Written response to the recommendations from Glasgow School of Art

The Glasgow school of Art (GSA) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry into disability.

We would wish to draw your particular attention to our comments below relating to recommendation 58. The Scottish Funding Council’s (SFC) approach to this recommendation and resulting change in funding methodology has critically affected our ability as a small specialist institution to meet the needs of our disabled students.

Recommendation 19
GSA has an explicit objective in our Diversity & Equity Action plan to address the requirements of disabled staff and also welcomes the HE sector research, conducted by Equality Forward, into the factors inhibiting disclosure of disability by staff in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The School also welcomes the excellent work of the Equality Challenge Unit in England which is available to the Scottish Sector.

Recommendation 20
GSA has implemented compulsory training for all staff involved in the recruitment of staff or students and encourages disclosure. The percentage of GSA staff disclosing an impairment has risen from 0.27% in 2002 to a high of 4.29% in 2005 and has fallen to 3.29% this year but continues to be above average for disclosure in the sector.

Recommendations 38 and 39
The principle of mainstreaming underpins our approach to disability equality and is supported by an understanding that while inclusive practice will support the majority of students there are students who require specific and specialist services. The School has well developed monitoring and evaluation processes involving students and staff and specifically monitors and evaluates provision and implementation of reasonable adjustments for those who are disabled.

Recommendation 44 and 50
The School produced ‘Accessible Information Guidelines’ in 2003 and also encourages innovation in the delivery of information in the learning environment. An example of this funded through the School’s Learning and Teaching Innovation fund is an exploration of documentation delivery in audio format. The School is currently reviewing both the content and format of the information provided for applicants to ensure all students are more fully aware of the challenges of study in Higher Education and prepared to take up the opportunities.

Recommendation 52
All applicants who disclose an impairment are invited to meet with a Learning Support & Development Tutor with the objective of a mutual assessment of the learning & teaching environment, the support available and to ensure early engagement.
Recommendation 55
In 2005/6 20.89% (HESA) of students at GSA disclosed a disability. This is the highest level of disclosure of any HEI in Scotland and is the 8th highest in the UK.

We believe this statistic demonstrates our significant progress in building a learning environment in which students are confident that their needs will be considered and responded to.

Recommendation 57
The increase in the non medical personal help element of the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) is welcome. However the national scarcity of communication support professionals to provide consistent services to students with sensory impairments continues to be problematic.

The School also welcomes the wide ranging review of DSA currently being undertaken by the Scottish Government.

Recommendation 58
GSA understands and supports the rationale for the recommendation to remove the link between the number of students in receipt of DSA and the Disabled Student Premium (DSP).

However the SFC’s decision to link DSP to the FTE number of students has resulted in a 63% reduction in funding for GSA in 07/08 and has taken our funding to a lower level than in 2001, when the premium was first introduced. This drastic reduction in funding has a significant impact on the facilities, services and support we are able to offer our disabled students and means that the work we have consistently undertaken since 2001 to promote disability equality and support individual students is unsustainable.

We believe that the decision implemented by the SFC in introducing the new funding methodology is based on the false assumption that the incidence of impairment and disability is in proportion to the size of the institution.

The new methodology also runs counter to the advice of external agencies such as the Scottish Disability Team and indeed this recommendation of the Parliamentary inquiry into disability that supports a methodology based on the number of disabled students to whom an HEI provides a service.

It is the view of the GSA that the research and analysis on which the SFC based the changes to its funding methodology failed to undertake an analysis of the number of students to whom institutions provide a service and the nature of the service provided. The SFC also failed to usefully consider the complex relationship between funding that follows the individual disabled student and institutional funding and provision. Not only has this resulted in an opportunity lost it has a serious impact on the experience of disabled students at GSA.

Recommendation 68
GSA fully supported the development and work of the 'Teachability' project and believes it to have been a critical development in promoting disability equality in
Higher Education. Funding for the project ceased in July 2006. It would be useful for the SFC to explore with the sector the nature of the support now required to take this work forward in the current context and in particular in relation to impact assessments.

With reference to the view expressed above in relation to Recommendation 58 I enclose for your information a copy of GSA’s formal request that the Scottish Funding Council reconsider its method of allocating Disabled Students Premium funding [not reproduced here].

If you require any further information on any of the comments offered above please let me know.

Seona Reid
Director
Glasgow School of Art
29 November 2007