



**University of Guyana**

## **DISABILITY EQUALITY POLICY**

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## University of Guyana Disability Policy

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### 1. POLICY STATEMENT

The University of Guyana is embarking on a three-year plan to create a supportive and comfortable environment for people with disabilities. The institution recognises that giving people with disabilities the opportunity to study, work and the scope to have a normal life through an environment that ensures their comfort and inclusion is not a favour but an entitlement. This right is advocated by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 10 states that persons with disabilities ought to enjoy their inherent right to life on an equal basis with others. A critical aspect to this is the matter of accessibility; Article 9 of the Convention states that there is need to:

identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers and ensure that persons with disabilities can access the environment, transportation, public facilities and services, and information and communications technologies

The principle underlying this policy is the same as the one that informed the Proposal for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for People with Disabilities, that all people should be given the equal opportunities: civil, political, social, economic and cultural. Disability is a complex collection of conditions, many of which are the unintended consequences of our majoritarian ethos - barriers that society places on people with apparent disabilities, by the way it is organised and the conventions and priorities it creates<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, the management of the problem, according to the WHO, 'requires social action, and it is the collective responsibility of society at large to make the environmental modifications necessary for the full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of social life. The issue is therefore an attitudinal or ideological one requiring social change, which at the political level becomes a question of human rights.'<sup>2</sup>

The University intends to provide sufficient facilities, physical and otherwise, to create an inclusive environment and spread awareness in the society for people with disabilities through the implementation of policy, training & sensitisation, providing physical and information access, establishing links with disability organisations and conducting community awareness programmes, all of which would lead to an enhanced environment for people with disabilities to study and work.

This Policy is an indication of the University's commitment to staff, students service users, partners and stakeholders and people with disabilities in general, and sets out the extent to which the University would endeavour to provide the supportive environment for people with disabilities. The policy also comes at a time when discussions are ripe about disability access and the Draft Disability Bill is in circulation and due to reach Parliament in early 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) Research Reports 2004-2006, 2006, p9.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organisation, cited on <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/site/intros/ICF-Eng-Intro.pdf>, March 31, 2008

## 2. THE EXPERIENCE OF PAST STUDENTS

Over the years the University has had approximately five (5) students with disabilities (visual and/or physical mobility impairment). The experiences of some of these students only emphasise the need for reasonable adjustment to be made to cater for the needs of people with disabilities.

- a. **Kenwyn Carmichael, Mechanical Engineering Student**  
Kenwyn was an average student pursuing a degree in Mechanical Engineering in the Faculty of Technology at UG in 1993 when he became paralysed from the waist down at age 20. After going through diagnostic procedures for two years in Barbados and the USA and being told that he was paraplegic (a spinal cord injury), Kenwyn returned to Guyana and UG, only to realise that he could not continue the programme because there was no provision at the University to accommodate his physical (wheelchair bound) condition. As a consequence, he stayed at home for four years, until 1999, when he joined the Canadian Paraplegic Association and its Wheelchair Basketball Team. In December 2003, he was employed on a Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) sponsored project at the Ministry of Health as Data Entry Technician until March 2004 when he joined the staff at the Ministry of Health, in the same post, in the Georgetown Public Hospital GUM Clinic. Fifteen years later, Kenwyn still wishes to study at UG, perhaps to pursue the Computer Sciences degree. His advice to UG is to build a flat building in which programmes could be taught to students with disabilities and to provide distance education programmes.
- b. **Julie Lewis, BSc Public Communication**  
Julie, a visually impaired/blind student (1990-1994), indicated that her main challenge while pursuing the degree programme in Public Communication was access to information. Using the library, doing research/assignments was hassling. She believed that she was too dependent on people and help was not always easily available; she needed help to read all materials. While the Library did provide some assistance in this regard and she was provided with extra time for tests in the classroom, there were other challenges such as the reader sourcing/reading inappropriate materials which amounted to much time wasted and having to take a typewriter to classes. Although Julie indicated that she had little issues with physical access she nevertheless identified the need for UG to provide rails and ramps, and to make the place accessible for people with disabilities by conducting research on appropriate technology and what is being done at other universities. She also pointed to the importance of Admissions examining course requirements and determining whether it is appropriate for the person with disability making the application, before enrolment.
- c. **Karen Hall, BSc Disability Studies**  
Karen completed the Certificate in Business Studies in the Faculty of Education in 2001 and then went on to Ryerson University, Canada where she completed a degree in Disability Studies. She has 40% less balance than the average person and wears a pair of prosthesis. Karen indicates that while at UG, access was a huge issue and support was minimal and often nonexistent; there were many stairs to climb and around examination periods she was forced to join other students to fetch chairs and/or tables. She also had many falls, particularly when there was a blackout or heavy rainfall. Nevertheless, Karen advises UG that providing accessibility to people with disabilities should be an integrative process with emphasis on learning success for all. This could be done by offering on-going tutorials on interaction with students with disabilities; incorporating strategies for studying; writing various types of papers – analytical, math centres, etc to encourage student mentorship and peer tutoring; and having a programme of scholarships opportunities for all through partnerships with international scholarship programmes such as the Ford Foundation.

### 3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Currently there is no Disability Discrimination Act, although a Bill is in circulation and is expected to be passed in Parliament in 2008. According to the Bill, 'the provisions of Articles 149 and 149D of the Constitution of Guyana which prohibit discrimination, *inter alia*, on the ground of disability and provide for equality of persons before the law are to be construed as providing the guiding principles for the implementation and enforcement of this Act'. It describes disability as

a physical or mental impairment caused by the limitations of the body structure or one or more bodily functions that restrict the ability to perform ordinary day-to-day life activities

It outlines the rights of people with disabilities, which relate to equal opportunity in the areas of employment, education, health, housing and water, auxiliary services, sports and recreation, communications, and accessibility. The Bill makes it compulsory for all organisations to provide reasonable adjustment for people with disabilities by a stipulated period after its implementation. Failure to adhere to these requirements could cause people with disabilities to make complaint to the National Commission on Disability or Chief Labour Officer, for which the burden of proof to disprove the allegations rests on the respondent. A person who contravenes the Act could be subjected to a monetary fine and/or imprisonment.

Although the Bill has not yet been passed in Parliament, the University has a primary role to play in educating people with disabilities, spreading awareness in society, encouraging tolerance, bridging the gap between people with disabilities and others, and ultimately, creating a society of inclusiveness, as such it is only appropriate to jump start plans in this area and ensure that its own environs are well advanced by the time of enactment.

The Prevention of Discrimination Act No. 26, has also established grounds for non-discrimination of people with disabilities, though in a generalist mode, which outlines the prohibitive grounds of discrimination as race, sex, religion, colour, ethnic origin, indigenous population, national extraction, social origin, economic status, political opinion, disability, family responsibilities, pregnancy, marital status or age, except for purposes of retirement and restriction on work and employment minors.

Outside of this policy, the University has no clear statement on discrimination on the basis of disability as the Acts & Statutes only states the following:

Eligibility: Men and women shall be eligible for admission to and as students of the University and for appointment to any authority, office or employment of or under the University.

No Religious, political or racial test: No religious, political or racial test shall be imposed on or required of any person in order to entitle him to be a student or member of the University or to occupy any position in or on the staff of the University

Hence the clear need for policy on disability.

## **4. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **4.1 Scope of the University's Commitment to Disability**

The scope of the University's commitment to disability has been categorised according to micro (internal) level issues and macro (national) level issues.

At the micro level the University would engage in the following:

#### **A. Conformity & Internal Adjustments**

##### **1. Conformity with External Requirements**

The University would always seek to ensure that its policies, procedures and practices are in keeping with the legal requirements outlined in related Acts governed by the Laws of Guyana. However the institution also recognises that this is a minimalist approach and in no way intends to be limited by these requirements. In doing so it would keep updated with best practice demonstrated by international and local (disability) organisations, as well as conform to standards set by the Bureau of Standards or relevant local, regional or international standard regulating body.

##### **2. Training & Sensitisation**

The University would undertake intense training and sensitisation programmes that would include disability awareness, policies and procedures, course delivery methods and teaching and learning aids, use of technology, health and safety, etc., throughout the life of the project in order that staff and students would support the needs of people with disabilities. Persons with disabilities would be used as facilitators or resource persons where possible.

##### **3. Physical Access**

The UG would provide ground and upper level access to all buildings in a phased manner based on priority and would include offices, classrooms and lecture theatres, centres as well as toilets, pathways and car parking. This would be done in adherence to the accessibility codes of universal access as recommended by UN standards and the building code of the Bureau of Standards.

Ground level access would involve building ramps and pathways, adjusting doorways, providing special toilets and painting and posting signs, as necessary. Upper level access entails the construction of lifts/elevators, electro-fit staircase and extended ramps.

##### **4. Information Access**

As a tertiary level institution, the University endorses the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary education opportunities for all. The second year of the plan would address the problem of information access, which would entail reviewing the curricula to cater for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the classroom, the building of an access centre and the stocking of the required equipment and appropriate technology such as special soft ware of the Blind, Braille, tape services large print, etc, for enabling information access.

- a. The University would review its curricula to allow for programme delivery to people with disabilities. This would result in all courses becoming accessible to students with disabilities and the development

of more courses in the disability field (e.g. degree programmes in Rehabilitation, Special Education Needs, course for society on people with disabilities, etc.) so that the level of knowledge in the country would increase and services for people with disabilities could improve. In addition, distance education programmes would be facilitated through home and/or on-line studies for persons unable to physically access the campus, special education tutors would be employed to conduct these programmes and training conducted for lecturers and teachers in delivery methods.

- b. Research would also be conducted on disability matters
- c. Arrangements would be made with professors and departments for necessary adjustments and/or flexibility in classrooms (e.g. extra time for assignments and tests, changes in course delivery and assessment procedures) to accommodate learning for students with disabilities, thereby encouraging more people with disabilities to attend University.
- d. The University would collaborate with disability organisations, volunteer organisations and other institutions to provide specialist assistance to people with disabilities. In extreme circumstances and particularly in instances whereby the University is incapable of providing adequate assistance, a student with a disability may be allowed to bring his/her own special assistant (paraprofessional).
- e. An access centre would also be built in order that people with disabilities could have a resource centre that would enable access to information. This centre would be equipped with teaching/learning aids such as alternative exam formats, vocational education programmes, specialised computers, reading assistants, personal care and sign language assistants, special needs tutors, counsellors, peer support services, etc. The centre would have to be staffed with persons with knowledge in Special Education Needs, equipment operation and maintenance, and assistants.
- f. The Bureau of Standards or relevant curricula standard regulating body would also be involved to review the course standards in areas for delivery, assessment, etc.

## **5. Admissions**

Once the proposal Creating an Enabling Environment for People with Disabilities has been implemented, the University intends to enrol anyone who possess the requisite qualifications and/or experience and would, as far as possible, make the necessary adjustments to accommodate them. Persons with disabilities may have the following impairments: visual/seeing, physical/mobility, hearing/speech, learning/cognitive, mental health or other. These persons may be subject to the following conditions/procedure in order to be accommodated:

- a. to indicate the type of disability when making an application for entry to the University
- b. to indicate any special need or adjustment required
- c. to allow time for consideration of special need
- d. may be asked to visit the campus and/or be interviewed to ensure the University can meet his/her needs
- e. to provide a medical certificate detailing the condition upon enrolment, in order for reasonable adjustments to be made for their accommodation throughout the period of study

- f. Persons with impairments such as deaf-blindness and severe cases of autism, emotional disturbance, learning disability, brain injury, mental retardation and multiple disabilities are asked to inform us about these conditions before submitting an application so that we could ensure that adequate arrangements are available
- g. Persons who are temporarily disabled due to an accident may also request special arrangements on a short term basis and should contact the appropriate division in good time to facilitate these
- h. Persons with variable disabilities (such as multiple sclerosis, some back injuries, HIV/AIDS, arthritis, diabetes, epilepsy) may have fluctuating conditions that change throughout the duration of the course thereby varying the level of provision required at different times for exams, etc. In these instances persons may have to apply periodically based on the type of discomfort at a particular time and the degree of adjustment required.
- i. Mention must be made of these requirements in all advertisements

## **6. Health and Safety**

The University intends to take all precautionary action and make reasonable adjustments to avoid accidents in the workplace. The University would work along with and depend on the advice of the Occupational Health & Safety Committee and Students Welfare Division for information on changes required, risk assessments, accidents, complaints from students and staff with disabilities on ideas for reasonable adjustments to be made. The University must be given reasonable notice in order for the necessary adjustment to be made. The University would also enhance its medical centre to provide basic medical assistance and basic medication (e.g. diabetes, seizures, etc.) for persons with disabilities.

## **7. Disability Arising during Employment**

Should an employee become disabled during his/her period of employment with the University, all reasonable steps and adjustments would be made so that the employee could remain on the job. Discussions would be done with the Occupational Health & Safety Committee, Head of Department or staff supervisor, the staff affected and a specialist in the area of disability so that the extent of the disability could be determined and opportunities/possibilities for adjustments explored.

## **8. Employing Persons with Disabilities**

In demonstrating its commitment to the initiative, the University would attempt to provide employment to persons with disabilities, provided that they possess the requisite qualifications and experience necessary for employment to the post for which they have applied. By the end of the first 3-year period the University would aim to have a minimum of 2% of its employees containing persons with disabilities. Links would be made with disability organisations and the Ministry of Labour to identify persons for whom employment could be provided.

## **9. Confidentiality**

Staff are obligated to ensuring matters pertaining to the disability of people with disabilities to be kept with strictest confidence as required. In instances where the disability is not easily visible, students are required to provide staff with this information so that the necessary adjustment could be made.

## **10. Discrimination and Non-Compliance**

Any staff or student found guilty of discriminating against people with disabilities would be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal, in accordance with the Grievance and Disciplinary Procedure outlined in Sections 26 and 27 of the Handbook for Guidance of UB and Supervisory Staff and the Regulations Governing Students Conduct. Persons should also note that such action may lead to him/her being liable under Law and being subjected to the penalties outlined therein. Students should address complaints about discrimination to the Students Welfare Division, while staff should follow the Grievance Procedure.

## **11. Enhanced Environment for study and work**

As part of its outreach programmes the University would also encourage people with disabilities to develop themselves and provide advice on how they may work and/or study at the University. It would assist in this process by awarding scholarships to attend University and negotiate for boarding and lodging for awardees. In addition, particular emphasis would be placed on ensuring that no barriers prevent the entry of staff and/or students to the University, i.e. to ensure that they are enrolled/employed on the basis of their academic/professional suitability rather than their disabilities. The University would engage collateral agencies such as the Ministry of Health, PAHO, NGOs, etc. to sustain the environment and create awareness for people with disabilities.

## **B. Timelines & Targets**

1. During phases 1 – 3 of the project (consultation, policy formation, and training & sensitisation) the University would accept up to five (5) qualified students who have assessed and determined the capacity and capability for study at the Turkeyen or Tain campus.
2. Upon completion of phase 4 (ground level access), the University would accept applications and enrol up to ten (10) qualified students who may have a physical challenge and who have assessed and determined the capacity and capability for study at the Turkeyen and/or Tain campus.
3. Upon completion of phase 5 and 6 (upper level access and curricula review), the University would accommodate 15 qualified students.
4. Having attained the level of phase 7 (equipment & access centre) the University would accommodate the total number of eligible applicants to the institution.
5. The University would not enrol persons for any programme for study unless he/she possesses the requisite qualification and/or experience for the programme for which he/she has made an application.

At the macro level the University would engage in the following:

### **1. Examine support services**

The University would examine other areas to support entry of people with disabilities to University (namely loans/finance, transportation, accommodation) and work with related agencies (students loan agency, halls



of residence, bus service, and organisations that could provide scholarship for study) to promote/support entry to University.

## **2. Address Education Gap**

In demonstrating the institution's commitment to this initiative and recognising that prospective students with disabilities have not attained the required educational level and fail to meet University entry requirements, the extra-mural arm of the University (Institute of Distance & Continuing Education) would be equipped with the relevant facilities and equipment to help bridge the education gap. The University would also engage the relevant authorities and spread awareness about the need for reasonable adjustment in primary and secondary schools, as well as champion the issue of access to education for persons with disabilities.

## **3. Community Outreach**

One of the areas the UN believes is critical to the equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities is raising awareness. This is an important aspect of the inclusion process and letting others know that people with disabilities have the same rights and obligations as others. In spreading awareness of people with disabilities and promoting an inclusive environment, the University would commit to remove barriers to disabled access through the establishment of links with disability organisations to conduct community awareness programmes, publicity campaigns, research, seminars, workshops and focus group discussions that provide tips for working with people with disabilities. Persons with disabilities would be used as facilitators and role models. It would also help to guide the government, schools and organisations on policy, procedure and practices in creating an enabling environment for people with disabilities. The University would make attempts to always include the media in awareness and outreach exercises to help sensitise the community and nation about disability issues.

## **4. Pursue Legislation Enactment**

Further, the University would make the necessary approaches to engage authorities on the matter of legislation enactment in order to target other areas for equal participation (employment, income maintenance and social security, family life and personal integrity, culture, recreation and sports, and religion) and address the needs of persons with disabilities more comprehensively.

## **5. MONITORING AND REVIEW**

The University would monitor and review its policy and provision of support for people with disabilities once per semester in an effort to continuously meet requirements of students, staff, the Law and international standards. The Departments through which complaints are made (Students Welfare, Occupational Health & Safety Committee and the Staff Welfare Division) are expected to document reports on disability complaints and concerns at least annually.

The Registrar, through the Students Welfare Division, has responsibility for overseeing the general application of requirements for people with disabilities, and monitoring and reviewing the programme. He/she would head the Monitor & Review Committee, which would include stakeholder representatives as well as a representative from a disability organisation and a person with a disability (student/staff). Monitoring would be done in consultation with staff and students with disabilities and disability organisations. The Committee would:

1. assess the degree to which the institution complies with policy, related laws and standards
2. review the concerns and complaints of persons with disabilities, which would have been made through the Occupational Safety & Health Committee, the Students Welfare Division and the Staff Welfare Division
3. make recommendations for the requisite changes and apply necessary measures to ensure completion.

The Committee would report to the Vice-Chancellor.

By the nature of its work, the Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC) would conduct surveys and make requests from key departments (Occupational Safety & Health Committee, the Students Welfare Division and the Staff Welfare Division, faculties, etc) in order to do annual reviews.