

The Open University



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report 2020-21

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity/content/equality-scheme-objectives>

Signature:



This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between April 2020 and March 2021

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

1. In 2020-21, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

Restructuring of Equality and Diversity Team in The Open University



Professor Marcia Wilson

At The Open University our mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas, and this means that a commitment to equality is embedded in everything that it does.

The central Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team works to build a University that ensures equality of opportunity for staff and students, where diversity is celebrated, and where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. For some years the EDI team has been embedded in the People Services Unit. In 2020 a new Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was recruited externally to provide leadership on the OU's strategic priority to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the University's work and to serve on the Vice Chancellor's Executive. From August 2021 the team will report into the Vice-Chancellor's Office. This transfer will be reported on more fully in next year's report. The EDI team works with the Nation Teams in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to ensure that the legal and policy requirements of individual nations are embraced in the University's EDI work.

Prior to joining the OU, Marcia worked at the University of East London for 12 years where she established the UK's first Office for Institutional Equity (OIE) and held the position of Dean. Her work includes equality projects with Universities UK and London Higher to tackle racism in higher education institutions.

Equality Scheme



The University's Equality Scheme was originally launched in April 2016. The Equality Scheme was revised in 2020, with changes agreed by the Chair of the University's EDI Steering Group to update aspects of terminology and legislation. The most recent version is available on the University's website, and plans are underway for a review in 2022 to identify new KPIs and objectives.

A previous mid-term review was conducted in 2018, which was overseen by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group, chaired by Professor Josie Fraser. Key stakeholders were consulted for their views about the equality scheme.

The review focused primarily on two elements:

1. Evaluation of the approved institutional objectives against the SMART principle (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely) in the context of a changing and changeable internal and external landscape.
2. Evaluation of the governance and management of the scheme.

The review's recommendations were approved by University Council on 10 October 2018. The refreshed equality scheme will be in place from 2018 to 2022 and has been consulted upon with Northern Ireland Section 75 consultees, including the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland during 2019/20.

The review identified that priorities need to be set to enable achievement of institutional objectives (**please see Appendix 1 of the attached Equality Scheme for detailed objectives and interim performance measures**) to ensure the scheme's success, especially given the largescale changes taking place across the University.

It was agreed that the University needed to focus on the most pressing inequalities as institutional imperatives. These are currently BAME student retention; the gap between BAME and white students for the award of good degrees (i.e. a 1st or 2.1); the underrepresentation of employees with protected characteristics in senior roles; and line manager capability in recruiting and developing individuals and teams from diverse backgrounds.

The review also proposed a new governance and management structure to encourage greater commitment and visibility to institutional objectives at senior management level. Student objectives are owned by the Pro Vice Chancellor - Students, and staff objectives are owned by the Group People Director, People Services. Two Senior Accountable Executives

(one for student and one for staff objectives) are responsible for the delivery of the related KPIs (key performance indicators)

The Scheme is being revised for 2022 onwards, alongside the forthcoming EDI plan. These will feed into the strategy.

Equality Analysis

In 2020 the EDI team reviewed the University Equality Analysis Process and guidance with a view to increasing the quality of engagement throughout the university. This has led to a commitment to greater transparency, sharing of best practice and a more evidence based and outcome focused approach. Recommendations were approved by the EDI Steering Group and an action plan developed. This includes simplifying the guidance and providing more good practice examples, ensuring nation differences are clear and that nations are supported throughout the process, and additional training to support People Business Partners and Units.

Preparation for new University Strategic Plan 2022-2027

A key aim of the new strategy will be a commitment to diversifying our staff base and curriculum and reaching new kinds of learners. Key to this success is creating a greater local presence in order to reach a wider group of students and alignment with the local skills-focussed agenda in each UK nation and our Access and Participation Strategy targets. The proposed new Strategic Goals were:

- 1. Extending our Reach and Offer** to include even more people from all parts of society in lifelong learning
- 2. Enabling the Success** of our students and learners through our expertise in supported online learning
- 3. Achieving Impact** in the four UK nations and globally through research and the development of knowledge and skills
- 4. Enacting our Values** to increase equality, diversity and inclusion
- 5. Champion Environmental Sustainability**

The University undertook a significant piece of consultation with staff and students from 08 February to 22 March 2021 via multiple channels ('In Conversation' events, internal, communications, social media, Associate Lecturer fora, formal surveys, email and localised engagement discussions in units and faculties). The feedback received will guide the development and launch of the new strategy, due in September 2021.

Race

Dismantling Racial Inequalities in Higher Education

Dismantling Racial Inequalities in Higher Education was the first in a series of events hosted by the OU's newly created BME (Black and minority ethnic) Researchers Group to discuss research and scholarship around race, ethnicity, coloniality and decolonisation. The BME Researchers Group is part of the Teaching, Research and Curriculum Pillar of the OU BME Staff Network.

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The seminar series was launched by Baroness Valerie Amos (Master, University College, University of Oxford) on Thursday 28 January 2021, and was the first formal event to welcome the OU's new Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Professor Marcia Wilson.

The event was chaired by Dr Jenny Douglas, Senior Lecturer in Health Promotion and Chair of the BME Researchers Group. The launch is an opportunity for all OU staff interested in widening their knowledge on the broader cultural perspectives at the core of the disparity for BME communities and explore cases of best practice in the higher education sector.

The BME outcome gap, in particular the degree-awarding gap, has now been recognised as a pressing priority for the Higher Education sector. Research across the sector shows that the lack of BME academics, particularly in relation to BME professors in higher education is closely linked to the degree-awarding gaps.

Approaches for addressing these gaps remain underdeveloped and, where there are strategies, they are not straightforward.

The seminar programme aims to help OU staff to gain deeper insight into these gaps and explore solutions for closing BAME outcome gaps at the OU.

Race Equality Charter

The Open University is a member of the Race Equality Charter, run by Advance HE, and progressing its application for a Bronze Award. The Race Equality Charter (REC) helps HE institutions to identify and self-reflect on barriers standing in the way of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and students. The Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team (SAT) held its first meeting in March 2021. This group will take forward the OU's REC submission planned for 2023, showing how the OU is addressing cultural or institutional barriers for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and students.

Chaired by Professor Marcia Wilson, Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, members of the SAT were nominated by managers and Heads of Unit across the University to fulfil the range of criteria specified by Advance HE, which administers the REC framework. The team includes members from OU Units, faculties, nation offices, trade unions and the OU Students' Association.

The Open University Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team participates in Advance HE race equality networks, seeking to develop good practice within the institution.

The REC process is managed by the EDI team and progress on the REC will be reported in 2021-22.

Universities UK and Halpin Report recommendations

The Open University agreed to implement the recommendations published by UUK in November 202 to tackle racial harassment, alongside recommendations made by the Halpin report in assessing UK universities' responses to Black Lives Matter. A working group will be

formed to take forward the work, identifying areas where there is currently good practice, and where changes need to be made.

Anti-Racism and anti-discriminations statements

The OU published Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination statements on 19 August 2020. The subject of racism and discrimination has been discussed at a societal level for generations, and events in 2020 both globally and locally brought about a renewed momentum around these issues. At the OU, inclusivity and openness are an implicit and intrinsic part of our mission, but implicit is no longer enough. That is why we are pleased to be publishing institutional anti-racism and anti-discrimination position statements. These statements are designed to make our position as a University clear to all staff, students and external stakeholders. In publishing these statements, we are committing to adopting a zero-tolerance approach towards racism and discrimination and taking a role in challenging these issues in the communities in which we live and work. The statements will be used to inform and reinforce our institutional decision-making when building upon our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) goals, including work on the Race Equality Charter and implementation of Universities UK recommendations for tackling racial harassment.

Race and Ethnicity Hub

It was thought in the wake of heightened concerns over Black Lives Matter, after George Floyd's murder in May 2020, and in light of the disproportionate effect of the Coronavirus on people from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background that an Open University resource should be developed that collated expertise on race and ethnicity, not only for general learning and personal interest to everyone, but also to directly inform Black, Asian and minority ethnic OU staff and students on topics that might affect their wellbeing and mental health.

In pursuit of this aim, in November 2020 the University launched a new Race and Ethnicity Hub, a collection of existing and new free resources – articles, videos, audios, timelines and courses – that explore the themes of race, racism and ethnicity across the core faculty areas within The Open University. The hub has drawn on existing content already on OpenLearn, but also includes newly commissioned content created specifically for the Hub.

The content has been created by experts across (and sometimes outside) the OU in conjunction with the OU's academic community and the OU's BME network. Utilising the experience of staff within the institution, the hub will not only work as showcase for academic research and some of the university's high-quality teaching in this area, but also provide a necessary and important source of knowledge for this organisation as well as for the general public. These resources will help people to understand both historic and contemporary ideas of race and racism and how these ideas could inform our decisions and interactions.

Disability

There has been further progress in the service offered to Disabled Students in 2019/20. With duties having been delegated to universities by the Department for the Economy in relation to the support of students eligible for Disability Support Allowance, the OU in Ireland recently expanded its support offered to students who have a disability with the recruitment of a Senior Disability Support Assistant. A fuller update is provided in Section B and in revisions to the Disability Action Plan.

The OU currently holds Level 1: Committed of the Disability Confident Scheme. The scheme supports employers to make the most of the talents that disabled people can bring to the workplace. The OU is among over 18,000 organisations playing a leading role in changing attitudes, behaviours and cultures and reaping the benefits of inclusive recruitment practices.

Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-23

Supporting our students and staff with their mental health and wellbeing is a hugely important part of all we do. In Northern Ireland, improving mental health is identified as a key indicator in the Programme for Government for the Northern Ireland Executive. The expectation is that those in the higher education sector will need to demonstrate how they are actively contributing to achieve this.

The Open University Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been developed in line with the Universities UK (2017) #stepchange framework for mental health in higher education. It is directly aligned with all eight of its strategic themes: leadership, data, staff, prevention, early intervention, support, transitions and partnerships.

The strategy focuses on future actions and improvements to our current service to be implemented over the next 3 years. We will measure the impact of our strategic approach by using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data obtained from various university data sources, including student and staff surveys and student and staff feedback, using data from 2017/18 (the most recent and fully comprehensive student and staff dataset) as our baseline reference. This will feed directly into our annual equality, diversity and inclusion review as well as our unit business planning process to help inform and better promote equality of opportunity. An annual report on mental health and wellbeing trends, actions and outcomes will be delivered at the institutional level, beginning in 2021.

Sexual Orientation



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2020/21 saw a continuation in our engagement with LGBT+ initiatives on the island of Ireland, in conjunction with Pride ,the LGBT+ group of the Open University Students Association. With Pride events moving online during the year, OU staff in Ireland participated in Global Pride Day on 27 June 2020 with a message of support delivered via social media.

The University also marked LGBT+ History Month in February 2020, with a programme of events run by the LGBT+ Staff Network, and articles and news opportunities supported by the EDI team.

The University is a member of the Stonewall Diversity Champions Scheme. This has previously, been an England-centric scheme, with some specialism in Scottish and Welsh LGBT+ support. Stonewall has, however, been working with the Rainbow Project to expand their Diversity Champions offering in Northern Ireland. In our most recent renewal of membership, the University secured tailored, four-nation support from Stonewall, which will continue to revise their Diversity Champions programme to better include Northern Ireland.

Promoting good relations with all sections of the community in Northern Ireland



During 2020/21, the OU in Northern Ireland continued to liaise with elected members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, MPs, Departmental officials and other people in public life from all major political parties.

The OU continues to be a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly's All-Party Groups on Disability, Learning Disability and Science. The University's engagement plan includes a series of regular meetings with elected representatives from the main political parties, attendance at the party conferences of the five largest parties and attendance at briefing sessions run by the political parties themselves. To date, we have attended major party conferences online in the reporting period and held a range of meetings and briefing sessions with MLAs and Councillors from the main five political parties. We have also undertaken regular updates with the Department for the Economy and Department for Communities.

The OU in Northern Ireland has also continued to support participation in Higher Education via Community Partnerships with The Shankill Women's Centre and Falls Women's Centre. A successful bid for funding from the Department for the Economy has allowed us to expand this programme, progress on which will be reported in 2021-22.

Furthermore, 1003 students were offered free places on STEM and Business Post Graduate courses, Short Management Courses and Microcredentials under the Skills Intervention Programme funded by the Department for the Economy this year, with a focus on those

whose employment had been disrupted by the pandemic. As the young and those in low or unstable income roles were disproportionately affected, this important intervention

An additional £1.8m has been allocated for further rounds of free places in the next year, available to people in Northern Ireland who want to up skill.

Gender

Athena Swan

In 2021, The Open University was re-awarded Bronze status for the institutional [Athena SWAN Charter](#) following its submission to [Advance HE in November 2020](#). The institutional submission was chaired by Professor Clem Herman, and through extensive consultation and analysis of a range of data on staff profile, recruitment, promotion and training in the preparation for this submission, the OU identified a range of areas to further gender equality at the OU, including improvements to maternity and paternity leave practices, a revision of our transgender staff policy and greater support and guidance for managers around key transition points in staff careers and the employee lifecycle.

In addition to our institutional award the [School of Environment, Earth & Ecosystem Sciences](#) secured its first Bronze award and the [School of Life, Health & Chemical Sciences](#) also renewed its Bronze status. The School of Engineering and innovation received a Silver award. Athena SWAN is an internationally recognised gender equality charter, acting as a catalyst for change and cultural transformation, which enables all staff to achieve their maximum potential. By identifying barriers faced in the workplace and finding solutions to break them down, Athena SWAN supports our strategic objective to promote a dynamic and inclusive culture. As part of our 2020 renewal, the University has committed to an ambitious four-year action plan, using evidence-based self-assessment of our policies, practices and culture. We will address a variety of areas, including career development for academics returning from parental leave, issues surrounding miscarriage and infertility in the workplace, better career development and training opportunities for mid-career women, enhanced paternity leave, and more detailed data capture on gender on our systems.

We have also committed to all Schools within the OU having applied for their first departmental Athena Swan award by the end of 2023, which is already in progress. In 2021, OU Business School became the first non-STEM School at the University to apply for an Athena Swan departmental award and their result will be announced in the coming weeks.

As part of the Athena Swan work, the University's central EDI team has already collaborated with the OU in Ireland on a response to the Northern Ireland Assembly's call for evidence on parental bereavement leave. This consultation raised a number of gendered issues, including miscarriage and stillbirth, which are part of our action plan.

Gender Equality Steering Group

The University's Gender Equality Steering Group (GESG) was devolved as the Athena Swan self-assessment team during the latest resubmission for the institutional Bronze award. In December 2020, it reformed as the steering group, with representation from all the nations within the OU and all Faculties. The GESG will supervise the implementation of the above

action plan and will also be the primary body for the consideration of gender-related issues for staff at The Open University. Issues outside the remit of the latest Athena Swan submission, for instance, the development of a menopause policy for the University are being overseen by this body.

Pay Gap

The OU's median gender pay gap for 2020 is 5.7%, a decrease of 2.2% on last year's figure. This is significantly lower than the sector average of 13.7% (2019 – latest figure) for other HEIs of a similar size and income.

The overall gender pay gap at The Open University has decreased in 2020. There is no median pay gap between male and female Associate Lecturers and the pay gap for staff in Professional Services roles has continued to decrease; however, these positive developments have been partially offset by the increase in the mean and median pay gap reported across our staff on Academic grades (6.8%). To close the pay gap, our ambition is to:

- Improve the representation of women in senior roles and work towards a target of increasing the proportion of women who hold these roles by 2022.
- Improve managers capability to recruit, manage and develop diverse teams with clear completion targets for this year.
- By 2022 every interview panel member to have received training on Recruitment, Selection and Interviewing (including unconscious bias).

Whilst the Open University gender pay gap for 2020 is below the sector average of 13.7%, and lower than 2019, it is important to understand and recognise successful interventions and build on this momentum. We have more women than men in lower paid roles within our Academic and Professional Services employee groups which is a key contributor to the pay gap. The OU will continue to monitor this and address our gender pay gap through the ambitions outlined in this report. To address the gender pay gap the University will:

- Improve the representation of women in senior roles and work towards a target of increasing the proportion of women who hold these roles by 2022.
- Improve managers capability to recruit, manage and develop diverse teams with clear completion targets for this year.
- By 2022 every interview panel member to have received training on Recruitment, Selection and Interviewing. We are currently trialling anonymous recruitment in some units.
- Review the promotion processes for Senior Academic and Academic Related grades.
- Continue to support colleagues applications for development in underrepresented groups:

I) Aurora: a women only leadership programme aimed at giving women more confidence to work at senior levels in the organisation. We supported 30 colleagues in the 2020/2021 cohort.

II) Increase the number of Black female professors through participation in the '100 Black female professors' UK-wide project.

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- Continue to embed Athena SWAN actions which contribute to the career progression of women, at both institutional and School levels.
- Significantly invest into our people systems which will enhance the data and insight available to us. In turn this will help inform where we prioritise our actions around our broader Equality, Inclusion and Diversity agenda.

The recent appointment of our Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at the Open University will play a leading role in our quest to promote equality and will work directly alongside the Vice-Chancellor.

OU Staff Transgender Network

A new staff network was launched in January 2021 to give transgender, non-binary or gender diverse colleagues at The Open University (OU) a safe space to meet and share experiences .

The network is inward-facing and exclusively for the trans community (trans is taken here as an umbrella identity, covering non-binary and gender diverse colleagues) to protect the anonymity of members. It is important for group members to feel safe without worrying about being outed to the wider work community, and allyship is facilitated through the LGBT+ Staff Network, of which the trans network is part.

The network is supported by the University's Athena Swan institutional action plan, which is being implemented by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team, under the supervision of the Gender Equality Steering Group.

The plan identifies various actions for supporting trans staff, such as making available and promoting more gender-neutral toilets and facilities, and encouraging colleagues to add their preferred pronouns to their work email signature.

The OU has begun revisions to the OU's Transgender Staff Policy – in consultation with LGBT+ charity Stonewall, as well as the University's LGBT+ Staff Network and its trade unions as part of Athena Swan work. This will build on the work of OU faculties and units to support trans awareness across the University.

2). Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2020-21 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

Equality Objectives

In pursuit of The Open University's four revised objectives set out in the Equality Scheme 2018-2022 and the annual action plan posted on the Open University's public website (<http://www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity/content/equality-scheme-objectives>) the University has developed the following KPIs by which Equality Objectives may be measured:

1. Reduce the retention gap between Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students and white students, for any cohort, from registration to qualification.

- A reduced retention gap between white students and BAME students at Year 1-2, from a 5-year average of 5.4% to a 5-year average of 2.4%, by the end of 2023/24

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- A reduced retention gap between white students and BAME students at Year 2-3, from a 5-year average of 4.5% to a 5-year average of 1.5%, by the end of 2024/25
 - A reduced retention gap between White students and BAME students at Year 3-4, from a 5-year average of 3.8% to a 5-year average of 0.8%, by the end of 2025/26
2. Reduce the degree awarding gap between by Black, Asian and minority ethnic students and white students for “good” degrees, to be in line with the sector average.
- A reduced ‘good degree’ awarding gap of 4 percentage points from a 4-year average of 19% to a 4-year average of 15%, by the end of 2025/26
3. Improve the representation of disabled, Black, Asian and minority ethnic and female staff in senior roles
- An increased proportion of female staff who get promoted from 6.4% to 10% by 2022
 - An increased proportion of disabled staff in senior roles from 2.9% to 6% by 2022
 - An increased proportion of BAME staff in senior roles from 8% to 11% by 2022
4. Improve line managers’ capability to recruit, manage and develop diverse teams.
- 50% participation achieved by 2020, and 80% by 2021, on the following line manager development modules:
 - Management Practices
 - Prevent
 - Safeguarding
 - Unconscious Bias
 - Equality Essentials
 - By 2022, every interview panel member to have received training on the following module.
 - Recruitment, Selection and Interviewing (includes unconscious bias)
 - A reduced gap in Staff Survey results between disabled staff and non-disabled, for the following two metrics by 2022:
 - Satisfaction with line management (i.e. staff report that they are satisfied with line management) – from 5% (2017) to 2% (by 2022)
 - Satisfaction with managerial support (i.e. staff report that they receive positive managerial support) from 7% (2017) to 4% (by 2022)

As reporting on these objectives has been delayed by the pandemic, it is hoped fuller progress can be recorded on in 2021-22.

HESA data for 2015/6-2019/20 indicates that the Open University in Northern Ireland is performing well in a number of other priority areas, such as increasing the participation of under-represented groups in higher education (21.1% of students against a sector benchmark of 16.5%).¹ Furthermore, we have increased accessibility to study for students in

¹ [Widening participation: UK Performance Indicators 2019/20 | HESA](#)

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receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance with over c.100 assessments and referrals made during the reporting period, in line with the university's commitment in our [2020-25 Access and Participation Strategy](#) regarding Fees and funding to enable students who identify with characteristics associated with underrepresentation and disadvantage to be supported in the financial models available to them.

3 Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2019-20 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes No (go to Q.4) Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

Please refer to sections 1 and 2

3a With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

Please refer to section 1 and 2

3b What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)*

As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details):*

Other *(please specify and give details):*

In the reporting period the university responded the OU has continued to work on an organisation-wide initiative to identify the root causes which prevent Black, Asian and minority ethnic students and staff to reach their full potential. The reduction of institutional objectives is intended to give maximum focus on the more intractable issues of Black, Asian and minority ethnic student success, and issues relating to career progression for female/disabled/Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff. There has been immense progress with some previous equality objectives, such as recruitment of students with a disability (now around 18% overall), and some objectives are now devolved to units within the OU rather than being institution-wide objectives. The establishment of specific targets (as outlined in Question 2 above) is intended to introduce accountability and self-scrutiny into the process, data on which will be made available in 2021-22.

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The University has updated its equality statement on job descriptions and public facing advertisements: **“We value diversity and we recognise that different people bring different perspectives, ideas, knowledge and culture, and that this difference brings great strength”**.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done

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Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Adherence to equality and diversity responsibilities (the duties and all protected characteristics covered by Section 75 and other UK legislation) is implicit in all job descriptions.

The University has made it compulsory for new and continuing staff to undertake modules in Equality Essentials, while modules in Diversity and Understanding Unconscious Bias are mandatory at a unit level.

6 In the 2020-21 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? (*tick all that apply*)

- Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- Yes, in some departments/jobs
- No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
- No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2020/21 report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The Open University Planning system requires all Units within the University, of which The Open University based in Northern Ireland is one, to produce an annual business plan. Objectives within the plan, such as those relating to widening access to higher education for people from socially disadvantaged groups and for those with other protected characteristics, may also be included in the institution-wide Equality Diversity and Widening Access Plan, which is in effect the Action Plan for the OU and the Widening Access and Participation Plan submitted to the Department for Employment and Learning. Objectives in business plans which have a significant impact on equality and diversity for staff and/or students must be subjected to Equality Analysis. None of the objectives in the Northern Ireland business plan, which is a commercially sensitive document, required equality analysis in 2020/21.

Attainment of equality objectives will inform development of the new University Strategy (2022–2027).

Equality action plans/measures

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7 Within the 2020/21 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:

See Below

Actions ongoing:

See Below

Actions to commence:

See Below

Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

The Open University's Annual Objectives and regular monitoring reports are published on its website and the current plan includes objectives for Northern Ireland specifically, as well as for the entire University. We are currently awaiting publication of reports pertaining to the period 2020/21, and when published they will be made available here:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity/content/equality-scheme-objectives>

8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2020/21 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

Not applicable

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2020/21 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

- Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
- Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

10 Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: (*tick one box only*)

- All the time Sometimes Never

11 Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2020/21 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

See below (13)

12 In the 2020/21 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: (*tick all that apply*)

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- Face to face meetings
- Focus groups
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- Questionnaires
- Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation
- Internet discussions
- Telephone consultations
- Other (*please specify*):

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

A consultation on the refresh of the Equality Scheme was carried out in early 2020. The Open University has been undergoing a major period of strategic change in all parts of the United Kingdom and an early consequence of the pandemic was a noticeable absence of consultee responses. The University will attempt a further consultation in 2021 on the Disability Action Plan and Equality Scheme.

- 13** Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2020/21 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

2020/21 has been a most exceptional year because of the Covid-19 pandemic, with face-to-face activities largely impossible and no new consultations with Section 75 consultees. However, the OU is constantly raising awareness of its offering and the positive transformative impact it can have on people's lives, skills, employment prospects, personal development and self-actualisation. This is through promotion of its formal and informal courses, free online content, a UK leader in the promotion of social justice and its contribution to Northern Ireland as one of three universities through public events, scholarship and other mainstreamed activities. Promoting equality and diversity and good community relations are implicit and explicit in all we do. Consultation is more an opportunity to fulfil specific statutory duties under Section 75, which we welcome.

- 14** Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2020/21 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes
 No
 Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

[Insert link to any web pages where screening templates and/or other reports associated with Equality Scheme commitments are published]

15 Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*):

Nil

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2020/21:

Nil	Policy consultations conducted with screening assessment presented.
Nil	Policy consultations conducted with an equality impact assessment (EQIA) presented.
Nil	Consultations for an EQIA alone.

17 Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

Normal consultative processes have been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is asked to note that in 2020 the EDI team reviewed the University Equality Analysis Process and guidance with a view to increasing the quality of engagement throughout the university. This has led to a commitment to greater transparency, sharing of best practice and a more evidence based and outcome focused approach. Recommendations were approved by the EDI Steering Group and an action plan developed. This includes simplifying the guidance and providing more good practice examples, ensuring nation differences are clear and that nations are supported throughout the process, and additional training to support People Business Partners and Units. The new EQIA will be the subject of the next consultation with the Commission and with Section 75 consultees.

18 Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes
 No concerns were raised
 No
 Not applicable

Monitoring information has yet to be made public for the reporting period

- 22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2020/21 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

N/A – in the monitoring period there was no monitoring activity specific to Northern Ireland.

- 23** Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

Please refer to question 2.

The Open University in Northern Ireland submits a Widening Access and Participation Plan to the Department for the Economy each year and this establishes three-year targets for a number of student groups including people from the lowest socio-economic quartile, young men from this quartile, disabled students, students in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance and BAME students. This can be made available to the Commission on request.

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

- 24** Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2020/21, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

As an educational institution, the OU has a strong commitment to providing learning and development opportunities for staff to enable them to be effective in their roles and to fulfil their potential.

Everyone working at the OU needs to know something about equality and diversity. Staff working directly with students need to be able to respond to a wide range of needs and circumstances. Staff who develop learning materials need to know how to create inclusive and accessible resources. Managers need to know how to manage a diverse workforce effectively. Some staff need more specialist equality knowledge, such as those involved in advising others.

All staff need to know about their responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty (Great Britain) and the Section 75 duty (Northern Ireland). Our core training for all staff, the mandatory **Equality Essentials** module, provides full details of institutional and individual responsibility. It introduces staff to equality and diversity at The Open University, and promotes the impact and benefits that can be achieved from positive and fair behaviours. The **Understanding Unconscious Bias** module introduces staff to the idea of unconscious or 'hidden' bias, and how it can impact in the workplace. It provides staff

with the opportunity to think about situations where their own unconscious bias might affect their ability to make objective decisions or judgements.

Line managers and those involved in recruitment are required to complete awareness training via the **Recruitment, Selection and Interviewing at The Open University**, a sector leading module which scrutinises the end-to-end recruitment process in line with best practice (<https://www.gov.uk/employer-preventing-discrimination/recruitment>)

- 25** Please provide **any examples** of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

Among the many courses available to staff are the full range of Open University courses offered to the general public and also a range of internal staff development and training courses as described in the previous section.

In Northern Ireland we have included in our annual business plan ensuring that all staff take the **Understanding Unconscious Bias Module**. This has been implemented fully, with the module now compulsory for new members of staff. Additionally, staff complete the module **Understanding Equality Essentials** which introduces the Equality Act 2010 and the concept of protected characteristics, while a recently launched **Understanding Gender Identity** course offers the opportunity to increase their awareness of trans identity

All student facing staff have been asked to complete **Safeguarding Training**.

Student-facing staff also undertake regular training on **Disabled Students Allowances, Mental Health** and other issues.

The University is currently developing training concerning neurodiversity which we will report on in 2021/22.

Senior staff avail of training opportunities offered by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)

- 26** Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2020/21, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

Please refer to sections 1 and 2

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

- 27** How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2020/21?

Insert number here:

0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Section 3: Looking Forward

28 Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

Recent and mid-term reviews have concluded with the outcomes listed above. The University will commence the next review of its Equality Scheme in the academic year 2021/22.

29 Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

The institutional equality objectives are being focused on Black, Asian and minority ethnic students and staff, the promotion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, disabled people and women to senior posts and to the issues of unconscious bias, as detailed above. The University is committed to achieving recognised charter marks in pursuit of these objectives (Race Equality Charter, Athena SWAN, Disability Confident Scheme).

30 In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2020/21) reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

- Employment
- Goods, facilities and services
- Legislative changes
- Organisational changes/ new functions
- Nothing specific, more of the same
- Other (please state):

New language and culture arrangements in Northern Ireland as a result of the implementation of New Decade, New Approach.

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

1. Number of action measures for this reporting period that have been:

8

Fully achieved

0

Partially achieved

0

Not achieved

2. Please outline below details on all actions that have been fully achieved in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
National ⁱⁱⁱ	Open University Students' Association Disabled Students Group Network (OUSA DSG)	Ongoing	Students with disabilities are invited to participate in the OUSA DSG which provides and promotes services to enhance student experiences including holding specific events and facilitating social forums.
Regional ^{iv}	Student consultation events	Ongoing (annual)	Students with disabilities are invited to attend student consultation events which currently are held online.

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Local ^v	Student consultation events	Ongoing (annual)	Students with disabilities are invited to attend student consultation events which are currently held online
	Disabled Students' Allowances Needs Assessment Survey	Ongoing	Students who receive a DSA needs assessment are invited to submit feedback via an online survey. This helps to develop service delivery and inform discussion within the DSA sector.

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Ensure relevant Open University staff in Northern Ireland continue to receive relevant and up-to-date in-house disability	Ongoing	Improved knowledge of disability issues amongst staff. Regular training opportunities are provided including briefings on specific topics such as mental health, inclusive language, auxiliary support services for students with disabilities and

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	awareness training and guidance.		DSA. A range of training materials on topics such as equality for example, are also available to staff and included in induction training for new staff.
2			

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Implementing reasonable adjustments for students, including sharing of essential information with key personnel to support students.	Continuous	Providing a reasonable response, clear and consistent procedures to implement support such as alternative formats of study materials, curriculum modification, 1:1 non-medical help and assistive technology.
2	The OU has appointed a Senior Disability Support Assistant who alongside specialist colleagues, provides ongoing support and information to students with disabilities. This includes supporting students through the DSA application process.	Continuous	Availability of dedicated staff with key knowledge to offer consistency in supporting and advising current students and enquirers. This includes information and advice on internal and external support options.
3.	Disabled Students' Allowances Needs Assessment Survey	Continuous	Students who have a DSA needs assessment with the OU in Ireland are given the opportunity to submit feedback verbally and also via a survey. The feedback is used to monitor and inform

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			service delivery and also to communicate the interests of OU disabled students at regional DSA meetings with DfE and representatives from higher and further education institutions, therefore assisting in development of policy.
4.	The OU in NI has adopted measures to make disability support services more visible to prospective students and enquirers.	Continuous	Designing Open Days (online at present) and events to ensure there is a dedicated area for Disability Support queries, with a knowledgeable member of staff available to speak to students and enquirers. Enquirers feel more comfortable to ask questions and are aware that there are staff who can assist in this area.
5.	Increased numbers of students applying for DSA.	Continuous	In 2020/21, 805 (19%) students with declared a disability registered to study, with 3% in receipt of Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA)

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to 'encourage others' to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Appointment of a Senior Disability Support Assistant	Ongoing	Greater staff and student awareness of disability support.
2	Specific training for staff in student support roles on	Ongoing	Increased confidence and understanding of the importance of inclusive language and promoting

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	inclusive approaches to language.		self-awareness of language used in communications with students.

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
1	The Open University offers a Disabled Veterans' Scholarship Fund which can assist 50 eligible students with fees, disability support and careers support. Promoting this to students and enquirers as appropriate verbally, via OU website and through social media.	Ongoing	Increased awareness of support available for disabled veterans. Encouraging and supporting disabled veterans to disclose disabilities, access support and engage in education.
2			

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1				
2				

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4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1		
2		

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

Disabled Students' Allowance Needs Assessment Survey – issued to all students who receive a DSA needs assessment with the OU in Northern Ireland. The survey obtains qualitative and quantitative data.

Non-Medial Help Follow Up Feedback – students who receive DSA funded non-medical help are contacted at intervals throughout the academic year to offer feedback on their experience.

(b) Quantitative

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Disabled Students' Allowance Needs Assessment Survey – issued to all students who receive a DSA needs assessment with the OU in Northern Ireland. The survey obtains qualitative and quantitative data.

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

Please select

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation's annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

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ⁱ **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

ⁱⁱ **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

ⁱⁱⁱ **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments

^{iv} **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level

^v **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.