Essex Access Forum (EAF)

Minutes of meeting held on March 26th 2015

Present: Rowena Macaulay, Angela Jones, Alexandra Seabrook, Kevan Wilding, Jan Cooper, John Stevens, Karen Bush.

1. **Apologies**: Ian Hack, Mary Pelowski, John Crust, Francisco Sepulveda

2. **Minutes from previous meeting (9th December 2014)**

3. **Matters arising**
   - Lift access to teaching/research spaces for disabled staff and students during servicing remains problematic, despite being the subject of extensive communications last summer. Francisco Sepulveda continues to be adversely affected. A planned approach to making access adjustments must be addressed earlier at the works scheduling stage. Resolving this issue must be regarded as a matter of absolute priority now.
   - AS reports that she is happy to feedback informally from STEM meetings on access issues as they arise (this is not her primary role), and/or to contribute an access perspective where appropriate.

   **Action**: RM to ask MV to consider further and come back to the forum with a suggested strategy.

4. **Appointment of Disability Champions**
   - Bryn Morris and David Sanders are the first appointed Disability Champions (all members of the USG now have equivalent roles in respect of one of the Protected Characteristics).
   - AJ, KB and RM had a positive first meeting with Bryn and David recently, intended to introduce them to the history and work of the forum. Amongst issues discussed, the question of how to ensure against access oversights on new builds, following the recent serious design shortcoming associated with entrance to the EBS building from North Towers Causeway. The possibility of structuring in to project briefs a stronger set of access expectations was discussed as a potential solution.

   **Action**: EAF to generate some sample text for further discussion

5. **Report from current EMS Project Steering Groups (standing item)**
   - AS reported on the new £10m STEM building (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths); bid won just before Christmas 2014, and due to open October 2017. Keith Miller is lead. Several positions for the new building have been discussed, all based on the grass slopes between HHS building and Psychology, Square One and South Courts. Most likely design will adjoin the existing buildings at the point between Squares 1 and 2, with a planned main entrance from Square One. RM expressed concern at this, since it would entail an unnecessarily long journey for mobility-restricted visitors approaching from main central campus (via footbridge to Networks Centre and NC lift, and the back across Square One. Could the entrance not be split-level, between Square 1 and 2?
**Action:** a faculty design meeting is being held on April 16th. John Stevens will attend and make this representation.

6. **Hexagon update – the commissioning of a virtual exhibition**

   - A recent multi-party meeting was held to resolve some outstanding access issues concerned with the Hex (the ongoing use of the upper level Hex for large meetings whose membership is unknown, felt to be in contravention of Equality law). All are now agreed that this must no longer be permitted, until lift access is in place.

   - At the same meeting, the possibility of commissioning a virtual tour of the Something Fierce exhibition by Ambient Light, a company who have already done work for the University at Parkside, was discussed. Initially conceived as a part-solution to the problem of access to the upper exhibits, but quickly also recognised as means of archiving the exhibition and enabling much broader inclusive access to it, by alumni staff and students for example, unable to make the real thing. Our Disability Champions have since also expressed support in principle for the project, and suggested discussion with CER.

   **Action:** RM to explore further, in liaison with Jessica Kenny, Jules Lubbock and others. EAF have agreed funds to be put aside for this purpose, but will also seek partner funders from other relevant University bodies.

7. **Terms of Reference**

   - These need to be updated to take account of agreement reached last summer ‘The Head of Equality and Diversity or his/her nominee’ will be represented on all capital project steering groups henceforth.

   - Likewise, to record recent decision to include EMS Project Steering Groups as a standing agenda item at EAF meetings.

   - The issue of ensuring an access perspective in the context of refurbishments remains outstanding, since not supported by the steering group structure. AS suggested we discuss with EMS the inclusion of an access checklist on refurbishment briefs and sign-off paperwork.

   **Action:** RM to discuss a way forward with MV, and report back to summer EAF meeting.

8. **AOB**

   - RM is keen to stand down as EAF Chair, at least to have support in administrative aspects (agenda setting, meeting planning and minute-taking). However no immediate takers for the role. KB suggests that this could become part of the E&D Frontrunner role, although this position has yet to be confirmed.

   **Action:** KB and RM to liaise further on how this might work.

9. **Date of next/summer EAF meeting**

   - To be confirmed. Disability Champions to be invited.