

Interventions for staff disclosure in higher education

Background paper 2009



Equality Challenge Unit

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higher education

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1 Introduction

Equality data about staff enable higher education institutions (HEIs) to take steps to address diversity and equality issues in the structure of the workforce, to ensure they are preventing discrimination and to provide appropriate support services to staff. However, many institutions have found it difficult to gather the relevant information and have met with staff reluctance to disclose equality information.

Although equality data provide vital information that allows HEIs to monitor and address issues of concern regarding equality and diversity, Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) recognises it is critical to be clear about the purpose of the information. It is also critical that individuals should not be requested to provide information unless a safe and supportive environment has been created, enabling staff to disclose information without fear of discrimination or negative attitudes.

In 2005, the Institute for Employment Studies produced a research report on staff equality disclosure for the UK higher education funding councils (Higher Education Funding Council for England, HEFCE; Scottish Higher Education Funding Council; Higher Education Funding Council for Wales). The report (IES, 2005) aimed to demonstrate how hidden inequalities affect different groups, particularly those who do not disclose personal information.

Since then, research undertaken by ECU (ECU, 2008b, c) and other organisations (see References) has identified some of the factors, which institutions can control, that can affect an individual staff member's decision on whether to disclose equality information. Building on this existing information, and in consultation with the sector, ECU has collated a range of interventions that it considers could contribute towards creating a safe environment and improving staff disclosure. These interventions are grouped here under four categories:

- = improving clarity on disclosure and data quality
- = improving communication and engagement in disclosure and equality
- = implementing equality in recruitment and retention
- = achieving behaviour and culture change through developing supportive structures.

For the 2008/09 academic year, a group of HEIs (Appendix A) have agreed to select

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and pilot a range of interventions and monitor their impact on disclosure in the equality areas of ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

ECU will be conducting a review of the project's progress in February 2009, and an analysis of findings from this project in summer 2009. Following this, ECU will publish a final report containing case studies and recommendations to the sector on action they can take to improve disclosure levels.

The interventions used as a basis by the pilot groups are published here in order to support other institutions to use the information to develop their own strategies. Some of the interventions listed might help improve disclosure in several equality areas, including disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, or gender identity, while others are targeted more specifically.

ECU would be interested to hear from any institution doing work in this area, so that they can add to the evidence and help to disseminate shared learning.

2 Workforce profiles by equality group

This section provides information on workforce profiles, broken down by the equality areas of disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation, on which ECU is specifically aiming to focus during the pilot project of 2008/09.

2.1 Disability

The approach that ECU wants to encourage, through the adoption of interventions presented here, is the social model of disability (Appendix B provides comparison between the social and medical models). In the social model, disability is defined as a problem created by society – particularly in the design and structure of organisations, services and systems, which have historically taken little or no account of people with long-term impairments or medical conditions. People with impairments or medical conditions are therefore frequently disabled by society and excluded from mainstream activities. An unresolved issue at the moment is that monitoring of disability among staff usually requires them to indicate a personal medical or impairment condition, rather than to indicate the access or other requirements that they need to support them in working effectively. ECU will continue to work with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and other organisations to try and resolve this issue in the longer term.

This project is based on trying to remove barriers (physical, social, attitudinal and environmental) within the higher education sector that may prevent disabled people from realising their potential or being able to carry out their duties effectively. Information gathered about an individual's personal details should therefore only be used to ensure the institution takes responsibility for removing barriers, through inclusive policies and practices, or for individuals, through making reasonable adjustments.

There has been no significant progress in recent years in the number of staff who have chosen to declare a disability. According to HEFCE workforce analysis (HEFCE, 2007, 2008), only about 2.6 per cent of all HEI staff are known to be disabled during the past five years. The overall higher education workforce has increased by about 25,000 (from 275,124 to 300,086), but the number of staff with a declared disability has increased by only 1222.

Workforce profiles by equality group

Table 1 Statistical overview of HEI staff disability status				
Academic year	Number of staff	Number with known disability status	Number with declared disability	Percentage with declared disability
2003/04	275,124	247,139	6,404	2.6
2004/05	284,635	255,722	6,783	2.7
2005/06	292,433	267,762	6,941	2.6
2006/07	300,086	276,131	7,626	2.8

Source: HEFCE (2007, 2008).

The number of known disabled staff in the higher education sector compares poorly with those in other employment sectors. For example, in the public sector about 13 per cent were known declared disabled in September 2005 (ONS, 2005), and in the civil service 6.7 per cent were known declared disabled in September 2007 (ONS, 2008).

According to data sourced from HESA (ECU, 2008a), only 2.2 per cent of academic staff and 2.9 per cent of professional and support staff had declared a disability. HESA data also show the following.

- ⇒ There is lower disclosure among staff at senior levels – 2.0 per cent at professors and heads of department grade, compared with 2.3 per cent below this level (although disclosure rates are higher in the higher grade group).
- ⇒ There is lower disclosure by staff in science, engineering and technology (SET – this includes the cost centres of: biosciences, chemistry, physics, agricultural sciences, engineering, mathematics, IT and computer software engineering) than in non-SET – 1.9 versus 2.4 per cent.
- ⇒ There is lower disclosure by staff in more highly paid jobs – 1.9 per cent among staff earning over £50k compared with 2.5 per cent among staff earning under £30k.

This paper incorporates recommendations put forward by the Commission for Disabled Staff in Lifelong Learning's Disability Equality Implementation

Group, of which ECU is a member. This group was created in response to a recommendation from the Commission for Disabled Staff in Lifelong Learning's (2008) report *From Compliance to Culture Change* (www.niace.org.uk/projects/commissionfordisabledstaff). The report sets out the major challenges faced by the lifelong learning sector (including higher education) if the ambition of real inclusion for disabled staff is to be achieved.

The Commission states:

'Disclosure is crucial if improvements for disabled staff, and indeed all staff, are to be secured on an anticipatory basis. However, while the Commission found a number of examples of staff disclosing for positive reasons – such as to challenge stigma – there is widespread unease and anxiety about disclosing other-than-obvious impairments. Some respondents reported that fear of discrimination prevented them from disclosing. Others felt their impairments were simply irrelevant. While we (the Commission) found evidence of some comprehensive good disclosure practice in a number of organisations, it is not widespread.'

2.2 Ethnicity

Among black and minority ethnic (BME) staff, there is a large population of staff whose ethnicity is not known. According to data from HEFCE, in 2006–07, of a workforce of 239,096, the ethnic status of 12,617 (5.3 per cent) was either unknown or not disclosed. Further analysis of HESA data shows that, at an institutional level, the non-disclosure rate varies between 0 and 47.0 per cent. This variation in rates indicates that barriers to disclosure of ethnicity still exist, and that HEIs need to review their policies and practices proactively to ensure that staff are more willing to disclose.

ECU's (2008a) *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2008* (www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-he-stats-08) also indicates the following.

- = Among UK nationals, 6.1 per cent are from a BME background. This compares with 8.7 per cent in the UK employed population. Among all academic staff, including international staff, the BME percentage is higher at 10.9 per cent.
- = 6.7 per cent of academic staff (UK nationality) in England have a BME background compared with 3.3 per cent in Scotland and Wales, and 2.4 per cent in Northern Ireland.

Workforce profiles by equality group

- = BME academic staff (UK nationality) represent 4.8 per cent of heads of department and professors, compared with 6.2 per cent of staff below this level. The figure is higher in SET subjects (6.7 per cent are BME) than in non-SET subjects (5.8 per cent), and is higher in research-only posts (8.9 per cent) than in teaching-only posts (5.1 per cent).
- = UK national BME representation among professional and support staff is 5.9 per cent, only slightly lower than among academic staff. The occupation group 'managers and professionals' has the lowest BME representation (4.8 per cent).

2.3 Sexual orientation

The third equality area on which this pilot project focuses is sexual orientation. There are currently very limited data available with regard to lesbian gay and bisexual (LGB) staff employed within the higher education sector. HESA does not collect data on the sexual orientation of staff, and there is inconsistent data collection across the sector, although some institutions do collect this information.

As there are such low disclosure rates for sexual orientation, the data are often statistically insignificant and unusable. This has led many organisations, including HEIs, to look instead at collating qualitative data on the experiences of LGB staff, for example through focus groups and staff surveys. Without any accurate data, visibility or feedback from staff on sexual orientation issues, institutions will find it difficult to ensure policies and procedures are adequately promoting equality for all staff in the workplace.

To assist the sector in understanding the barriers and issues for LGB staff, ECU is conducting research to establish whether actions need to be taken by the sector. A survey was launched in November, leading to a published report of the findings and subsequent recommendations in March 2009. Details of this project can be found at www.ecu.ac.uk/our-projects/lgbt-in-he.

3 Categories

3.1 Improving clarity on disclosure and the quality of data

Previous ECU reports (ECU 2008a–d) have highlighted the importance of monitoring disclosure in order to address issues of equality and diversity. ECU's (2008d) *Mapping Equality Data in the Higher Education Sector* (www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/mapping-equality-data-he) states that monitoring of diversity and equality, at both sectoral and at institutional levels, has usually focused on gathering quantitative information about workforce composition, and that this is not an accurate reflection of reality.

The report also indicates that minimal qualitative data are gathered about incidences of discrimination and other barriers that may be leading to disadvantage, or on attitudes that may be relevant to equal opportunities. It suggests that there are few systematically collected data on staff satisfaction with jobs, or the workplace, where equal opportunities are likely to feature. This type of data could be useful in identifying reasons why staff in the sector are reluctant to provide quantitative data.

There is a need to improve clarity and understanding as to why data are being collected, and to distinguish between different types of staff monitoring. Two main reasons for data collection are:

- = recording for statistical monitoring, which is required by HEFCE and enables analysis of staff from different equality groups within the workforce
- = recording of equality data for staff records, for example to provide adjustments or support.

Unless staff are confident that an employer's reason for collecting data is to improve equality in the workplace, they may not choose to disclose this information. Additionally, regarding disability disclosure, staff may not consider that their impairment or condition falls within the legal definition of 'disability'.

Poorly designed monitoring forms can also be a barrier for some staff, and their lack of accessibility can deter staff from disclosing. A well designed monitoring form should:

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- = include a clear, understandable definition of any equality terms that may be referred to
- = (for disability) explain what is meant by 'disabled'
- = include a message that, as far as possible, any disclosed information, and monitoring of such, will be anonymous and confidential
- = include explanatory text on why the institution is conducting monitoring, what will be done with the results, and what support is available for those who disclose.

Issues that can have a negative effect on the quality of equality data in the higher education sector are:

- = variable and inconsistent reporting by individual institutions in some equality categories
- = variety in quality and sophistication of data management tools and information systems
- = insufficient resources allocated to equality data monitoring and variations in the levels of senior commitment to improving equality in institutions.

Table 2 Suggested interventions for improving clarity	
Intervention	Targeted group
<p>Provide appropriate mechanisms to give staff ongoing opportunities to disclose equality information during their employment. Systems also need to be in place to feed back the information for recording and support purposes. Stages that should be considered are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> = initial job application or CV = interview (before or during) = job offer = induction = annual staff survey = pulse surveys = any time, via an HR self-service system = promotion = exit interview = learning and development. 	All equality groups

Table 2 Continued	
Intervention	Targeted group
During equality impact assessments of policies, processes and procedures, remove any barriers to disclosure. For example, staff monitoring forms should encourage disclosure through emphasising confidentiality and data protection.	All equality groups
Use information technology to develop robust HR self-service systems that are secure in terms of confidentiality and are able to produce accurate equality data. This type of system will provide improved information and enable target-setting in future. Aston University, one of the institutions participating in ECU's disclosure project, is developing such a system.	All equality groups
Consider ways to build capacity to help staff access and make better use of existing equality data. This might include staff development in statistics; more help from data specialists for equality practitioners; and greater sharing of good practice, experiences and ideas.	All equality groups
From an evidence base, develop key indicators of equality within the university, which can succinctly capture the current experiences of students and staff, and can be used to manage progress towards greater equality in the years ahead.	All equality groups (ECU is developing national work to support this activity; see www.ecu.ac.uk)
Conduct annual staff anonymised surveys, which include equality-related questions and give staff opportunity to declare any personal equality status information, such as their ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. Senior management should participate in this exercise and should send supportive messages to staff to do likewise. Qualitative information is particularly useful in designing actions to improve opportunities.	All equality groups

3.2 Improving communication and engagement on disclosure and equality

A communication strategy is a critical element in dispelling stigma associated with equality and encouraging staff to feel that they are able to disclose information without fear of discrimination or harassment. It also allows institutions to make it clear why they are asking staff to disclose, and the purposes to which the information will be put, such as providing adjustments and support. A well developed communication strategy will also help encourage the sharing of good practice on equality disclosure between institutions.

Communication channels that could be used with regard to promoting and increasing equality disclosure are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 Suggested interventions for improving communication and engagement	
Intervention	Targeted group
Develop effective communication on the reasons why staff equality data are collected and for purposes the information will be used.	All equality groups
Develop staff newsletters to include regular articles on equality and disclosure issues.	All equality groups
Use staff intranet sites to provide information on equality disclosure and what support is available (it will be important to ensure intranet sites meet accessibility standards).	All equality groups
Arrange equality staff events on all equality areas, when appropriate, coinciding with important events, for example Black History Month in October.	All equality groups
Develop equality-related literature in induction materials and an equality module in induction courses.	All equality groups
Develop toolkits for managers and staff on equality areas, providing guidance on employment and other workplace issues.	All equality groups

Table 3 Continued	
Intervention	Targeted group
Develop a communications campaign promoting staff groups and networks.	All equality groups
Develop a library of equality publications and literature for use by all staff members.	All equality groups
Encourage disabled staff, particularly senior colleagues, to be role models through openly disclosing their disability. This can make a real difference in promoting disability equality to colleagues, students and learners. One effective mechanism is to ask these individuals to be speakers at an event or in a short video.	Disabled staff
Arrange adverts in targeted equality-related and local media, promoting to prospective staff the institution's commitment to equality.	All equality groups
Develop a supporting communication and engagement strategy that promotes and encourages disclosure of ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability. HEIs should communicate why they are monitoring, and what they want to find out. They need to be clear about what the data will be used for, and how findings will be reported back. Guarantee confidentiality and compliance with the Data Protection Act, and ensure individuals cannot be identified from the findings. Results from monitoring exercises should be communicated widely, and positive action should be taken to address any issues.	BME, LGB and disabled staff
Use institutions' internet sites to communicate information on its commitment to equality and diversity, equality schemes, other disability issues and interventions that are available to support staff and their development.	All equality groups

3.3 Implementing equality in recruitment and retention processes

For institutions wanting to develop increased levels of disclosure, it is important to demonstrate a commitment to mainstreaming equality into all areas of their business. Ensuring that no employment policies or practices will affect or discriminate against potential or existing staff is a vital part of achieving this.

Institutions should be confident that every stage in the recruitment process, from advertising the job to induction, is fair and inclusive and promotes equal opportunities in employment. For example, recruiting senior management roles through head-hunters who have no brief actively to seek staff from diverse backgrounds, or advertising administrative jobs solely in ethnic-focused publications, will not help to achieve a diverse workforce.

It is also vital to ensure that, once staff have been recruited, they receive the support they need to progress and develop. The implementation of positive action initiatives, such as mentoring schemes, should be considered as a way to give staff an opportunity to develop and compete for work in which they have been under-represented or absent. Ensuring learning and development opportunities are fairly available will demonstrate an institution's commitment to developing all staff so that they have an equal opportunity to reach their potential.

Some interventions suggested in this section require institutions to conduct equality impact assessments. To assist in this process, ECU has published *Conducting Equality Impact Assessments in Higher Education* (2007) (www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-impact-assessment-in-he). This practical guidance includes what to assess, who should carry out the assessment, when assessment should take place, and a step-by-step guide to carrying out the assessments.

Table 4 Suggested interventions for recruitment and retention	
Intervention	Targeted group
Conduct equality impact assessments of recruitment policies and procedures in order to encourage applications from staff with diverse backgrounds and adopt open and inclusive recruitment processes, especially for part-time and/or temporary staff.	All staff
Develop ability to identify and use a diverse range of national, regional and equality-focused media to ensure job adverts are positioned to reach a diverse audience.	Prospective staff from equality groups
Provide equality training for those who write job adverts and descriptions. They should be aware that it is unlawful to publish, or to be responsible for publishing, any advertisement that indicates, or may reasonably be understood to indicate, an intention to discriminate, even if the act of discrimination were lawful (ECU, 2008d).	Recruitment staff
Those responsible for writing job descriptions should reassess the criteria used in person specifications to avoid overspecification, which might deter applications from under-represented groups.	Recruitment staff
A range of outlets should be used to ensure vacancies reach local applicants. This could be through developing links with local councils, job centres, charities, equality groups and networks.	Prospective staff from equality groups
Offer unemployed local people the opportunity to gain some voluntary experience, either within the institution or at a local partner organisation. This will provide them with a chance to develop their skills, maximise their potential and have a stepping stone into paid employment. And it will help institutions to develop a diverse workforce and support the independent living agenda.	Prospective staff from equality groups

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Table 4 Continued	
Intervention	Targeted group
Provide equality awareness training for chairs and members of recruitment panels.	Recruitment panels
Review recruitment procedures in order to encourage applications from disabled people, guaranteeing interviews to disabled applicants meeting the job requirements. Sign up to schemes such as the Mindful Employer Charter (www.mindfulemployer.net) and the requirements of the Two Ticks scheme (www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Employmentsupport/LookingForWork/DG_4000224), which guarantees interviews to disabled applicants meeting the job requirements.	Disabled staff
Collect equality data on staff progression and occupations – to address issues relating to occupational segregation and glass ceilings.	All equality groups
Develop and enhance the skills of managers in relation to longer-term planning to consider improving staff diversity.	All equality groups
Improve data on the whole ‘supply chain’ from postgraduate study into academic careers, to identify where inequalities and barriers exist for people in the different equality categories.	All equality groups
Introduce a structured mentoring/coaching programme for all equality groups to help them progress, but market it particularly to under-represented groups. Those being mentored will receive coaching in identifying their career goals and help in achieving them. Mentors will receive training in their role and will commit to a mentoring partnership for an agreed period.	All equality groups, particularly BME, LGB and disabled

Table 4 Continued	
Intervention	Targeted group
Introduce a reverse mentoring scheme – in this mentoring partnership, staff members will have the opportunity to mentor senior colleagues, aiming to spread better understanding of diversity issues among senior management.	BME, LGB and disabled staff
Introduce a shadow senior management team – this development tool will give talented individuals in under-represented groups the experience of senior collective decision-making. They will be given the opportunity to meet briefly prior to meetings of the senior group and discuss the same papers as that group. A member of the shadow group will be invited (on a rotating basis) to attend the senior group's meetings and feed in the thoughts of the shadow group. This will contribute to the equality proofing of senior decisions.	All equality groups
Employ equality officers to act as a recognised port of call for staff on equality issues. This could lead to staff being encouraged to disclose their status.	All equality groups
Examine how occupational health services can work with service users and human resources to encourage higher disability disclosure rates.	Disabled staff

3.4 Achieving behaviour and culture change through developing supportive structures

If staff from under-represented groups are to feel secure in disclosing personal information to enable institutions to provide increased support, it will be important for the institution to:

- = foster visible leadership and develop managers who understand the benefits of equality and diversity, and have a proactive approach to achieving it
- = develop a workplace culture that is supportive and respects the individuality of all staff
- = provide equality and diversity learning opportunities for all staff
- = involve staff, from equality areas, in policy-making and other decision-making processes.

Table 5 Suggested interventions for achieving behaviour and culture change	
Intervention	Targeted group
Develop and promote guidance on providing anticipatory and reasonable adjustments and accessibility.	Disabled staff
Provide training on the effective delivery of adjustments and accessibility.	Disabled staff
Finance reasonable adjustments centrally so that no section, department or faculty is disadvantaged, financially or otherwise, in meeting disability equality responsibilities.	Disabled staff
Carry out impact assessment and monitor the uptake and use of existing flexible working provisions, and ensure the flexible working policy supports all staff.	All staff
Communicate and promote flexible working provisions and the business benefits of flexible working via a staff booklet.	All staff

Table 5 Continued	
Intervention	Targeted group
Introduce and encourage appropriate mechanisms to ensure the voices of disabled, BME and LGB staff are involved, heard and supported. This can be through staff equality discussion groups, forums or networks, and will give individuals a platform from which they can contribute to designing policies and processes of benefit for everyone, and raise any concerns.	BME, LGB and disabled staff
Design inclusive social activities, giving better consideration to the circumstances and needs of those from under-represented groups.	All staff
Ensure disabled people are encouraged to be trustees and governors, and that bodies responsible for governance include disabled people.	Disabled staff
Ensure disability equality policies and schemes, staff appraisal schemes and impact assessments involve disabled staff and trade union officials, reporting to governing bodies/trustees annually, as the Disability Equality Duty requires (www.ecu.ac.uk/law/disability-legislation).	Disabled staff
Raise higher expectations of appropriate behaviour, for example raising awareness of equality-related legal, social and etiquette issues (through learning and development), or including diversity objectives within personal performance appraisals.	All equality groups
Develop a strategy for ensuring ongoing involvement in equality-assuring policies and processes, or any other opportunities, such as reviewing communication channels or developing change programmes.	Disabled staff, also benefiting other staff
Introduce clearly designated senior members of staff with responsibility for providing leadership and championing equality issues.	BME, LGB and disabled staff

Table 5 Continued	
Intervention	Targeted group
Ensure all senior managers and all line managers are aware of their responsibilities regarding equality policies.	All equality groups
Conduct quarterly pulse surveys. Pulse surveys are often employed between regular surveys to provide an indicative result. They normally involve a small number of respondents – perhaps the most affected by the issue in question, or a sample thought to represent the views of the majority. Analysis of results should be conducted by equality area, which may identify barriers. Successful pulse surveys find the correct balance between limiting the questions and sample size, without compromising results.	All equality groups
Identify where disadvantage or inequalities are greatest – by carrying out more intersectional analysis of the equality categories (e.g. gender and ethnicity together), and taking in other personal characteristics (e.g. to identify groups such as mothers) or work situations (e.g. type of institution, senior levels, discipline areas).	All equality groups
Review complaints and grievances procedures to ensure staff are aware of what a person should do if they experience discrimination – e.g. consider types of complaint, sources of help and representation, roles and responsibilities, and types of procedure.	All equality groups
Introduce a network of trained members of staff to act as harassment contact officers, who can provide support to other staff members who may be experiencing harassment or discrimination. Harassment contact officers are outside the individual's line management chain, and can act on behalf of that person by acting as a liaison with human resources, unions, etc.	All equality groups

4 Measurements of success

A range of measurements could be used to monitor the success of any staff disclosure project and individual interventions, including the following.

- = Increase in disclosure rates for different equality groups.
- = Improved data quality and coverage.
- = Responses from staff to equality questions in staff and pulse surveys.
- = Feedback from exit interviews.
- = Performance against targets based on analysis of recruitment and promotion data.
- = Effective embedding of equality and diversity in HR policies and processes, such as recruitment, induction, performance management, and learning and development.
- = The percentage of staff from different equality groups reflecting the percentage of these groups in the working population.

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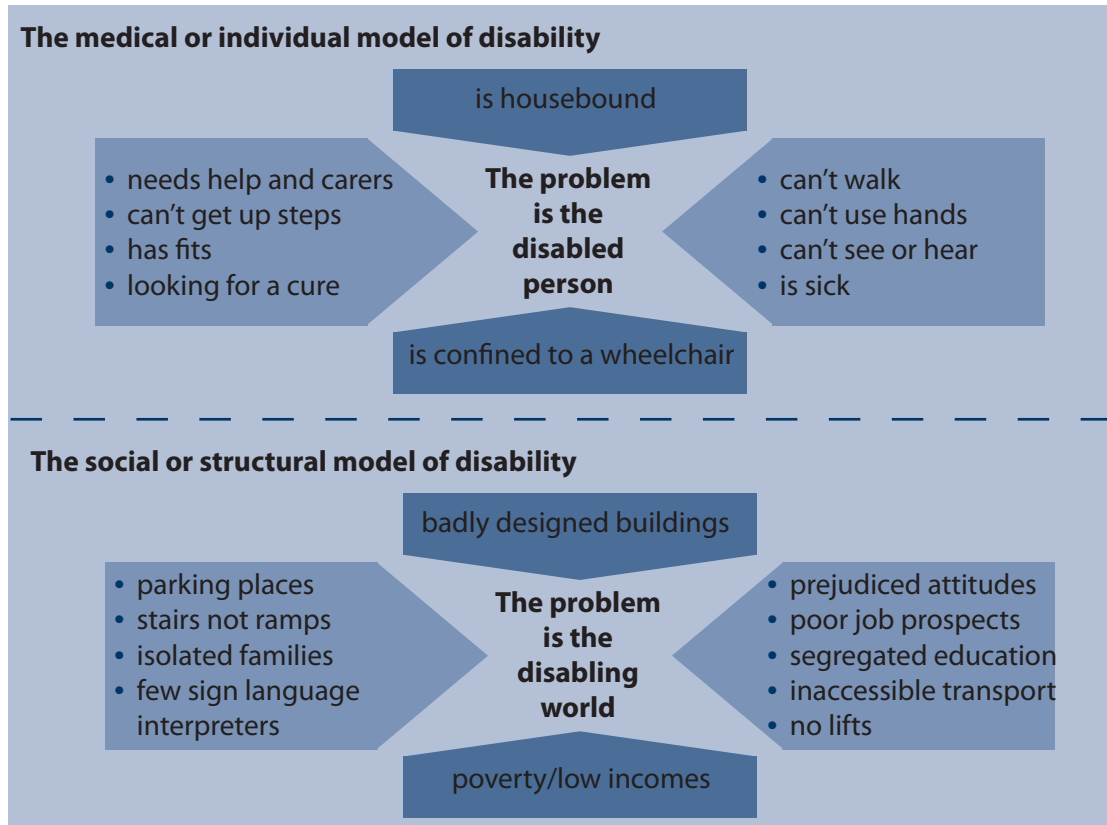
Appendix A: Participating HEIs

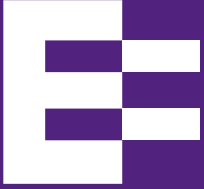
Higher education institutions that participated in the ECU staff disclosure project during the 2008/09 academic year:

- = Aston University
- = Canterbury Christ Church University
- = Oxford Brookes University
- = Sheffield Hallam University
- = University of Birmingham
- = University of Hull
- = University of Leeds
- = University of Salford

Appendix B: The social versus medical models

Figure 1 The social versus medical model of disability (source: DRC, 2005)





Equality Challenge Unit

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

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