

Liverpool John Moores University

This case study explores why it has been possible to take such radical steps within the equality agenda at this particular University. On arrival in 1994, the new Equalities practitioner reviewed the four existing distinct Equalities policies covering anti-discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, race and sex. The Equalities practitioner challenged the thinking behind them because he believed that the application of the policies was haphazard and inconsistent. There were compliance measures in place but few proactive support initiatives to raise awareness about the policies and equality legislation in general. There was a need for transparent guidelines because staff had different interpretations on elements of the policies, in particular at that time with regard to expectations for giving lectures and attending lectures, which coincided with cultural and religious festivals. As a result a new policy on cultural and religious diversity was developed and implemented in 1999. However, it became obvious that five separate policies could be interpreted differently. Therefore a major redrafting and consultation exercise was undertaken to develop one comprehensive policy for equality and diversity, which extended the scope of previous stand alone policies to include equality on the grounds of: Class/ Socio-economic status; Gender (including gender reassignment); HIV/ Aids status; Socially excluded; and Sexual Orientation. The policy also makes explicit reference to race equality in compliance with the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. LJMU is one of the few HEIs in the UK that collects data on staff with respect to sexual orientation and religion. To achieve this new data collection the University carried out a staff audit in February 2002, which required disclosure in terms of a signature. A total of 2,507 forms was circulated, of which 1,117 forms (44%) were returned. Similar data are now collected from potential job applicants through the anonymous equality and diversity monitoring form. Staff recruitment and selection trends for the period January– April 2003 revealed that 84% returned the form and most applicants complimented the University for introducing the new form.

Training provision at LJMU was concentrated on fair recruitment and selection practices. The training portfolio was expanded by the equality officer to include disability awareness training (first delivered in 1995) and Cultural Diversity (1994). The courses were made compulsory and all newly appointed staff attended within the first twelve months of their appointment. These courses are in addition to the two-day programme on Managing Diversity in Recruitment and Selection, which remains mandatory for members of all short listing and interview panels. The ethos of training is to engage staff from all spheres of the University, from Professors to cleaners and staff on fixed-term contracts and to refrain from training one particular group to the exclusion of any other. The 'mixed training' has led to a sense of corporate identity especially in light of the fact that LJMU consists of fifty-one buildings over a 3-mile radius. Participants are invited to stay in touch. They are also encouraged to include each other on appointments panels and find out more about each other's roles by spending time in the different environments in which people work. It provides a space to challenge the assumptions people make and the "comfort zones" that they inhabit.

LJMU has an ethos of commitment and a 'can do' attitude to equalities – it can be done and therefore it will be done. Whereas many HEIs have stressed the barriers to implementing monitoring and made the assumption that 'they (the staff or students) will not return the form', LJMU provides an example of how it can be done if the right environment is created and appropriate support is provided to meet the diverse needs.

