

## The Open University in Ireland

*Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998 – Annual Progress Report for*

*1 April 2002 – 31 March 2003*

***NAME OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY:***

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***EQUALITY OFFICER NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS:***

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***SECTION 1: PREPARATION OF EQUALITY SCHEME***

- The Commission received and approved the Open University's Equality Scheme in March 2003 having insisted that the final version be signed by Open University Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive, Professor Brenda Gourley and Regional Director, Dr Rosemary Hamilton.
- As reported to the Commission in last year's Annual Progress Report, a draft scheme was sent out for public consultation, the address list of consultees, having been approved by the N.I. Higher Education Equality Consortium, of which the OU is a member, and the Equality Commission.

***SECTION 2: STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SECTION 75 EQUALITY DUTIES***

- As stated in section 6.1 "Arrangements for Assessing Compliance with Section 75 Duties" on page 23 of its Equality Scheme, the Regional Director has put in place such arrangements as are necessary to enable her to review, on a regular basis, progress in relation to the Scheme.
- To discharge these duties the Regional Director has established a small working group drawn from the Region's Equal Opportunities Committee to co-ordinate and manage the implementation of the Scheme, thus ensuring that the necessary actions are progressed in accordance with the OU's Section 75 commitments and timetables.
- This group comprises the Regional Director and her 3 Assistant Directors with responsibility for 'Student Services', 'Planning, Resources and Teaching Services' and 'Development' respectively.

- On behalf of this group the Assistant Director (Development) who has been delegated by the Regional Director to ensure the Scheme is implemented. This has involved liaising and seeking guidance as appropriate from the Open University's Equal Opportunities Unit based in Milton Keynes.
- A clearly defined organisational structure with resources for implementation of duties and assessment of policies has therefore been established.
- It can also be confirmed that equality objectives are built into the job description and performance indicators of relevant staff and that these are considered in the appraisal process.
- It follows from this that the OU in Northern Ireland is on course for completing its five-year timetable for the implementation of its Equality Scheme.

***SECTION 3: SCREENING AND EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EQIA)  
TIMETABLE***

- 3(a)** - As one of the OU's 13 regions, the Open University in Northern Ireland is required to submit strategy reports for central approval.
- Accordingly a screening report on the OU's policies in Northern Ireland is being drafted with the Open University's Equal Opportunities Unit in Milton Keynes.
  - The region is working closely with the central unit to ensure that central authority will be granted for the policies that have been identified to be screened and decisions made about which of these will be subject to Equality Impact Assessments in 2003-04.
- 3 (b)** - The process of policy identification, screening and EQIA takes longer for the OU in comparison to the other universities in Northern Ireland because of the need for OU central approval and the need to be consistent with the rest of the University in related areas such as the University's Race Equality Action Plan and Diversity Initiative.

***SECTION 4: TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION***

- As reported in last year's document a training day was organised in the Northern Ireland Regional Centre to familiarise OU staff with Section 75 legislation and to show how it applies to the policies and functions of the OU in Northern Ireland.
- The Assistant Director with responsibility for the Scheme attended a 2-day seminar on Racial Equality organised by the OU in Milton Keynes. During the year he also attended a training session on EQIA organised by the N.I. Universities Equality Consortium.

### ***SECTION 5: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS***

- In conjunction with the OU's Equal Opportunities Unit a list of OU policies is being compiled – this is being matched with the policies template produced for the other universities and university colleges in Northern Ireland, constructed by the N.I. Universities Equality Consortium.

### ***SECTION 6: INFORMATION PROVISION AND ACCESS TO SERVICES***

- With regard to reviewing and developing arrangements for the provision of information in accessible formats, the OU in Northern Ireland follows the approach of its guiding body, the N.I. Universities Equality Consortium, by making available documentation, if requested, in large print, audio and alternative formats, where appropriate, also to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English. This approach has been approved by the Commission.

### ***SECTION 7: COMPLAINTS***

- None received to date

### ***SECTION 8: TIMETABLE***

- The implementation timetable is reviewed by the OU's Section 75 Working Group.
- Currently and as stated previously, we are consolidating our policy screening process with colleagues in Milton Keynes and identifying which policies will be screened in 2003-04.

### ***SECTION 9: CONSULTATION***

- The consultation approach to be used by the OU in Northern Ireland is the one used by the N.I. Universities Equality Consortium as stated in its guide to consultation, ie., 'The Universities/Colleges recognise the importance of meaningful consultation and are committed to consulting in an open and conclusive manner. They particularly welcome the views of any organisation, group or individual with a particular interest in their work and/or the likely impact of their policies.'
- Based on this approach the Open University in Northern Ireland will invite advice and guidance, both qualitative and quantitative, from interested organisations, groups and individuals on its policies. These will then be taken into account by the OU in drawing up its programme for full Equality Impact Assessments and will inform its prioritisation exercise.
- The list of consultees is the one compiled by the N.I. Universities Equality Consortium and approved by the Commission.

***SECTION 10: IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES***

- The main impact for the OU is that arising from a regional imperative (in this case the obligations of Section 75 for the OU as a designated public body in Northern Ireland). The Open University centrally has had to review its policies university-wide and through its Equal Opportunities Unit map these onto the 10 functional areas identified by the N.I. Universities Equality Consortium, for the purposes of its consultation on the screening of universities' policies in Northern Ireland.
- This exercise has helped to inform the Open University's Race Equality Action Plan formulated by its Equal Opportunities Unit and Registry in Milton Keynes.

***SECTION 11: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION***

- The emergence of Section 75 in Northern Ireland has informed and enhanced the affirmative measures the OU is taking nationally in areas such as Fair Employment and Treatment, Sex Discrimination, Race Relations and Disability Discrimination.

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***Dr Rosemary K Hamilton, Regional Director***