



PLANTS PEOPLE
POSSIBILITIES

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

Action Plan

March 2009 – March 2012

Updated May 2010

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Foreword from the Director

I am very pleased to introduce the Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan for the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Integral to Kew's mission to inspire and deliver global plant conservation is the sustainable enhancement of the quality of life. Kew's work underpins conservation and sustainable development strategies that will mitigate climate change, thereby promoting human well-being and tackling poverty.

It is not only environmental degradation which threatens this goal. The attitudes and environmental barriers of our society can create serious disadvantages for disabled people. As a significant employer and a business with a global reach, we can influence those attitudes and obstructions by ensuring that disability equality is at the heart of what we do.

We are committed to promoting and safeguarding equality for disabled people. With the full involvement of disabled people amongst our staff and stakeholders, including our visitors, we are identifying priorities for change in both policy and operations. This Action Plan is the first step in an evolving, effective and transparent Disability Equality Scheme, which will enrich our institution and our engagement with the wider community.

Professor Stephen Hopper
Director

March 2009

Kew: what we do

Kew is a world-leader in plant science and conservation, and a major visitor attraction that shows the importance of plants in all our lives. Kew is governed by Trustees, under the terms of the National Heritage Act, 1983.

Kew's statutory objectives are to: carry out investigation and research into the science of plants and related subjects and disseminate the results; provide advice, instruction and education in relation to the aspects of botany in which we are involved; provide other plant related services including quarantine; care for the collections; keep the collections secure as national reference collections, allow access to them and supplement them as resources allow; allow public access for the purposes of gaining knowledge and enjoyment.

As a body set up under statute, the UK Government has a primary role in ensuring that Kew is adequately resourced to fulfill its statutory obligations. Kew is sponsored by Defra, which champions sustainability. Funding also comes from visitor income and fundraising.

Within the organisation, Kew's Director (Professor Stephen Hopper) carries executive responsibility.

Science, conservation and sustainable use

Kew's 19 major collections are mostly held on the two main sites at Kew and Wakehurst Place and range from DNA to botanical art and form a unique global resource. They include the Herbarium's 7 million preserved plant specimens, of which 300,000 are 'type' specimens that determine the scientific application of plant names. The Herbarium is a bedrock resource; its organisation and scale enable an increasingly wide range of studies in conservation and science by users from around the world. Improving Internet access to Kew's resources increases the assistance given to workers around the world.

Our mycological collections comprise 850,000 fungal specimens, including the national reference collection for UK taxa (300,000 specimens). The merge with CABI's mycology unit will bring a further 400,000 specimens into the collection and add valuable complementary skills. The Living Collections represent 33,000 different types of plant. The Millennium Seed Bank (MSB) at Wakehurst Place houses, on site, over one billion seeds representing over 20,000 species. Parts of this vital collection are now duplicated in over 50 countries as a result of the MSB Project's partnership and capacity building programme. We hold 27,000 DNA specimens, also covering 20,000 species.

The Library and Archives hold a global collection of botanical literature, comprising more than 750,000 volumes.

Kew's cross-departmental Science Teams emphasise outcomes in conservation and sustainable use, collaboration and capacity building – an approach endorsed by the independent 2006 Science Audit. At both main sites, Kew is committed to sustainable practice and has achieved the ISO14001 standard.

Audiences, communication and learning

Sustainability can only be delivered if there is strong public support and involvement. Kew plays a valuable role in communicating the rationale for conservation to the public, and has the potential to do even more. We currently receive 1.9 million public visits p.a., including almost 100,000 children in school parties and over 250,000 with their families. Entry for children (17 years and under) is free. Visits to Kew (real, online or through other media) are enjoyable, learning experiences that engage increasingly diverse visitors at an emotional level and thus create real interest in sustainability and plant diversity. This contributes directly to Defra's aims and helps engender support for Kew's work; the recent BBC series have greatly increased Kew's profile. Kew's Learning Agenda contributes to Target 14 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, creating 'hands on' learning opportunities and providing a conduit for plant science and conservation stories to all audiences.

Support and Enabling

Kew's most important assets are its collections, information and, above all, people. Kew aims to equip employees, students and volunteers for challenging and fulfilling roles, expanded financial awareness and increased ownership of customer service and risk control. Information technology is essential in the drive to make resources accessible and operations effective and efficient, so enhancement of the IT capability and service level is essential to progress.

What is a Disability Equality Scheme?

Public bodies are required by the Disability Equality Duty 2005 to publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) every three years.

Disability Equality Duty 2005

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 made it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people in connection with employment, the provision of goods, facilities and services or the disposal or management of premises.

In 2005 the DDA was strengthened with the introduction of a Disability Equality Duty for all public authorities. This requires public bodies to integrate disability equality into every level of their work, from policy-making right through to daily operations. The Duty is a tool for vital change in the culture of public authorities, carrying disability equality to the heart of all decisions and activities.

The Disability Equality Duty introduces a basic requirement for a public authority, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to do the following:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act
- eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life
- take steps to meet disabled people's needs, even if this requires more favourable treatment.

What this means for Kew

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is an organisation which:

- has direct dealings with disabled service users;
- impacts on the lives of disabled people;
- could be a significant employer of disabled people
- is of sufficient size to support the duties

Therefore Kew has specific duties in relation to the Disability Equality Duty. Kew is accountable to the Department of Work and Pensions for compliance with this Duty.

Kew must publish a Disability Equality Scheme every three years.

Kew's Disability Equality Scheme

- is being developed with the full involvement of disabled people
- has an action plan containing key actions to comply with the duty; reflecting priorities of disabled people and the strategic priorities of Kew; specifying outcomes against a realistic timetable, measurable indicators and lines of accountability; identifying training needs and human resources policies
- will contain full details of arrangements for gathering quantitative and qualitative data to inform the review, revision and renewal of the DES
- will contain evidence of disability equality impact assessments on both existing and new policies and activities.

Current initiatives supporting disability equality

Kew has established a Disability Equality Group to develop, champion and monitor the implementation of its Disability Equality Scheme. The Group (now the Diversity Equality Group), is made up of more than 20 staff members, representing departments across both sites. The members bring diverse personal and professional experience of disability equality to their work. As part of the development of the Disability Equality Scheme, the Group will evaluate Kew's established practices and ensure the effective involvement of external stakeholders in the mapping, monitoring and improvement of all disability equality initiatives.

Accessible Kew

Kew engages with a diverse local, national and international community. A key objective as a visitor attraction and as an employer is to ensure equality of access for all visitors and staff.

The Kew Explorer people mover provides an opportunity for our visitors to get an excellent overview of, and introduction to, the 120 hectares of Kew through the driver's commentary. The current route, lasting approximately 35-40 minutes incorporates 8 stops close to buildings and areas of interest within the Gardens. Each vehicle has a hearing loop, plus one fixed wheelchair space and room to store up to 5 folded wheelchairs. Large print leaflets are available.

The Discovery Bus offers a mobility service to enable groups of people with special needs to enjoy the gardens. It travels around the gardens, taking in all the major sights and vistas including the remote wooded areas. 'The Discovery' provides excellent visibility and year-round comfort and protection from the elements. It seats 12 people with additional space for two permanent wheelchair users. A driver and volunteer guide accompany all tours. The Discovery Guides have been recruited and trained to work with disabled people.

Mobility scooters and wheelchairs are available free of charge and in the last year alone, our mobility scooters have enabled in excess of 1600 visitors to enjoy the gardens with increased independence.

The Kew Guides have been established since 1992. Visitors with disabilities of all kinds are catered for through Kew's guiding service, which offers sensory tours for those with visual disabilities, signed tours for those with hearing issues and specialist tours for individuals and groups with other physical or learning difficulties. Similarly, Kew's schools teaching staff are able to tailor

make activities for schoolchildren with a range of disabilities, both physical and intellectual.

Kew Events caters for weddings and corporate functions of all sizes, needs and age groups which take place in the various venues and glasshouses throughout the Gardens.

Improving accessibility at Kew

One of the objectives of the Disability Equality Scheme will be to gather more qualitative data and feedback from the many disabled people who visit our sites.

Our concessionary ticket scheme gives us a certain amount of raw data – for example, in 2008 we welcomed over four thousand people with special needs and an equal number of carers, who receive free entry when accompanying people with special needs. However, we need to find out more about the experiences of disabled visitors so that we can identify any areas for development or improvement in our service and ensure fulfilling engagement. To that end, we have facilitated a number of accompanied visits by disabled people in order to discover priorities for improvement to physical and intellectual access, and during 2009 and 2010 we set up an Interim Disability Equality External Forum to ensure a frank and constructive dialogue with external stakeholders, and to improve Kew's offer, where possible, to all visitors. In 2010, we are in the process of recruiting up a permanent External Forum for Kew.

As part of Kew's commitment to culture-change with respect to diversity and equality, a programme of Disability Equality Awareness Training is being rolled out at Kew, in order to raise awareness of seen and unseen disabilities to all staff – those interacting with the public as well as those behind the scenes, interacting with their colleagues, students, volunteers, and visitors.

Volunteer scheme

One of the ways in which Kew engages with the local community is through its Volunteer Scheme. Volunteers are a vital and integral part of Kew and donate a range of diverse talents and skills to many departments. 440 volunteers donated in excess of 40,000 hours to Kew and Wakehurst Place in the last year, in areas ranging from horticulture and science, to education and interpretation, bringing a wealth of experience and vital support to staff across the organisation. Successful partnerships with voluntary, community and other organisations have increased volunteer placements

and opportunities for a range of people, particularly for those most likely to experience social exclusion.

Ongoing partnerships with organisations such as Mencap, National Autistic Society and Richmond CVS have resulted in both assisted and unassisted volunteer placements for people with mental health issues and physical disabilities such as deafness and blindness. Kew has also worked with Homes for Hounslow, St Mungo's, Action4employment and given ongoing support to the Millennium Volunteer Scheme to offer placements to socially disadvantaged volunteers.

In many cases Kew has made reasonable adjustments to volunteer role descriptions and placements to make them more accessible to people with special educational needs, particularly in the area of horticulture as well as ongoing adjustments to placements for volunteers with long term, degenerative conditions. In addition, Kew has collaborated with Richmond CVs on the making of an educational video promoting accessible volunteering opportunities and using the Kew/Richmond CVS collaboration as a role model for this.

Recently Kew has been working with the London Museums Hub to put together a package of training for volunteers including a workshop on Disability Equality which is being rolled out to volunteers. At the end of the workshop it is intended that participants will have:

- An understanding of the wider diversity of disabled people
- An understanding of disability from a 'removal of barriers' perspective
- Knowledge of a range of things volunteers can do to make the gardens and activities within it more accessible to disabled visitors
- Confidence and competence in their communication with disabled people.

Outreach projects

Kew has been running local community outreach projects, often in partnership with Historic Royal Palaces, for several years. Annual projects engage a number of groups from boroughs close to Kew e.g. local special needs schools, the Disabled Photographers Society of the UK, excluded schoolchildren and young offenders, stroke victims, single parent groups, and participants from the BME community. The project activities aim to engage and develop best practice for working with each of these groups and to encourage Kew-wide access for all visitors. Previous projects have included 'Treasure Troves' – developing an exhibition to celebrate participants' 'treasured items' from plant sources; 'From kingcups to Kangaroos' – a series

of outdoor garden based sculptures; 'Plants through time' – an oral history and dance fusion programme focussing of the use of plants and the 'Temple of the Imagination', celebrating the built and natural heritage of Kew.

Current work includes the setting up of 'community partnerships' to develop longer term relationships with many of the community groups that Kew has worked with in the past. It is expected that this will strengthen interaction, bring in knowledge and expertise from key outside organisations and groups, and provide on-going evaluation of access and DE issues with regards to Kew visitor programmes.

Many community groups, including a range of groups with disability issues, have been consulted formally as part of the restoration project for the Marianne North Gallery at Kew, which was reopened in 2009.

The Chair of the Diversity Equality Group is Andy Burchell, Director of Corporate Operations and Finance.

He says: "While we are proud of our initiatives for disability equality, Kew recognises the importance of continuing to strive to achieve best practice. The very process of introducing a Disability Equality Scheme is extremely valuable, as it encourages staff and stakeholders to re-evaluate their attitudes to, and understanding of, disability. Thus it is important that the Scheme is developed in a universal manner, so that all staff take ownership of the concepts and actions required to ensure real cultural and operational development."