Written response to the recommendations from Ayr College

Please find attached a report on progress against the recommendations listed in the Parliamentary Report on ‘Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities’.

Ayr College is committed to working in partnership with other organisations to ensure that together we deliver the best possible service to people within our community with a disability. Our aim is to encourage everyone in our community to have ambition and to realise their potential. We are particularly committed to seeing more of our Supported Education students transfer to mainstream programmes and to employment.

I hope you find Ayr College’s report a useful contribution to your work.

Diane Rawlinson  
Principal  
Ayr College  
28 November 2007
Ayr College's response to the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee Publication ‘Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities’

Ayr College is an equal opportunities organisation which has adapted and developed its structure since the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005 to respond to the needs of staff, students and community members with a disability.

The Equality agenda is embedded in the planning processes of the college and is based on the ‘Social Model’ of disability. The College has an inclusive and comprehensive approach to strategic and operational planning focussed on a clear set of strategic goals. The Operational plans of both academic and support teams must incorporate specific targets on access and inclusion. Progress towards these targets is closely monitored by senior management and the Board of Management of Ayr College. At regular points in the year, the College systematically encourages stakeholder feedback to inform future planning.

Ayr College recognises the necessity to constantly adapt and change, to promote awareness and respond to the individual needs of staff, students and the community we serve. The College’s response to the equality agenda is co-ordinated through development and implementation of policy. The College promotes the full participation of those with disabilities in the life of the College, whether this be through employment, learning or visiting.

Promotion of the Equalities Agenda
The College promotes this agenda by: Removing barriers and changing attitudes that prevent people with disability from gaining access to education, employment and services provided by Ayr College and its partners.

- Promoting disability equality at all levels within Ayr College.
- Working together with people with a disability, organisations of people with a disability and disability access groups to achieve equality of opportunity.
- Involving people with a disability including employees with a disability and students on employment matters and the development and operation of services we provide.
- Training our own employees, so they are aware of and have the skills to take positive action in removing barriers placed in the way of people with a disability by society.
- Creating a College culture where harassment and discrimination against people with a disability is unacceptable and will be stopped.
- Creating a culture where both learners and employees feel able to declare their disability so that accurate information is available to help us make reasonable adjustments, prioritise areas and targets for improvement.
- Acting as an example of good practice to other organisations.

We believe that having a disability is a social issue and that impairment causes an individual to be disadvantaged because of the social, attitudinal
and environmental barriers that the individual faces. Our efforts are therefore focussed on removing these barriers.

**Guiding Principles**
The College is guided by the following principles:

- Anti-discrimination — so that people with a disability do not face discrimination arising from bad practice
- Equality of Opportunity or making things fairer — for people with a disability in every aspect of their contact with Ayr College.
- Increasing the independence and choices that people have.
- Involvement in decision making — so that people with a disability and/or their advocates are consulted before decisions which affect them are made.
- Recognition that people with a disability, like all others, has their own needs, abilities, human rights and responsibilities.
- Inclusion — such that all College provision is accessible and offers choice.

**Providing Access to Ayr College Services**
We are committed to providing access to Ayr College services by:

- Providing services fairly to all people with a disability
- Involving people with a disability appropriately regarding their requirements, their level of satisfaction with the services they use and seeking their views on how new facilities are provided or designated.
- Undertaking Equality Impact Assessments to assess how services are provided to people with a disability in order to inform an improvement action plan.
- Being inclusive through management of the college environment.
- Working with our partners to undertake similar initiatives.
- Monitoring our performance against agreed measures of success, seeking continuous improvement and reporting annually to the Board of Management through the Quality Assurance Committee.
- Monitoring and checking complaints.

**Ayr College as Employer**
As an employer, Ayr College seeks to build on our commitment to people with a disability by:

- Encouraging applications from people with a disability and ensuring that the application, short-listing and interviewing process guarantees equality of opportunity.
- Ensuring that all reasonable steps are taken so that the working environment does not prevent suitably qualified people from taking up or remaining in employment with the College.
- Ensuring that all employees with a disability have the same opportunities to develop within the workforce.
Making every effort that any employee that develops a disability stays in employment and is supported in maintaining a role appropriate to his or her experience and abilities.

Offering training in disability awareness and customer service throughout the college.

A commitment to learner and workforce profiling.

Providing a consultative and contributory forum for learners with a disability and employees to improve provision.

The following section details Ayr College’s response to and progress against recommendations 39–68

**Recommendation 37 More Choices More Chances**
Comprehensive selections of courses are currently offered in College and outreach for special schools in South and East Ayrshire. Full time programmes specifically designed for young people in the category of not in employment education or training take into account the needs of young people with a disability. This curriculum will continue to expand in the next few years. In addition to mainstream activity, Ayr College has lead responsibility for the implementation of the Equal Employability Development Partnership. This partnership comprises 13 organisations from across Scotland, working in the area of supported employment. Through access to Equal Programme funding and the European Social Fund these 13 partners have worked collectively to develop and pilot innovative projects with the shared objective of testing new methods of improving the employability of those furthest from the job market. A key theme of this project has been supported employment. In addition to providing training, Ayr College has worked extensively with outside agencies to provide suitable work placements which will lead to sustainable employment. Ayr College sets an example as an employer through the permanent employment of two young people with learning disabilities, one of whom has made the transition from supported learning within the College.

**Recommendation 38 Self Evaluation**
Self Evaluation to underpin quality improvement is undertaken by all academic and support areas on an annual basis. This process is subject to internal audit and scrutinised by HMle. This is a comprehensive process includes elements on equalities and access and inclusion. Through this evidence-based process, every team in the college that contributes to the quality of the student or staff experience actively considers its contribution to the equalities agenda.

**Recommendation 39 Self Evaluation**
Ayr College actively promotes student involvement in SPARQS, a service which is funded by the Scottish Funding Council to assist and support students, students’ associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness and engagement in quality assurance and enhancement in institutions across Scotland. SPARQS provides annual training for student representatives and actively encourages student participation in colleges’ quality improvement procedures. Through the involvement of SPARQS, the College strives to
gather comprehensive and meaningful stakeholder feedback to inform action planning.

All curriculum areas have student forums and, in addition, a Disability Equality Forum has been established to facilitate consultation with staff, students and stakeholders on issues of access and inclusion. Membership of the Forum includes representatives from South Ayrshire Council, Hansel Community and the Scottish Mental Health Association. The Chair of the Disability Equality Forum also meets with students with disabilities or who have and interest in the area of inclusion once per semester to discuss needs requirements and recommendations. Recommendations from this Forum are reported to the Equal Opportunities Committee and the Senior Management Team. An extension of feedback mechanisms is planned to include an on line page on the College website and intranet for stakeholders to place any questions or comment regarding College facilities for people with a disability.

Recommendation 40 Legislative Awareness
The College has endeavoured to inform all students of their rights, however in order to go beyond the minimum specifications it is our intention this year to add additional information to our prospectus, application form, web site, intranet and induction programmes.

Recommendation 43 Lifelong Partners
A monitoring and evaluation process is undertaken across all curriculum areas and tracking of students with a disability is incorporated into the Disability Equality Scheme.

Recommendation 45
The College has developed links with Careers Scotland who provide information for clients with additional support needs. Careers Scotland also works closely with staff and managers in the College to assist college leavers from the Supportive Education Team in finding positive outcomes, whether this be through transition to employment or further training. Students from a range of programme therefore participate in guidance workshops and interviews with Careers Scotland and other agencies if required. Careers Scotland also set up visits for prospective students from special schools as well as signposting College courses for parents and clients. Careers Scotland is also represented on the College’s Partnership Group that works to smooth transitions for students.

Recommendation 49
The College leads a well established Partnership Group that works to support seamless transitions for students progressing from school to College.

Recommendation 52
Students with disabilities are encouraged to visit the College, with their key worker, prior to a course starting. Most students with additional needs take up this opportunity. All students in the College are offered the opportunity to attend a short familiarisation course during the summer months to boost
Recommendation 54 Occupational Standards
Although the College processes for guidance are comprehensive, additional collaboration between schools, college and careers is necessary. An additional support programme will be introduced in August 08 to facilitate enhanced support for young people at point of entry, including the development of skills in citizenship and employability.

Recommendation 55 Disclosure
The College at present encourages disclosure at completion of application, interview and during on-course guidance interviews. Additional information on the rights of people with a disability planned for inclusion in the prospectus, on the web site and intranet will also encourage people to disclose.

Recommendation 56 Communication Support
The College supplies scribes and interpreters as required and has a variety of support packages to support learners’ needs. However, it is recognised that clerical and support staff would benefit from training in a variety of communication methods that would be helpful to prospective students.

Recommendation 64/65 ‘Pretendy’ Courses
The College recognises the unfortunate circumstance which has resulted from the closures of Adult Training Centres on some of the population of the Supported Learning section of the College. The social inclusion agenda has played an important part in incorporating initiatives to cope with a changing population, however not all students can progress to qualifications and employment. Over the past 2 years, the College has introduced additional vocational options at access 3 and intermediate I and work placements as part of the curriculum. These introduce students to the world of work and give them confidence in their ability. The College plans further work with employers to promote this initiative, as resources become available.

Recommendation 67/68 Students with Complex needs
The addition of a wet room in Ayr has allowed some progress in providing for people with complex needs, however further for support staff, training and equipment is necessary to enhance provision.

In conclusion, the recommendations contained in the report by the Scottish Parliament’s Equal Opportunities Committee are encouraging to support the needs of people with a disability. Colleges have been endeavouring to meet the needs of a diverse population for many years, often without the necessary support. The traditional College image of the technical College offering training for heavy industry and apprentices bears no resemblance to the reality of Scotland’s Colleges today. The social inclusion agenda has benefitted many students with complex needs who have received support and guidance to assist with their future careers.