

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Authority Annual Progress Report 2006 - 2007

This report template includes a number of self assessment questions regarding implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties from **1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007**. Please enter information at the relevant part of each section and ensure that it is submitted electronically (by completing this template) and in writing, with a signed cover letter from the Chief Executive or, in his/her absence, the Deputy Chief Executive to the Commission by **31 August 2007**.

Name of public authority (Enter details below)

The Open University in Ireland
40 University Road
Belfast BT7 1SU

Equality Officer (Enter name and contact details below)

Mr Gary Sloan, Assistant Director (Development)
Tel: 028 9024 5025
E-mail: W.G.Sloan@open.ac.uk

Executive Summary

- What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations?
 - The Open University in Ireland contributed to two significant equality and good relations consultation exercises during the year of report.
 - The Open University nationally launched its Disability Equality Scheme which applies to its operations in Northern Ireland. This scheme provides the essential framework for promoting and embedding disability equality across all areas of the University's work.

- The first of the consultations took place in June 2006 when the universities, and university colleges in Northern Ireland, including The Open University, which constitute the NI Higher Education Equality Consortium (HEEC), conducted a 'Good Relations' audit as part of their compliance to the second part of Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act.
- The publication of the full results of this audit, which was followed up by focus groups on specific issues arising from the consultation, is being prepared at the time of writing.
- The main finding of the consultation was that current relations across the NI universities and colleges between staff and students of different religious belief, political opinion and racial groups are generally positive.
- With regard to The Open University, the good relations and diversity engendered by its EU Peace II supported Cross-Border 'Openings' Programme was commended – specifically in relation to the numbers of migrant workers and their families this programme had introduced to learning and training in Northern Ireland.
- The second consultation was carried out by The Open University across the UK in an attempt to assess the impact of its policies on people from different racial groups.
- This was an extensive exercise, aimed primarily at compliance with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 in England.
- In carrying out this consultation the University acknowledged and took cognisance of its requirement to carry out equality impact assessments of its policies in Northern Ireland as specified under Section 75.
- Specific reference was made in the OU's UK Consultation Booklet to the University's compliance duties in relation to Section 75 in Northern Ireland and the contribution of this consultation to these.

- What are the main initiatives planned in the coming year to ensure the authority improves outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75?
 - In view of these 2 major consultation exercises detailed in the previous section, the intention to carry out 2 EQIA's on OU local staff and students in Northern Ireland around the question of "How Open is The Open University?", had to be rescheduled and will take place in 2007-08.
 - An attempt will be made to assess if the OU in Northern Ireland is truly "Open to People" as reflected in the composition of its staff population and its student population in comparison to the profile of the adult population in Northern Ireland.
 - The details of the NIHEEC's 'Good Relations' consultation will be considered and appropriate actions taken.
 - The details of the OU's UK consultation about the openness of its policies in relation to Northern Ireland will be considered in the context of the second paragraph above and appropriate action taken.
 - The NI EQIAs will be carried out using Section 75 categories.
 - The dissemination of all related equality and diversity matters to OU staff and students in Northern Ireland will continue.
 - The introduction by the University of a new Employment and Equal Opportunities monitoring form to include Section 75 categories in Northern Ireland.

Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

- Outline evidence of progress made in developing and meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2006-07.
 - In line with Section 75 ie., the preparation for the national racial equality consultation required the identification of policies across the University's operations (125), which were then 'screened' for Equality Impact Assessment and from which 12 were identified for EQIA.
 - It will be appreciated that the identification of policies across the University nationally was a considerable task, as was the subsequent 'screening' exercise then carried out by University heads of unit. These policies apply in most cases to the University's operations in Northern Ireland. This exercise has therefore contributed significantly to enabling the OU in Northern Ireland to assess OU policies locally.
 - A substantial publication on the results of this national consultation exercise is in the process of being prepared by the University's Equality and Diversity Office.
 - Because this consultation required the identification and confirmation of University policies by heads of unit it had to precede the intention of the OU's NI regional office to carry out two local impact assessments as planned in its 2005/06 report. These will now take place in 2007/08 as reported in Section 3.
 - In response to the increasingly complex equality legislative environment and to underpin its commitment to mainstreaming equality and diversity, together with the need to manage strategic links externally, the University reorganised its Equal Opportunities Unit to become its Equality and Diversity Office within the OU's Strategy Unit.
 - This development integrates the focus for institutional equality and diversity, strategic policy development, implementation and review, encompassing OU staff, students and curriculum.

- Regular communication takes place between the OU region in Northern Ireland and the Equality and Diversity Office at its headquarters in Walton Hall, Milton Keynes – specifically as to how Section 75 compliance is being carried out and how it can continue to inform the University’s Race Equality Policy and Strategy Action Plan.
- All Open University Regional staff and students in Northern Ireland continue to be kept up to date and informed about Section 75 legislation and its implications.
- The Open University in Northern Ireland was given its own Section 75 page on the Open University’s Equality and Diversity’s external website.
- The OU’s Equality Officer in Northern Ireland continued as a member of The Open University’s Equality and Diversity Management Group (EDMG) which co-ordinated the UK consultation and advised upon Section 75 compliance.
- He has continued to attend meetings of the Northern Ireland Higher Education Equality Consortium (NIHEEC).
- He continued to attend and contribute to meetings of the UK Equality Challenge Unit’s N.I. Group.
- He continued to liaise with the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC) on the implementation of Section 75 good practice across Northern Ireland and during the year reviewed and replied to consultation documents from other NI public bodies, most of which have been in relation to EQIAs.
- He contributed to the NIHEEC’s “Good Relations” questionnaire for staff and students in the universities and university colleges in NI. This questionnaire was distributed following approval by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and the NI Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

Section 2: Screening

- Provide an update of new/proposed/revised policies screened during the year.
 - Refer to attachment.

Title of policy subject to screening	Was the <u>F</u> ull Screening Report or the <u>R</u> esult of initial screening issued for consultation? <i>Please enter <u>F</u> or <u>R</u></i>	Was initial screening decision changed following consultation? <u>Yes/No</u>	Is policy being subject to EQIA? <u>Yes/No</u> ? If yes indicate year for assessment.

Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- Provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2006/07, stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities and an indicative EQIA timetable for 2007-08.

EQIA Timetable – April 2006 - March 2007

Title of Policy EQIA	EQIA Stage at end March 07 (Steps 1-6)	Outline adjustments to policy intended to benefit individuals, and the relevant equality & good relations categories due to be affected.
During the year the University identified 125 policies nationally and agreed that these be screened in relation to racial equality and to assist with Section 75 compliance.	Of the 125 policies, 12 were identified for EQIAs	These EQIAs are ongoing at the time of this report.
		Because of differences in England it was decided to carry out the EQIAs on the basis of 5 categories and that 2 of the major policies ie Recruitment of Staff and Admissions of Students should be subject to 'local' EQIAs in Northern Ireland and be subject to the Section 75 categories. It is intended to carry these out in 2007/08.

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2006- March 2007

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased
	See above	See above

2007-08 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2007 – March 2008	Existing or New policy?	Please indicate expected timescale of Decision Making stage i.e. Stage 6
Student Admissions Strategy in NI	Existing	March 2008
Staff Recruitment and Selection in NI	Existing	March 2008

- Where the EQIA timetable for 2006/07 (as detailed in the previous annual S75 progress report to the Commission) has not been met, please provide details of the factors responsible for delay and details of the timetable for re-scheduling the EQIA/s in question.
 - Refer to Section 1, para 4 of this report

Section 4: Training

- Outline training provision during the year associated with the Section 75 Duties/Equality Scheme requirements including types of training provision, numbers attending, and conclusions from any training evaluations.
 - The Region’s Equality Officer continued to attend EQIA training presented on behalf of the NIHEEC and the OU’s Equality and Diversity Management Group.

- He has also attended general awareness raising sessions at the Open University in Milton Keynes about the University's obligations under the Race Relations Act.
- He contributed to the launch of The Open University's Disability Equality Scheme.
- He helped co-ordinate a one-day conference on learning and training for migrant workers.

Section 5: Communication

- Outline how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the statutory duties during the year and evidence of the impact/success of such activities.
 - The Equality Officer continued to keep OU regional staff informed of Equality developments by e-mail and by announcements on the Region's OU website.
 - All OU staff and students in Northern Ireland were contacted personally in connection with the NIHEEC Good Relations Questionnaire, the introduction to which gave an updated overview of Section 75 compliance and the need for the Good Relations duty.
 - He disseminated information received from the Commission including Anti-Racist Workplace Week in November 2006.

Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis

- Outline any systems that were established during the year to supplement available statistical and qualitative research.
- Outline any research undertaken/commissioned to obtain information on the needs and experiences of individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75.
 - The most significant equality related research carried out during the year was the dissemination of the NIHEEC's questionnaire to university and university colleges' staff and students across Northern Ireland.

- To enable the widest possible access to these questionnaires, all OU staff and students in NI were contacted by circular letter, e-mail and reminders posted on the Region's web site.
- This involved nearly 5,000 people in Northern Ireland and represents the largest communication on behalf of the region on equality matters.

Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

- Detail any initiatives/steps taken during the year to improve access to services including provision of information in accessible formats.
 - The questionnaires referred to in the previous section were offered in alternative formats to ensure accessibility.
 - The Open University documents referred to in this report are all available in alternative formats.

Section 8: Complaints

- Identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:
 - received by the authority;
 - resolved by the authority (including how this achieved);
 - which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
 - which were referred to the Equality Commission.
 - None recorded

Section 9: Consultation and Engagement

- Provide details of the measures taken to enhance the level of engagement with individuals and representative groups during the year.
 - 2 substantive consultations
 - Launch of Disability Scheme nationally and locally
 - 1 day conference for agencies and representatives supporting migrant workers.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

- Provide details of additional steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.
 - The OU's participation in the NIHEECs 'Good Relations' questionnaire to HE staff and students in Northern Ireland.
 - This exercise represented one of the biggest and far reaching consultations about good relations in Northern Ireland.
 - Further information about the approach of this questionnaire and its findings can be obtained from:-

Rebecca Boyd, Research Assistant
Higher Education Equality Consortium
Room 2H18B
University of Ulster
Shore Road
Newtownabbey
BT37 0QB

Section 11: Additional Comments

- Please provide any additional information/comments
 - The Open University has embraced and highlighted equality as the first of its 10 Strategic Priorities.
 - This priority states that it will promote fair access for all especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds or from under-represented groups.
 - It has extended its Mission to state, "The Open University promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential".

- In its promulgation of the importance of equal opportunities and diversity it has referred consistently to the equality guidance produced by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.
-

Gs/fmo/31/08/07