Jennifer Parr – University of Bolton
Danielle Mannion – University of Bolton
Jason Leeming- BPP
Catherine Peppit – Sheffield Hallam

Apologies: Laura Cragg (UoM), Sophie Flieshman (UoM)

2. Minutes from the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes accepted as accurate record.

3. Update from Student finance

KM provided an update on the current progress of applications, and agreed to:

- Send information on Placement and Study Abroad
- Feedback to Anthony Hill and Amy Hedges (SLC) comments re: NAR Tender Process
- Send slides detailing the DSA condition breakdown for 2018/19
- Send list of eligible conditions for DSA support (subject to severity of condition and effect on study)

ACTION- KM to forward information to PR to circulate

It was reported that the DSE Quality Assurance Group would be closed on 20 December. In future complains regarding equipment would be dealt with by suppliers – if still not satisfied complaints will be dealt with by Anthony Hill and Amy Hedges. It was pointed out that the QAG guidance was used as a reference for suppliers, and if it's going then something else will be needed in its place.

KM reported that work was about to begin with students who submit a DSA1 letter but don't attend a needs assessment. Feedback would be given to the next meeting. Members

were asked what they do to follow this up, but it was stated that, as HEPs no longer receive a copy of the DSA1, they don't know unless the student tells them and therefore can't follow up. There was a query as to how big an issue this was – KM reported he didn't know but assumed it must be significant for it to be investigated.

Action - KM to feedback to Anthony Hill and Amy Hedges on the implications the removal of DSA1 letter had had for HEPs

It was also confirmed that Jon Legg had been replaced by Steve Jones as the regional link.

4. Transition from HE to employment support - how this work has progressed

- It was noted that from a recent AGCASS report there was clearly a lot to do to support disabled learners into employment.
- There was a discussion about how well disabled graduates were supported when they progressed into employment or undertook placements. VB commented that students often feel better in small organisations, although larger companies can absorb additional costs easier than small/medium ones.
- It was noted that for many disabled students, they develop skills in using assistive technology whilst studying, and this becomes their natural way of working. As a result these students feel prepared for work and don't find it a barrier.
- Often students may not take advantage of placements/work experience as they don't feel ready for employment. Evidence shows engagement in placements is lower for non-disabled rather than disabled students.
- There was also a discussion about how students on Degree Apprenticeships are supported. It was clarified that the HE provider are responsible for support with the academic input and the employers for the work based element. However it was noted that this funding comes through the ESFA – although information on this was difficult to find and it could be hard to access.

ACTION- SL to forward information in relation to employment/placement support for disabled students

5. Engagement with outreach activities

- It was noted that in Greater Manchester numbers on targeted outreach events for disabled learners had been reducing recently (as opposed to targeted events for care experienced students which were increasingly popular). However transition/pre-entry events for committed students were popular, especially around supporting the transition of ASC students.
- VB said staff in colleges disseminate a lot of information to students, and therefore there may be an opportunity to get information out through contacts in colleges, rather than engaging with learners direct.
- FG said Lancaster had run an all-inclusive event which had not had a great attendance, but a pre-arrival event for Autistic students was really well attended.
- There was a discussion about the work of getting key messages out during transition, such as what is a disability and what support is available. Some universities were

including information at the end of student finance presentations as a way of engaging a wider audience.

- KM said the percentage of DSA support (DSA2) was 56% for learning difficulties and mental health.

ACTION- KM to forward breakdown of DSA2 claims by disability type.

- The question was asked whether the work which had been done in recent years had increased the proportion of learners applying for DSA prior to enrolling, however it was stated there had been no significant shift with the figure still around 50% of all claims being received before enrolment.
- It was noted that Salford University had been working more closely with Admissions, and this seemed to have generated applications in earlier in the cycle.
- Sheffield reported that they now mail out to applicants in May. They used to do it sooner – but now feel this is the best time as they are able to do something with responses received at this point.
- The question was raised as to was there a definition of a disability which could be used by outreach staff (to encourage learners to disclose). KM said there was a list of what disabilities have been accepted for DSA and the evidence requirements which might be useful.

6. Updates on recent activities/conferences

- Sheffield had developed a social group for students on the spectrum, and this grown from 3 to 24 students. The sessions are facilitated by Spectrum First Education. The sessions are structured to provide a review of the week, as well providing some social space. It is a student led group, with staff members there to provide support.
- At Manchester Met there is a Peer support for disabled students, but this is more around the social side. Work has been done with the sports centre to provide social activities. This starts as a transition project with current 1st years supporting pre-entry students on-line and at pre-entry events, before becoming the social events when they enrol. Typically find the network tails off after the first term as students develop their own support networks.
- University of Bolton would be hosting a Greater Manchester Higher event in December entitled 'Breaking Barriers, which is a CPD event for staff in FE, sharing best practice and engaging with practitioners in HE. Presentations will include a session from SFE, one on evidencing, and a talk about mental health issues.
- University of Salford was hosting a Greater Manchester Higher Pre-16 Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Difficulties Event on 27th February. It would focus on the transition from school into FE and then HE and answer questions such as what will be different. Also it will look to manage expectations, how HE relates to FE and what the expectations are on them to get the support they need.
- There was a discussion as to whether school pupils could attend events with their parents where there wasn't a teacher available to bring them? It was recognised this was a challenge, as having parents could change the dynamic of a session. For many transition events people will often have separate sessions for learners and parents/carers.

7. Access and Participation Plans

- Members were reminded that Access and Participation Plans, most of which had now been signed off by the Office for Students, looked at performance across the student lifecycle for equality groups. As a result, many institutions would have ambitious and challenging targets around disabled students which would influence activities in the coming years. These may focus on recruitment, retention, degree outcomes of graduate outcomes. Members were encouraged to ensure they were aware of any relevant targets in their institutions.
- It was also noted that in the HESA return there was likely to be a focus on what had happened as a result of the additional money which had been invested in supporting disabled learners in the last 2 years.

8. AOB

- Attention was drawn to the Ability Net resource 'My Study – My Way' which may be of interest.

ACTION- PR to forward with minutes

9. Date and location of next meeting

12 – 2pm on 25 February 2020 at Liverpool John Moores.