

Evolve, assist, transform, understand

ECU strategic plan 2011-13



Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK.

ECU works closely with colleges of higher education and universities to seek to ensure that staff and students are not unfairly excluded, marginalised or disadvantaged because of age, disability, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or through any combination of these characteristics or other unfair treatment.

Providing a central source of expertise, research, advice and leadership, we support institutions in building a culture that provides equality of both opportunity and outcome, promotes good relations, values the benefits of diversity and provides a model of equality for the wider UK society.

Foreword

Since the first substantive anti-discrimination legislation over 40 years ago, we have seen a transformation in the understanding of equality, together with the importance of diversity. Initially, inequality was understood simply as the mistreatment of people directly arising from their identities; what has become known as direct discrimination. Over time, that understanding evolved to include indirect discrimination, victimisation and harassment.

But it was not until the murder of Stephen Lawrence (and the subsequent report of the inquiry into the police investigation by Sir William Macpherson) that a better understanding of systemic or institutional discrimination was reflected in legislation. Systemic discrimination is embedded within strategies and practices, and often not based on conscious intent. This was recognised first through the public sector race duty in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, followed by gender and disability duties and, in 2011, by a single overarching duty. In short, the shift from a focus on intended discrimination to a much broader one which understands systemic inequality has been transformative.

The last 13 years have seen a plethora of national initiatives from central government to advance equality, including legislation (most recently the Equality Act 2010). However, with a change in government and a dramatically different economic environment, the focus of activity will likely be more localised, such as greater collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs) and communities.

Meanwhile, there has been a shift in understanding of the meaning of equality from that of equality of opportunity to, at least in some respects, equality of outcome (as evidenced by the recent extension of the public sector duties, gender pay reporting requirements and positive action) and indeed equality of dignity. Inherent within this is a greater understanding of the benefits of diversity – the recognition that different individuals contribute different ideas, skills and knowledge – fostered by a culture that can flexibly meet different requirements and which values difference. This is often reflected as the ‘business case’ for equality – that diversity advances excellence and success. The methodology of the Athena SWAN programme is a good example of the promotion of diversity and systemic change.

At the same time, the development over the past decade of a human rights discourse in the public sector, including explicit equality requirements, is helping to embed equality as a key aspect of effective service delivery. Alongside this is the growing internationalisation of equality standards through the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Convention on Eliminating Discrimination Against Women, the EU Treaty of Lisbon and many others. Equally, socio-

economic disadvantage and particularly the intersection with 'traditional' equality considerations pose new and complex challenges.

Public services, especially the higher education sector, are facing the most challenging financial settlement in living memory. The sector is faced with possible mergers, restructures, reorganisations, the sharing of services and even closures. The comprehensive spending review will ultimately impact on public finances available in the higher education sector for all four countries of the UK. Current proposals in England will bring about the wholesale transfer of most higher education funding for teaching from the state to students, through increased fees and loans. This will have major consequences in virtually every area of university life, including equality and diversity. ECU will seek to meet these challenges; both with respect to our own income arrangements and also in helping the sector meet what are likely to be significant equality considerations arising from these changes.

The political environment within which the sector operates is also changing. HEIs are increasingly competing in a global market, with an evolving diversity of suppliers, including private and other providers. This will have consequences for compliance and best practice in the area of equality but perhaps further underscores the arguments for diversity.

These issues, alongside legislative developments such as establishing and operating a new public sector duty in England, Scotland and Wales and the abolition of the national default retirement age, will require a focused and potent programme of activity by ECU.

The higher education sector occupies a unique position in society; providing ideal drivers that result in economic as well as social change. Embedding equality and diversity, particularly through systemic change, has the potential to produce huge benefits for society as a whole. HEIs have the opportunity to influence people at a formative period in their life, contribute new and developing models of economic and social activity and embedded attitudes that staff and students will carry with them into wider society.



David Ruebain
Chief Executive

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Since being established in 2001, ECU has developed into an authoritative central equality and diversity resource for the sector, extending our remit in 2006 to include students as well as staff. Our team has expertise covering all equality groups, and we are able to provide fast, responsive information on topical issues and new legislation as well as proactively developing strategic direction and initiatives for the sector.

Based on evidence from the sector gained through data gathering and first-hand reports, ECU has initiated new research projects which explore barriers to inclusion and progression for staff and students. We work in partnership with equality practitioners, professional networks and other relevant organisations to distil and disseminate this information and influence the sector at all levels, in order to stimulate the changes necessary to deliver equality outcomes and increase diversity.

ECU has also sought to help eliminate discrimination in higher education by influencing individual institutions, national organisations and sector networks to embed equality issues into their policies and practices, by responding to consultations and by being part of their decision-making structures. ECU will continue to focus on making equality and diversity a mainstream issue for the sector so that it is part of its everyday business. In addition, we will continue to work collaboratively with HEIs, other sector agencies and representative organisations.

In September 2010 ECU significantly expanded activities and service delivery into Scotland. We are delighted to now be able to work comprehensively with Scottish HEIs, extending all our core services including training events, research collaborations and the ECU advice service, alongside access to our publications and materials. Our support for the Scottish sector will also include a number of Scotland-specific projects, developed in consultation with Scottish HEIs.

The 2009 review of ECU, commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers, confirmed that we were operating effectively and efficiently within our remit. The review noted that performance levels and outputs were high, and that the sector particularly valued ECU's central role in providing expertise, intelligence and good practice. ECU was also highly valued for our role in raising the profile of equality and diversity in the sector. This highlights the successes of our 2007-10 strategy of applying this expertise and sharing good practice to support HEIs to implement effective equality and diversity policies and practices. Our strategic focus on providing targeted materials for a variety of institutional functions has been successful in supporting sustained institutional change and has enabled ECU to be an effective advocate for equality and diversity.

The review further reflected a core principle of the previous strategy by noting our strong collaborative relationships with HEIs and sector bodies.

The review also made specific recommendations for ECU's 2011-13 planning cycle. Building on the previous successful strategy, we will address these recommendations, including further developing our continuing student agenda in close cooperation with institutions, student representative bodies and partner organisations.

In addition, we are exploring a range of initiatives to diversify our income from our current base of six funders (the higher education funding councils, the Department for Education and Learning of Northern Ireland, Universities UK and GuildHE).

Specifically, ECU is developing proposals:

- = to extend our work to parts of the further education sector and private HEIs
- = to develop a 'service plus' model of providing bespoke consultancy services to HEIs for a fee
- = to consider further internal cost savings including through sharing services
- = to explore European Union, trust and other project funding

We will also ensure that our core services are protected for those bodies that we are currently funded to support by taking measures to restrict external access to ECU resources.

ECU strategic priorities 2011-2013

= **Evolve**

to position the work of ECU in light of the dramatically changing economic and funding environment to assist institutions in meeting these challenges

= **Assist**

to assist institutions in embedding the requirements and ambitions of equality legislation within the higher education sector, in particular the Equality Act 2010 and the abolition of the default retirement age

= **Transform**

to work with institutions to develop strategies and methodologies to transform systemic or cultural practices and approaches which unfairly exclude, marginalise or disadvantage individuals or groups

= **Understand**

to progress the development of methods to gather and use evidence of, and data on, equality and diversity within the higher education sector at a national and local level

Integrated within this strategy, ECU will address the needs of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and will endeavour to cover all areas of equality, prioritising according to evidence of need within the sector.

Under the new strategy we will develop our stakeholder engagement work, continuing to work in collaboration with institutions on pilot projects to jointly investigate and produce guidance materials with effective practice examples. ECU will build on relationships with relevant organisations outside the sector such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the unions, national and governmental bodies and the funding councils. Through these relationships we will influence wider equality policy development and embed equality in the remits of external organisations relevant to the sector. ECU will also seek to raise our external profile in matters relating to equality and diversity for the benefit of the higher education sector with greater media and other public-facing initiatives.

Measuring the benefits to the sector

The moral, legal and reputational arguments for equality and diversity are reasonably well understood but there are also clear economic arguments. From 2011 ECU is introducing a new set of performance measures to assess the impact of our activities on the sector and demonstrate what has changed as a result. As part of this process we will continue to monitor, and seek to increase, citations and media references to our publications and activities.

As well as working to meet organisational performance targets, ECU makes individual project value assessments at the commencement of projects and their impact is evaluated on completion. Through these systems we expect to provide considerable educational, financial and social benefits to HEIs, which include:

- = cost savings on consultancy and training while improving equality standards more efficiently
- = cost savings by reducing the likelihood of legal challenges through implementing robust equality practices and processes
- = cost savings through access to national research findings, advice and support, which can reduce or negate the need for individual institutional research
- = improved staff and student achievement and attainment through guidance on more targeted and informed support
- = improved experience of working and studying in higher education
- = direct gains for institutions from working with ECU and other HEIs to develop and improve equality policies and practices through projects and workshops
- = access to an equality advice service
- = access to extensive, authoritative and up-to-date resources and online information

Key performance indicators for ECU strategic plan 2011-13

The following key performance indicators are proposed for 2011-13. Many are reliant on an ECU survey of the sector to measure the progress over the three year period. This survey will be established in 2011 and then run annually.

Evolve To position the work of ECU in light of the dramatically changing economic and funding environment to assist institutions in meeting these challenges		
Sector outcomes and benefits	Key performance indicators	Measurement of key performance indicators
Institutions are able to navigate economic developments without sacrificing equality principles, therefore enhancing their domestic and global reputations and increasing staff and student satisfaction. Institutions can retain their competitive edge and global reputation, while meeting the equality and diversity challenges of increased globalisation. Increased active senior management engagement with the equality agenda. ECU to diversify income sources to ensure continued high quality service delivery.	Identifiable ECU support for the sector around equality issues, reputation and the business case, which will include events, seminars and guidance.	Number of contacts reporting awareness of support in the ECU annual sector surveys.
		Number of participants reporting that they are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with ECU support in event and publication feedback forms.
	Higher take-up of tasks and responsibilities relating to equality implementation from senior managers.	Number of publication downloads obtained from website data.
		Number of ECU activities aimed at senior management staff and increased attendance of senior managers at equality and diversity events.
		Number of examples of new or increased senior and middle management engagement in equality issues cited in the ECU annual surveys.
	Percentage increases in ECU income received from non-core funding sources.	ECU annual financial reports.

Assist

To assist institutions in embedding the requirements and ambitions of equality legislation within the higher education sector, in particular the Equality Act 2010 and the abolition of the default retirement age

Sector outcomes and benefits	Key performance indicators	Measurement of key performance indicators
<p>Institutional compliance with legislation to reduce the number of legal challenges and accelerate progress towards equality.</p> <p>Strategic compliance with the single public sector duty and developed frameworks to ensure compliance with the abolition of the default retirement age.</p> <p>Evolving differences in law and practice in the four countries of the UK are understood within the sector.</p>	<p>Identifiable support for the sector in setting equality objectives that are both compliant and meaningful, including hosting events and seminars that are responsive to the needs of the sector.</p>	<p>Number of contacts reporting knowledge of the existence of support in the ECU annual sector surveys.</p>
		<p>Number of contacts reporting knowledge of and attendance at events and seminars as reported in the ECU annual sector surveys.</p>
		<p>Number of case studies citing activities which reach beyond compliance and embed culture change as reported in the ECU annual sector surveys.</p>
	<p>Number of downloads of ECU publications in this area.</p>	<p>Website data and contacts reporting that they are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with publications in this area and feedback on how useful these have been to bring about positive changes, as reported in the ECU annual sector surveys and publication feedback forms.</p>

Transform

To work with institutions to develop strategies and methodologies to transform systemic or cultural practices and approaches which unfairly exclude, marginalise or disadvantage individuals or groups

Sector outcomes and benefits	Key performance indicators	Measurement of key performance indicators
<p>Enhanced reputation of institutions in providing inclusive and supportive environments in which to work and study, resulting in increased recruitment, retention and achievement of a diverse staff and student body.</p>	<p>Increase in institutional activities as a result of ECU guidance to transform systemic or cultural practices and approaches which unfairly exclude, marginalise or disadvantage individuals or groups.</p>	<p>Number and volume of HEIs reporting undertaking activities as demonstrated by project feedback and evaluation and from examples cited in the ECU annual sector surveys.</p>
	<p>Increase in number of Athena SWAN members, award-holders and award progression and the extension of the methodology to other equality areas.</p>	<p>Increased membership and number of award holders and progression to higher awards of Athena SWAN.</p>
		<p>Increased numbers of women working in science, engineering and technology departments in higher education and women working at senior level as shown in ECU impact surveys.</p>
		<p>A pilot extension of Athena SWAN methodology to another equality area.</p>

Understand

To progress the development of methods to gather and use evidence of, and data on, equality and diversity within the higher education sector at a national and local level

Sector outcomes and benefits	Key performance indicators	Measurement of key performance indicators
<p>HEIs to have a better understanding within their institutions and across the sector of the picture of equality and diversity within their institution. This will enable more effective targeting of institutional resources to reduce discrimination, increase diversity and improve the retention progression and achievements of staff and students.</p>	<p>Increase in the number of HEIs viewing one or more heidi equality reports (which are advised by ECU) and an increase in institutional activities instigated by these reports.</p>	<p>Percentage increase shown in the heidi data usage report.</p>
		<p>Percentage increase of HEIs undertaking activities instigated by heidi equality as reported in the ECU annual sector surveys.</p>
	<p>Increase in downloads of the ECU annual statistical report and an increase in institutional activities instigated by the statistical report.</p>	<p>Percentage increase in downloads of the ECU annual statistical reports as shown in website data.</p>
	<p>Increase in the number of HEIs gathering evidence on how they eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations across the protected characteristics as laid out in the Equality Act 2010.</p>	<p>Percentage increase in the number of institutional activities instigated by the statistical report as reported in ECU annual sector surveys.</p>
		<p>Percentage increase of HEIs publishing this evidence as reported in the ECU annual sector surveys.</p>

Alternative formats are available

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