University of Essex Access Forum (EAF)

Minutes of meeting held on July 1st 2010

Present:
Rowena Macaulay (Chair)
Angela Jones
Syd Kent
John Crust
Kevan Wilding
Joshua Nehinbe
Maria Fasli (CSEE)
Vic Callaghan (CSEE)
Alex Seabrook
Mark Vinter
Monica Illsley

1. Apologies – Apologies received from Mary Pelowski

2. Minutes of last meeting (24th November 2009) agreed as accurate.

3. Matters arising and brief updates:

   ▪ (3 i) Joshua Nehinbe has completed his term as Frontrunner. RM thanked him for his contribution, in particular to the development of the Department Access Guides. Sigita Vaigauskaite, who has been working for the Equality and Diversity Unit, will be providing some support with access-related work over the summer months (see also 6).

   ▪ (3 iii) There has been no news on the proposed alterations to the new Lakeside Theatre lift, following an early complaint on various design features: lack of automatic door opening; door weight and hold-down controls.

   **ACTION:** MV/RM to follow-up with Richard Halsall.

   ▪ (3vi) Some discussion around the choice of colour backgrounds within the University’s new branding scheme. 3 of these are very pale and not suitable as a background for text. EAF propose that they should be altered or discontinued, or alternatively retained with an underscanding that they will not be used as a background for text.

   **ACTION:** MI to follow up with the relevant parties and report back

   ▪ (4 ii) RM queried progress on E15 accessible parking spaces. MV confirmed these are going ahead as part of the current funding round, and are due to be actioned this summer, but unsure whether improvements to adjacent ramp were also factored in (i.e. inclusion of handrails, levelling of surface).

   **ACTION:** MV to clarify improvements to ramp

   ▪ (7) SK reported that online disclosure forms have been redesigned. Information on the purposes of disclosure is improved in an attempt to allay some of the anxieties connected with disclosure and encourage a more representative response. The new design also allows staff to opt in to receive information that may be relevant to them (e.g. on disability-related campus services etc).

4. iDorm – Maria Fasli (HoD) and Vic Callaghan, School of CSEE, attended the meeting at EAF request with a mutual view to resolution of the iDorm access issues that have been
outstanding over the past 2 years. Lengthy discussion of the background to the iDorm issue took place and VC/MF clarified the following points:

- The decision taken in 2008 to exclude disabled participants from iDorm-based research related specifically to the Chimera research being conducted at that time and not to a more general policy on the part of CSEE.

- Following this, the decision to refurbish the iDorm (bathroom in particular) in ways that effectively made it less accessible, was dictated by the needs of the subsequent research project and the commercial/research interests of the relevant client for an environment that approximated a ‘normal’ living space as far as possible. A very visibly adapted bathroom might it was felt influence the behaviour of research participants in ways that risked affecting research outcomes.

- The design of the iDorm however would not prohibit the research involvement of disabled staff and students.

MF/VC apologised for the perceived poor communication on the part of CSEE over the past 2 years that has contributed to misunderstanding in these issues and delay in resolution.

The meeting accepted that research needs were necessarily the primary drivers behind iDorm design at any one time.

However SK raised a related concern in this context i.e. that pressures brought by commercially-driven research might nonetheless compromise in future – albeit unwittingly – CSEE/University commitment and legal responsibilities in respect of disability and equality of opportunity. It was agreed that this was a potential risk and that future consideration might be given to building checks into the research planning processes to protect against oversight or undue compromise in this respect. MF/VC restated CSEE’s commitment to inclusive policies in principle and to accessible design being the default position.

5. Graduation and parking – following complaints received regarding the use of accessible under podia parking spaces at graduation last year, AJ fed back on work completed by Rachel Frost. This year additional accessible parking will be made available in the visitors’ car park. Anyone disclosing a mobility impairment will be allocated to these spaces and Patrol Staff will be briefed to direct visitors to these spaces on the day if disabled visitors hadn’t previously disclosed. Contractors would be advised that under podia was a drop-off zone only. There were concerns that access from north towers car park was poor with the current building work. Request that Patrol Staff at north towers car park be briefed to advise people to park at south campus.

**ACTION: AJ to follow up with Rachel Frost**

6. Summer post: Access and Inclusion Projects Officer – RM reported that funding has been agreed for a new, permanent, part-time summer post (August and September) to progress access issues. The post of ‘Access and Inclusion Projects Officer’ will be based within the Equality and Diversity Unit. RM is appointed to the post.

7. The interactive mapping project – RM reported on behalf of Ken Guild (CSEE) that the initial period of work on the interactive map is now complete. A prototype is up and running and now requires testing and subsequent refinement. KG and RM to explore how best to do this, and specifically how the Access Forum might be involved in the process.

**ACTION: RM to liaise with KG and report back**

8. Door opening/closing weights – RM reported that the University has now invested in x2 door pressure gauges (one to be held by the Access Forum). RM, Bernie (Estates) and Sigita (Frontrunner) will undertake some joint training in their use this summer, and publicise a university-wide campaign to address the familiar problem of heavy doors.
9. **AOB**

i. **Complaint re underpodia disabled parking for visitors** – a complaint has been received from a staff member in HHS via Annette Lufti relating to the lack of clear routes to squares from under podia and poor signage etc, which led to recent delay and embarassment in helping two disabled visitors up to the department. Inevitable problems were acknowledged in this respect underpodia; it is not an easily navigable space for anybody, less still disabled users. The creation of an underpodia map to complement the campus access map has been discussed previously and this needs revisiting. The situation will likely remain though that some level of responsibility will necessarily fall to staff within departments to inform themselves in advance (e.g. via security) when they are expecting guests who need parking under podia, in order to meet and guide them.

**ACTION: RM to start work on underpodia map this summer**

ii. **The new Equality Act:** SK gave an update on progress regarding the new Equality Act. There are still some uncertainties with regard to the governments implementation of the Act and we await the publication of various regulations, codes of practice and guidance documents. In the meantime the E&D Unit will be drafting a single policy, scheme and action plan for consideration by the implementation group as the deadline of October 2010 is fast approaching.

10. **Date of next meeting** to be confirmed