Progress made on the recommendations contained in the Scottish Parliament’s Equal Opportunities Committee report entitled “Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities”

Thank you for your letter dated 13 September 2007 addressed to the Principal, Professor Bernard King, who has asked me to respond on his behalf.

I enclose a response to the Report’s recommendations, as they pertain to Universities. In so doing, I would like to draw particular attention to the response to recommendation 52 as I feel there is more the Scottish Government could do to financially support disabled students to attend summer schools and thereby improve their transition into University life.

I trust the attached meets the needs of the Committee.

Professor Nicholas Terry
University Secretary & Vice-Principal (Planning & Resources)
University of Abertay Dundee
6 December 2007
Recommendation 3

249. The Committee recommends that all public authorities should work to the social model of disability when implementing their duties under the forthcoming Disability Equality Duty.

The University works from the social model of disability which is evidenced by the published Disability Equality Scheme (http://www.abertay.ac.uk/About/Equality.cfm).

Recommendation 39

645. The Committee recommends that all further and higher education providers seek stakeholder feedback in relation to the services that they provide and respond where appropriate.

The University obtains feedback for disabled students on support the University provides on a regular basis. Information from disabled student is used to improve the services provided to this group of individuals. The University also has a Disability Equality Task Group (a sub group of the Equal Opportunities Committee) that has student membership and the ability to review the services offer to disabled students.

Recommendation 40

653. The Committee recommends that further and higher education providers should develop mechanisms which allow them to go beyond the minimum specifications in the Disability Discrimination Act with regard to informing disabled students about their legal rights.

The University provides all disabled students and applicants with information regarding the University’s legal responsibilities via its Disability Equality Scheme [DES]. This is published on the University website (http://www.abertay.ac.uk/About/Equality.cfm).

Recommendation 41

655. The Committee welcomes the toolkit developed by the funding council to ensure that further and higher education providers comply with their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and recommends that further and higher education providers make full use of it and other resources available to them.

The University makes full use of available resources to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. The University DES (item 11 under Diversity in the Curriculum) highlights the use of the teachability materials (developed by the University of Strathclyde) to ensure disability issues are addressed in teaching and learning.
Recommendation 44

687. The Committee recommends that all providers, in conjunction with their disabled students, carry out a taking stock exercise of the information they provide to ensure it is appropriate and meets the needs of disabled students.

The University has a student experience coordinator who undertakes research into the student experience by using focus groups. Disabled students are one group who have been identified in a series of focussed discussions. The University plans in the near future to elicit information about their experience to improve on the University understanding of their needs.

Recommendation 48

737. In order to assist in raising expectations amongst young disabled people, the Committee recommends that—

- the focus of careers advice to disabled people should move from what people cannot do to what positive options are available to them; and

- research be carried out examining the progress of disabled graduates. The Committee hopes that such research will identify positive examples and role models for schools and further and higher education providers to promote.

The University’s DES identifies career advice, guidance and work opportunities as an important aspect of a disabled students experience at University. The University DES items 10.1, 10.2 and 10.3 identify how the Career Development Centre is addressing these issues.

The University CDC is currently reviewing the best way to provide positive role models of former disabled students in work to applicants and current students. There is an understandable reluctance from former disabled students to come forward as (anecdotally) many have not disclosed their disability to employers for fear of discrimination.

Recommendation 49

754. The Committee recommends that there must be systematic planning from schools, the careers service and colleges or universities to ensure that the support a disabled student receives whilst in transition is seamless. The Committee notes that the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 may have the potential to achieve this. The Committee considers that the Scottish Executive should commission research to establish best practice in this area.
The University invites disabled applicants who have disclosed on their application via letter to contact its Disabled Students Advisor at the earliest opportunity. This is done to ensure that the relevant information and documentation is acquired and that support is in place prior to the beginning of their academic career.

**Recommendation 52**

773. In order to encourage more disabled learners to take advantage of early starts and familiarisation visits to acclimatise and to access and identify any additional requirements for support, the Committee recommends that—

- further and higher education providers should consider how best to provide early starts and familiarisation visits to disabled people as a matter of course, before students commence the academic year;
- the Student Awards Agency for Scotland works with further and higher education providers to publicise that early start support and funding is available to potential students; and
- Scottish Ministers explore how familiarisation visits could be funded to allow disabled students the opportunity to fully investigate their choice of further or higher education provider.

The University invites all disabled applicants to attend its three week summer school. The Summer School supports individuals in making the transition from school, college or employment. The Summer School gives a flavour of university life and helps individuals in adjusting to university education and life. It will also help raise confidence and allows individuals to gain the necessary skills, to give them a head start on their degree programme.

There are difficulties for the University and disabled students in funding such activities. Firstly, many disabled students already have the academic qualifications needed to attend Abertay and are not required to attend the Summer School as a condition of entry. Universities are not funded for summer school attendees unless it is a condition of entry, thus there is a financial burden to undertake this activity.

Secondly, students are not funded to attend summer school by SAAS. Disabled people are generally some of the poorest people in society thus the financial burden of attending means for many disabled students summer school is not an option. Thus, few disabled students attend what many non-disabled students describe as ‘excellent’.