

The Role of the Equality Specialist in Higher Education Institutions

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Equality and Diversity in Higher Education





Foreword

The Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network and the Equality Challenge Unit publish guidance and advice on the full range of equality and diversity topics. The five publications that make up this new series complement existing advice on different aspects of legislation and policy in order to engage all those who work in higher education to think about our responsibilities for building a positive culture of diversity within our institutions. To promote positively equality and diversity and to take steps actively to make sure that discrimination does not occur, are now established requirements of the new legislation that has been put in place since 2000 covering each of the equality and diversity strands. This positive duty is both the most important and one of the most testing obligations the legislation places on public bodies. As they respond to the new legislative environment, higher education institutions are seeking to tackle the root causes of inequalities that affect both staff and students.

In the context of a large body of legislation, this series of publications is timely as issues of equality and diversity move up the higher education agenda. But, it is not only the legislation that is driving this agenda. It is clear from the work done for this project that institutions that have long been aware of the moral case for equality now also recognise that their success depends on building organisational cultures that

value diversity. They see the obvious and tangible benefits in being organisations in which staff and students wish to work and study and in which all are able to achieve to the best of their abilities. A positive diversity dynamic generates the energy on which organisations thrive. Drawing on the resources of a diverse society strengthens performance. Creating a workplace culture based on fair treatment and a positive view of diversity encourages high levels of commitment.

The University of Wolverhampton was pleased to support this joint HEEON and ECU project to produce guidance documents, which is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The project relied on the full participation and support of all the partners and exemplifies partnership working. The project combined the efforts, skills and contributions of many, has been grounded in real experience and has built a sense of ownership in the sector. The five publications are addressed to all levels of HEIs, including Governors, Members of Council, managers, equality specialists and anyone with an interest in how the sector is developing the equality and diversity agenda.

I hope that you find these documents useful in providing you with practical advice and support.

Geoff Hurd
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
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Acknowledgements

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Thanks are due to HEFCE staff for their support in the earliest stages of the project and continuing support by representation on the Steering Group. It was the HEFCE funding that enabled the project to get off the ground initially but it was clear that that was not the end of their support and they were happy to give advice and guidance if needed.

It would not have been possible to formulate and develop this project without the solid support given to it by the Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network (HEEON), which is a network of specialists in the area of equality and diversity. It was among the HEEON Colleagues that the idea for this project was born and nurtured.

The University of Wolverhampton provided the base for project management and contributed to the project in many ways throughout. Thanks to the many colleagues from the University of Wolverhampton who gave of their time and commitment in numerous ways from secretarial support and handling the finance to commenting on drafts and contributing ideas.

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Thanks are due to the group of six did some critical reading for us and came up with helpful and informative remarks. Their positive feedback gave us confidence that we had got it right for the Equality and Diversity specialists.

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Introduction

1. Over the last decade there has been a huge increase in the amount and coverage of equalities legislation in the UK. In that decade there was also a shift in cultural awareness and societal attitudes, due both to legislative changes and high profile incidents. For the first time, it became incumbent on public authorities to be proactive in the promotion of equality of opportunity between people of different races, and gay men and lesbian women, people of different faiths and those with disabilities were legally protected against discrimination in *inter alia* employment. This protection was extended to all those undertaking vocational training, which means that every student on every course of further and higher education enjoys the right not to be discriminated against. The increase in equalities legislation and cultural diversity and awareness has led to the employment of greater numbers of equality specialists¹ in higher education institutions (HEIs).
2. Equality specialists have a complex and challenging role that varies considerably between HEIs. To gain some understanding of the different roles these specialists have within their respective institutions, and from that to attempt to determine the most effective ways in which equality and diversity can be delivered through them, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded a research project through its Leadership, Governance and Management Fund (LGFM). The project was led by Berry Dicker at the University of Wolverhampton and supported by the Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network (HEEON) and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU).
3. The research was undertaken using an online questionnaire that equality specialists in all UK HEIs were invited to complete. 70 fully completed questionnaires were returned to the project team from 169 HEIs², giving a response rate of 41%³. It is the first investigation into the role of equality specialists working in HEIs and endeavours to determine their profile both in terms of their own working environment and across the higher education sector as a whole.

¹ Equality specialist is used throughout the report to describe the person who is specifically employed to have all or some of the responsibility for the delivery of equality and diversity within an HEI. This nomenclature is used to avoid any confusion that may arise due to job titles.

² 30 partial responses were received and are not included in the analysis.

³ Two responses were received from one institution

4.
 - i. The first section profiles the equality specialist. It looks at the number of years' experience the specialists have of working in the equality and diversity field; how long they have been in their current position; who their remit covers; what they spend their time doing and how long they spend doing it. It concludes with the equality specialists' appraisal of how progress on equality and diversity should be assessed.
 - ii. Equality specialists interact with managers in different ways. The second section is concerned with the frequency of contact between the equality specialist and decision makers.
 - iii. Different HEIs have different arrangements for the location and management of their equality specialists. The third section analyses the distribution of equality specialists between different departments and looks at the appropriateness of those locations.
 - iv. Section four considers the size of the HEIs in which the equality specialists work and the number of people also engaged in equality and diversity in either a voluntary or remunerated capacity in those institutions. The number of people the equality specialists manage is also considered, as is the composition and purpose of equality and diversity committees.
 - v. Equality specialists obviously have views on how best to embed equality and diversity within an HEI and these are reported in section five, as is the size of the specialists' budgets. Some of the additional factors that impede the embedding of equality and diversity in higher education are also considered.
 - vi. Section six is concerned with the interaction the equality specialists have with various institutional committees and the attitudes of people in the schools and departments towards them and their work. It looks at the support equality specialists get from their colleagues and networks, and at which organisations they find most useful when they need help and advice.
 - vii. The final section looks at the promotion and career development prospects for equality specialists. It considers their aspirations and expectations and how those things might have changed since they entered the higher education sector. It concludes with a list of activities that equality specialists think might enable them to progress to their 'ideal level'.



1. Equality specialist profile

5. The need to promote equal opportunities, equality and more recently, diversity has been recognised for a number of years. Throughout the 1990s the Commission for Career Opportunity (CUCO) produced guidance on childcare, sexual orientation, flexible working and related topics. This group was made up of trade unionists, equality specialists from HEIs and higher education sector agencies. There was however a dearth of equal opportunities policies within the sector and dedicated staff could only be found in a small number of HEIs. This changed quite abruptly in the latter part of the 1990s when HEFCE allocated specific funds to provide for the needs of disabled students in England and HEIs were obliged to demonstrate their arrangements. The legal requirement to make provision for disabled students was followed quite rapidly by another legal imperative which required the production of a race equality policy and action plan. This was followed by a raft of, mainly Europe-driven, equalities legislation that introduced new equalities areas to the statute books, which, in turn, necessitated the employment of staff to ensure that the legislation was not being breached.
6. Within an HEI some kind of equality brief may be held by one or several people and there are numerous permutations on the kinds of brief. It can be defined through categories of people like, for example, staff and/or students, with the understanding that all aspects of equality will be covered, or through the provision of specific support to some, usually disabled, students. However, where the brief is only a part of a person's remit it may be coupled with a complementary role, most usually in human resource management.
7. There is a tendency for equality and diversity to only be a part of someone's remit in the smaller specialist colleges, but that is not always the case. It is the only remit for 70 per cent of the respondents and the majority of them hold a brief for both staff and students. Less than a fifth of those whose brief is solely equality and diversity are concerned only with staff, while fewer still, ten percent, only have a student remit. The number of staff in the HEIs where the equality specialist has a staff-only remit ranges from 1000 to 6000 and it is not specific to pre-or post-92 institutions or Russell Group universities.
8. The situation for equality specialists who have equality and diversity as only a part of their brief is slightly different. More than half of them are concerned just with staff and they are mainly employed in post-92 universities.
9. Nearly three fifths of respondents are responsible for staff and students and for 85

per cent of them equality and diversity is their only remit. Equality specialists who are responsible for both staff and students are slightly more likely to be employed in a Russell Group university than any other.

10. Where equality is only a part of a respondent's brief it does not mean that they are the only people working in that area within their HEI. There is nearly always a student disability team and usually a network of harassment advisers, both of which are usually also found in HEIs that have one or more dedicated equality specialists.
11. The majority of equality specialists in HEIs have been in their current job for less than five years and just over a quarter have been there less than a year. This is not a reflection of an inexperienced cohort of equality specialists. A very small number have not previously held equality positions, but the majority of respondents (60%) have been working in the field of equality and diversity for five years or more. This suggests that either there is a high turnover of equality specialists within HEIs, or that more HEIs are identifying the need for an equality specialist within their institution and creating the position. This is unsurprising given the amount of legislative change in the past five years.

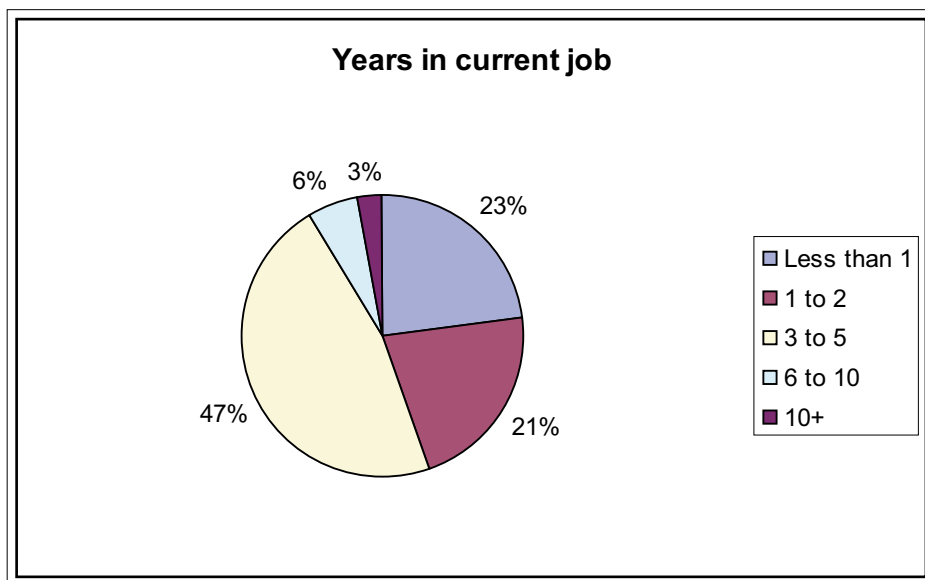


Figure 1: Number of years equality specialists have been in their current job

12. 59 per cent of respondents were doing equality and diversity work in a previous employment, though 29 percent of these people have been working in their current positions for less than a year. This indicates higher education institutions are successfully attracting staff from other sectors. Respondents were not asked which sector they had come from to higher education, however they were asked



the reasons for applying for their current position. Most people wanted to work in the equality and diversity field, though widening experience and desire to work for an HEI were also motivating factors. One or two people wanted to work in specific HEIs or move to a particular place, while for others equality and diversity was added to their role or there was a promotion opportunity.

- Many of the key elements of the equality specialist’s role are common to all HEIs (see Figure 2). Nearly all are engaged in policy development, liaison with external agencies, giving advice on legislation to staff, impact assessment and consultation. Advising students is not as common and obviously dependent on whether the remit covers students. Though, interestingly, even taking the distribution of the staff, student and staff/student remit (Paragraph 7) into account, proportionally more specialists advise staff than students, implying that even those with a remit for staff and students are more engaged with staff than they are students. This might be because of their location within the institution which will be considered in the next section.

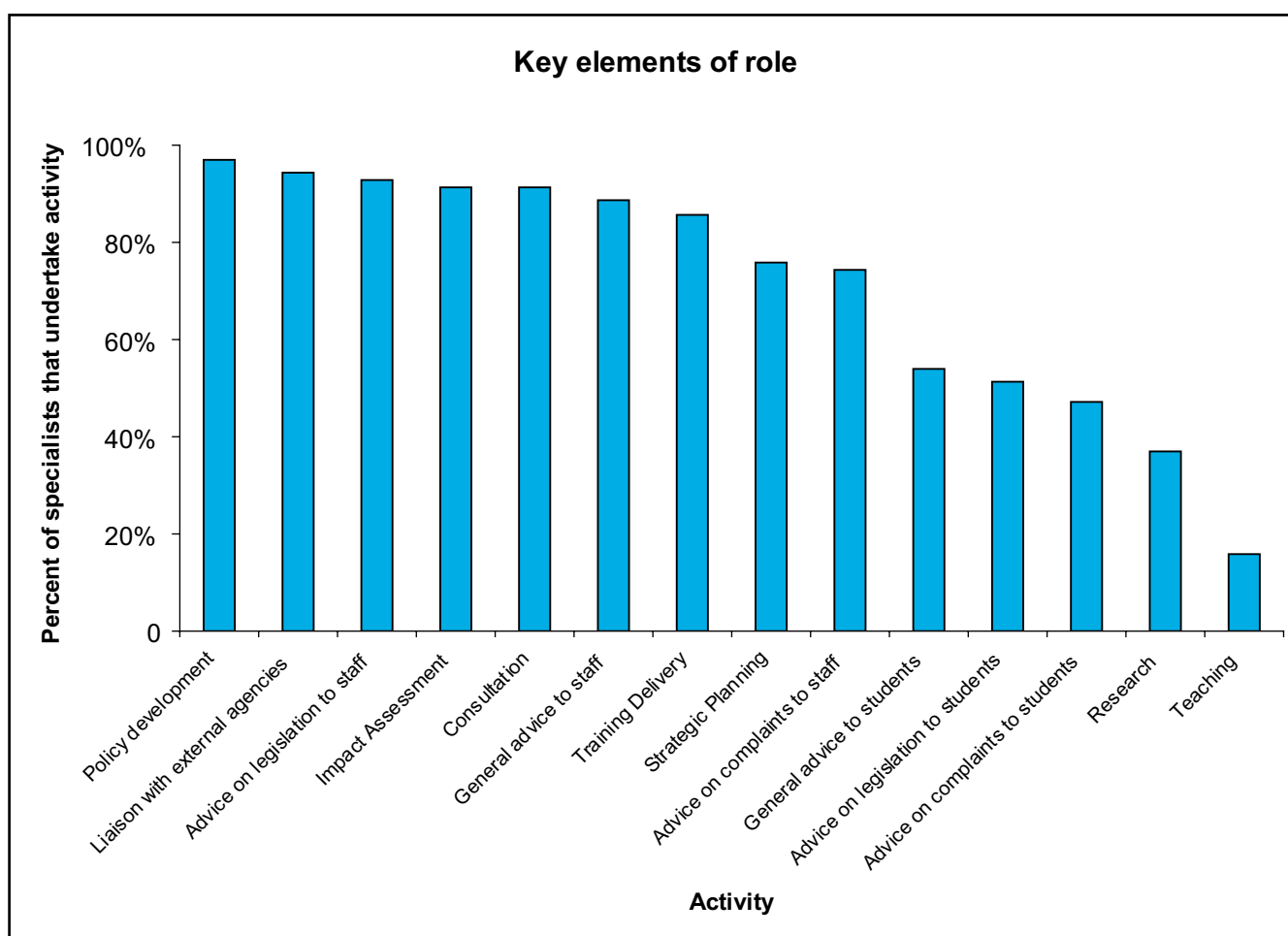


Figure 2: Key elements of an equality specialist’s role

14. The fact that some respondents spend time on research and teaching demonstrates additional value to the HEI. HR projects, marketing, communications and monitoring activities, engagement with the community and mentoring were also listed as elements of some respondents' role, but are less common and not included in Figure 2.
15. Equality specialists in higher education undertake broadly the same sort of activities wherever they are employed and the time spent on them varies according to post-specific responsibilities. The average amount of time respondents to the questionnaire spent on the different activities is shown in Figure 3. The greatest proportion of time is spent on policy development and the least on advising students.

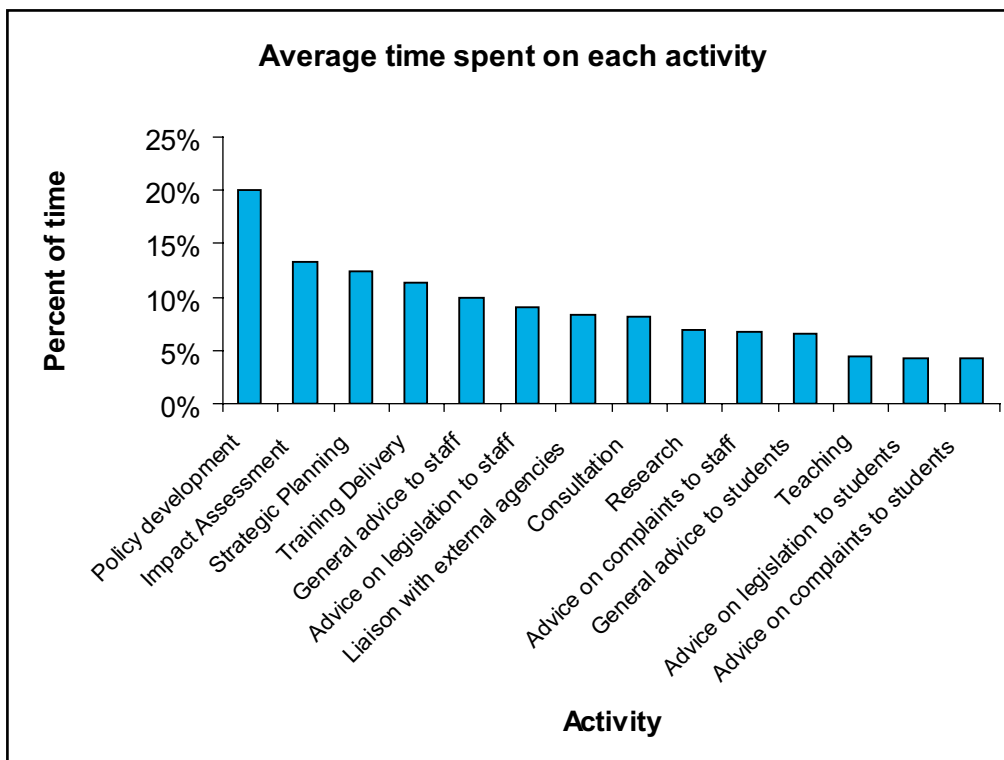


Figure 3: Average time an equality specialist spends on each activity

16. Both the activities an equality specialist undertakes and the time they are engaged on them are largely dictated by external forces. When this research was undertaken, early in 2006, equality specialists were preparing for the introduction of age legislation and a positive duty to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people, as well as continuing to meet the requirements of the positive duty to promote race equality. This is reflected in the time spent on policy development, impact assessment and strategic planning and in their comments



“Due to the current volume of equality legislation and other important areas such as RAE 2008, much of my time is spent on policy development, however as this subsides I would see the role as being more active in supporting staff.”

“At the moment I am working on the Disability Equality Scheme which is taking up the majority of the high percentage of time spent on policy development. Otherwise I would be spending more time on strategic implementation.”

17. The activities of equality specialists and time spent on them, is self-evidently important for the promotion and embedding of equality and diversity within an institution, but there is also the question of how progress can be measured. A large majority of respondents (85%) thought that annual monitoring of progression towards the implementation of good equality and diversity practice should be conducted through the self-assessment of progress towards individual institutional goals and 71 per cent thought that institutional targets should be set. Less welcome was the suggestion that monitoring should be undertaken through sector wide assessment of progress towards sector wide targets, with only about half the respondents agreeing with either proposal. Additionally, a small number favoured performance indicators, external audit and funding council mechanisms.

Recommendation 1 The work of the equality specialist should be planned over the period of the HEIs own strategic plan to allow for the proactive implementation of equality and diversity within the HEI.

Recommendation 2 An HEI should set institutional equality and diversity targets that align with its strategy. Progress towards goals should be measured annually and reported in the Annual Report.

Recommendation 3 In preparation for the Commission for Equality and Human Rights' State of the Nation Reports HEIs should identify measures of progress comparable with other HEIs and sectors.

2. Interaction with management

18. Reassuringly, the research findings show a relationship between the key elements of an equality specialist's role and the reasons for managers contacting them. The most common reasons for managers contacting their specialists are on matters concerning the implementation of procedures and policies; for advice on complaints; and staff issues. The average response rate to this part of the questionnaire was 80 per cent. One of the reasons for its non-completion was because some of the respondents had not been in post long enough to have gauged this interaction. The responses suggest that managers rely on the equality specialists as a source of advice when they are required to implement or react to something that has an equality angle. The proactive activities of mainstreaming and promoting equality were near the bottom of the list of reasons for managers to contact their equality specialists; the most infrequent reasons for contact were, not unexpectedly, learning and teaching and curriculum issues. Only one respondent reported that some management contact was "to talk over their equality and diversity plans".
19. There is then the question of who these 'managers' are and how frequent the contact equality specialists have with them. Figure 4 shows who the equality specialists prepare reports for, who they receive requests for advice from and the frequency of contact with managers of the institution. As some of the sample had only been in post for a short period of time and in a newly created post in which reporting lines were still being defined, it should not be inferred that in some HEIs no-one in a senior management position receives any report from the equality specialist. However, it is apparent that only very few heads of institution have frequent contact with their equality specialists, though the majority consult them. As the distribution of roles in the senior management team varies between HEIs, the amount of contact with the institution head may not be as significant as senior management commitment.



	Head of Institution	Senior Management Team	Head of Faculty/ Department	Governing Body
Prepare reports/ briefings for:	67.1%	90%	74.3%	74.3%
Receive requests for advice from	62.9%	84.3%	90%	40%
Contact: weekly	5.7%	20%	28.6%	-
Monthly	12.9%	28.6%	30%	1.4%
Quarterly	37.1%	31.4%	24.3%	22.9%
Annually	21.4%	7.1%	7.1%	34.3%

Figure 4: Frequency and type of contact between equality specialists and senior figures in their HEI

20. Members of governing bodies are least likely to request advice from the equality specialist and not all receive reports directly from them (though it is possible that elements of reports made to Senior Management Teams (SMTs) are included in reports to governors). Heads of Faculty/Department have the most frequent contact with the specialists. This is probably because of their direct managerial and departmental responsibilities as they are the people who most often ask for advice. The senior management team is slightly more likely to receive reports from the equality specialist than engage in other forms of interaction.
21. Frequency of contact is likely to have some relationship with who makes the decisions about the equality specialist's work. For most of the respondents decisions relating to their work were taken by more than one person, though the work of 13 per cent was determined without reference to any other person or committee. One person's work was determined by their departmental manager and another's by a committee. Where the work was decided by just two people it was most often the equality specialist and their line manager; four per cent stated that it was set by them and their departmental manager. The majority, 56 per



cent, had a number of people who were involved in their work programme. These people were most often their line manager, a committee and the executive. Overall, one third of respondents had input from the executive. The head of the institution was directly engaged with making decisions about the work of two of the respondents.

Recommendation 4 An assessment should be made of members of governing bodies' awareness of equality issues and their responsibilities. Training should be provided where gaps in knowledge are detected.

Recommendation 5 As there are increasing requirements to promote and progress equality issues HEI policy makers should review the way contact between the equality specialist and senior management is enabled.



3. Does location matter?

22. There is an ongoing debate about where equality specialists should be located within their HEI for them to be most effective. As many of their posts are relatively new and have perhaps had their origins in partial positions in Human Resources/Personnel Departments, the majority of respondents reported being situated there. Generally, there is no difference between type of institution and location of the equality specialist. There is proportionate representation of all the different locations across all the different types of HEI, except when the specialist is located in a stand-alone equality and diversity unit. Then they are more likely to be employed by a Russell Group university than any other.

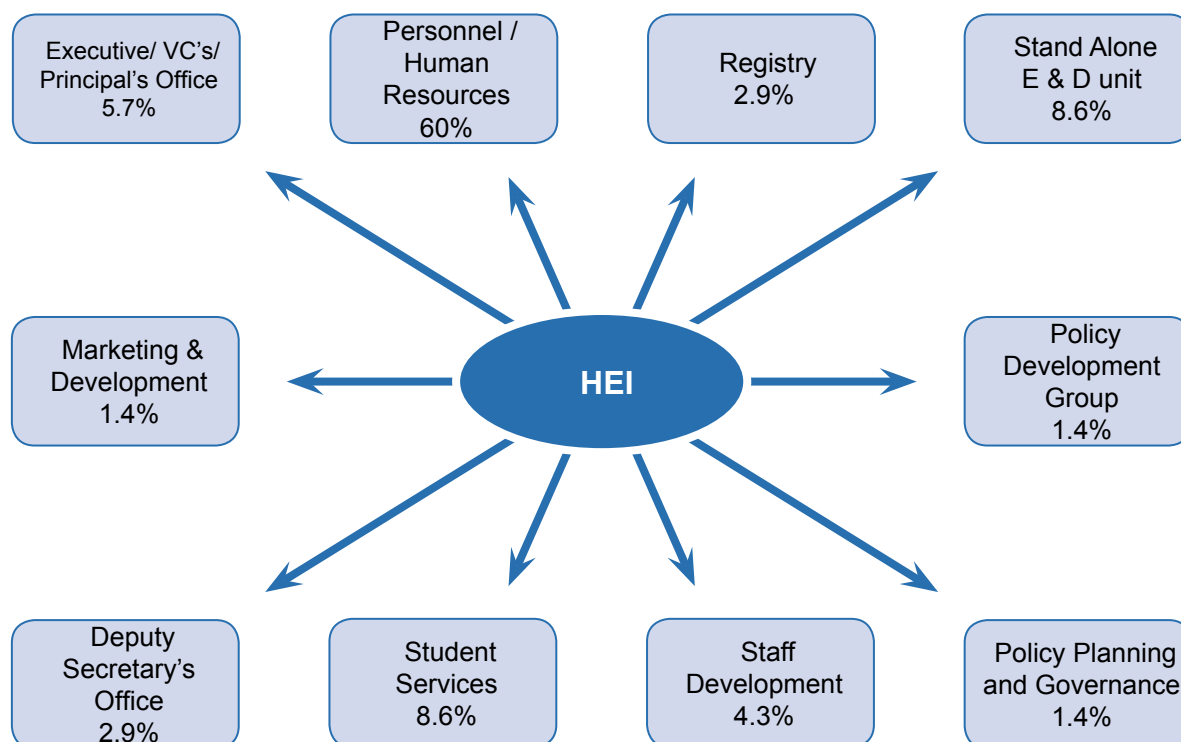


Figure 5: Location of equality specialists within their HEIs

23. Respondents were asked if they considered themselves to be in the most appropriate location. 60 per cent thought that they were in the right place. Of the ones that thought they should be somewhere else; 38 per cent of the people in Human Resources/Personnel Departments thought it was not the best place for them to be and though there are smaller numbers working in Registries, Student Services and Staff Development units these were also thought to be inappropriate locations by the majority of people working in them. All respondents from Russell Group universities, except two, thought they were in the best

location for the job. The highest proportion of people who thought they were wrongly located came from post-92 institutions and there was an equal split over whether the Executive/VC's/Principal's Office was the best location or not.

24. There was no overall agreement about the best place to be located. Some of those who think they are in the wrong place give the same reasons for it being the wrong place as people who are in the same place give for it being the right place.

“Staff are suspicious of my role which can be seen as siding with Personnel practices and academics and students do not see why someone from Personnel is involved in their area.”

“It would be better for diversity to be independent and be responsible for both staff and student activities.”

“Equality and diversity work should be at the very heart of an organisation's work. Being placed in HR can be problematic as it is seen as a soft area of the organisation's business”

Equality specialists in 'wrong' location in Personnel

“I believe E&D is an HR issue although we would prefer to have a dedicated officer.”

“Despite some involvement in student issues, there is better colleague support in HR. At one time I thought the VC's office would be best, but it would be a 'lonely road', I think!”



“It works for now because of the staff focus but longer term it might not be the best place, especially if students are covered. However in that case unless it can stand alone it’s hard to see where it would best fit.”

Equality specialists in ‘right’ location in Personnel

25. Even though very few of the respondents were based in a stand-alone equality and diversity unit (and all who were thought this was exactly the right place for them to be) they gave compelling reasons for the establishment of such units.

“We are independent and can respond to things in a more dynamic manner than if we were linked to another area of the College. However, it does mean that we have a job of work to do in winning support from other areas and that we are probably less secure as a result.”

“I think it vital to have some independence from university “management” if we are to be genuinely approachable. We certainly need close links with HR but my feeling is that we can offer a more objective view sometimes than HR.”

“We are unusual in not being based in HR. This is because I am responsible for both staff and students. I feel that where EO is only focussed on staff, the student issues can be more difficult to progress.”

Equality specialists in the ‘right’ place in stand-alone equality units

- Recommendation 6** In consultation with their equality specialists, managers should review the position of the equality specialist within the HEI to consider whether they are most effectively placed to deliver the HEI’s equality and diversity aims and objectives.

4. Does size matter?

26. Location is only one factor that might affect the effectiveness of the equality specialist; size of institution, department in which the specialist is based and support networks are also relevant factors. Many of the specialists who took part in the survey work on multi-site campuses, some based in different towns, but this was not taken into account in the analysis. Comparisons have only been made on the basis of staff and student populations, which have been tabulated according to the remit of the respondent. Figure 6 shows the other people working on equality and diversity within the HEIs where the respondent is responsible for both staff and students.

Size of HEI (Staff and Students)	Only/part remit of respondent	Disabled student support	Student support	Volunteer Harassment Contact	Admin/ Clerical Support	Other
<2000	Only	5	7			
2000 – 6000	Only			27		
6000 - 10000	Part	1	1	Yes		Yes
6000 – 10000	Only	3		6		
6000 – 10000	Part	6				
6000 – 10000	Part	9.5	26		.5	2
6000 – 10000	Only	Yes		Yes		
10000 – 15000	Only	Yes	Yes	Yes		
10000 – 15000	Only	3	6	15		2
10000 – 15000	Only	1				
10000 – 15000	Only	Yes				1
10000 – 15000	Only			36		Yes
10000 – 15000	Only	Yes		Yes	1	
10000 - 15000	Only	3		10		15
10000 – 15000	Only	Yes				
15000 – 20000	Only	Yes				20
15000 – 20000	Only	Yes		Yes	1	
15000 – 20000	Only	Yes		Yes		Yes
15000 – 20000	Only	Yes				
15000 – 20000	Only	Yes				Yes



Size of HEI (Staff and Students)	Only/part remit of respondent	Disabled student support	Student support	Volunteer Harassment Contact	Admin/ Clerical Support	Other
15000 -20000	Only	8		11		
15000 – 20000	Only	Yes		Yes		Yes
15000 – 20000	Part	3	4	30		Yes
20000 – 25000	Only					15
20000 – 25000	Only	Yes		Yes	1	
20000 – 25000	Only	1.5			2	Yes
20000 – 25000	Part	12		10		
20000 – 25000	Only	2.5			.5	1
25000 – 30000	Only	Yes		Yes		Yes
25000 – 30000	Only	Yes		Yes		Yes
25000 – 30000	Only	12		20		Yes
25000 – 30000	Part	Yes		Yes		
>30000	Only	Yes		Yes		Yes
>30000	Only				2.5	Yes
Unknown	Only			6	1	27
Unknown	Only	Yes	Yes			

Figure 6: Number of people within the HEI that have explicit equality and diversity roles when the equality specialist is responsible for staff and students

27. Size of institution alone does not appear to determine the number of people engaged in some capacity with equality and diversity as individuals (equality committees are considered in Paragraph 31 of the report). It can be seen that the majority of HEIs in which the respondent is responsible for both staff and students provide separate support for disabled students and that most have volunteer harassment contacts. However administrative and clerical support seems to be lacking. Other staff who have some responsibility for equality and diversity include school/departmental equal opportunities representatives, school disability co-ordinators, a staff diversity development manager and staff support and welfare officers. In one or two institutions a senior member of staff, like a Pro-Vice Chancellor, has some specific responsibility for equality and diversity. In one institution the equality specialist is a member of the senior management team.
28. There is a similar distribution of equality roles in the HEIs where the respondent's

only remit is students and again, there is no correlation with the size of the establishment.

29. A quarter of respondents are only responsible for staff. The people in this group reported some of the most innovative equality and diversity positions. Champions can be found in three institutions - for race, equality generally and as part of a Pro-Vice Chancellor's post. One HEI said that a separate department advises on equality and diversity in pedagogic and curriculum matters and another has volunteer race equality contacts in departments, while a third has equality and diversity contacts in its faculties and gives them a 20 per cent time allowance to carry out this function. University-wide dignity advisers were also mentioned. Unsurprisingly, nearly all the equality specialists who have a staff-only remit are located in HR/Personnel departments, though one is in the Vice Chancellor's office and another is in the Registry.

Size of HEI (Staff and Students)	Only/part remit of respondent	Disabled student support	Student support	Volunteer Harassment Contact	Admin/ Clerical Support	Other
<2000	Part		2	Yes		2
2000 - 6000	Part					1
6000 - 10000	Part	Yes	Yes			
6000 – 10000	Part	13		22		Yes
6000 - 10000	Part	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
6000 – 10000	Only					Yes
6000 – 10000	Only		Yes			
10000 - 15000	Only		Yes			Yes
10000 – 15000	Only	Yes		Yes		
10000 – 15000	Part					1
10000 – 15000	Part					10
10000 – 15000	Only	Yes				4
11000 – 15000	Only			6		20
15000 – 20000	Only	3		6	.5	6
15000 - 20000	Part	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
25000 - 30000	Part	30				Yes
15000 – 20000	Only			Yes		Yes
>30000	Part	Yes				Yes

Figure 7: Number of people within the HEI that have explicit equality and diversity roles when the equality specialist is responsible for staff only



30. Size extends to the amount of influence equality specialists have. They will directly influence the people they manage, but their influence on the culture and decision-making processes within an institution will vary. Almost half the respondents to the survey do not manage anyone. The remainder manage between one and twenty or more people. All the people who manage more than ten staff have a line manager who is a member of the senior management team. There is no relationship between people managing less than that number and their line manager's membership of their institution's SMT. However, 64% of equality specialists' line managers are members of the SMT and as the majority of line managers are involved in determining the equality specialists' work (see Paragraph 21) it would seem to suggest that most equality specialists have a channel through which the SMT can be influenced.

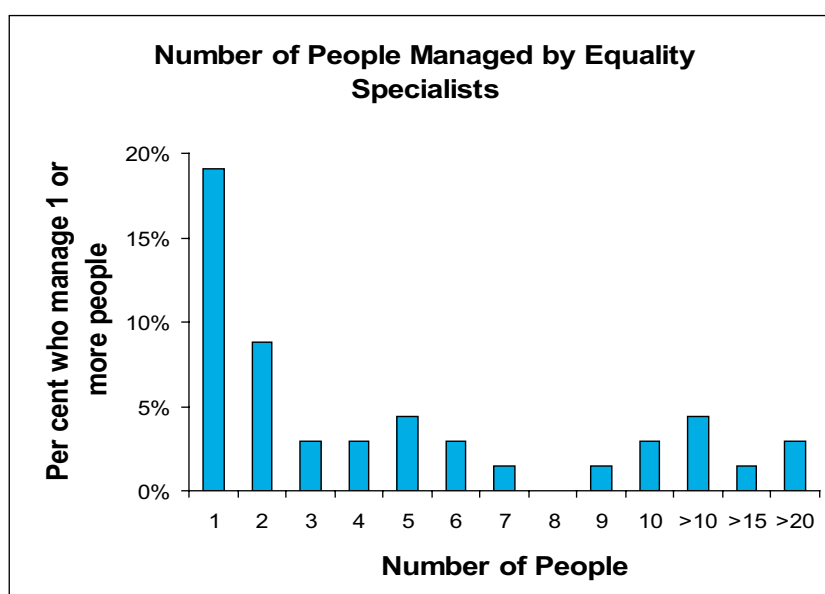


Figure 8: Number of people managed by equality specialists

31. Influence can also be gained through interaction with an equality and diversity committee, depending on its membership. The majority of respondents (90 per cent) said that their institution has an equality and diversity committee. Membership of 71% of these committees is determined by role within the institution and the committees consider matters relating to both staff and students. Typically, equality and diversity committees are chaired by a senior member of staff most usually a Pro-Vice Chancellor. Vice Chancellors are the second most likely people to chair the committee. There is no absolute standard model for them but many consist of representatives from the senior staff, students' union and trades unions. Where there is more than one equality specialist within the institution it is not uncommon for them all to attend. Almost all the committees were large, with twenty or more people on them. Given the seniority of some of the people on these committees and the number

of members, it would suggest that the equality specialist has at least one mechanism for reaching a reasonable number of people within the HEI and that at least some of these people are in a position to influence institutional decision-making.

32. The main purpose of most of the committees is ensuring and reviewing the implementation of equality and diversity and receiving key reports. Of secondary interest for almost three quarters of the committees are consultation, ensuring legislative compliance and policy development. The purpose of less than half the committees is to be a part of the communications strategy. One committee was involved in “scrutiny” and another monitored staff and students for things like recruitment, a third received feedback from departments and a fourth developed and approved an annual action plan.
33. Opinions about the effectiveness of the committees vary and different approaches are taken in different HEIs. In one institution there are two committees, one for staff and one for students and in two others the equality and diversity committees have been dissolved. A small number of respondents were dissatisfied with the support they got from and for these committees.

“I had initially hoped that the equality and diversity committee would be more active/strategic, but they rarely contribute to agendas, leaving me to propose most items.”

“The above [purpose of committee] is what it’s supposed to do – not what it does!”

There were also comments about downgrading the committee to a working group and lack of commitment from senior staff to attending its meetings, or staff that do attend being too young and inexperienced. However, one committee was “apparently the School’s most lively and controversial”.

34. In the HEIs that do not have equality and diversity committees different means have been developed to consult on policy development. These include involving the governing body, task groups, consultation events, non-formal steering group, joint staff committees and equality and diversity action groups. Sometimes the formation of a dedicated group is the most appropriate way of achieving a specific aim.



“Our Race Equality Scheme was put together by a task group representing all schools, offices and students. It was very effective.”

Recommendation 7 If there is no obvious or direct link between the equality specialist and the senior management team, other than the equality committee, one should be created.

Recommendation 8 Consideration should be given to the effectiveness of the equality and diversity committee (or its equivalent). Introducing equality and diversity to the institution’s main committees might be a more effective way of bringing about cultural change.

Recommendation 9 If the equality and diversity committee meets infrequently or does not have the right composition for the development of a specific policy, the formation of a dedicated group might be more effective. Should this approach be adopted it is important that accountability and responsibility for implementation are clear.

5. No time, no budget, no resources

35. Embedding equality and diversity within HEIs is integral to the job of the equality specialist (though, arguably, if they are too successful their posts will cease to exist). It is unrealistic to expect them to be able to carry out this function of their work if they are under-resourced and receive little or no support from the people who can effect change within the institution. The equality specialists were asked what they thought HEIs should do to embed equality and diversity and then asked if these things happened in their own institution. The most frequent responses to the first question are:
1. visible leadership from the head of institution and senior management
 2. provision of adequate financial and staffing resources
 3. inclusion of equality and diversity considerations in institutional, strategic and business plans
 4. mandatory training for all staff
 5. sound and robust communications strategy
 6. mainstream equality and diversity throughout the HEI
 7. monitoring and measurement
 8. cohesive, integrated policies and procedures.
36. When asked if these things happened in their institutions about a fifth said no unequivocally, but others had more positive experiences.

“No real commitment from the top. Promotion of values and policies, therefore, come from a different level within the organization. No training is mandatory and difficult to engage staff who really need it.”

“Resources are sadly lacking. The support I have from the top allows me to communicate the message. My concern is that our practices can be inconsistent. Things are changing for the better but dedicated resources would help to embed culture more effectively.”



37. Over a quarter of respondents felt they were under-resourced, which has the effect of limiting the work they can do.

“Funding limitations make it difficult to adequately deal with university wide awareness and promotion issues.”

One suggestion was that the funding councils should provide more support. There was also a plea for integral rather than initiative led non-recurrent funding. Whether this relates to funding council or institutional money is not known.

38. The challenges equality specialists identified in their own institutions are complex and at times contradictory if applied to a diverse sector. They include tangible problems that could be quite easily resolved; lack of resource was the most commonly cited challenge, for example, and the more nebulous were those that focussed on things like cultural change. Generally, resources were needed for more training initiatives, or to comply with the volume of recent legislation. This has time implications mainly for equality specialists, but if equality is to be embedded, then also for other staff within the institution. Support and buy-in from senior management were seen to be lacking, but this was weighed against competing institutional priorities such as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The staff group who were thought to be least engaged with equality and diversity was academics. Again, this was partially interpreted as an issue that related to available time, but it was also thought that academics do not see equality and diversity as a priority. Some academics were reported as being engaged in the “freedom of expression versus equality and diversity” argument and were actively resistant to equality and diversity initiatives. Prioritisation also concerned equality specialists. Many of them are responsible, to some degree, for all six legally defined equalities areas, each of which is at a different stage of its legal development, thus compounding the problem of volume. One respondent asked how we would know if equality and diversity activities are truly effective, which was answered by others when they cited cultural change (though respondents were not asked how this could be achieved).

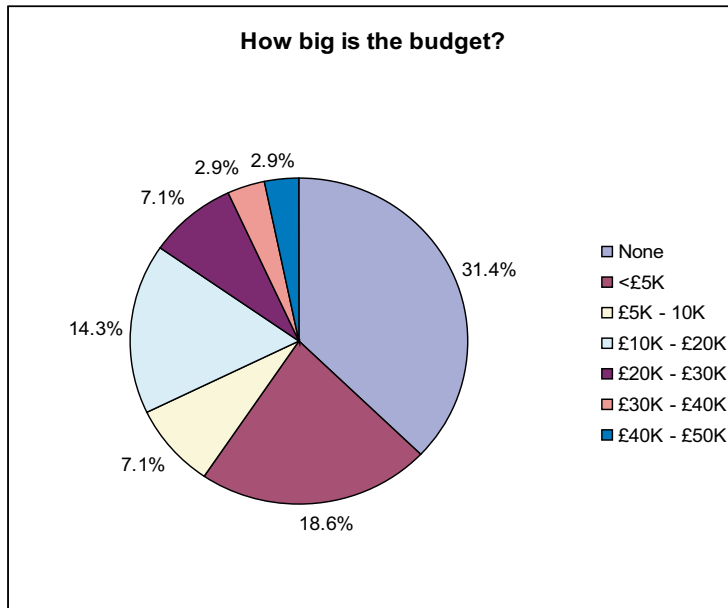


Figure 9: Size of equality specialists' budgets

39. Respondents were asked if they had a budget and if they did, how much. Just over two-thirds have a budget. The size of that budget ranges from less than £5,000 to over £50,000. Not surprisingly, those who do not have a budget at all are not satisfied with the amount they (do not) get. There are, however, some people who are satisfied with a budget of less than £5,000 and two of the recipients of budgets over £50,000 reported that the money included salary provision and that the remainder was insufficient for planning and project purposes. All but two of the respondents who have a budget of between £5,000 and £20,000 were unhappy with the amount they were allocated. If the intention is to mainstream equality and encourage spending by the faculties and division, as one respondent who was satisfied with the amount reported, then it has to be contextualised as part of the HEIs equality and diversity strategy. Alternatively, if the equality specialist is funding all equality work across an institution from their budget, then what can be achieved is limited.

Recommendation 10 An equality and diversity budget enabling the realisation of the institution's strategically aligned equality and diversity objectives that align with its strategy should be included in the institution's financial plan.



6. Who is there to help us?

40. Having a trustworthy network is, arguably, one of the best supporting mechanisms for any member of staff. For the equality specialist such networks are also vital to the delivery of their work. Lack of internal networks could isolate the equality specialist and impede the progress of equality and diversity within the institution. Equality specialists' networks comprise a variety of people, departments and/or committees that provide them with information and actively support and promote their work.

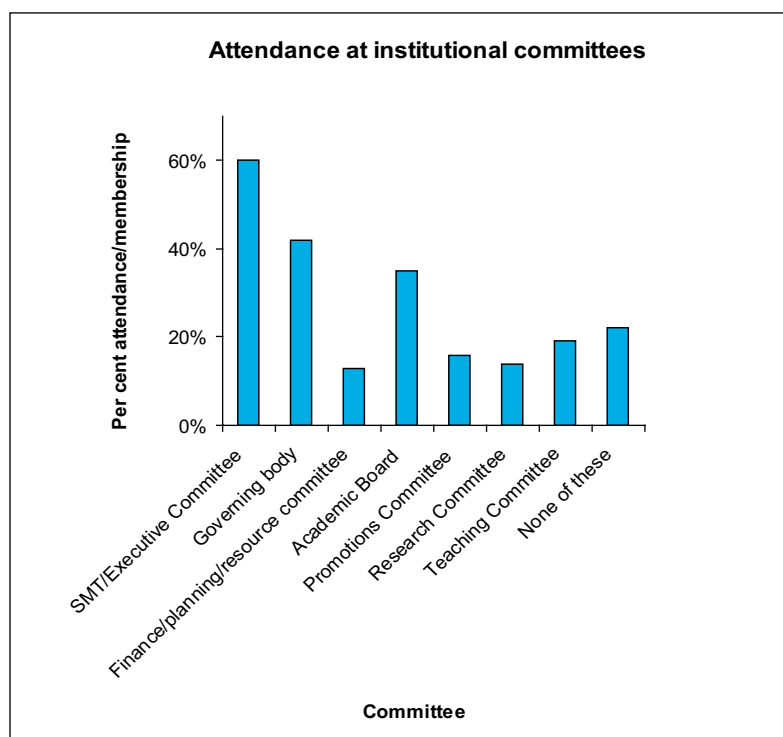


Figure 10: Per cent of equality specialists who attend/are members of different committees

41. Three quarters of the respondents are members of committees other than the equality and diversity one, or they have been asked to attend other committees' meetings. The majority of equality specialists have attended meetings of the Senior Management Team or Executive Committee⁴ and 42 per cent have been involved with the governing body⁵. The other most commonly attended committee is the Academic Board. One of the difficulties faced by equality

⁴ One respondent is a member of the Senior Management Team.

⁵ Respondents were not asked if they were staff governors or equivalent.

specialists in effecting cultural change is the mainstreaming of equality and diversity across institutional functions. It is possible that if equality specialists attended more academic committees and had the opportunity to understand how equality and diversity might be relevant to the business and objectives of those committees it could go some way to achieving this goal.

- 42. While most respondents had some association with one of the committees above, the other committees they are likely to be involved with usually have an obvious relationship to their role, such as widening access, student support, disability and human resources. Membership of campus security, ethics, campus planning, quality assurance and learning and teaching committees is much less common. One respondent was a member of the chaplaincy council. No respondent chaired a committee that did not have a direct link with equality and diversity.
- 43. In the last three years, only 13 per cent of the respondents had been on an appointments committee for academic staff in their own department, 21 per cent had been on an appointments committee for academic staff in another department and three per cent had been on an external appointments committee.
- 44. Every respondent either convenes or is involved with an institutional network that relates to equality and diversity. Whether the proportion of equality specialists convening or involved with the different networks is indicative of either institutional, their own or legislative priorities was not asked. The greatest number of respondents either convenes or is involved with a network of harassment contacts; this is followed by disability support staff and black and ethnic minority groups, suggesting that funding for disability and the race duty influenced the formation of these groups. The introduction of the gender duty in April 2007 may result in the formation of more gender groups and the possible shifting of trans issues to these groups as they are included in the gender duty.

	E&D Reps	Disability Support Staff	Harassment Contacts	Black and Minority Ethnic	Gender	LGBT	Religion/ Belief/ Multi-faith
Convene	43%	19%	49%	31%	16%	16%	10%
Involvement with	10%	60%	27%	30%	24%	24%	37%

Figure 11: Per cent of equality specialists who convene or are involved with equality networks

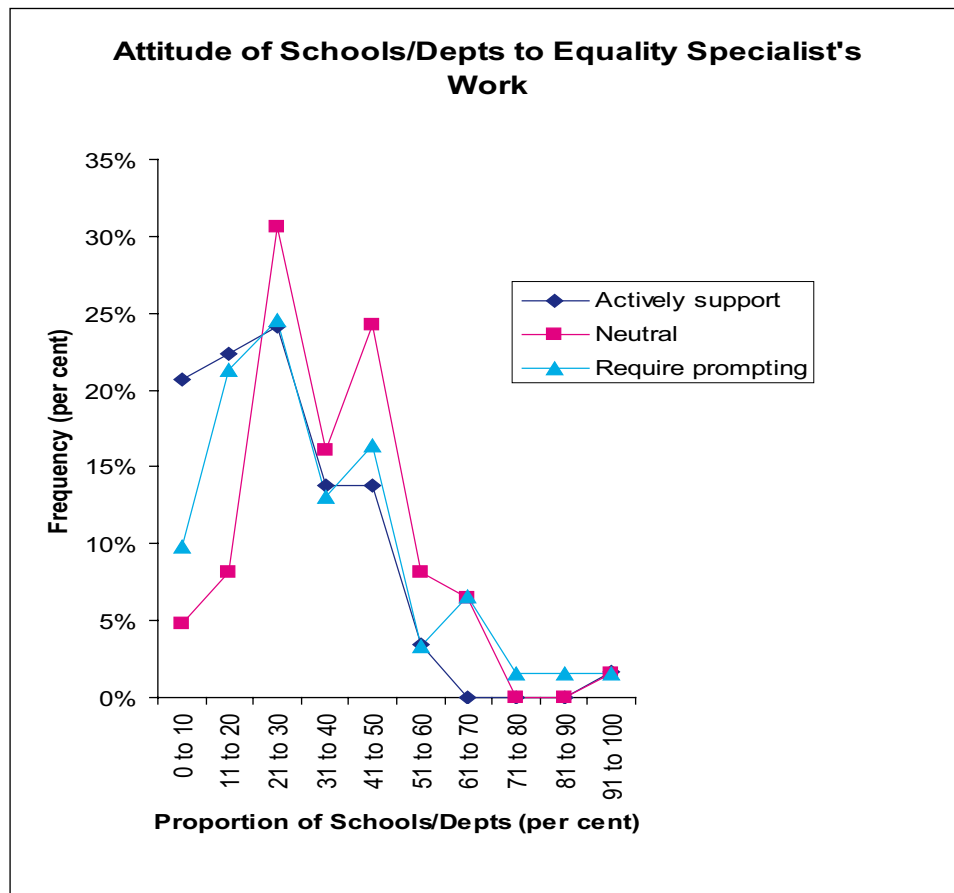


Figure 12: Attitudes of Schools/Departments to the equality specialists' work

45. Respondents were asked to gauge the support of schools and departments for their work. There is very little difference in the distribution of schools and departments which actively support their equality specialist and those which require prompting. There is also a balance at the extremes of the scale – one respondent reported that all departments are sluggish and required considerable prompting, while another said that all the schools and departments actively support their work. The highest proportions of departments and schools were neutral to the equality specialists' work, but would take up initiatives when asked to do so.
46. Just over half the equality specialists feel that the people around them, especially those they work with directly, are supportive and either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements “most senior managers are supportive” and “my role in the institution is valued”. 21 per cent and 14 per cent respectively, strongly disagreed or disagreed with these statements. About two thirds feel they are socially integrated within their departments, while 21 per cent disagreed with this statement. Perhaps, most tellingly only seven per cent of respondents thought that their administrative contribution was undervalued.

47. Individuals are also a source of support for equality specialists. Over a third of respondents have more than 15 allies or equality and diversity champions at work. Just under a quarter have between eight and fifteen allies and a quarter have between four and seven. Sadly, three percent have no allies at all.
48. Where support is lacking internally it can often be found through external support networks. Ninety per cent of respondents are members of an equality and diversity network. These equality and diversity networks vary in scope and/or focus. Overall the respondents were members of more than twenty networks⁶. The largest and most often mentioned is the Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network (HEEON), which provides support, information and encouragement to equality and diversity specialists in all parts of the UK. The majority of respondents (67.5%) found HEEON to be useful or very useful; a small but significant proportion (13.7%) did not find it very useful, if at all. 14.3 per cent of respondents are not members of HEEON. Nearly all of the other networks are regionally based and are predominantly for equality specialists who work in HEIs, but respondents also belonged to wider groups such as the Surrey Equality Partnership and the North West Race Equality Network.
49. As well as having a supportive function, networks can be a source of essential and valuable information. Equality specialists have to know not just about equality and diversity, but also the institution they are working in, and to varying degrees, they also have to understand the higher education sector as a whole. They were asked which three pieces of information would have been most useful to them at the start of their job. The most useful information they could have been given was examples of other HEIs' policies; a reason, perhaps, for every HEI to make them available on the public areas of their websites. About half would have found information about the higher education sector and associated topical matters helpful and just over a third would have wanted to know about local networks and forthcoming legislation. Twice as many people would have wanted to know how to contact ECU as opposed to other equality and diversity organisations, but these contacts were not seen as very important. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that newly arrived equality specialists are often unsure about the environment in which they are working, the standard of work expected in it and the things that are of the most current concern.

⁶ A full list can be found at Appendix A



50. Even though knowing how to contact ECU at the start of the job is not seen as being especially important, it is the organisation most frequently contacted by equality specialists. It is three times more likely to be contacted than either the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) or the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), the next two most frequently contacted organisations. Again, this illustrates the extent to which the equality specialists' work is legislation driven.

Recommendation 11 Academic committees should consider equality and diversity, receive advice and reports from the institutions' equality specialist/s and consider how they can work with their equality specialist/s to integrate equality and diversity.

Recommendation 12 Equality specialists could be given the opportunity to be members of, or observe, as many of the HEI's committees as possible. Alternatively, equality specialists could be given a contact on each committee who would be responsible for maintaining liaison for updating and consultation purposes.

Recommendation 13 An appraisal should be made of the relevant characteristics of the schools or departments that actively support the equality specialists' work.

7. Climbing up the ladder

51. Equality specialists are as likely to be interested in advancing their careers as any other member of staff. Professional development entails constructive training, an opportunity to gain or develop certain skills, clear career structures and transparent promotion/re-grading procedures and encouragement from peers and senior managers. Career progression is motivating and could be linked to workplace performance.
52. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (70.6%) said their access to training is satisfactory (35.3%) and/or good (35.3%). A further 21 per cent think it is excellent. Only 7.4 per cent are dissatisfied with this aspect of their job and rate it poor. There is a great deal of consensus about further training needs. Most respondents would like to learn more about equality legislation, followed by impact assessment and management practice. Statistical analysis, general equality and diversity training, practical employment law lessons, how to deliver training internally and to communicate across staff and the general higher education context and strategy were also identified as useful to the current role. A smaller number of people think that training in equality in relation to teaching and the curriculum, and in equality and diversity in relation to dramatic and musical performance would be beneficial.
53. Respondents participating in this research project come from diverse career backgrounds and hold divergent posts. Those who are already in a management or senior position have usually been working as equality specialists for some time and have a better knowledge of the higher education sector and where equality and diversity sits within it. However, a large number of respondents have not been in their current job for very long and are keen to progress within their institution. More than half the equality specialists have ambitions to be a senior manager and/or manage a department or a larger department. 64.3 per cent think working on high status projects will appreciably facilitate their progress to those higher levels. In addition, personal development, mentoring and greater flexibility to move between roles are highly valued. Other useful skills are management/supervisory skills, financial management, communication skills and appraisal. Only a quarter of respondents consider qualifications to be relevant to their progress to their ideal position. By and large, almost 80 per cent of the respondents are confident that they will be able to gain or develop all or some of these experiences in their current position.
54. Most respondents have a strong background in equality-related work, though not



necessarily in higher education and they are reasonably evenly divided about the changes to their aspirations and expectations since they first entered the higher education sector. The aspirations and expectations of 31 per cent of respondents have changed a lot, 48 per cent said some changes have occurred, while for 20 per cent of equality specialists there was no change whatsoever.

55. When asked to explain how their expectations and aspirations had changed equality specialists had largely negative responses.

“I have never worked in an HEI before and I’ve found it very old-fashioned and slow-moving. I don’t see career progression here as people are still given jobs that are never advertised, despite management publicly promoting equality and diversity and open, transparent, accountable procedures.”

“I didn’t expect it to be so sluggish and hierarchical.”

“When I took the job I hoped to be able to make a real impact, but I feel like I’m just implementing other people’s ideas – even if they don’t know a huge amount about diversity and equality issues. People politely listen to what I have to say but I don’t feel like I have any influence.”

One or two were more positive and optimistic.

“I’m more ambitious. Not just for myself, but for equality and diversity.”

“The opportunities and the flexibility of higher education is very empowering.”

Overall, there was frustration about the pace at which HEIs operate and change and the lack of will within the institutions to change. However, for the majority it was the role, not the HEI, which they found demoralising. 44.3 per cent would

definitely like to continue their career at their present institution, 38.6 per cent were undecided, but only 11.4 per cent have decided that equality in their present institution is not for them.

56. Despite their disappointment in terms of their expectations and aspirations equality specialists are essentially resilient and persistent. The ones who intend to remain at their current institutions, or are undecided, are comfortable, in good locations, feel challenged, but have some support within the institution. This is tempered by feelings of being undervalued and confined to the role

“Yes, because I know how best to work within it [the institution]. No, because I am seen as the EO person only, no other institutional potential is picked up on.”

“I like where I work but feel a little frustrated about my level of influence and the lack of autonomy I have in how I do my job”.

57. Promotion and/or re-grading are steps necessary to career progression within the same HEI, but some equality specialists believe there is no possibility for advancement for them in their current roles. Half the respondents have a good knowledge of the criteria for promotion/re-grading and a further 31 per cent have fairly good, or some knowledge. Unfortunately, 16.4 per cent have no knowledge and alarmingly, three per cent claim there are no criteria whatsoever. The ones with the greatest knowledge of the systems are likely to be those who have applied for promotion or re-grading. Most applicants who had applied for promotion or re-grading were successful at their first attempt and rates were also high for those who had tried twice. Applying for promotion or re-grading more than twice was likely to meet with further failure. However, respondents were not generally encouraged to apply for posts at a higher level. Only a quarter had been asked to apply for such a post, but over two thirds are encouraged to undertake activities that will contribute to a stronger CV.
58. When asked to rank the activities that would enable them to progress to their ‘ideal level’ equality specialists ordered them as follows:



1. involvement in high status projects
2. leading on projects
3. management skills and experience
4. networking
5. external representation
6. committee membership
7. good career management by line manager
8. qualifications
9. publications
10. mentoring

Interestingly, it can only be assumed that progression is not at the forefront of equality specialists' minds. When asked to identify their further training needs equality and diversity legislation was the most popular choice, followed by impact assessment and management practice, leading to the conclusion that the demands of the job are so great that the immediate focus is on it.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 The work of the equality specialist should be planned over the period of the HEIs own strategic plan to allow for the proactive implementation of equality and diversity within the HEI.

Recommendation 2 An HEI should set institutional equality and diversity targets that align with its strategy. Progress towards goals should be measured annually and reported in the Annual Report.

Recommendation 3 In preparation for the Commission for Equality and Human Rights' State of the Nation Reports HEIs should identify measures of progress comparable with other HEIs and sectors.

Recommendation 4 An assessment should be made of members of governing bodies' awareness of equality issues and their responsibilities. Training should be provided where gaps in knowledge are detected.

Recommendation 5 As there are increasing requirements to promote and progress equality issues HEI policy makers should review the way contact between the equality specialist and senior management is enabled.

Recommendation 7 If there is no obvious or direct link between the equality specialist and the senior management team, other than the equality committee, one should be created.

Recommendation 8 Consideration should be given to the effectiveness of the Equality and Diversity Committee (or its equivalent). Introducing equality and diversity to the institution's main committees might be a more effective way of bringing about cultural change.



- Recommendation 9** If the equality and diversity committee meets infrequently or does not have the right composition for the development of a specific policy the formation of a dedicated group might be more effective. Should this approach be adopted it is important that accountability and responsibility for implementation are clear.
- Recommendation 10** An equality and diversity budget enabling the realisation of the institution's strategically aligned equality and diversity objectives that align with its strategy should be included in the institution's financial plan.
- Recommendation 11** Academic committees should consider equality and diversity, receive advice and reports from the institution's equality specialist/s and consider how they can work with their equality specialist/s to integrate equality and diversity.
- Recommendation 12** Equality specialists could be given the opportunity to be members of, or observe, as many of the HEI's committees as possible. Alternatively, equality specialists could be given a contact on each committee who would be responsible for maintaining liaison for updating and consultation purposes.
- Recommendation 13** An appraisal should be made of the relevant characteristics of the schools or departments that actively support the equality specialists' work.

Appendix A

Equality and diversity networks

Association of University Administrators Equality Advisory Group
Association of University Teachers Equal Opportunities Group
Birmingham Race Action Partnership
Commission for Race Equality Higher Education Network
East Midlands Equality Network (ACAS)
Eastern Region Equality and Diversity Forum
EMN (Ethnic Minority Network)
Equality Challenge Unit East Midlands Network
Equality Challenge Unit Northern Ireland Liaison Group
Equality Challenge Unit Welsh Liaison Group
Equality North East Forum
Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network
Higher Education Equality Consortium [Northern Ireland]
Local Employers Acting on Diversity, Equality and Race [South]
Local Equal Opportunities Network [South]
Leeds Equal Opportunities Network
National Association of Disability Officers
North East Council for Diversity and Racial Equality
North East Universities Personnel Equal Opportunities Group
North West Race Equality Network
North West Support Group
Oxford Employers Race Equality Network
Opportunity Now Regional Practitioners Network
Surrey Equality Partnership
Scottish Universities Personnel Association Equal Opportunities Sub-Group
UK Council on Overseas Student Affairs
West Midlands Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network



Appendix B

Equality profile of the respondents

Gender (N=69)

Male.....	13%
Female.....	87%

Ethnicity (N=68)

White, British	72%
White, Irish.....	5.9%
White, other	4.4%
Shared Heritage, White and Black, Caribbean.....	1.5%
Shared Heritage, White and Black, African	1.5%
Shared Heritage, other	3%
Asian or Asian British, Indian.....	3%
Asian or Asian British, Pakistani	1.5%
Asian, other	1.5%
Black or Black British, Caribbean	3%
Chinese	1.5%
Other.....	1.5%

(Total not equal to 100% due to rounding)

Age (N=70)

26 – 30.....	8.7%
31 – 35.....	15.9%
36 – 40.....	17.4%
41 – 45.....	14.5%
46 – 50.....	14.5%
51 – 55.....	18.8%
56 – 60.....	10.1%



Appendix C

Employment profile of the respondents

Contractual status (N=70)

Permanent/open-ended.....	88.6%
Fixed-term	11.4%

Job Share (N=70)

Yes.....	4.3%
No	95.7%

Full/Part Time (N=70)

Full time.....	77.1%
9.9.....	1.4%
8.8.....	8.6%
7.7.....	4.3%
6.6.....	5.7%
0.5.....	2.9%

Funding for Post (N=68)

Mainstream.....	67.6%
Rewarding and Developing Staff	19.1%
Other.....	13.2%

Other = Widening Access premium funding; Disability premium funding; mixture of above and compliance budget; mainstreamed but funded by widening participation income.

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