

MAKING EDUCATION ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

A joint discussion evening between the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists (WCIT) and the Worshipful Company of Educators (WCoE) was held on Monday November 10 at Gresham College. The subject was making education accessible for all.

Jean Irvine, Chair of the Accessibility Panel at the WCIT, opened with an account of the current position. The duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils in schools has existed since 2002, originally under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and from October 2010 under the Equality Act 2010. From 2012 the duty for reasonable adjustments has included a duty to provide auxiliary aids and services for disabled students. Substantial guidance is available on the Website of the Equality and Human Rights Commission which published technical guidance on reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils in 2012. The Commission is developing a teacher training resource on the reasonable adjustments duty in 2015.

The Equality Act 2010 requires schools to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and not to discriminate, harass or victimise pupils within the other relevant protected characteristics (Gender Reassignment, Pregnancy/Maternity, Race, Religion/belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation). Two other protected characteristics – Marriage/Civil Partnerships and Age do not apply to schools under S84 of the Equality Act 2010.

The EHRC also worked a couple of years ago with the British Computer Society and AbilityNet, the UK's leading charity in accessible technology to develop an online e-learning resource called Digital Accessibility – Web Essentials, on how to build accessible web sites which is also relevant for educational institutions.

Robin Christopherson of AbilityNet gave a demonstration of an online- profiling system which enables schools and colleges, in partnership with students and parents to assess the need for adjustments for pupils.

Further advice on the current position may be obtained from the Websites listed below.

One key output from the evening was a proposal that the WCIT and the WCoE should work together on this topic. Educators who are interested in this topic should contact the Education Committee and its Secretary Lis Goodwin lisgoodwin@btinternet.com.

On Line Resources

The Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com

The Worshipful Co of Information Technologists www.wcit.org.uk

AbilityNet www.abilitynet.org.uk

Web Essentials www.activ-training.com/solutions/personal-elearning