

## John Harding

Head of the Disability Resource Centre

*Interviewed by Marie Synakewicz*

The Disability Resource Centre is a small, but very busy front-line student service. In the past 8 years since John started working in his current position for the Centre, the number of students they advise and take care of has risen from about 600 to over 2100. As the Head of the Centre he has a variety of jobs. About a third of the time is spent on line managing the small group of staff who coordinate the Centre's services and projects. Another third is spent on his work with the academic division developing policies in relation to students, teaching and learning. The rest of the time is taken up by a diverse range of duties: starting from running some of the training courses, to responding to government cuts to disabled student allowances.

John has three children who are now all at school. Nearly six years ago, John applied for flexible working since he wanted to do the drop offs and pick-ups from school and nursery at least some days of the week. He asked to adjust his full-time hours in a way that enabled him to work shorter days on Mondays and Tuesdays, while his wife pursues her profession, with the rest of the hours spread over the other days of the week. Before all three children were at school, the circumstances were a bit more difficult in terms of private childcare arrangements. John and his wife did look into the University nurseries, but decided that it was not practical considering they lived a long way from Cambridge.

Originally, John had applied to be able to work the shortest day from home to save 2hrs a day on commuting. However, He and his seniors agreed that as a line manager he needed to be present in the office every day for some time at least. At the time he thought it was a fair compromise since he did get most things he asked for and by now he has gotten quite used to it. If necessary, e.g. because either his work or family arrangements require it, it is still possible to work from home on an ad-hoc basis. In fact, he also promotes flexibility in his team, quite a few of whom are part-timers with children themselves. Just recently he supported one of his male advisers in their application for flexible working and was positively surprised about how much the bureaucracy had eased up.

John would like to see more men applying for flexible working arrangements to reduce persisting stereotypes and negative connotations associated with it. He thinks a focus on productivity and ensuring a healthy work-life balance will be appreciated by most people. "If you give flexibility, it will pay great dividends for the business and people will pay it back to you," he says. Especially considering the expenses today it is often necessary that both partners with children are able to work. Therefore, cultural attitudes towards flexible working must change.