The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) today launches its first Disability Equality Scheme to promote equality of opportunity within Further Education (FE) and the learning and skills sector. The scheme, developed in line with the Government’s Disability Equality Duty, will ensure that equality and diversity values are embedded across the sector by laying down a set of key commitments and an action plan to improve provision over the next three years.

Shirley Cramer, Chief Executive of Dyslexia Action and Chair of the LSC’s Equality and Diversity Committee, launched the scheme saying:

“This scheme is the start of a new era in equality and diversity policy. It demonstrates a clear commitment to ensuring that the needs of disabled people are met by all education and training providers and we are hopeful that it will have a significant impact across the sector. For the first time, we require our policies to change and adapt to include disabled people, rather than asking disabled people to make do.”

The scheme builds on the LSC’s recent ‘Talk to Des’ campaign. Over the last five months the LSC has been gathering feedback and opinion from disabled learners, their carers, representatives and other key partners on how to make education more user-friendly.

Lee Probert, the LSC’s Director of Equality and Diversity said:

“We are committed to listening to all learners to ensure changes are made for their benefit. Nearly 1,500 people responded to our electronic ‘Talk to Des’ survey. This unique insight has helped ensure our future work is relevant for those it is targeted to help and
this connection with disabled learners is vital to the future success of the scheme."

Chris Banks, Chairman of the LSC and Disability Equality Duty champion for FE said: "It is the LSC’s job to make sure that all young people and adults – whatever their background – have the opportunity to get the skills they need to succeed in work and in life. However, disabled people are still twice as likely as non-disabled people to have no qualifications and half of disabled people of working age are not in employment. In this day and age this is unacceptable, and we must work to promote disability equality throughout the FE sector."

Key commitments include:

- complying with and promoting the Government’s disability equality duty
- reaching out to those with low skills who are not currently involved in learning
- improving access to different types of learning
- improving learners’ experience of the education and training they undertake
- ensuring that learners succeed and can progress in a way that matches their abilities and aspirations
- acting as an organisation that harnesses the talents of all, and does not tolerate any form of discrimination or harassment

These commitments will be brought to life via a new National Panel for Disabled Learners and a Regional Involvement Programme which will ensure disabled learners are involved in a range of learning experiences across the country. The LSC continually monitors the impact it is having with disabled learners. In 2004/05; nine out of ten of the 641,000 disabled learners undertaking LSC funded further education were satisfied with their learning experience.

Alongside the Disability Equality Scheme, the LSC is working on a range of complementary initiatives to shape change. A new national strategy ‘Learning for Living and Work: Improving Education and Training Opportunities for People with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities’ has recently been launched. This is part of the Government’s wider commitment to this agenda.
Bill Rammell, the Minister for Higher, Further Education and Lifelong Learning said:
"This Government is strongly committed to ensuring that learners with learning difficulties
and/or disabilities have access to high quality suitable learning opportunities that offer real
progression. We want them to have the same options in learning and work as everyone
and to be able to progress as far as their talents and efforts will take them.

"Recent legislation has led to steady improvements in securing access to appropriate
provision for learners with disabilities which meets their needs and which provides, where
appropriate, the additional support they require to undertake it. A new cross Government
group has been set up and will launch a joint-strategy next year for further improvements
in provision and partnership working."

-Ends-

Notes to Editors

Learning and Skills Council:
The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for
planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. We have a single
goal: to improve the skills of England’s young people and adults to world class standards. Our
vision is that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching
the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work
nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

The Disability Equality Scheme will be available via the LSC website www.lsc.gov.uk.

The Disability Discrimination Act was introduced in 2005 and has placed a general duty upon
organisations such as the LSC to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people, be they
employee or service user.

The Disability Equality Duty is being introduced across the public sector in December 2006 and is a
legal duty for organisations to actively promote equality of opportunity for disabled staff, students
and service users.

The LSC is required to carry out its functions with ‘due regard’ to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful disability discrimination and disability-related harassment;
- promote equality of opportunity for disabled people
- promote positive attitudes to disabled people; and
- encourage disabled people to participate in public life

News released on 4 December 2006 embargoed until 4 December 2006
The LSC is additionally required to meet specific duties, to develop and publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) and associated SMART Action Plan with the involvement of disabled people (active participation rather than just consultation).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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