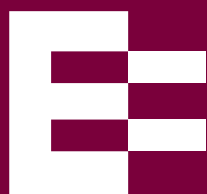


Inclusive Students' Unions

Equality and diversity in practice



Equality Challenge Unit



national union of students

Equality Challenge Unit

Inclusive Students' Unions

Equality and diversity in practice

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Summary

The key recommendations from this guidance are summarised below.

Knowing the legislation – section 2

- = Assign key members of staff to keep the union and its officers abreast of equality and diversity issues, and to champion equality and diversity within the union.
- = Consider aligning internal union policies and procedures relating to equality and diversity with those of the parent institution.

Accessible communication strategies – section 4

- = Collect and use data on the membership to ensure services are inclusive.
- = Consider inclusive ways of communicating to the full membership.
- = Consider adopting publicity campaigns targeting equality groups that may not access union services.
- = Integrate equality and diversity training into the orientation/induction period.

Accessible democracy and representation structures – section 5

- = Collect and monitor the diversity of members standing for elected positions in the union to determine equality groups for future targeting.
- = Carry out impact assessment of representative structures with members from equality groups, to find areas of positive intervention (which may be echoed elsewhere within the union) and to identify barriers to involvement that require strategy for change.
- = Monitor the representation of equality groups within voter turnout to determine any positive action required to improve participation by all equality groups in the future.

Accessible union services – section 6

- = Carry out accessibility and inclusivity audits on all union service spaces to ensure they are accessible to all equality groups.
- = Consider running a range of events to ensure equality groups are not excluded by alcohol culture.

Summary

- = Provide training for clubs and society officers outlining principles of equality of opportunity.
- = Work with parent institution's disability officer (or equivalent) to produce materials for clubs and societies that are inclusive of disabled students.

Equality and diversity for union staff – section 7

- = Carry out impact assessment of staff recruitment policies and practices.
- = Provide equality and diversity training to all staff.

Given the potential readership of this document in the students' union sector, care has been taken to allow each section to be read in isolation, although we recommend that sections 2 (existing initiatives in the sector), 2.2 (legislative background) and 4 (accessible communications) are essential reading for all staff and elected officers.

1 Introduction

This guidance represents the second stage of a 2007/08 project carried out by Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) in conjunction with the Association for Managers in Students' Unions (AMSU, www.amsu.net) and the National Union of Students (NUS, www.nus.org.uk). It provides further information and examples of inclusive practice within students' unions in response to research undertaken in 2007 on equality and diversity issues.

The impetus to create this guidance resulted from an acknowledgement that although higher education institutions (HEIs) have been required to work transparently to meet various legislative demands in relation to equality, including relatively new agendas of proactive work on race, disability and gender equality, there has been a lack of clarity about the equality legislation requirements as they apply to students' unions.

While the students' union movement may be renowned for challenging practice within HEIs, it has become increasingly important for individual unions to be able to demonstrate that their own policies and practices can withstand scrutiny. This guidance seeks to explore what is meant by inclusive practice in a students' union context, and provides examples of good practice already adopted in parts of the sector. The guidance covers all functional areas of a students' union, from membership services through to commercial services and union staff, and will be useful to elected officers and staff alike.

The guidance has been partly shaped by findings of research undertaken by ECU during 2007. This research had the participation of almost 500 students and members of students' union staff, who responded to ECU surveys seeking their views on the inclusiveness and accessibility of various aspects of union life: services, facilities, communications, democratic processes, and the behaviours and attitudes of staff and student officers. The survey findings were published in *Inclusive Students' Unions: Survey Findings 2007* (ECU, 2007).

The survey was followed up with a focus event held by ECU in October 2007, and attendance at higher education conferences, to further inform this guidance. Many examples of practice emerged where unions had proactively sought to include diverse student groups, and some of these are illustrated in this guidance in order to share learning.

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The guidance is supplemented by case studies to provide examples of practical interventions for inclusive practice already adopted within the students' union sector. It is hoped that students' unions will want to take up some of the examples of good practice highlighted throughout this publication to enhance the diversity of members accessing union services and improve the inclusivity of policies and practices for students and staff.

2 Background and legislative context

There are just over 150 higher education students' unions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – the same number as there are HEIs. There is wide variance in the number of staff employed by individual unions, and in the number of paid elected officer posts within each union. The National Union of Students (NUS, www.nus.org.uk) estimates that each students' union has between five and ten posts for unpaid, part-time elected officers, often including leaders of what they refer to as 'liberation campaigns', such as women's officer and black students officer positions.

In addition to lobbying, campaigning, debating and carrying out other representative activities, most students' unions facilitate student activities (clubs and societies, volunteering opportunities, sport), offer support (through advice centres, helplines, job shops), and provide venues to bring their members together. Most students' unions receive some funding through an annual allocation, also called the block grant, from their educational institution. Many students' unions supplement this income from commercial sales from their venues and shops, and from marketing revenue.

2.1 The diversity of the UK higher education student body

In 2007, ECU commissioned a mapping exercise of equality data relating to staff and students in higher education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This exercise identified existing data as well as gaps in data, and helped inform *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2008* (ECU, 2008a). The following summarises some of the key data relating to the make-up of the student body.

- = 41.6 per cent of undergraduate students are male and 58.4 per cent are female.
- = 35.9 per cent of all female undergraduates study part time, compared with 28.7 per cent of male undergraduates.
- = Around one in six (17 per cent) of undergraduate (UK-domiciled) students are from a black or minority ethnic (BME) background. The BME representation is lower among part-time students, and lower among women than men.
- = The largest BME group is Asian or Asian British (6.4 per cent), the next largest is black or black British (5.4 per cent).

Background and legislative context

- = 8.2 per cent of the undergraduate student population declare a disability, almost half of whom are dyslexic. Just over 7000 declare mental health conditions, accounting for 5 per cent of the declared disabled group.
- = Almost two-thirds of the undergraduate student population are under 25 years of age. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) students are younger on average than non-STEM; full-time students are younger on average than part-time; and white students are younger on average than BME students.
- = Partial data are available for socio-economic status of undergraduates. Among full-time first-year undergraduates (where the data are more complete), just over half come from a professional parental background. Fifty-five per cent of white students come from a professional background, compared with 43.2 per cent of BME students, and male students are slightly more likely to do so than female students.
- = Some of these general patterns also apply among postgraduate students. The main differences are that the gender gap is smaller in postgraduate study, with 53.4 per cent female and 41.6 per cent male. BME representation among postgraduates (14.8 per cent of UK-domiciled) is lower than among undergraduate students. The declared disabled percentage is also lower (4.6 per cent), and fewer disabled postgraduates than undergraduates declare dyslexia as their main area of disability (1.7 per cent of all postgraduates).
- = Postgraduates are, on average, older than undergraduates, and almost a third are over 35.
- = In terms of overall satisfaction with their course of study, older students (31+ years) are more positive than younger ones, as are white students compared with BME groups, and disabled students.

Historically there has been a deficit of research into the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) staff and students in higher education. To address this gap, ECU published a large-scale research report in March 2009. The research found unequivocally that while HEIs provide a very positive space for many LGBT students, there is a real need for the sector to engage with this area and review how it provides support and addresses discrimination against LGBT staff and students (www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/lgbt-staff-and-students-in-he). Monitoring data on sexual orientation and gender identity are not routinely captured, meaning that it is impossible to compare the achievement and satisfaction of LGBT students with those of other students. The NUS reports that LGBT students can face

discrimination, harassment and bullying from their peers and lecturers, and barriers to participating in students' unions because of direct or indirect homophobia and transphobia.

The 2001 census declares 77 per cent of respondents to have a religious affiliation, 15.5 per cent to have no religious affiliation, and 7.3 per cent not stated.

It is also worth noting the high proportion of international (non-UK-domiciled) students studying at HEIs. Figures for 2006/07 from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, www.hesa.ac.uk) show that 12 per cent of all full-time first-degree students are international (non-UK-domiciled), and 66 and 49 per cent of all full-time taught and research postgraduates, respectively, are international (non-UK-domiciled) students.

2.2 Equality legislation and HEIs

For the purpose of the equality legislation, HEIs can be employers, educators, service providers and public bodies. This broad range of functions means that institutions must adhere to the full range of equalities legislation as it applies to each type of activity. Full details of these legal obligations can be found on ECU's website (www.ecu.ac.uk/law), and are summarised below.

- = As **employers**, HEIs are bound by anti-discrimination legislation in respect of their employees in relation to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, and religion or belief.
- = As **education providers**, HEIs are bound by anti-discrimination legislation in respect of their students in relation to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, and religion and belief.
- = As **service providers**, HEIs are bound by anti-discrimination legislation in respect of their service users in relation to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and religion or belief. While age discrimination is not yet unlawful in relation to service provision, distinctions between equality groups and an attempt to harmonise the different equality areas will be addressed in the Equality Bill expected in 2009. More details of the implementation of the Bill can be found at www.ecu.ac.uk/law.
- = As **public bodies**, HEIs are required to adhere to both the general and specific equality duties, which vary slightly depending on the equality area. One of the most recent and key tranches of equality legislation is often referred to as the

Background and legislative context

'public sector duties', or 'positive duties' on equality. These duties currently cover race (since April 2001), disability (since December 2006) and gender (since April 2007). It is worth noting that a single equality duty that will also include age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion and belief is expected to be introduced by the Equality Bill.

A key element of the specific equality duty for race, disability and gender equality is the publication of an Equality Scheme; some public bodies have chosen to have one scheme incorporating all three equality strands. Such a scheme should cover:

- = the way in which people facing inequalities covered by the scheme have been involved in its development
- = actions the public authority has taken, or intends to take, to carry out equality impact assessment on its current and future policies and practices
- = how the authority has gathered (or will gather) information about the effect of its policies and practices on people facing inequalities, and how such information will be used
- = how the public authority will implement and monitor the scheme, which should be reviewed at least every three years.

In addition to complying with their public sector duties, HEIs need to ensure the 'fair' operation of the students' union pursuant to the Education Act 1994, and allow freedom of speech pursuant to Section 43 of the Education Act (No. 2) 1986.

2.3 Equality legislation and students' unions

For the purposes of equalities legislation, students' unions can be employers and service providers, and must adhere to the equalities legislation as it applies to each activity.

- = As **employers**, students' unions are bound by anti-discrimination legislation in respect of their employees in relation to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, and religion or belief.
- = As **service providers**, students' unions are bound by anti-discrimination legislation in respect of their service users in relation to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and religion or belief. While age discrimination is not yet

unlawful in relation to service provision, distinctions between equality groups and an attempt to harmonise the different equality areas will be addressed in the Equality Bill expected in 2009. More details of the implementation of the Bill can be found at www.ecu.ac.uk/law.

Positive duties

Students' unions, while not public bodies in their own right, will be affected by the positive duties of their parent institution (explored in section 2.2).

Many students' unions will be involved in contractual relationships with their parent institution, for example through use of premises and through provision of services on behalf of the university. Statutory guidance from the three former equality commissions (now subsumed into the Equality and Human Rights Commission, www.equalityhumanrights.com) reminds HEIs that contracts procuring services need to include conditions requiring contractors to meet the race, disability and gender equality provisions of the relevant statute when providing services under the contract. The guidance provided (which is still in force) outlines that these contractual requirements should be proportionate to the relevance of the contract to the public sector equality duty (for more information see www.equalityhumanrights.com and click on For advisers, Codes of practice).

Practical steps

On a practical level, it is recommended that students' unions maintain the same institutional standard in relation to the promotion of equality and diversity as their parent institution. Indeed, *AMSU's Diversity Report 2006* recommends that 'unions would be wise to act as if they were covered by this legal (public sector duty) requirement.' In addition, students' unions are charitable organisations. Guidance from the Charity Commission (2008) suggests that one of the ways a charity can demonstrate it is fit for purpose (hallmark 3) is to show it 'recognises, promotes and values equality and diversity in beneficiaries, staff and volunteers, and in all areas of its activity.' Students' unions may decide that the most effective way of ensuring fitness for purpose in this respect is by implementing the equivalent of an equality scheme.

3 Equality initiatives in the students' union sector

3.1 National Union of Students

Black, LGBT, disabled and women students are represented by specifically elected officers on the NUS National Executive Committee. The officers convene the four liberation campaigns aimed at addressing the inequalities faced by particular groups of students within the UK educational system and supporting the establishment of liberation groups and officers in students' unions (the four groups have been identified by students themselves over time, and established through NUS democratic structures). The officers are elected by students who self-define into those groups and are elected specifically to represent them and campaign on their behalf. Autonomous campaigns also operate in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Staff working in the Social Policy Unit of the NUS also look at issues faced by mature and international students, as well as those with children. NUS has an international student campaign (www.officeronline.co.uk/international) that includes a specific project funded by the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) for international education, which is developing and piloting an international student strategy for students' unions.

- = Despite 20 per cent of NUS members being from BME groups, they account for fewer than 4 per cent of elected officers and sabbaticals (Runnymede Trust, 2007, p. 5). AMSU's diversity survey (2007) indicates that BME officers face barriers to entering students' union staff positions.
- = Women are under-represented as elected officers, despite having a significantly higher rate of participation in higher education (section 2.1). Certain elected positions are significantly more likely to be held by male students, including president, treasurer/finance officer, clubs/societies officer, sports officer, and LGBT officer. The role of welfare officer is significantly more likely to be held by a female student. The NUS recommends that students' unions have women's officer positions, and should also target women for non-traditional union roles. Gender audits should be carried out to assess whether particular areas of work are dominated by any gender (NUS, 2008a).

Useful events

In July each year, the NUS runs an event called 'Liberation'. This is an open event for all officers from students' unions, providing a forum to explore the history and reasons why liberation campaigns are essential in the fight for equality, to find out what liberation campaigns do and why they do it, and how each union can get involved (www.officeronline.co.uk/lgbt, www.officeronline.co.uk/black, etc.).

3.2 AMSU's Diversity Action Working Group

AMSU's Annual General Meeting 2005 passed a motion noting that increased diversity, both in society and in the student population, was not reflected in students' union staff. Anecdotally, it was known that unions were struggling to recruit BME staff and women into senior management positions. The AMSU Conference noted that this needed to be addressed, or the mismatch would grow and the movement would face a crisis of legitimacy. Conference approved the establishment of a working group to report to the Annual General Meeting in 2006 with data and information, benchmarked against other, similar sectors. The group was asked to research other sectors to identify effective strategies and practices, and to make recommendations for change.

The Diversity Action Working Group (DAWG, www.amsu.net/projects/dawg) produced an initial *Diversity Report* (AMSU, 2006) summarising the position relating to employment of staff in students' unions, and initiated an annual staff monitoring survey, which has now been undertaken in two subsequent years.

DAWG has laid a solid foundation for tackling the historical lack of diversity in the workforce of students' unions. AMSU's diversity survey in 2008 (www.amsu.net/projects/dawg/diversityreports) indicates a barrier to becoming a member of union staff for BME officers. DAWG's work in 2009 will focus on the issue of under-representation of staff from BME groups.

3.3 Students' Union Evaluation Initiative

In 2006, the Students' Union Evaluation Initiative (SUEI, www.suei.co.uk) was set up to offer an independent accreditation and quality assurance programme for students' unions. Accreditation follows two years' preparation and a successful final audit based on the SUEI model, which supports continuous development based on the needs of students.

Equality initiatives in the students' union sector

The first five SUEI awards were presented at the House of Commons in October 2008. These went to Leeds University Union (gold award), Bath and Hull Unions (silver), and Teesside and Essex Unions (bronze). Over 50 unions are currently participating in the scheme, which is supported by the NUS and AMSU. NUS support for SUEI includes securing funding both from the NUS itself and from the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (www.dius.gov.uk) and the Scottish Government (www.scotland.gov.uk).

At the core of SUEI is the requirement for unions to connect with all members and to identify and deliver outcomes that add value to their student experience. ECU worked with SUEI in 2007 to strengthen the equality and diversity components of the SUEI Key Lines of Enquiry (www.suei.co.uk/model_how.html), which now reinforce the importance of equality impact assessment in relation to all the union's functions.

4 Inclusive communication strategies

To ensure students' unions are communicating effectively to the full membership, it is important to consider different ways of communicating the same message. Where possible, we have included examples of innovative communication with students adopted by some students' unions.

4.1 Knowing who your members are

The make-up of the student body has become increasingly diverse, and it is important not to make assumptions about members' background, or about why some do or don't participate in students' union services and activities.

There are a number of ways in which students' unions can research the membership, which can lead to in-depth knowledge and a comparable data set to track shifting demographics, provide key information as to who is (and is not) accessing services, how they access them, what they feel about the students' union, and any barriers they encounter in accessing what is offered.

Ideas for researching the student profile are listed below.

- = HESA data provide an invaluable source of information about the profile of students at each HEI (www.hesa.ac.uk).
- = Request the university's academic registry to provide anonymised data on the profile of the university by equality group (the more detailed the information the better). Ideally, as well as details on each of the equality areas (age, disability, gender, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation), the information requested should include mode of study (full-/part-time), year of study, undergraduate/postgraduate status, and whether a student is a carer or has dependent children. While staff and student data are owned by HEIs, and there is no obligation for them to disclose such data to third parties such as students' unions, unions can nevertheless make a request to see this information as the HEI may be likely to comply.
- = Undertake local research (surveys online, face-to-face) on the student profile by asking membership how they access information and what barriers they have experienced on accessing the union's services (see case studies).

Inclusive communication strategies

- = Whenever the membership is surveyed, it is important to give a clear explanation as to why the information is being requested and what will be done with it.

University College London Union (www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-union)

UCLU runs an annual survey, which considers a range of student issues:

- = satisfaction with services
- = relevance of services
- = level of use of cafés, bars, shops and sports/fitness facilities
- = membership of, and involvement with, clubs and societies
- = awareness of advice and volunteering services
- = use of advice and volunteering services
- = understanding of democracy issues
- = views on student media and information services
- = student profile information.

The survey is disseminated primarily via the website, supplemented by a team of people who speak to students one-to-one, with the aim of accessing a cross-section of the student body. The survey results allow the union to make changes to their service provision and consider the needs of equality groups.

4.2 Accessible communication with students

A communication strategy is a critical element in promoting equality and encouraging students to feel they will be fully represented and supported by the union. To reach the diverse student audience and anticipate their needs, it is vital that accessibility is built into all forms of communication.

It is recommended that students' unions integrate equality and diversity training into the orientation/induction period. The disabled student subgroup of the National Student Forum additionally propose a 'more systematic approach to raising awareness of disability amongst the general student population, especially during the orientation period, e.g. offering workshops on disability, self diagnosis posters and leaflets' (NSF, 2008: p. 50).

Some important tips to remember when communicating face-to-face with students are listed below.

- = If you are communicating at a meeting or assembly, find out in advance if any students have access requirements (adjustments needed for hearing, visual or physical impairments) and make adjustments in advance, for example by providing either an interpreter or palantypist (someone who transcribes any spoken words onto a visual screen); providing visual materials in alternative formats; and ensuring the venue is accessible.
- = If you are communicating with a group of students one of whom has a sign language interpreter, it is important to speak directly to the student, not their interpreter.
- = When communicating with a speech-impaired student, avoid correcting them or finishing their sentences. If you don't understand, don't pretend that you do, be patient and ask them to repeat if necessary, and tell them what you have understood so far.
- = Dyslexic students or those with other learning difficulties may wish to use a recording device to keep an audio version of the conversation. You should try and cater for such occasions by speaking clearly and at an even pace.

Written materials should be available in accessible formats so that all students can participate in the work of the union. For example, providing ballot papers in alternative formats allows all students to have the opportunity to cast their democratic vote, thus ensuring the union is fully representative.

Accessible written formats include email, Braille, Easy Read (www.officefordisability.gov.uk/resources/background0604.asp), large print and audiotape. A disabled person's requirements will depend on their impairment, as well as other factors. For example, many blind people do not read Braille, but instead prefer to receive information by email or on audiotape. Some general tips to remember when producing electronic documents are given below.

Do:

- = use relevant graphics, images and pictures to break up text
- = ensure sequential presentations allow enough time for a slow reader (who may have to decode each word separately) to keep up
- = allow the user to go back and re-read information
- = use headings and wide side margins

Inclusive communication strategies

- = use boxes for emphasis, or to highlight important text
- = put key information, instructions and tasks towards the top of a page.

Don't:

- = continue a presentation until the user is ready (*do* provide user control)
- = use graphics that serve no informational purpose.

(Source: www.techdis.ac.uk/accessibilityessentials)

The internet is an increasingly important resource in many aspects of student life. An accessible website will give students' unions the opportunity to engage all students with their work, campaigns, elections and activities. A students' union may have a website that has existed for a number of years, so may have some accessibility barriers.

While improving accessibility on an existing website may seem overwhelming at first, there are approaches to make the process more efficient and effective. Should you decide to update your website, it is advisable to become familiar with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0

(www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20). These have been developed by the World Wide Web Consortium and are an informative resource for anyone with responsibility for website development.

Some quick tips for improving website accessibility are available on the website of the Web Accessibility Initiative at www.w3.org/WAI/quicktips and on the website of Jisc-TechDis at www.techdis.ac.uk.

4.3 Knowing how to communicate with students

Providing outreach opportunities

The following comments from the ECU survey highlight the need for students' unions to consider providing outreach work to ensure the widest possible inclusion of all student groups.

'Activities tend to be more aimed at students who are already involved in the union in one way or another.'

'Staff will go out of their way to help someone if they can – but I imagine that a lot of the time that would depend on the student needing to ask for help in the first place – so some people will remain excluded.'

Increasing awareness of the union and its elected officers

Although approximately half the students surveyed felt the relationship between elected officers and the student body as a whole was transparent and functioned well, students reported being unaware of the purpose of the students' union, that officers can be inaccessible and their work unnoticed, and that the role of officers can be misunderstood.

Ideas for increasing awareness of officer roles

- = Use the student newspaper to showcase the different positions, and allow officers to write about what they do.
- = Have well publicised drop-in hours when students can come and talk to officers about their roles. Consider holding these in public places where there is a high footfall, rather than in the offices.
- = It is likely that the majority of students are unaware of the unseen activities that student officers spend much of their time engaged in, such as HEI meetings. Some unions manage this by placing a noticeboard in a prominent area in the union, listing sabbatical officers' whereabouts for the week, to ensure there is a very public record of exactly how busy officers are. Make sure you explain what the work means to students – plenty of officers spend all day in university meetings that change students' lives, but it is hard for the membership to see the impact of these activities.
- = Use e-democracy such as blogging, online timetables and regular e-newsletters. Podcasts and web-based videos about officers' roles can be a good way of making sabbatical officers more visible to those who don't use the union. Beware of the new phenomenon of 'Facebook blindness', however – just as students no longer see posters in the halls' corridor, they may become increasingly unaware of electronic messages.

University of Kent Students' Union (www.kentunion.co.uk)

Kent Union employs an outreach worker to make contact with hard-to-reach students and/or students who have never been involved with the union before. This role was seen to be particularly important for students studying for higher education qualifications at partner further education colleges, as these students can have very little idea of their entitlement to union services.

5 Democracy and representation

This section looks at one of the key functions of students' unions: democracy and representation. It responds to some of the questions posed in the *Inclusive Students' Unions* survey (ECU, 2007), and considers some of the issues around diversity and democratic participation. It also provides examples of best practice in relation to election processes, representation, and ideas for increasing awareness of the roles of students' unions and officers.

5.1 Improving the diversity of elected candidates

The *Inclusive Students' Unions* survey (ECU, 2007) uncovered a perception among both union staff and students that the people who stand for, or who are elected to, student office are a 'certain type of person'. This person is least likely to be a postgraduate, a part-time student, or a parent or carer. The report also identified issues around the diversity of elected student executive teams, and their correspondence with the diversity of the student body. In particular, the following groups were considered to be especially poorly represented in student elected officer teams:

- = BME students
- = mature students
- = postgraduate students
- = disabled students
- = students who hold a religious belief
- = students with dependants.

Responses from staff in unions to the ECU survey suggested that a lack of diversity on student executives is directly related to barriers to participating in election processes. This section considers ways to improve election processes so as to encourage the widest range of students to stand for election.

Research and monitoring

- = Carry out research to ascertain the experiences of equality groups in relation to the union. This is a key starting point for improving the diversity of elected officials.

- = Equality monitoring of union candidates provides basic information about who is standing for election and who is being elected. This information can be used later to identify where problems exist in representation, when compared with the data describing the student body as a whole (section 4.1).

Targeted encouragement of a diverse range of candidates for elections

- = Publicity for election campaigns can be a useful vehicle for promoting images of diverse role models in sabbatical and part-time positions.
- = Access students through pre-existing student-led networks such as disabled students' groups, religious groups, LGBT groups, etc.
- = Target courses where particular groups are well represented; for example, in many institutions students with dependants are particularly well represented on teaching, health and social care courses.

Supporting candidates

- = Run candidates' meetings in accessible venues, away from alcohol, and offer a number of options to allow the maximum range of students to attend.
- = Consider offering some help with childcare or caring expenses during the course of an election campaign, to enable a candidate with dependants at home to run a fair campaign against their opponents.
- = Consider allowing job-sharing and/or flexible working for some/all elected positions.

Ideas to promote standing for election

Finances

- = The salaries for sabbatical officers are often not enough to support dependants. Unions may want to consider ways of supporting childcare needs and other caring responsibilities.
- = Elections can be an expensive business. Candidates should not be put off from running, or suffer a disadvantage, by not having a large amount of funding for their campaign. Capping the amount spent by candidates, or refunding a proportion back, are positive steps to combat this.

Publicity and communications

- = Nomination periods should be advertised early and widely, and in a number of formats, to ensure maximum exposure (section 4.2).

Democracy and representation

- = Heavily promote the benefits available with any union elected position, for example stating clearly that for part-time positions, expenses are available for childcare while on official duties.
- = Inform your students about the single transferable vote process so that it is both demystified and accessible to the full membership.
- = Create cultural support for elections – make sure students' union staff and elected officers are excited about the elections, and have a range of strategies to reach out to a diverse range of potential candidates and voters. It is important that current officers use their profile to appeal to groups not traditionally involved in the union, and avoid promoting particular candidates.
- = Where possible use multilingual ballot boxes and election publicity, especially in halls or areas with a large international population.

Reading University Students' Union (www.rusu.co.uk)

In 2007/08, RUSU rebranded the way it marketed its full-time officer elections, leading to 1000 more votes than in the previous year. Methods used included advertising the elections a term earlier than usual, via a leaflet distributed to a wide range of students giving information on all the roles available in the election. This was distributed to students' groups and societies and in halls, available online, and handed out on campus. Prospective candidates were able to attend one of a series of workshops, which included sessions on what is involved in being a trustee, how to campaign, and how to write a manifesto. The workshops built in time to ensure all candidates had a chance to ask questions and be informed on what to expect throughout the process.

RUSU used an online voting system for the first time, supplemented with an accessible brochure providing information on how the system worked. Three thousand hard copies were distributed through several routes: available in the library computer area, online, hand-distributed throughout the week in the centre of campus, placed in departments and computer rooms, and available all week in the union building.

Part-time positions and job-shares

Just under half of the students who responded to the ECU survey stated they would be prepared to stand for part-time office, compared with just under a third of those who said they would consider standing for full-time office. In particular, part-time elected positions appear to have the potential to appeal to more female

students, more students with a religious belief, and more students in the 18–21 age group, as well as those in their 40s and 50s. In order to encourage students who cannot undertake a full-time commitment to stand for full-time positions, it is worth considering instituting job-shares.

Many unions are creating non-officer trustee positions. These are non-representative roles, and often take up less time than traditional roles, but allow students to have a meaningful influence on the governance of the union. Some unions co-opt these positions with a particular view to persuading students who wouldn't normally run in elections to become involved.

Leeds University Union (www.luuonline.com)

LUU has been proactive in increasing the diversity of candidates standing for election to the Student Executive Committee. It has convened a Union Working Group, which looks at the diversity of the student population compared with the elected executive. Prospective candidates are encouraged to complete an equal opportunities monitoring form, which allows the union to identify under-representation of specific groups and devise ways of future targeting.

An example of this kind of targeting can be found in the information book produced by LUU for potential candidates. In an effort to target international students, information was provided about the implications for a student's visa and status of remaining in the country for a year to be a sabbatical officer. The union also used its annual 'Culture Week' to promote the elections to groups representing different cultures, faiths and ethnicities.

5.2 Improving the inclusivity of representative structures

The *Inclusive Students' Unions* report (ECU, 2007) identifies a number of issues in relation to the accessibility and openness of election processes. Both staff and students felt there were significant barriers to participation for the following groups of students:

- = disabled students
- = postgraduate students
- = students with dependants
- = part-time students
- = international students.

Democracy and representation

Issues identified for these groups of students included the language used by unions, timetabling clashes, time constraints, negative perceptions of the students' union, and finances. In particular, the following were highlighted as problematic:

- = short lead-in times to elections
- = meetings in the evenings (when students may have other responsibilities)
- = time constraints (e.g. not enough time for canvassing or to hold a voluntary position on top of other commitments)
- = postgraduate students' perception of themselves as staff rather than students
- = accumulation of debt for postgraduate students
- = difficulty for students with physical impairments to access services
- = lack of awareness of the right of international students to become sabbatical officers
- = students with dependants finding it difficult to make full-time commitment to elected positions.

Although not identified in the research, it is also likely that international students participate less than other groups in students' union democracy. Issues around language and cultural understandings of democracy can be barriers to this group (section 6.2).

Ideas for increasing access to election processes

Hustings

- = Some unions have changed the name of 'hustings' to 'meet the candidates' – this is a simple way of clarifying an old-fashioned term that assumes a level of knowledge about the political process which many students will not have.
- = Candidate meetings should be formal and run according to strict rules. While they should be lively, these meetings should not involve activities that may be offensive or discriminatory to particular groups. The NUS Women's Campaign reports hearing from students who were asked to mud-wrestle and undress in candidate meetings. This should clearly be avoided.
- = Allow students to email questions to candidates, to enable those who can't attend to participate.
- = Produce summaries of candidate meetings to distribute to people who can't attend; if you have the technology, record the meetings and put them on your website as a podcast.

Timetabling and locations

- = Hold voting and related candidate meetings in a number of locations and at different times, in order to capture diverse audiences. Many students' unions have opted for online elections. It is important to consider the need to be even more proactive in advertising online elections than with paper-based ones for them to be successful, as well as inclusive.
- = Try to ensure all official election business takes place in alcohol-free zones.

Where possible, hold counts in alcohol-free venues the day after the elections (rather than late into the same night). This allows all students to attend during normal university hours, and will benefit those with children, other caring responsibilities and those who commute to university from other towns. It has the added benefit of allowing any election issues to be resolved before the count starts.

Specific representation for groups

Representation of any student body covers two main axes: representing the different types of people who are students (also called liberation groups by some unions and the NUS), and the different types of students (international, postgraduate, part-time etc.).

For the four main liberation groups (women, black, LGBT and disabled students), NUS recommends that students' unions have specific campaigning and representation positions, open only to students who are themselves from one of the liberation groups. In practice, this usually manifests as a women's officer, black students officer, LGBT officer and disabled students' officer. Closed positions on student executive teams for specific groups will help to ensure students who belong to those groups are represented. The level of representation will differ from each union to the next, depending on size, funding, etc. Many unions create forums, committees or specific officer positions for specific groups of students. The NUS advocates that creating a position is not enough on its own. There must be sufficient resources and support for those groups, and for the officers who represent them.

Birkbeck Students' Union (www.bbk.ac.uk/su)

Birkbeck Students' Union recently carried out a governance review with the aim of increasing democratic participation. The review came about partly for legal reasons, but also in response to a feeling that the hierarchical structure of a sabbatical full-time President didn't suit the Birkbeck lifestyle of working/family commitments and part-time education and research. This has resulted in a new constitution for the 2008/09 academic year. It includes a new structure for student representation, which features seven equal part-time sabbatical officers, a guaranteed women's officer, a rule that 40 per cent of council must be women, and a caring responsibilities officer. Both the guaranteed women's officer and the caring responsibilities officer positions involve being a trustee and sabbatical officer of the union. The structure seeks to free up time so that council can get on with campaigning and representation, while the new Trustee Board will ensure strategic planning and compliance. It also provides protection for autonomous and liberation campaigning, and the creation of peer groups.

5.3 Improving the diversity of member voting

NUS Election Research 2007, which had responses from 80 students' unions across the UK, found that, on average, only around one in 10 students vote in elections. The ECU (2007) *Inclusive Students' Unions* survey found that among those who don't vote, the most common reasons cited include:

- = lack of awareness of elections
- = not feeling elections are important
- = forgetting to vote
- = distance from campus/problem of split campus
- = not knowing/not being impressed by candidates
- = not being around/involved.

Leeds University Union (www.luuonline.com)

LUU holds two referenda each year and allows members to submit motions to be voted on. In the most recent referendum, the union had a record turnout of 3358 votes. The union puts this down to a number of initiatives, including the following.

- = Ballot box staff being trained to approach students and engage them with the issues being voted on. Rather than sitting behind the box and collecting votes, they proactively went out and encouraged students to vote, and explained the issues to them. Staff were impartial on the issues themselves, but promoted the debate in general.
- = This was supported by 'crib sheets' summarising what was discussed during public debates on the motions. This allowed students who were unable to attend to read about what happened and follow the debate.
- = Ballot boxes were placed in a number of different locations around the university and union, including in the library; online voting was also available.
- = Staff to man multilingual ballot boxes were recruited. The union identified the most common languages spoken as a first language by students, and advertised times when staff speaking these languages would be at the ballot box.
- = Campaign meetings were held with candidates proposing motions, where they received staff support in developing ideas around creative campaigning.
- = The referenda had strong branding based around the theme of 'building change'. Ballot box staff wore hard hats, and the union was decked out like a building site for the referendum period.

6 Membership and commercial services

In addition to its democratic and representative function, most students' unions provide social spaces to bring members together, facilitate student activities via clubs and societies, operate commercial services such as bars and cafés, and offer support through advice centres, helplines and job shops.

This chapter explores the equality and diversity aspect of these functions, and offers tips and examples of good practice for developing more inclusive and welcoming services.

6.1 Social space

The *Inclusive Students' Union* report (ECU, 2007) shows that only 50 per cent of students described general social spaces as 'welcoming and inclusive'. Some simple ideas to improve the inclusivity and accessibility of such spaces are listed below.

- ⇒ Web-based interactive tours and online maps of union offices and buildings can aid some students to orientate themselves about the location of facilities, which may encourage a broader range of students to use them.
- ⇒ Information on access should be available in leaflet form, in handbooks and on the website, and should state clearly what adjustments are available to meet the needs of equality groups (for example, hearing loops for hearing-impaired students; facilities for students with children). This information should include details of disabled access to social spaces and other union amenities.
- ⇒ Advertise clear fire evacuation plans for disabled staff and students. The Department for Communities and Local Government has produced detailed practical guidance on emergency evacuation for disabled people (DCLG, 2007).
- ⇒ Use contrasting paint colours for doors and corridors, to assist visually impaired students to navigate union buildings.
- ⇒ Conduct an accessibility audit (see ECU, 2008b).

6.2 Commercial services: bars, cafés, shops and entertainment

The ECU (2007) survey reflected dissatisfaction about a lack of choice in students' union services, rather than any issues with their quality, inclusivity or accessibility. The dominance of an alcohol culture came up as a chief concern.

Some students with a religious belief, students with children, or those whose lives have been affected by alcoholism may choose not to enter areas where alcohol is sold and consumed.

Leeds University Union (www.luuonline.com)

LUU members asked for a recreational area in the union building where students could relax and get some refreshment. LUU decided to open the Juice Bar. It was felt that the Juice Bar would offer a very good alternative to the alcohol culture in the union bars. The bar provides a relaxed environment where members can get a healthy drink, made from fresh fruit. They also have the use of the free computers and comfortable seating.

Equality and diversity message

It is important to have a union-wide voice on being inclusive and involving students. Students' unions need to communicate how equality and diversity relates to each department, as well as how the work of each department affects the inclusion and involvement of all members, and the expectations of the union.

Oxford Brookes University Students' Union (www.thesu.com)

Oxford Brookes University noticed that Chinese students did not appear to access students' union services, and undertook research to identify any barriers to access. This uncovered a mixture of reasons why Chinese students were under-represented in union activities, including pressure from peers and parents to concentrate on study, and not identifying the union as a place for them due to a lack of other Chinese faces. Oxford Brookes Students' Union took a variety of targeted steps to encourage involvement of these students, including meeting requests to stock Chinese food items in union outlets, and involving Chinese students in staff development days to learn about the difference in perception of what a students' union is.

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Range of events

ECU survey staff and students' responses found the range of events offered by unions to be too narrow and focused on the 'traditional' young British student. Where respondents cited examples of events, these tended to be linked to freshers' events. It was also noted that, although inclusive events are provided, these are rarely well attended.

The need for a range of events can be particularly important for international students. This is highlighted by the international student subgroup's recommendations in the National Student Forum's *Annual Report 2008* (NSF, 2008). The group proposes that to combat international student isolation, unions should be encouraged to be more 'international student-friendly'. The same group also proposed that 'cultural transition workshops' be introduced as part of an orientation programme (this may be appropriate for both institutions and unions).

NUS is currently working with three students' unions as part of the PMI for international education to develop a draft strategy to embed the needs of international students at the heart of union culture. The PMI is coordinated by the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA, www.ukcisa.org.uk). More details of the NUS project can be found at www.officeronline.co.uk/international.

University of Sussex Students' Union (www.ussu.info)

USSU has incorporated a range of events throughout the Freshers' week calendar to provide opportunities for all equality groups to get involved. 'Laid back and latte', which incorporates watching live bands over coffee, was created specifically to target non-alcohol-drinking students, and has become a popular staple of Freshers' week. Additionally, USSU runs a Barn Dance, Comedy Night, Poetry Night, Monday Funday (games and events during the day), Re-Fresh (free massages, health checks, healthy food and drink, hairdressers, etc.) and Sports Trials to give a full range away from the standard alcohol-based events of the Brighton clubs, pub crawls and Freshers' ball.

University of Warwick Union (www.warwicksu.com)

The Union helps the Postgraduate Society put on a welcome event in the first week of term by hiring a venue in the union building. The Society usually has an event every Tuesday during term time, supported by the students' union. A member of the sabbatical team also attends many of the Postgraduate Induction talks to welcome new students and talk about how the union can support them. A large number of new international students, including many postgraduates, attend Orientation Week. The university runs Orientation Week, but the union works closely with the International Office to provide support for international and postgraduate students.

University of Derby Students' Union (www.udsu.co.uk)

The Equality & Diversity Coordinator (a full time union staff position) provides resources to the diverse student voice that makes up Derby's student population, and assists in the running of student-led projects. The Coordinator helped run the Studentship Festival in 2008, and worked in partnership with the local Multi-Faith Centre, with community cohesion as a theme. The festival was a week of student-led events with activities ranging from an anti-racism gig, through Islamic awareness day, to a poetry night with Edinburgh Festival Award-winners. Students created the ideas for each day, helped organise the event, and also participated either through performances, film-making or debate. Within each day, a local community group or partner organisation (such as Stonewall) attended, ran workshops or provided guest speakers. The Equality & Diversity Coordinator is also a member of Derby Equality & Diversity Network Group, which is made up of local community partners. The group looks at benchmarking, sharing good practice and working towards joint projects, one of which is a Multi Faith Calendar, coordinated by the union, sponsored by members of the group, and distributed city-wide from schools to police stations, student halls of residence and health services.

6.3 Clubs and societies

The *Inclusive Students' Unions* report (ECU, 2007) cites clubs and societies as the most inclusive element of students' unions. Both staff and students commented that if there are gaps in provision, any student can start one, and will often be assisted in this process. Clubs, societies and sports groups are an effective way of bringing diverse groups of people together to enjoy a shared passion or interest. In this context it was surprising that 14 per cent of students did not believe that clubs and societies are welcoming and accessible, and a further 16 per cent responded 'don't know'. Analysis of the results showed that postgraduates appeared to be the group that felt most marginalised.

The problems identified were that:

- = clubs and societies can be cliquy and elitist
- = students' attitudes and behaviour can be off-putting
- = experience and know-how on equality issues are not spread evenly across clubs and societies
- = the presence of a drinking culture
- = the use of initiation ceremonies
- = groups do not do enough to encourage mature students and postgraduates to participate
- = resources are limited in terms of venues, time and money.

Ideas for improving the inclusivity and welcome of clubs and societies include the following.

- = Some HEIs are considering providing equality and diversity training for new students (both home and international) covering the legal and cultural environment and acceptable modes of behaviour. Students' unions may wish to lobby for this training or collaborate with their parent organisation to influence the nature and level of training provided.
- = Providing equality and diversity training targeted at presidents of clubs and societies, outlining responsibilities and good practice.
- = Exploiting the pockets of knowledge and good practice that do exist by coordinating sessions to allow clubs and societies to share know-how.

- = Introducing incentives/fines for clubs and societies with regard to equality and diversity.
- = Promoting 'give it a go' schemes to help students overcome the barriers to joining clubs and societies.
- = Providing written guidance and training to clubs and societies on how to make adjustments to enable disabled students to access these opportunities (unions may want to utilise the expertise of the HEI's disability adviser or equivalent).

University of Sussex Students' Union (www.ussu.info)

USSU's value statements include 'participation' and 'respect'.

Participation:

'wherever and whenever possible we must strive to provide as many opportunities as possible, without discrimination, for students to be involved in all of our activities, services and governance'.

Respect:

'we commit ourselves to promoting equal opportunities in the provision of our services, as an employer and as a representative and campaigning body'.

These messages are incorporated into equal opportunities training for all elected officers, and in the induction training for club and society members. Additionally, club and society members wishing to apply for funding for an event must demonstrate how their event complies with these values.

University of Derby Students' Union (www.udsu.co.uk)

UDSU has a designated member of staff – an Equality & Diversity Coordinator – who provides equality and diversity training as part of the wider induction for student clubs and societies.

Club and society initiation ceremonies – the legal context

Students' unions are understandably concerned about the risks of initiation ceremonies getting out of hand, with resulting damage to property or person, or accidents arising during society activities – and with where the legal liability for such events rests.

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Almost all unions are established by a university's charter and statutes, or by a process under the equivalent articles of government of the HEI. In pre-1992 universities, only three have students' unions established by ordinances rather than by charter. If established by ordinances, the union's existence can be terminated by act of the institution without the requirement of the consent of the Privy Council.

The liability of a students' union's officers/members depends on its constitution. Some students' unions have already become incorporated, either as a charitable company limited by guarantee or a charitable incorporated association (a new legal structure introduced by the Charities Act 2006). Either way, the liability of its officers/members is limited to a nominal amount (or, in the case of the latter, they may have no liability at all).

Where a students' union is an unincorporated association, the union itself is not a legal entity and cannot be sued. Union officers (and in some circumstances the members) have personal liability for actions/activities of the union, and could be sued by aggrieved parties.

From 1 October 2009, the Charities Act 2006 will introduce some changes to the regulation of HEIs and students' unions. HEIs in England will remain largely outside the Charity Commission's jurisdiction and will be regulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, www.hefce.ac.uk). Welsh institutions will be regulated by the Charity Commission. Students' unions will lose their exempt charitable status (which they have had until now due to falling under an HEI umbrella of being an educational charity). Where a students' union has a gross annual income of more than £100,000, it will need to register as a charity with the Charity Commission (see www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/law_and_regulation/charities_act_2006.aspx).

The Charities Act 2006 is likely to lead to most unions becoming incorporated associations, and may result in officers having more protection from legal liability for union actions or activities. However, regardless of the legal entity of their union, officers will need to ensure relevant legislation (such as that relating to contracts, health and safety and equality issues) is complied with.

6.4 Union support services

The *Inclusive Students' Unions* report (ECU, 2007) highlights that support services are well received. Concerns were raised about whether services reach all sections of the student membership, and it was suggested that unions need to communicate more effectively and creatively to promote services.

Conducting a survey of the membership to ascertain members' knowledge, experience of, and access to union-led services should raise awareness of the services, as well as providing useful information on barriers to access and ways to improve services.

Hull University Union (www.hullstudent.com)

Hull Union introduced a virtual receptionist – Virtual Dee – to allow communication with and accessibility for a target audience who do not normally visit the union building. The system offers a real-time communication medium for members who may feel uncomfortable, or choose not to access services in person. Certain religious groups who do not enter the students' union because of the presence of alcohol are actively encouraged to seek information and guidance through the Virtual Dee system. Enquiries on welfare or academic advice are referred appropriately to a suitably qualified person to answer. Virtual Dee receives anything from 15 to 100 enquiries a day, and has improved accessibility to union services considerably.

6.5 Under-18s

The introduction of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations in 2006 has made it difficult for HEIs to set minimum age restrictions for admission to university. The regulations have consequent implications for students' unions in their capacity as service providers.

In February 2008, ECU conducted a workshop at a conference organised by Universities UK (www.universitiesuk.ac.uk) and AMOSSHE (The Student Services, www.amosshe.org.uk) – 'Safeguarding children: issues for HEIs dealing with under-18s' – which focused on welfare and quality-of-life issues for young students. Workshop discussions highlighted a view that students and their parents tend to see the institution and the students' union as one and the same organisation – the 'university' – and therefore it was felt important to work together to create

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a suitably safe environment. Some HEIs and students' unions have responded by creating joint policies to safeguard under-18s accessing their services.

The Independent Safeguarding Authority is the agency responsible for vetting all individuals who want to work or volunteer with vulnerable people. From November 2010, institutions are required to register any students and staff involved in regulated activity as defined by the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006. This places a responsibility on students' unions to safeguard under-18s in a small number of situations. Further information can be found on ECU's website (www.ecu.ac.uk/subjects/age).

Southampton University Students' Union (www.susu.org)

At the University of Southampton there has been some collaborative work between the institution and the union. Safeguarding officers have been placed in appropriate student support areas, within both the university and the union. For example, it was identified that student-run clubs and societies would need support, and a union Nominated Safeguarding Officer (NSO) is located in the department dealing with the administration of clubs and societies. Southampton also has a staff member in welfare advice trained as an NSO. The appropriate union staff have undergone a nationally accredited training programme (funded by the university) and are now qualified to support under-18s.

University of Sussex Students' Union (www.ussu.info)

USSU has a joint policy with the university's Sports Service, which provides clear procedures for parents, under-18s, staff and volunteers. The policy sets out clear procedures for all parties to be able to voice their concerns or lodge complaints.

7 Students' union staff

AMSU's Diversity Action Working Group (DAWG) has undertaken detailed work on students' union staff and equality and diversity issues. This section outlines the conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group, and recommends adoption of the impact assessment approach, training initiatives and diversity champions.

7.1 Staff diversity

AMSU's DAWG (see also section 3.2) researches and reports on staff equality and diversity data, and makes recommendations for change. The *AMSU Diversity Report 2007*, reporting on the results of the 2006 monitoring survey, found that:

- = the students' union workforce is predominantly white, aged under 40, and able-bodied
- = there are slightly higher numbers of female staff overall, but men are more likely to be managers
- = the larger the union in commercial terms, the less likely it is that the general manager will be a woman – 30 per cent of general managers overall are women, but they are concentrated in very small unions
- = only 6 per cent of permanent staff and 4 per cent of management are from BME groups, compared with BME elected officers (18 per cent) and BME student staff (30 per cent)
- = 7 per cent of staff reported a disability
- = the age profile showed only 15 per cent of respondents to be over 50; almost half of permanent staff were under 30, with another quarter between 31 and 40
- = DAWG found no evidence of overt or conscious discrimination – the small survey conducted on unions' recruitment practices indicates that the chief constraint is the lack of applicants, rather than discriminatory practice during the process
- = progression was identified as an issue, particularly by women and BME staff
- = work–life balance is difficult to achieve at senior levels – unions were perceived as operating a long-hours culture.

Students' union staff

The AMSU (2007) report notes:

'Unless the movement effectively addresses this agenda, unions have diminishing relevance to a significant and growing section of the student body. This is likely to lead to unions' legitimate remit to represent students being called into question by institutions.'

The *Inclusive Students' Unions* report (ECU, 2007) highlights a lack of clarity about diversity, in particular whether permanent staff should reflect the student population, or the community from which they are drawn. The key message from AMSU is that benchmarking is important in order for a union to report on its improvement/success in achieving greater diversity among union staff. This is explored further in section 7.3.

7.2 AMSU recommendations

The AMSU report notes that there is a need to attract and retain a more diverse workforce, and that there is equal access to progression for historically disadvantaged groups. To achieve this, DAWG recommended:

- = target-setting, monitoring and evaluation
- = positive action
- = establishment of a mentoring exchange
- = diversity champions
- = training.

The report also recommends that all union policies and practices should be subject to equality impact assessment (see section 7.3). To supplement this recommendation, DAWG ran workshops in March and November 2008 to promote equality and diversity, to review equality and diversity policies, and to share best practice in effective impact assessment. These workshops were open to all staff and officers in UK students' unions.

7.3 Conducting equality impact assessments

Equality impact assessment (EIA) is a review of an organisation's policies to ensure it is not discriminating unlawfully – and that it is making a positive contribution to equality. The process involves examining proposed or existing policies, plans,

strategies or projects in order to identify what consequences their implementation may have for different equality groups. EIAs are a key tool in making union services inclusive, because they both anticipate and recommend ways to avoid any discriminatory or negative consequences for a particular equality group (on the grounds of age, disability, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation). EIAs also enable organisations to identify and demonstrate the potential benefits for equality groups arising from a proposed policy or project.

Such assessments are best understood in the wider context of the positive equality duties that exist in the areas of race, disability and gender (see section 3.3 for how these apply to unions). Impact assessment is core to the specific duties underpinning the general duties. ECU has published guidance on equality impact assessment (www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance/impact-assessment).

An example of impact assessment in practice is being explored by AMSU, whose research has shown that the lack of diversity among union staff is a product of a lack of diversity of candidates, rather than any discriminatory practices or procedures. An impact assessment of pre-recruitment policies and procedures is likely to establish the steps that need to be taken to increase the diversity of candidates. This could involve unions taking the following actions:

- = decide which population to measure itself against – the local or the student population
- = carry out research to establish where the gaps are, and consider what, if any, action is required
- = review job descriptions, essential requirements and competencies, and consider if these are suitable, necessary and present any unintended barriers to any equality groups
- = review where and how posts are advertised, and consider targeting specific equality and diversity organisations locally and nationally for distribution
- = review positive action measures – if any – or the need for them if none
- = monitor candidates to establish if improvements are made, and what this means for recruitment
- = communicate what is being done to increase diversity, and communicate improvements/success to staff and students.

7.4 Equality and diversity training

The *Inclusive Students' Unions* report (ECU, 2007) explored equality and diversity training for staff. Twenty per cent of staff felt they were not well trained in equality and diversity issues. Many noted that while there was an ever-increasing awareness of equality and diversity within students' unions, this was not yet matched with the availability of training.

The issue of staff training was explored in the ECU focus group event at which participants highlighted unevenness in training provision. Staff at the event said that training available concentrates on frontline staff. It was felt it should be extended to commercial services staff, whose work has a huge impact on the inclusiveness of services and how events are marketed and/or presented to students. Additional suggestions include the following.

- = Provide compulsory training for all staff. This sends a powerful message about the importance of equality and diversity to the union. ECU has produced guidance on appointing equality and diversity trainers:
www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/choosing-e-and-d-trainers.
- = Training should be developed that is tailored to different roles (entertainment, marketing, strategic, etc.), which provides staff with knowledge of the impact of equality legislation on their roles, how their roles influence diversity, and practical examples of how to make improvements and achieve good practice.
- = Consider appointing diversity champions to act as the key contact within the union to assist it in engaging with equality issues for staff (see www.amsu.net/projects/dawg). Their responsibility may also be extended to gather and share examples of best practice nationally.

University of Derby Students' Union (www.udsu.co.uk)

The University of Derby funds the students' union to establish an Equality & Diversity Coordinator post, to reach out to and represent all students as well as raising the profile of equality and diversity within the institution. As well as providing equality and diversity training to students as part of their induction to clubs and societies, the Coordinator provides training to union staff. By having a designated staff member working on equality and diversity, the union now carries out EIA of union policies and procedures, and has introduced a Plain English Policy. The Coordinator also works closely with the LGBT Officer, and is creating a joint campaign for unisex toilets, a priority campaign for the LGBT students.

Conclusion

It is clear that students' unions are hugely important agents for championing and campaigning for the rights of students in the higher education sector. It is hoped that this guidance will be a practical resource for the union sector to enable inclusive practice that meets the needs and entitlements of the broadest range of students and staff working within, and using, union services.

While this guidance includes a range of practical case studies from within the students' unions community, it is recognised that it is likely to leave a range of activity unacknowledged. ECU would be very keen to hear from any students' union with details of specific activity that is being undertaken, for inclusion in future or updated editions of this publication. Please contact info@ecu.ac.uk quoting 'Students' Unions' as the title.

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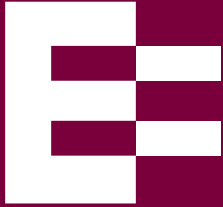
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