

Case study: Kingston University

Business Disability Forum readiness review for changes arising from Disabled Students Allowance and Access to Work

Kingston University is committed to providing an enabling culture in which all staff and students can excel and where they are able to access the support they need to reach their full potential. For staff and students with disabilities and long-term health conditions, this involves ensuring that all students and staff are supported in a fair and inclusive manner. In collaborating with Business Disability Forum (BDF) and undertaking this disability review, Kingston University has reaffirmed this commitment to achieving disability best practice across all functions.

The project

- BDF was commissioned by Kingston University to undertake a 'readiness review' following the substantial changes to funding and eligibility for Access to Work (AtW) and Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

Kingston University sought to:

- identify the nature and scale of the changes and how these impact the University's practice and finances
- review the University's ability to respond to changes
- set out recommendations for the University to move forward.
- frame their approaches to disabled students and employees within best practice.

Methodology

Led by George Selvanera, Director of Strategy and External Affairs at BDF and Helen Macfarlane, Principal Consultant at BDF, the project involved a mixed-method methodology with data collected across February - April 2016. These included:

- focus groups of students with disabilities
- a survey of disabled students
- a survey of staff
- interviews with wide-ranging academic and student support staff and line managers, as well as suppliers of adjustments for students and occupational health advisors
- a review of key policies and procedures that impact staff and students.

Research was also conducted with representatives from BDF Members: Manchester Metropolitan University and Brunel University London, to learn from their experiences of preparing for these changes.

Commenting on the assignment, Helen Macfarlane said:

“We were able to capture the voice of disabled students and staff to better inform Kingston University’s understanding of the status quo. Coupled with interviews with key stakeholders, the desktop policy review, and best practice research, we were able to provide Kingston with detailed recommendations for how to improve.”

Key recommendations

BDF’s report set out where Kingston University is doing well and areas for improvement to minimise potential legal and reputational risks and encourage more best practice approaches.

BDF’s recommendations provided a comprehensive framework for the University to apply across all functions:

- covering the whole student journey: from attraction, application and enrolment, individual adjustments for students and wider adjustments for disabled students such as for accommodation and premises, student life and careers services.
- covering the employee journey through recruitment, retention and end of employment.

George Selvanera observed, ‘Kingston University can feel pleased that they have many good building blocks in place to help support their readiness for the reforms to DSA particularly. Like any higher education institution, there are areas of potential risk that need identification and mitigation too. These risks can be substantial and if realised, will be extremely costly to individual higher education institutions. We are really pleased that Kingston has been determined to get it right for disabled students and staff and are progressing with a high quality improvement plan.’

Conclusions

Following the BDF review, the Kingston University is now working on an 18-month project entitled KU Disability Review taking forward the recommendations from BDF. Furthermore, the University is also raising the profile of the work Kingston are doing working with disabled staff and students and improving the visibility of information available.

Commenting on this project's impact Emma Fegan, EDI Projects Manager at Kingston University said:

“We are pleased with the positive feedback our existing practices have received but realise there is still work to be done in this area. The BDF provided a set of excellent recommendations that have already started to be implemented and will create a positive impact on Kingston University's disabled staff and student experiences.”

BDF will be facilitating a roundtable event focusing on the recent reforms to Access to Work and Disabled Students Allowance and their implications for higher education institutions and is delighted that Kingston University will share what they have learned from their work with BDF and how they are progressing implementation of these Government reforms. The event is free for BDF Members and will take place at Kingston University on 30 November 2016. For more information or to book a place, please call 020 7403 3020 or email events@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Ends

For more information about Disability support at Kingston University, visit:

<http://www.kingston.ac.uk/disability/>

For more information on Business Disability Forum, visit:

<http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/>

www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

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