

ECU STRATEGIC PLAN 2007-2010

Equality Challenge Unit supports the higher education sector to realise the potential of all staff and students whatever their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or age, to the benefit of those individuals, the higher education institutions and society.

This strategic plan sets out the objectives of Equality Challenge Unit for 2007-2010 and the strategies whereby those objectives will be achieved.

The higher education sector in the UK is recognised as being amongst the best in the world. Its success is dependent on students and staff being able to realise their full potential. ECU's role is to support the sector in enabling staff and students to fulfil their potential regardless of their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or age, and to act as a catalyst for change in relation to equality and diversity.

There are overwhelming moral, legal and social arguments that underpin the importance and value of integrating equality and diversity into the work of higher education institutions. But the justification goes further than this. It is an essential part of ECU's strategic plan that its work aligns with and supports sector priorities, be they promoting the highest quality student experience and world-class research, widening participation, or promoting the enhancement of the wider role of universities and colleges of higher education within the economy and society. This alignment will maximise the extent to which equality and diversity are genuinely integrated into the work of higher education institutions. It will also ensure that the promotion of equality and diversity contributes to the objectives of the institutions. So although the aims of this strategic plan are expressed in terms of working with the sector to promote equality and diversity, ultimately its aims should be indivisible from those of the sector.

ECU's strategic plan has four objectives. Underpinning them all is the development of an equality framework. This builds on the work previously done by ECU, and will take the form of an overarching approach which recognises the relationship between the different equality strands, and acknowledges the way in which they interact and converge in the work of universities and colleges. The framework will link the objectives of this strategy so that together they form a coherent programme.

One of the first priorities of the framework, and therefore ECU's first strategic objective, will be to develop a system to enable the sector to identify and measure equality and diversity, to assess the impact of equality and diversity practice, and to develop evidentially based benchmarks and outcomes. This will form the basis for a refinement of ECU's strategic and operational plans as well as a basis for a potentially major advocacy campaign both within the sector and through the media.

Throughout the period of this plan, ECU will be developing its previous work in putting together the building blocks of support to further the integration of equality and diversity into sector activities. This is ECU's second objective. As a centralised agency, ECU is uniquely

placed to provide information about relevant developments in law and practice, to work with the sector to embed equality and diversity, and to disseminate the many examples of excellent practice in individual institutions (both in the UK and abroad) for the benefit of the whole sector.

However, the work of ECU needs to go further than the provision of a centralised resource for information and guidance. Even though good policies and procedures are generally in place in higher education institutions, institutions are complex organisations and decisions are not and cannot be made solely on the basis of policies and procedures. Decisions will be made according to a web of factors and circumstances. To engage with and influence that substrata will involve a programme of more fundamental institutional change. ECU will be working with the sector to develop a strategy, its third objective, that addresses those more subtle and fundamental processes so as to ensure that a sustained programme of change is in place by 2010.

ECU will be able to achieve little on its own. It can only be effective if it works with the HEIs and sector groups. It will also need to be an authoritative and credible advocate for equality and diversity. Throughout the period of this strategic plan, the Unit will ensure that it works in a way that is fully integrated with the sector, delivers a high quality and cost effective service, and is rigorously focused on the successful implementation of this strategy.

ECU objectives 2007-2010

- 1. To develop an authoritative system for measuring progress on equality and diversity within the higher education sector**
- 2. To support HEIs in implementing effective equality and diversity policies and practices**
- 3. To be a catalyst for change: to support sustained institutional change in relation to equality and diversity**
- 4. To be an effective advocate for the development of equality and diversity practice within the sector**

To achieve these objectives ECU will:

- work in partnership with higher education institutions, agencies and groups

- define the parameters of its remit by reference to the legal equality strands: in particular gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, and age
- prioritise the harmonisation of procedures across equality strands whilst maintaining the specific profile of each
- ensure that ECU is an effective and dynamic organisation

OBJECTIVE 1: To develop an authoritative system for measuring progress on equality and diversity within the higher education sector		
STRATEGY	INTENDED OUTCOME	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
Working with sector groups and agencies, to produce resources that strengthen the evidence base for equality within the sector, for use by institutions	<p>Identify criteria for assessment</p> <p>Provide resources for institutions that assist them in establishing where they and the sector are now in relation to all areas of equality and diversity</p> <p>Facilitate development by the sector of KPIs, benchmarks and objectives</p> <p>Provide empirical underpinning for E&D initiatives within institutions and the sector</p> <p>Provide mechanism for testing impact of individual and sector projects and programmes</p> <p>Provide a basis for advocacy</p>	<p>Production by ECU of authoritative reference documents, widely distributed throughout the sector</p> <p>Production of resources utilised and considered useful by sector</p> <p>Development by the sector of meaningful KPIs, benchmarks and objectives</p>
OBJECTIVE 2: To support HEIs in implementing effective equality and diversity policies and practices		

STRATEGY	INTENDED OUTCOME	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
<p>1. Programme of publications, provision of information and other resources</p> <p>Produce with and for the sector a comprehensive programme of publications, support and exchange of information, aimed at integrating equality practices into institutions' operations and drawing together examples of good practice</p>	<p>An authoritative and practical programme with which the sector engages, and which informs all key decision makers within institutions</p>	<p>HEI/sector performance on E&D, as measured against KPIs (developed in Objective 1 process)</p> <p>Involvement and support of HEIs in programmes</p> <p>Feedback to ECU as to usefulness of initiatives and services provided</p>
<p>2. Cross-equality strand projects</p> <p>Undertake projects that identify and address discriminatory barriers. These will include projects that relate to aspects of the sector as a whole, and also to specific types of institution/subject areas:</p> <p>(a) Students Specific projects, developed in partnership with student groups and relevant professional networks such as admissions staff, careers advisors, E&D and academic staff</p> <p>(b) Staff Specific projects developed with staff and professional groups and trade unions</p>	<p>Targeted projects, complementing the programme of publications and support, which focus on specific aspects of the experience of students and staff</p> <p>Engagement by HE groups and networks in equality and diversity issues</p>	<p>Targeted impact on specific aspects of sector activities</p> <p>ECU programme that reflects diversity and specialisms of sector</p> <p>Engagement by specialist institutions and subject matters in ECU programme</p> <p>Feedback to ECU as to usefulness of initiatives and services provided</p>

<p>(c) Inclusive campuses Projects that identify and promote inclusive practice in terms of the physical, social and cultural experiences of all staff, students and visitors within the HE environments</p>		
<p>3. Strand specific projects</p> <p>Specific projects will be developed for each equality strand reflecting specific considerations and requirements of each equality strand</p>	<p>Different requirements of each equality strand explicitly addressed by sector</p> <p>Compliance by sector with legal requirements e.g. public sector duties, new Age Regulations</p>	<p>HEI/sector performance in relation to each specific equality strand, as measured against KPIs (developed in Objective 1 process)</p> <p>Support and engagement of staff and students in each equality group for E&D programmes</p> <p>Avoidance of investigations (by EHRC)</p>
<p>4. National and regional priorities</p> <p>Work with Welsh and Northern Irish institutions and groups to ensure that ECU programme properly addresses their priorities</p> <p>Liaise with Scottish Funding Council and Equality Forward in provision of publications to Scottish institutions, and to ensure broad coherence of strategies</p> <p>Work with English regional groups to ensure that programme properly addresses regional priorities</p>	<p>ECU programme that reflects Welsh and Northern Irish priorities</p> <p>Programme relevant throughout England</p> <p>Broad coherence of ECU and Equality Forward strategies</p>	<p>Engagement by Wales and Northern Ireland in ECU programmes</p> <p>Engagement by English regions</p> <p>Feedback to ECU from Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland (and regions) as to merits of initiatives and services provided</p>
<p>OBJECTIVE 3: To be a catalyst for change: to support sustained institutional change in relation to equality and diversity</p>		

STRATEGY	INTENDED OUTCOME	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
1. Developing the case for E&D Develop a programme involving key players in sector (including sector agencies) to inform and debate the case for E&D	Influence and inform decision making	Clearly and consistently articulated case for E&D in HE sector
2. Working with external partners Work with private and public sector partners to influence the climate and decision making processes of HEIs in relation to E&D	Introduction or embedding of E&D into mainstream processes	Creation of partnership projects inside and outside HE sector which work towards common equality goals
OBJECTIVE 4: To be an effective advocate for the development of equality and diversity practice within the sector		
STRATEGY	INTENDED OUTCOME	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
Ensure that ECU priorities reflect sector priorities (including funders and stakeholders) Active engagement with sector networks, agencies and groups, and trade unions	E&D fed into sector priorities and planning Clarity as to ECU's role in sector Authority and impact of ECU's work	E&D embedded in sector priorities Coherence and clarity in sector for ECU's role and programme
Develop external relations strategy that promotes ECU strategy	Use of media to achieve ECU programme	Improved credibility of ECU within (and outside) sector
Structure work of ECU so as to focus on implementation of this strategic plan	Effective output driven work practices	Achievement of strategic plan

1 June 2009