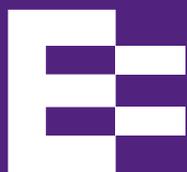
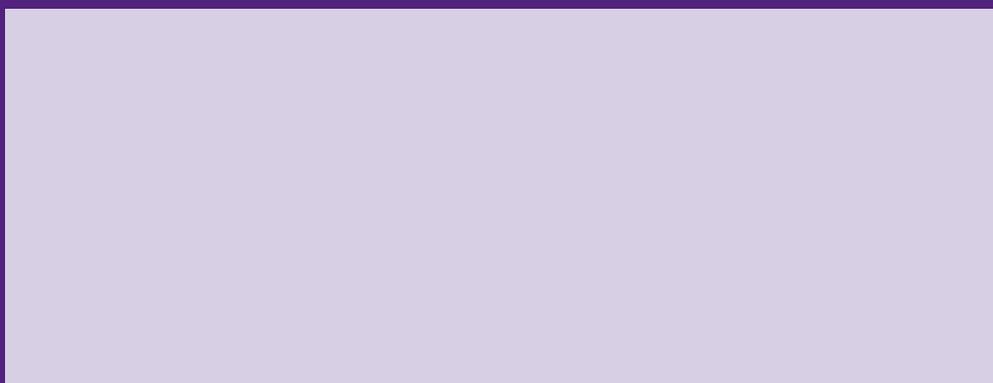


Embedding equality in student services



Acknowledgements

ECU would like to thank the following institutions for their time, engagement and constructive feedback during this project:

- = Liverpool John Moores University
- = University of Brighton
- = University of Edinburgh
- = University of Essex
- = University of Kent
- = University of Sheffield

Further information

Amy Felsing
info@ecu.ac.uk

Embedding equality in student services

Contents

Introduction	1
Using equality data to improve student services	2
Understanding patterns of engagement	3
Example areas where equality data can inform service provision	9
Effective data collection across the university	14
Communicating equality data	18
Appendix A: Meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010	23
Appendix B: Example data-collection statement	24

Foreword

Ben Lewis
AMOSSHE Chair



Equality has always been at the heart of student services: providing the means for all students to perform to the best of their abilities on an equal footing with their peers.

That's why AMOSSHE, the Student Services Organisation, was delighted to get the chance to work with Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) on their student services and equality project.

ECU worked with six AMOSSHE member higher education providers to analyse the current practices and procedures for supporting protected groups across different services, and the research findings are valuable for student services leaders across the UK.

Many student services departments are good at collecting data, but it is not always clear what to do with this information. Furthermore, different service strands do not always share data in the most effective way to ensure equal provision for all kinds of students.

ECU's recommendations for collecting, sharing and acting on data are useful and timely, providing guidance and also inspiring ideas about how to work in a better way to ensure equality in service provision. The institutions that took part in the project have already benefited from taking a fresh look at student services and equality, and with this research and guidance others have a great opportunity to develop too.

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) provide a range of support services to improve the student experience.

Collection and analysis of equality data can help to evaluate whether the provision is supporting students with different backgrounds and protected equality characteristics. However, many student service departments are missing an opportunity by not routinely collecting or monitoring equality data for trends that could help inform key decisions about their service provision.

Institutions that do currently record the profiles and interactions of students who use their services do not necessarily also examine the data for differences in service use or the varying degrees to which elements of the service are used by particular groups of students. Many have not fully updated their systems to collect the full range of data on the groups protected by equality legislation.

In 2012/13 ECU undertook a project with the support of AMOSSHE to examine the working practices of six student services departments based in HEIs in England. ECU visited each of the institutions and met a range of staff working in and aligned to student services to understand how student-facing services embedded equality in their work. Due to other priorities, one institution had to withdraw from the project before it concluded.

This guidance explores some of the equality issues ECU discussed in the course of this project and highlights examples of good practice as case studies to share with the rest of the student services sector.

This guidance should be useful to managers of student services and related staff working within those teams.

Using equality data to improve student services

The aim of equality data should be to inform, evaluate and develop the services and support available at your institution.

In order to do this data needs to be reliable, detailed and relevant. It is also important to build a picture across the whole institution.

Collecting and analysing equality data can assist student services departments in a number of ways, including:

- = enabling compliance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010
- = meeting the Quality Assurance Agency's requirement for awarding institutions to use relevant data and information to inform careers, information, advice and guidance
- = identifying protected groups of students who are not accessing services proportionately
- = establishing an evidence base for developing or revising activities, policies and practice
- = benchmarking internally and externally to identify gaps in performance, seek new approaches for improvements, and adopt good practice
- = having access to up-to-date equality monitoring data when reviewing, revising or developing policies and practice helps ensure that the equality impact assessment process is robust; this will allow you to consider the impact of any changes on different groups

Analysing data

Analysis of data may highlight more questions than it answers but it can offer the starting point for exploring potential causes of data anomalies. Where possible it will be useful to make explicit links between the levels of use of particular components of student services to student success, retention and achievement. For example:

- = your data uncovers one academic faculty to have proportionally lower referral rates to student services and proportionately more cases of temporary or permanent withdrawal than the rest of the institution
- = further exploration of the data shows that this particular faculty has a higher proportion of minority ethnic and female students than other faculties

- = this could highlight a need for:
 - proactive targeting of particular elements of this faculty to inform staff of the importance of student services provision
 - proactive targeting of students from this faculty to inform them of the services you offer
 - identification of staff training and development needs on the support services offered and referral routes

Most of the institutions involved in this project were confident in their collection of data but less so about its routine extraction and analysis to produce meaningful information. It is important that mechanisms are established to facilitate quick and meaningful monitoring and analysis of data by protected group.

Understanding patterns of engagement

Monitoring various stages of the student services cycle and analysing trends can help you to:

- = gain a better understanding of the make-up of your service users and give access to quantifiable information about which students engage (and do not) in each student service offer
- = evaluate the relative success of each component within the service, for example participation in welfare, careers and counselling services and their respective referral routes
- = identify whether practice within particular parts of service provision may disproportionately affect certain protected groups, or seems to be particularly effective in reaching particular groups
- = identify students that may need to be reached earlier in their student journey, so when they come to access support it is not at a crisis point

If students are able to access professional welfare support at an institutional and student union level it is worth considering sharing aggregate data. This will help identify trends in take-up of elements of your services and enable partnership working or improve service provision and potential targeting of some underrepresented protected groups.

You may not have access to information on every component of the student cycle (particularly prospective students) but where data is available it may help to identify hidden inequalities and unequal outcomes, allowing you to take appropriate action.

The **University of Essex** identified that students of Chinese ethnicity and nationality are underrepresented in their overall use of student services compared with their representation in the student population. However, they did not have detailed information on which services Chinese students are using. Essex created a monthly dashboard reporting on use of services, as well as tailored reports. This has enabled student services to consider how they may be able to engage non-traditional users of their service.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking your institution's data against the national picture as well as other institutions can identify issues such as whether the under representation of any protected group is particular to its own context or a wider concern for the sector, and identify how these might be addressed. Benchmarking can enable:

- = a better understanding of your data by providing meaningful comparators and context: for example, to assess whether the proportion of a certain protected group accessing discreet services is low, normal, or high, relative to appropriate comparators
- = self-assessment of service performance

Each year ECU produces a report with a detailed analysis of national equality data returned by institutions to the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA). Institutions may find it helpful to use this data as a national benchmark.

ECU (2013) *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2013*.
www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-higher-education-statistical-report-2013

Across campuses

If your institution has a large campus spread across different sites it may be useful to monitor any equality issues in the take-up of different services by campus, focusing on type of course and protected group. This will feed into communication strategies with students as well as with staff. Are students accessing student services because they are more aware of the services available due to location and/or because they are actively referred by their tutors or simply because they have a greater need to access this support? Are there certain points in the year where engagement is more concentrated and, if so, why is this?

Where devolved systems are in place it may be useful to survey staff at individual academic schools to gather information about the various activities undertaken there. This can help central student services gain an understanding of what student support activities and equality and diversity projects are available remotely. This intelligence can help to identify good practice, areas where additional support would be beneficial, and encourage a more collaborative, joined-up approach.

Satisfaction with student services

Identifying any differences in awareness and use of, and satisfaction with, student services by students with different protected characteristics can be particularly revealing.

This can be particularly useful when students might have less access or interaction with student services, for example students studying at more remote campuses.

ECU recommends that you consider the following.

- = Conduct a broad survey of the student population and then examine whether responses differ by protected characteristic. This has the benefit of providing a comparator group to ascertain whether awareness, use and perceptions of student services differ between certain groups.
- = Examine national datasets, such as the national student survey, at a local level to ascertain if there are differential rates of satisfaction among students with certain protected characteristics and correlate these to the open-text comments they may have provided about your institution.

- = Examine other ways in which awareness, use of services, and satisfaction ratings can be measured by protected characteristic – through surveying the broader student population or analysing other available datasets.

Liverpool John Moores University has recently adapted and extended existing technology for student attendance monitoring to include the capture of equality data and access to student service offerings. Students can choose to swipe their student card when entering student service provision (and while this is optional very few students decline to do so). Once the system has been in place for a year student services plan to convene a student critical friend group to discuss and analyse the data they will have on service use. The results will be analysed by protected characteristic to provide a greater perspective of the thoughts and perceptions of students and a starting point for more targeted work.

Multiple identities

Student services and related practitioners will be well aware that students do not act as a homogeneous group. The intersection of a student's mode, level of study and discipline area with their cultural and socio-economic heritage, age, disability, sex, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality and personal circumstances (having caring/parental responsibilities, living with parents, being a care leaver) have the potential for broad ranging implications for their interaction and success at your institution.

ECU recommends identifying intersectional issues, for example comparing age and disability with attainment to help identify when targeted activities may be appropriate.

- = **Gender and ethnicity:** Female students dominate every ethnic group. However, 19.7 per cent of male students are from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds compared with 18.1 per cent of female students.
- = **Gender and age:** Male students have a younger profile than female students. 54.1 per cent of male students are aged 21 and under, compared with 49.1 per cent of female students. 63.4 per cent of students aged 36 and over and 57.7 per cent aged 26-35 are women.
- = **Ethnicity and disability:** Among UK-domiciled students, a higher proportion of white students are disabled (10.5 per cent) than BME students (7.6 per cent). However, mixed UK- domiciled students have the highest proportion of disabled students (11.3 per cent). 21.3 per cent of students who are blind or had a serious visual impairment are BME, compared with 7.8 per cent of students who disclose a social communication or autistic spectrum disorder.
- = **Ethnicity and age:** 25.4 per cent of black UK-domiciled students are aged 36 and over, compared with 7.8 per cent of Chinese UK-domiciled students. 20.0 per cent of UK-domiciled students aged 26-35 are BME, compared with 15.3 per cent of those aged 35 and over.
- = **Disability and age:** A higher proportion of students aged 36 and over are disabled than students in other age groups (9.5 per cent). 19.0 per cent of disabled students aged 36 and over declared two or more impairments, compared with 4.7 per cent of disabled students aged 21 and under. The majority of disabled students who declare a social communication/autistic spectrum disorder (75.2 per cent) or a specific learning difficulty (62.3 per cent) are aged 21 and under.

ECU (2013) *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2013*.
www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-higher-education-statistical-report-2013

Groups less likely to engage

Male students

In some institutions male students are underrepresented in their engagement with counselling services with data showing this as a trend over many years (ECU 2012).

Analysing the gender composition of service use can identify if male underrepresentation is a wider issue in your institution. It is useful to compare engagement levels of male and female students across services and also to further break down this data by other characteristics to understand which services male students are using more or less frequently, for example BME male students and disabled male students. Undertaking this work helps to inform future actions around communication and the language used in promoting student services to male students.

The **University of Essex** undertook a study looking at patterns of participation in one-off enquiries and found that, regardless of mode and level of study, male students were consistently less likely to contact student services. The university plans to explore further whether men tend to seek support from other parts of the institutional welfare infrastructure, for example the students' union.

The **University of Brighton** undertook a study looking for any equality patterns of in-person use of their careers service. It found that while service use was broadly consistent with the student profile, young white men used the service less. In the future the university will be exploring whether these users access other careers service-led activities (such as workshops or employer events) to ascertain if any targeted activities are needed. The careers service has developed a post that will look at overall engagement of students in careers activities, and this post will work with the equalities officer to consider engagement across the whole range of careers activities.

ECU (2012) *Male student engagement with academic and pastoral support services*. www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/male-students-engagement-with-academic-and-pastoral-support-services

Minority ethnic students

The NUS *Race for equality* report found that BME students are less likely to approach academic tutors for help in comparison to white students.

In the course of this project ECU found that referral data is not always collected or analysed. We recommend that you collect this information, allowing you to assess how students are directed to your service. You should try to identify if any protected groups are more or less likely to be referred by a particular academic department. This will allow you to target training for staff accordingly.

National Union of Students (2011) *Race for equality*.
www.nus.org.uk/en/news/race-for-equality

ECU (2013) *Equality and diversity for academics*.
www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/e-and-d-for-academics-factsheets

Example areas where equality data can inform service provision

ECU's work has highlighted a number of equality challenges for the higher education sector. Exploring some of these challenges by analysing available data within your institutional context may assist in collaborative and targeted working between student services, curriculum development and learning support.

Student attainment

Ethnicity, gender, disadvantage and school type can have a significant effect on the chances of students obtaining an upper second or first class degree in higher education. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) reported in 2014 that:

- = 72 per cent of white students who entered higher education with A-level grades of BBB gained a first or 2:1 degree: this compares with 56 per cent for Asian students, and 53 per cent for black students entering with the same A-level grades
- = female students are more likely to achieve a 2:1 or higher than male students with the same prior educational attainment

HEFCE (2014) *Differences in degree outcomes: key findings*.
www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201403/#d.en.86821

Analysing the national picture of student attainment by protected characteristic uncovers some trends that may be useful for student services to benchmark against and explore at a local level.

- = A higher proportion of white UK-domiciled qualifiers receive a first/2:1 than BME UK-domiciled qualifiers. The ethnicity degree attainment gap in 2011/12 varied between 8.6 per cent for qualifiers aged 21 and under and 26.3 per cent for qualifiers aged 36 and over.
- = Regardless of their age a higher proportion of non-disabled students receive a first/2:1 degree compared with their disabled peers.
- = Within every age group a higher proportion of female qualifiers than male qualifiers received a first/2:1. A higher proportion of male qualifiers than female qualifiers received a first class degree in every age group. However, in every age group a higher proportion of male qualifiers also received a third/pass than female qualifiers.

ECU (2013) *Equality in higher education: statistical report*.
www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-higher-education-statistical-report-2013

A recent study looked at the data relating to the retention, progression, completion and attainment of BME undergraduate students in the US. The report highlights useful learning points and recommendations for the UK higher education sector. One of the most pertinent of these for this context is:

'The differences across racial and ethnic categories in relation to access, retention and attainment to higher education in the US suggest the need to attend more carefully to distinctions across racial and ethnic groups in the UK. In addition, there is a need for more nuanced research, to explore, for example, the intersectionality between ethnicity and part-time, disabled or mature students' degree attainment in the UK.'

Higher Education Academy, 2013

ECU and Higher Education Academy (2011) *Improving degree attainment of black and minority ethnic students.*

www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/improving-attainment-of-BME-students

Stevenson J and Whelan P (2013) *Synthesis of US literature relating to the retention, progression, completion and attainment of BME students in HE Higher Education Academy.*

www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/JS_BME_Lit_Syn

The **University of Sheffield** has developed a mechanism within their data-capture system to identify issues of retention and non-completion figures cross-cut by equality. This exercise showed that some BME groups are more likely to withdraw. As a result student services have developed a strategy to continually lobby and raise awareness of the importance of monitoring and setting targeted activity around BME recruitment, progression, engagement and attainment.

The **University of Kent** has established an equality and diversity steering group, which links to wider equality and diversity groups for students and staff within the university. This group is specifically concerned with the university's equality and diversity strategy in relation to its access agreement, and is analysing the attainment of BME students with the aim of developing effective interventions at school level to support retention and academic performance.

Student employability

Access to work and course-placement activities can give students an advantage in seeking employment after graduation. This is particularly the case in the arts and cultural sectors.

ECU undertook research in 2010 exploring equality of access to work-placement activities in the arts and cultural sector. The research found that disabled students, BME students, those with caring responsibilities and students from disadvantaged backgrounds face significant barriers in accessing placements. It also found that institutional structures and procedures can exacerbate these barriers.

For example, institutions may have a devolved system in which the central careers or employment process has no or limited control. This can mean it is harder to engage with academic faculties on the importance of managing relationships between work placement and equality and diversity and ensure that devolved policy and practice is creating equality barriers.

Monitoring the take-up of placements by protected group and course can help to identify if your students are facing barriers to work placements. Does analysis show that the most desirable placements are allocated and taken up by protected groups in a proportionate way?

The **University of Brighton** has a working group that considers course placements. It is attended by equality advisers and the careers service. This is an ideal forum to discuss building equality and diversity considerations into existing systems and practices.

Building in equality considerations

ECU recommends that the following equality considerations be built into work and course-placement systems.

- = Provide training to ensure placement staff are aware of the equality issues that may influence student employability and consider these in devolved policies and practice.
- = Ensure that all departments with responsibility for finding and allocating work placements are aware of the institution's equality and diversity policy and consider making it a requirement that the employers they use have an equivalent policy.
- = Ensure central and devolved systems build discretion into their allocation policies. For example discretion to consider on a case-by-basis the needs of some protected groups (eg discretion to prioritise pregnant students or those returning from maternity or students with mobility impairments to access placements closer to their home).

ECU (2010) *Work placements in the arts and cultural sector: diversity, equality and access*.

www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/work-placements-report

ECU (2010) *Work placement in the creative industries: good placements for all students: staff and student diversity, equality and access toolkits*.

www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/diversity-equality-and-access-toolkits

The **University of Brighton** has a career planning agreement (CPA), which forms part of their course development programme. The CPA requires coverage of four employability related skill sets within every course. This is complemented by a graduate toolkit that students can use to determine and identify what they can offer future employers. This agreement not only opens up a dialogue between careers counsellors in student services and course developers, but also gives the opportunity to build in employability and equality into every course.

Analysis of available data found that this practice, while embedded in undergraduate provision, is very piecemeal for postgraduate courses. The university will be exploring how CPA can be extended more consistently to postgraduate courses. As a starting point, the university will use the postgraduate taught experience survey to monitor feedback from this group and will act specifically on this if careers provision is highlighted in feedback.

Effective data collection across the university

Having reliable and detailed data across the whole institution will allow for comparability across different services.

This allows for a better understanding of the whole student experience and whether certain groups access different services at different rates. Effective data collection that supports this is therefore essential to improve the student experience and outcomes.

Standardising monitoring questions

Among the institutions involved in this project, equality data was not always collected and recorded in the same way. For example, disability, careers and advice services may use different monitoring questions and methods within the same institution.

Standardising monitoring questions, and the point at which they are asked, across all elements of student service provision will allow your institution to identify trends more broadly across student services, as well as to compare participation rates between different services.

The **University of Sheffield** used to have stand alone data-collection systems for its health, counselling and disability services. These were not linked to central student records, and did not routinely collect or record ethnicity data.

Since being involved in ECU's project the university has aligned counselling and disability systems to ensure they record equality data in the same way. The university will now be able to identify key trends in take-up of these services by age, disability, gender and race.

Encouraging disclosure of equality data
www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/using-data-and-evidence/monitoring-questions

Developing disclosure of equality data
www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/using-data-and-evidence/encouraging-disclosure

Central collection and monitoring

Most of the institutions involved in this project are planning to develop or modify their central customer relationship management (CRM) system. Their data-collection priorities are to:

- = collect student data from protected groups and link it to the student record
- = have a system that will allow student interactions with student services to be effectively monitored and linked to the central student record and protected characteristics

Connecting up equality data and information on use of student services to the central student record could enable services to examine the impact of engagement against retention, degree attainment and employability outcome.

ECU recognises that central administration, IT or equivalent services can be cautious about the collection and recording of equalities data, particularly about the newer protected groups (such as pregnancy and maternity, and gender identity). Confidentiality of data and who has access to the full information will need to be carefully considered. However, the development of new CRM systems may offer opportunities to work closely with central administration or equivalents to address these concerns.

Student services at the **University of Kent** have collaborated with the planning and business information office to create an annual timetable for the production of business information which captures all of the protected groups (with the exception of pregnancy and maternity).

The university is now able to link the protected characteristics to key student events, including retention and achievement, and has conducted an analysis of student equality and diversity data through the national student survey and the international student barometer survey.

Student services at **Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)** has adapted and extended existing technology for monitoring student attendance to also collect equality data and information about key elements of student services provision.

The attendance of students at intervention points (eg, one-to-one interviews, group sessions) is now captured. This has enabled a consistent approach to data collection and the information gathered will be used in committee reporting from professional services.

LJMU will run reports at the end of each academic cycle focusing on protected groups and their use (or not) of the services available. These reports will inform service development and marketing strategies to ensure that groups currently identified as not accessing services not only feel more able to do so but know that services are available to them.

Equality considerations in the development of CRM systems should include the following.

- = Collect data on all nine protected groups, or build in the capacity to do so over time. It may be that you decide your institutional culture is not well enough developed to collect all characteristics at this time. Building in space to include this data at a later date is likely to be easier and less expensive than further development.
- = Consider future-proofing the system to include socio-economic status. Having this data will, in any case, further enable widening participation work.
- = Ensure you can identify different rates of use between particular services, including at different points in the year, and the means of engagement. Build in the ability to analyse this data by different protected characteristics.
- = Allow for identification of peak points for each element of student service provision to allow for better targeting of resources and messages.
- = Where students are referred to services, ensure you can record the identity of the person making the referral as well as to where the student was referred.
- = Enable tracking within the central student record system in a way that captures data, but doesn't compromise confidentiality.

Sharing data between services

Analysis of student services data in isolation runs the risk of providing an incomplete picture of student engagement with support systems. To fully understand engagement there needs to be data collection and sharing between the different parts of student services provision, as well between your service and equivalent students' union advice services.

- = Explore ways individual services can share information about use across areas to establish an overall picture of engagement and take-up.
- = Consider how information is shared within the institution, and how it might be shared with students. This may include mapping the internal dissemination of data through the various committees responsible for student satisfaction, teaching and learning and equality and diversity. This can support coherent planning of policies and procedures relating to student equality information.
- = Develop a cross-organisation approach to monitoring and communicating information on equality, student satisfaction, progression and achievement.

This should enable you to better understand which groups of students approach different parts of the service. For example aggregate data may show that female students from India are overrepresented in their access of the students' union advice service for immigration enquiries, but drilling down into the data further finds that they are disproportionately over- or underrepresented in comparison to other nationalities in seeking academic information, advice and guidance from your service. Having this level of detail may allow all institutional services to target activities at relevant groups.

The **University of Kent** is in the process of developing arrangements for determining referrals to and from student services and the Kent Union advice service, to ensure a holistic picture of advice is available. Staff within student services have also worked collaboratively with the Kent Union to establish a disabled students network.

There may be concerns around data-protection restrictions in allowing access to individual records. ECU recommends that data be aggregated and provided to relevant staff in student services.

Communicating equality data

In order to make the most of what you have learned from analysing your data, it is vital that the key messages are shared across your institution to enable action and improvements to service provision.

Encouraging staff to engage with equality data

You may wish to explore how to build confidence and knowledge of staff and students around the collection of data. It is important to provide a clear explanation of why it is being collected and what it will be used for. It must be stressed that data reports will not identify individuals. Information around this could be built into equality and diversity training modules, included on student-facing webpages, to build confidence in the monitoring and use of equality data.

Presenting equality data

Ideally information on use of student services by students from protected groups should be routinely disseminated to senior management, academic faculties (or equivalent), relevant working groups and committees to improve understanding of where underrepresentation in engagement with services at specific points in the student journey might occur.

The type of staff who may benefit most from this data include:

- = staff employed in student services, student experience and widening participation
- = staff and elected officers who sit on student experience and related working groups and committees whose remit cover student experience, retention and attainment

The **University of Essex** had a strategic action for 2013/14 to mainstream and integrate consideration of equality and diversity data into institutional policies and processes. This has led to equality data reports being considered by the education committee.

The **University of Brighton** has an academic standards committee which reviews the student services equalities report. The university's equalities officer collaborates with the strategic planning office to ensure equality-specific recommendations are embedded into the report and action plan. This has helped to make student equality and diversity considerations more visible and understood by senior academic staff.

When communicating your equality data, it may be useful to consider the following.

- = Reporting should show who is using the service, when, and the types of enquires they have made. It should provide analysis which identifies any trends in use by protected group and make suggestions for further analysis.
- = Ideally reports should be tailored to individual faculties/ departments, relevant working groups and committees, for example, noting high or low referral rates from these service areas to initiate further discussion or highlight a need for targeted support.
- = Where data is being presented to staff who have a role in referral or signposting services, it is useful that analysis considers the link between protected characteristic and participation in student services activities, retention, attainment and employability outcomes.

Maintaining lines of communication

This project found that student services have a range of formal and informal lines of communication allowing for discussion of equality issues. Formal channels are through the equality and diversity committee, project implementation groups and other working parties and semi-formal projects. Where informal structures exist it is worth considering how communication may be affected if an individual leaves or if the structure changes and build a strategy to ensure that these positive working relationships continue and lines of communication are maintained in these events.

Communication with departments

For some institutions with devolved structures, it can be a challenge tracking the welfare and support-related activities that academic departments, faculties or equivalents are undertaking.

Where this is the case it can be difficult to put structures in place to ensure that information is shared between academic schools and central services, and that approaches are aligned. Approaches to mitigate the effect of devolved support services could include:

- = running development days with practitioners drawn from across student service areas to pick up on key equality topics and establishing working groups to look at specific equality issues identified
- = having equality and diversity representatives trained by student services but based in academic faculties/departments who get together to share common experiences, learning and good practice
- = building in ways to share data from and with devolved departments

The **University of Kent** has re-launched a staff equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) network. It includes the equal opportunities representatives within academic schools, representatives from the Kent Union and harassment contacts to facilitate internal communication channels and improve understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion issues.

The network has already been used to conduct a survey to identify and share good practice initiatives between academic schools and departments throughout the institution. This has led to the development of a new dignity at study policy, revision of the support to study procedure, production of a suite of EDI flyers, termly meetings between student services staff and disability contacts in academic schools and joint working with the university's learning and teaching network to deliver seminars on the use of inclusive learning plans and support to study procedures for Kent students.

Providing training to staff who may refer students to student services

Where there is an expectation for staff members in academic departments to make referrals into central student services, it is important that they undergo an induction process that includes the responsibilities of the role, equality issues for students, cultural awareness and awareness of service provision.

Staff should also be introduced to the relevant central and school contacts so that they are able to effectively aid in information-sharing about academic-related activities to central services and vice versa.

ECU (2013) *Equality and diversity for academics*.

www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/e-and-d-for-academics-factsheets

Creating a communications time-line

All of the services involved in this project mentioned 'pinch points' at various points of the student journey where support for particular groups of students might be needed. The start of the year for first year students and prior to examinations were identified as critical times for drop-outs and the need for extra support. However, wider pinch points across different parts of the service are not routinely considered.

It is likely that there will be different pinch or crisis points for different groups of students dependent on mode and level of study and the intersection of this with protected characteristics. ECU recommends creating a timeline to identify what information is being provided by whom and when. This will allow your service to consider harder to reach groups (such as second and final year students, postgraduates, mature and part-time students) and plan targeted communications for them into the timetable.

The **University of Brighton** has a student timeline that staff can access, which ensures that messages to different groups of students are refined and targeted at key points in the academic calendar. The timeline has recently been complemented through a piece of research following a new group of students through the application to their first-term experience. This has provided considerable insight into different student journeys and when they require certain information, and how they prefer to be communicated with.

Representing diversity online

The institution's website is often a student's primary source of information about the support services available. For this reason, careful consideration should be given to the images and messages contained on your webpages to ensure they are inclusive and reflect the student population and/or groups that may need support but are less likely to approach your service.

The **University of Sheffield** student services team appointed three student interns to review their webpages and other key information. As well as considering the institution's own materials the interns interviewed students and looked at comparable institution's web resources. This process identified a range of equality issues including a lack of visibility of minority ethnic students on the webpages and other materials. The interns made a number of recommendations which are being acted on, including the development of 'People like me' webpages covering a range of people from protected groups. These pages will be used for raising awareness of equality issues as well as to engender a better sense of belonging for minority ethnic students.

The **University of Kent** has appointed a digital content editor whose remit includes student communications. This role will work with a working party looking at these issues. The working party is reviewing the accessibility and user-friendliness of student-facing webpages from an equality and diversity perspective.

Communicating with a broad range of students

It became evident through the course of this project that student services employ a range of communication activities. However there was often a focus on first-year full-time undergraduate students on arrival. There was less communication with students who may miss welcome week or are new to the university in the second and third year. Information provided at a later point, perhaps through a refreshers week, or by 'drip-feed', could help to capture those students that miss the beginning or transfer to your institution after the first year.

It is worth considering how your service ensures that communication can be targeted at harder to reach groups.

Appendix A: Meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 is the key piece of equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales replacing much of previous equality legislation.

The Act provides protection to staff and students in further and higher education from unlawful discrimination. Specifically, section four of the Act protects staff and students based on their 'protected characteristics' which are:

- = age
- = disability
- = gender reassignment
- = marriage and civil partnership (in the context of employment only)
- = pregnancy and maternity
- = race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins)
- = religion or belief (including lack of belief)
- = sex
- = sexual orientation

Throughout this publication, we use the term 'protected groups' to refer to different groups of students with different protected characteristics.

The Equality Act requires institutions to develop an evidence base of equality information, publish data, and set measurable equality objectives to meet the public sector equality duty.

While there are differences in the reporting requirements across the four UK nations, in order to fulfil the public sector equality duty component to the Act, ECU encourages that where possible equality data is collected on **all the protected groups** and this information is analysed at key stages of the student life cycle.

In doing so, institutions can identify where work may be required to eliminate the potential for unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, all key aims of the Equality Act.

Further information on the Equality Act 2010
www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/equality-legislation

Appendix B: Example data-collection statement

Including a statement when collecting monitoring data can reassure people about the purpose of the monitoring and improve disclosure rate.

[Institution] aims to have an inclusive environment for all staff and students, by identifying and removing barriers in our practices. Completing this monitoring form will help us achieve this, and also help [institution] meet our obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

While it is voluntary to disclose this information, doing so will enable us to better understand the composition of our workforce/student body and examine our practices fully.

Your answers will be treated in the strictest confidence, and all data disclosed will comply with the Data Protection Act 1998. [Insert statement about institution's confidentiality policy.]

To find out more about the work [institution] is doing to meet the requirements of the Equality Act, please contact [name] or visit [\[website link\]](#)

Equality Challenge Unit

ECU works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK, and in colleges in Scotland.

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

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

Did you find this publication useful?

Your feedback will help us to improve and develop our publications and resources, and help us to ensure that we produce materials that support your work.

Please take a few minutes to complete our publications feedback survey: www.surveymonkey.com/s/ecu-publications-feedback

You can also email us with your feedback: pubs@ecu.ac.uk



Equality Challenge Unit

7th floor, Queen's House
55/56 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London, WC2A 3LJ
T 020 7438 1010
F 020 7438 1011
E info@ecu.ac.uk
www.ecu.ac.uk

© **Equality Challenge Unit 2014** Information in this publication may be reproduced solely by the universities and colleges that ECU is funded to support, as long as it retains accuracy, the source is identified and it will not be used for profit. Use of this publication for any other purpose is prohibited without prior permission from ECU. Alternative formats are available: E [**pubs@ecu.ac.uk**](mailto:pubs@ecu.ac.uk)

Company limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales, No. 05689975. Charity no. 1114417 (England, Wales) and SC043601 (Scotland).