

EDC12D001

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Fire safety and people with mobility impairments at UEA

Summary

Over the last two months the Equality and Diversity (E&D) team have been investigating the issue of fire safety for disabled students, staff and visitors on the University site. As a result of these preliminary investigations we have firm reasons to believe that UEA is currently at serious risk of being in breach of fire safety regulations for people with limited mobility. The current level of fire safety is inadequate to ensure the safety of people with mobility issues and, whilst a long term strategy is in place to mitigate this risk, there is inadequate provision to manage this risk in the interim whilst work is carried out to improve fire safety for disabled people on campus. We therefore suggest that the Committee immediately instigates a rapid review of current fire safety processes for disabled people and puts in place a strategy to manage the current situation in order that the University can comply with its obligations under both fire safety regulations and the Equality Act. Failure to do so could result in action being taken against the University for inadequate fire risk management with penalties including fines and enforcement notices a possibility. In addition, there is a genuine if small risk that the current inadequate processes might result in the serious injury or death of one or more individuals with mobility issues in the event of a fire in particular buildings on the University site.

Background

The E & D team decided to look at the processes in place for room and space allocation and usage at the University, to see if the current systems took into consideration the needs of campus users with mobility impairments. This exercise was motivated by the renewal of the DisabledGo contract outlining accessibility on

campus and concerns arising from anecdotal evidence about the issues wheelchair users and others with mobility issues were experiencing.

First steps were to map the activities of staff and students on campus and to identify what information was currently held in relation to the room booking process and mobility issues (See appendix 1). A decision was made not to look at visitors or at student accommodation in the first phase for the sake of simplicity. The diagram of activity and questions raised by the diagram can be found at Appendix 1.

Findings

During this initial fact finding stage, it became clear that there was a problem with the safe usage of buildings by disabled staff, students and visitors. Anecdotally, some staff seemed to be aware that areas of the campus were not safe for disabled people with respect to fire evacuation however the disabled users of these areas were not themselves aware of the situation. A long term strategy is in place to ensure that fire evacuation strategy is fit for purpose. However, efforts to improve the situation in the interim have been carried out on an ad hoc basis, for example signs have been put up in some buildings asking people unable to use stairs not to use lifts if they do not have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP). Overall however, having undertaken meetings with a variety of stakeholders (with the aim of providing a rapid and informed report to the committee to ensure further action) it quickly became clear to the E & D team that the fire risk to disabled people was significant. .

Meetings with Estates and the Health and Safety Office safety department have identified a heavy reliance on the PEEP system within the university. However, this is not an adequate alternative to a current safety plan, and there have been significant difficulties with implementing the policy. The Evacuation of Persons with Disabilities Policy states that disabled people should have a PEEP evacuation policy written by the PEEP officer in their locality. In addition, the PEEP officer is also expected to put in place a PEEP for every building a disabled individual visits. Given the number of buildings on site it seems patently unrealistic to expect a PEEP officer to identify and manage a plan for evacuation for every building that a member of staff, student or visitor may enter during their life on campus. In reality PEEPs are carried out for the main buildings that an individual visits, and possibly some (but not all) others. There is no central log of who has had a PEEP, and for which building and there also appears to be no central information point that might assist PEEP officers and others with regard to the accessibility and fire processes in the various buildings on campus. Where buildings are occupied by more than one school, faculty or service for example, there is no one individual who has overall responsibility for the building, or for co-ordinating the PEEP officers within the building.

The current approach has resulted in gaps in provision. The E & D team were told that there had been a particular focus on visitors to the university, however it was not possible to identify any evidence to this effect, and it was noted that visitors arriving at the university were not provided with any fire safety information. It seems unlikely that procedures are currently in place to adequately accommodate visitors with mobility impairments in safety, and the lack of signage for disabled people in many areas of the campus heightens the risk still further. It is also a misplaced focus given numbers of students and staff who may only be sufficiently familiar with certain parts of the campus, but have occasion to need access to all of it.

Our original fact-finding sought to identify what information resources existed at UEA in relation to room usage and disabled users. Although this research is not fully comprehensive the following have been identified:

- There is a list of students with mobility issues and other impairments
- There is no such list for staff
- The bookings system for rooms includes a register of which rooms are accessible but the level of accessibility is not identified.
- The Disabled GO database provides better guidance however this does not appear to be used by room bookings.
- It is extremely unlikely that room bookings has knowledge of which areas are fire safe for disabled people throughout the campus (as there is no central record of this), and so a room which is designated as 'accessible' may be in an area that is not fire safe for mobility impaired people.

On a positive note, a programme of works is being carried out in the teaching wall to ensure that there is adequate provision of evacuation lifts and emergency call points linked to the security lodge for mobility impaired people and others. We are awaiting a diagram which sets out which areas have been upgraded to provide these facilities and which areas have not. Currently there is no signage highlighting which lifts are evacuation safe and refuge points are not signed in the teaching wall, and other areas. It is not clear to individuals with mobility issues how to evacuate the building. We have been told that signage is due to go up in the teaching wall once work has been completed. The Thomas Paine Study Centre has been completed to adequate standards, but the Elizabeth Fry Building is not fire safe and notices have been put up urging individuals who are not able to use the stairs not to use the lifts, and Congregation Hall does not have the necessary communications systems to enable users with mobility impairments to safely use the buildings. The Edith Cavell Building has work scheduled, and does not currently meet regulations

As it is not currently possible to give full information to the Committee with regards to which areas which are and are not safe for mobility impaired individuals, Estates

have agreed to produce a plan of the campus showing which buildings are currently fire safe and which are not, and what the plans are over what timespan to carry out remaining works.. Whilst there is much good work being undertaken, at present operational policies, practices and procedures in the area of fire safety fall significantly short of compliance with Health and Safety and Equality legislation.

The following recommendations are made with the aim of rectifying this situation

Recommendations:

1. A fire safety audit be commissioned immediately to identify risk and implement a strategy for managing the current situation.
2. A list of all UEA buildings be made available indicating the current state of affairs with respect to fire safety. This to be updated and circulated annually.
3. Clear signage be put up (as has been done in EFB) to alert disabled people to the safety challenges in some buildings for those with limited mobility.
4. A clear information strategy with regard to fire safety for people with mobility issues be developed, implemented and widely and regularly communicated.
5. A review of the information held about the mobility issues of staff be undertaken with the purpose of creating a list for safety purposes.
6. A person be appointed to oversee this work for 6 months, managed by the E + D team, working closely with Safety Services and Estates.
7. A person, be nominated to have overall management of each building on campus, and to have ownership of the PEEP procedure to ensure consistent and cohesive communications take place. The overall network of these individuals to work closely with the Head of Safety Services to ensure their communications are accurate and in pace within the overall fire safety strategy.
8. A record be kept of all PEEPs carried out and reviewed bi-annually by the safety committee.
9. A fuller audit be undertaken to ensure 'joined up' services for disabled staff, students and visitors.
10. Information be routinely given to visitors about fire safety, and this process be implemented immediately for visitors with mobility impairments.
11. In addition, clear information about fire safety provision in associated areas such as: INTO, Sportspark, UEA London and the Research Institutes be gathered and held centrally by the University and regularly updated.

Immediate next steps

- Establish a comprehensive list of all buildings across campus.
- Liaise with Estates to annotate which buildings are fire safe, or which areas of buildings are fire safe by three measures: lift, refuge, communications linked from the lift to Security.
- Publicise the list on the web, in information packs, via School Boards, Faculty Executives, E&D Committee, Student Union, Dean of Students, Concrete, Broadview.
- Ensure that room bookings and Hubs have up to date information about which rooms are accessible and fire safe – Hubs and room bookings to work together to ensure that rooms currently booked are accessible and fire safe for students/staff/visitors with mobility impairments if relevant.
- Send letter or e-mail to all students and staff informing of the new situation, and informing them that they need to make themselves known if they have mobility issues which prevent them from using stairs safely.
- Create generic PEEPs for all areas of campus, so that PEEP officers can issue these to individuals when carrying out localised PEEPs.
- Create a log of PEEPs carried out – and keep updated.

Process for new students:

- As part of the registration process, students need to declare if they have mobility issues which prevent them from using the stairs. This information is logged by admissions and shared with the relevant Hub.
- Hub get initial PEEP completed within first week.
- HUB allocate rooms on ground floor to classes with students with mobility impairments.
- Rest of classes then scheduled.
- May/June – Estates update central information about work carried out on Fire Safety across campus
- Room bookings update information held in this respect on the system.

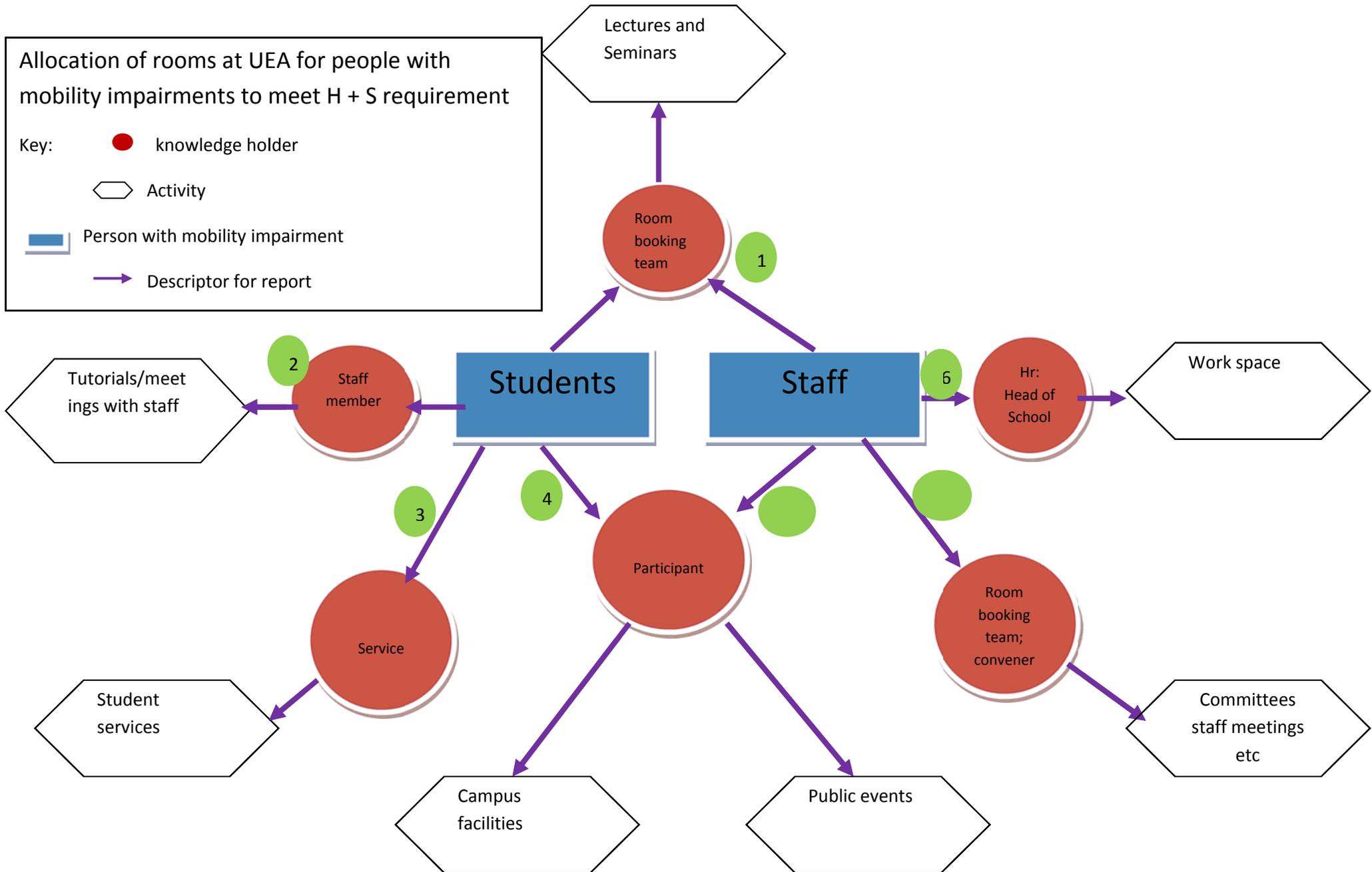
Process for existing students:

- List of continuing students held in Hub.
- Any students with mobility impairments will already known and held on database.
- Rooms for these student's classes will be allocated first.
- Rest of classes then Scheduled

Process for staff:

- At recruitment stage, HR to agree with new member of staff that details be shared with Line Manager for purposes of PEEP.
- Induction process should include information about access requirements discussed between staff member and their line manager.
- Access across campus to be discussed and information given to member of staff and discussed to ensure they are clear about routes and areas which are still not accessible to them.
- Useable teaching rooms and meeting rooms to be identified – core people who person will meet regularly to be identified and appropriate communication agreed so meetings can be planned with ease.

Appendix 1. Diagram and questions raised by room and space allocation for staff and students with mobility issues analysis.



Rationale for request

The above diagram outlines the main activities that students and staff undertake whilst on campus. As new directives to meet with fire regulations are being introduced which are going to prevent access to certain areas of the campus for students and staff with mobility impairments (to the degree where they are unable to use the stairs), it is important to identify procedures which will cause as little inconvenience as possible, as well as outline activity needed for the switch over. This report outlines where activity will need to either start, or be adapted from current practice to ensure a smooth transition to the new directives.

There are ways of mitigating the fire risk by individuals having PEEPS (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans).

Activity

Attending lectures and seminars:

- 1 When rooms are allocated for lectures it is important that the Booking team has knowledge of staff and students with Mobility issues

	Questions	Answers	Activity needing to be rectified (if necessary)
1	Is there a list of staff with mobility issues who cannot use stairs?		
2	Is there a list of students with mobility issues who cannot use stairs?		
3	Is this information available to the allocations team, and also people who are booking rooms directly?		
4	Is there a list of people who have PEEPs and which buildings these are for?		
5	Is the PEEP list linked to the staff/students mobility issue to the lists above?		
6	Are the procedures in place if there is a 'last minute' change to location of lecture or seminar?		

2 Attending tutorials and meetings with staff:

	Questions	Answers	Activity needing to be rectified (if necessary)
1	Is there a list of students with mobility issues who cannot use stairs?		
2	Is there alternative space to book within the building if the 'usual' space is not suitable?		
3	Is there a list of people who have PEEPs and which buildings these are for?		
4	Is this linked to the lists above?		
	Has a notice been put in the building to ensure that if information does not get through, then the person affected has an immediate course of action to follow (contact details on notice (whose? Building Fire Safety Co-Ordinator?))		

3 Using services across campus.

There are a variety of services for students in a variety of different buildings across campus. For example the collection of campus cards (Library), CRB office (Elizabeth Fry) etc.

	Questions	Answers	Activity needing to be rectified (if necessary)
1	Identify all of the services available to students, and locations.		
2	Is the room where the service is provided compliant with the safety regulations?		
3	If yes, no action required.		
4	Is no, has the publicity been altered?		
5	Has a procedure been written so that there is a way that students can contact service to ensure alternative location for service?		
6	Has a notice been put up in the entrance of the building saying to contact the service rather than go to the service if the person cannot use stairs and needs to for safety regulations in the building?		

5 Staff meetings, committees etc.

There are a variety of services and events open to students and staff. In order for these to be accessible to all students, it is important to identify how accessible these areas are – and for the student to know where there are going to be challenges because of their mobility issues. The PEEP needs to be carried out in a variety of different buildings across campus. For example the collection of campus cards (lib), CRB office, Elizabeth Fry etc, all need to be identified and logged.

	Questions	Answers	Activity needing rectify (if necessary)
1	Have all communal areas been mapped to identify accessibility?		
2	Is the room where the event is provided or the communal area compliant with the safety regulations for those who are unable to climb stairs?		
3	If yes, no action required.		
4	Is no, does publicity state this?		
5	How has the Events manager (do you mean the person organising the specific event?) considered how they will manage accessibility of staff, students and visitors by being clear about the accessibility levels of venues? How has this been communicated to event participants?		

6 Staff workspace

There are a variety of services and events open to students and staff. In order for these to be accessible to all students, it is important to identify how accessible these areas are – and for the student to know where there are going to be challenges because of their mobility issues. The PEEP in a variety of different buildings across campus. For example the collection of campus cards (Library), CRB office (Elizabeth Fry) etc, all need to be identified and logged.

	Questions	Answers	Activity needing rectify (if necessary)
1	Have all communal areas been mapped to identify accessibility?		
2	Is the room where the event is provided or the communal area compliant with the safety regulations for those who are unable to climb stairs?		
3	If yes, no action required.		
4	Is no, has publicity/information been changed to state this?		
5	How has the person organising an events considered how they will manage accessibility of staff, students and visitors? How has the accessibility levels of venues been made clear?.		

Below is a list of considerations for deciding on the level of accessibility for a room. Some of this is covered in the disabled Go website. The first section should be considered for both room accessibility and considered by PEEP officers when carrying out PEEPS for individuals.

Accessibility – criteria for fire safety	
Wheelchair access – door width	
Door weight	
Flooring (smooth)	
Waist height tables	
Fire alarms – flashing	
Floor of building	
Loops	
Criteria for all disability	
Accessible toilets	
Parking	
Moving around in the building	
Lighting in corridors (100 lux min)	
Chairs with arms	
Contrasting doors/windows	
Internal signs	