

The EQUAL OPPORTUNITY CELL (EOC)

A REPORT

The Equal Opportunity Cell was established by the University of Delhi on 27th June, 2006 to address the issues related to SC/ST, the OBC and minorities and the physically challenged on a continual basis. Prof. Rama Kant Agnihotri was appointed as its co-ordinator and a committee constituted with eminent personalities of the University as its members.

A. The Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC)

Soon after the Notification, the EOC decided to make every possible effort to make the University of Delhi friendly for all 'Persons with Disability' (PwD). It was obvious that its major domains of activity would, among others, include:

- Request the University to issue a Policy Statement on Disability
- Ensure a barrier free access to all buildings of Colleges, Departments, Libraries, Hostels and Offices
- Set up a Resource Centre that would specialize in addressing the needs of PwDs in all categories including Visual, Hearing, Orthopedic, Neurological etc.
- Set up counseling centres for psychological problems and employment
- Examine all possible ways in which the SC/ ST, OBC and minority groups could be helped
- Ensure that there is no discrimination in the University on grounds of disability or minority status

B. University of Delhi's Policy Statement on Disability

It was only after a series of meetings of the EOC and consultations with a large number of professionals that the Draft of the Policy Statement was finalized.

The [Policy Statement \(Annex.1\)](#) of the University of Delhi was approved and passed by its decision making Bodies, AC and EC, in 2006. The University committed itself to:

- undertake the task of sensitizing the university community and the general public to the problems and the strengths of the differently able.
- acknowledge that the differently abled may be variously positioned with respect to the level of discrimination dependent upon the degree and nature of impairment on the one hand and age, social status, gender on the other. In particular, the University recognizes that differently able women students, staff and faculty may require special provisions to counter the multiple forms of discrimination they may encounter in daily life.
- make the University environment secure, accessible and friendly for the differently abled by encouraging its colleges, faculties, and departments to provide necessary infrastructure and support.
- generate resources to provide tuition assistance and special equipment, educational counseling, and trained readers and writers to the differently abled.
- fulfill all statutory requirements for differently able persons by providing equal opportunities in the teaching, learning, and employment process.

The EOC was entrusted with the task of carrying out this Agenda and with the responsibility to initiate constructive programmes for ensuring equal accessibility to the resources of the University for all.

C. Some Initial Steps

In its meeting on 20th July, 2006, at the Department of Linguistics, the EOC decided to immediately make the path from the main Arts Faculty gate to the Arts Faculty ground floor accessible, barrier free and with strong railings for persons with disability. Similar decisions were taken with respect to the paths from the car park (opposite Daulat Ram College) to the Arts Faculty Extension building and to the disabled- friendly toilet in the Arts Faculty. It was also decided to provide ramps to Braille and main library. Further, it was decided that a disabled friendly toilet was to be built in the Arts Library complex.

While this project was being implemented, the EOC, at its various meetings, took up the following Projects.

D. Access Audit of D.U. Buildings

It was decided to have a comprehensive access audit of all the buildings of the University and the colleges done by a professional body as early as possible so that every building would be accessible to persons with disability of any kind.

Following this decision, the EOC decided to draw up a "Disability Access Pro forma" (Annex. 2) and to circulate to the colleges of the University in order get an estimate of the extent of accessibility required as well as to collect hard data on the number of students, teachers and staff with disability.

The Project was handed over to Samarthyam, National centre for Promotion of Barrier Free Environment for Disable Persons, a project of Samarthyam (Trust Regd. No.35922).(Annex. 3).

The detailed [Access Audit Report](#) was prepared by Samarthyam after visiting each college and University Department to identify and review the barriers in the external and internal environment of each college building. It provided guidance on cost effective solutions and prepared college wise reports with line illustrations/designs/sketches for implementation.(Annex. 3)

Status

1. Access Audit completed for **74** colleges and University Departments, offices and other buildings
2. All Reports available on [D.U. Website](#)
3. All Reports preserved in CD form
4. Hard copies prepared and sent to concerned Institutions
5. Proposals prepared for lump sum grants to implement the project. (Annex. 4)

Implementation and Funds

To make the process of implementation smooth and time bound, the Vice Chancellor has been requested to approach the UGC for grants in lump sum which can be disbursed to colleges as per their requirement for construction and refurbishment work necessary for accessibility. Out of an estimated cost of Rs. 20 lacs per institution, the colleges are expected to bear 25 % of the cost. It has been decided to send similar requests for financial support to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the M.C.D.

As a result of this series of efforts on behalf of the EOC and University, a special Orientation Programme was held on the 14th of July for newly admitted students with disability. In the presence of the VC, Pro-VC, DSW, a documentary film on Disability and the university made by the EOC was screened, in addition to several eminent guests speaking on different forms of disability and the role of educational institutions in providing an barrier free education.

E. DU-NTPC Resource Centre

The University of Delhi, under the ambit of the Equal Opportunity Cell, signed an MOU on 1st August, 2007 with NTPC Foundation charitable Trust to establish a Resource Centre in the erstwhile Graphic Arts Centre, near the Central Reference Library, in the University, to cater to the varied needs of all categories of persons. The newly built centre was formally inaugurated on the 20th of October, 2008 and became fully functional. The Resource Centre has a Reception-cum Information Centre; a Training Centre for sign language; an equipment room for Braille embosser and other high ended equipments; a computing laboratory with 15 terminals for the visually impaired; special educators, training room-cum-seminar-cum-committee room with adequate furniture and IT gadgets; a room for aids and appliances to be made available through a non-profit organization; and 2 toilets completely modernized for the differently abled users community. NTPC has also built up a tactile path from the main gate of the Arts Faculty Complex and from the tutorial building to the Resource Centre. The centre is probably the first of its kind in any Indian university.

As per the MOU, the Resource Centre will have a Director to take care of the over all operation and functioning of the Centre with two technical persons along with other administrative and sundry staff.

F. Short Term Courses

Developing and Conducting short-term courses at the newly built DU-NTPC Centre is the flagship programme of the EOC. These courses (listed below) are typically of 3-6 months duration and are meant to primarily train PwDs and others with job-oriented essential skills along with raising awareness of disability issues.

- I. Sign Language Interpretation: 6 months
- II. Communicative English: 6 months
- III. Information and Communication Technology: 4 months
- IV. Disability and Human Rights: 3 months

These courses evolved through several meetings and discussions and a [Handbook of the Courses](#) was prepared in August 2008. The various goals of each of the courses are as follows:

Course I: The goal of this course is to enable participants to develop Basic communicative competence in sign language and the ability to interpret at a basic level.

Course II: This is an enabling course which aims to give students a formal and methodical exposure to technical writing and professional communication skills. The approach is practical in nature. The course will provide an opportunity to use computer-based tools for effective document preparation and presentation.

Course III: This course is designed to enable participants develop basic skills in communication and information through the use of computers and to develop skills for training and enabling PwDs in ICT. Unit 6 is specially geared towards persons with low vision or visual impairment.

Course IV: In order to better understand the experiences of students and staff with disabilities, and to help facilitate equal access to all facilities and educational opportunities, this course has been designed to address the larger issues that affect the way in which people with disability are seen, both at local, national and international levels.

For the first year (2008), the courses will begin on December 1, 2008 and in the following years, from 1st August. Several eminent scholars and activists have agreed to be a part of the teaching activities at the Centre with regards to these courses. Application form for admissions can be downloaded [here](#).

G. Disability Status

Database: Equal Opportunity Cell sent proformas to all colleges and departments and other institutions to supply detailed information regarding persons with disability among the students and the teaching and non-teaching staff.

The Equal Opportunity Cell has put on record the status of appointments in the teaching and non teaching departments of the University thus focusing attention on achieving the mandatory quota in appointment in institutions. The data will be extremely beneficial as a reference source for any kind of effort for the PwDs in the University.

H. Sensitization with Posters and Hoardings

The Equal Opportunity Cell has designed posters to sensitize people towards the differently able with a view to demolish barriers in thinking and to promote the idea of **Equal Accessibility** to every one in Delhi University. These posters were pasted in all institutions of Delhi University and other approachable areas.

I. Facilities and Provisions

The Braille Centre

With the active collaboration between the Equal Opportunity Cell and the Central Library, the Braille Section has seen remarkable changes in the last few years and has achieved the following:

- (i) University of Delhi became the first University of India to adopt DAISY standards for talking books. 66 new titles were produced as DAISY Books at the centre and several others were added to its collection.
- (ii) It launched Book Scanning facility for students and faculty. 170 new titles were scanned. In addition, about 1500 books in e-text format have been added to its collection.
- (iii) Computerised Braille production facility has been commissioned. Multiple copies of 46 titles in English and Hindi have been produced in Braille format

besides production of important documents like question papers, college magazines etc.

(iv) 1000 cassettes of Talking books have been distributed to University Students.

(v) 5 computers of digital library with internet access were upgraded to latest configurations for efficient operations for persons with disability.

(vi) All the staff of the Braille library has been retrained to work on computerized Braille production and talking book production systems.

(vii) The Digital library for the visually impaired is equipped to work as an examination centre where students with vision impairment write their own examination on computers. Many students writing their own examinations are no longer dependent on writers or scribes.

The EOC took prompt steps in providing Sign Language interpreters for the three undergraduate students of the University of Delhi who approached the EOC for help in this regard.

The E.O.C. has begun to reconstruct the paths in the University to make them straight so that they are friendly for the visually and orthopedically impaired persons. In the next one year, we should meet the target of reconstructing all the essential paths that come into usage.

Tactile tiles are being fitted soon in the University to guide the visually impaired persons as they walk.

Work has begun on reconstruction of special toilets for the convenience of wheel chair users.

Ramps are being constructed at the entrance to the University buildings.

A project has been initiated to operate specially designed low floor buses (one each for the North and the South campuses), with an electronically managed ramp that can be lowered to pick up the wheel chair users. The buses will have trained care takers to assist the wheel chair users in boarding and alighting. The first bus will begin to operate in the North Campus by the beginning of December, 2008.

J. SIGNAGES AND SIGN BOARDS

Marking the whole campus with appropriate signage and putting up sign boards is a work in progress for a year and a half. The E.O.C. is working in this direction on a war footing and within a year, this work will be completed.

K. FOLLOW UP REPORTS FROM COLLEGES

Responding to the Access Audit Reports received by them, the colleges have started taking dedicated steps to implement the suggestions. The following colleges are in touch with the EOC with reports about the steps initiated:

- Sh. Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College
- Gargi College
- Shyma Lal College
- Hindu College
- Lakshmibai College

L. FUTURE PROJECTS

- Each building should have a lift and parking space reserved for the differently abled persons.
- Implementation on the Access Audit reports
- Removing all infrastructural pitfalls within the University premises, which inhibit access to University resources for the differently abled persons

M. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The University authorities have been extremely supportive and pro-active in getting with regards to the suggestions of the EOC. Grants have been released on a priority basis so that work is not held up. Recently, a grant of Rs.100.00 lakh has been approved of for the schemes for the disabled.