

Diversity and Equal Opportunities: Policy Statement and Action Plan for 2006 to 2008

Policy statement

All staff who work within The University of East Anglia's Student Services¹ are committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity in all aspects of their work. The information, advice and guidance offered, whether through face-to-face contact, by email, or by means of printed or electronic media, aim to be relevant and accessible, and respectful of the wide diversity in the views, experiences and expectations of those for whom the services are designed. This commitment is articulated in Student Services' first strategic aim, to:

- enhance the UEA student experience by contributing to the ongoing development of a learning environment that is of high quality and appropriate to the requirements of a diverse student body.²

Student Services work within the broader context of the University as a whole in support of its mission as:

' a premier research and teaching university dedicated to the advancement of learning and the increase of knowledge, both to satisfy the aspirations of individuals and to contribute to economic, social and cultural progress at regional, national and international levels....As a reflection of its mission, the University is a large, international and multicultural community, which values and encourages diversity'.

The value that the University places on the diversity of its community is reflected in its institutional commitment to the active promotion of equal opportunities for its students and staff. The current UEA policy statement in respect of students can be found at www.uea.ac.uk/ltq/Calendar/Calendar%202005-06/CalRegs/7EQUALOPPS.pdf and for staff at www.uea.ac.uk/hr/equal/welcome.htm .

Student Services are committed to a programme of work to meet their own equal opportunities objectives (those for 2006-2008 are outlined later in this document) and in support of the further review and development of equal opportunities policy and procedures at institutional level.

Context

The approaches to, and activities undertaken in support of, the promotion of equal opportunities aim to take full account of the relevant legislative framework and of effective practice across the HE sector. Recent and emerging equal opportunities legislation is placing new responsibilities on public bodies, including HEIs. A key feature of this legislation

¹ For the purposes of this policy, Student Services are the Careers Centre, Dean of Students' Office and University Counselling Service

² See: Student Services Strategic Aims and Objectives, 2006-2008.

is the shift of emphasis from a requirement for 'compliance' to positive duties that actively promote equality and eliminate discrimination. The various elements of the legislation aim to ensure that attention to diversity and equal opportunities is embedded in everything that we do and that there is widespread consultation with students, staff and others affected by our policies and procedures.

The relevant legislation is summarised below³.

Age

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations prohibit direct and indirect discrimination, and harassment and victimisation on the grounds of age. These regulations have implications for HEIs not only as employers, but also as providers of courses and services to students. The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) has commissioned general guidance on the age equality regulations⁴ and a literature review of their impact of this legislation in the HE sector.⁵

Disability

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1995), amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) (2001) gave new rights to disabled staff, students and prospective students and visitors and required HEIs to make reasonable adjustments to ensure access to their facilities, services and opportunities by disabled people. From December 2006 HEIs have had new duties that require them to eliminate institutional discrimination and take proactive steps to promote disability equality in all practices, policies and procedures. As part of this duty they are required to publish a Disability Equality Scheme which includes an Action Plan describing the action that they propose to take in fulfilment of these duties.

Gender

The existing Sex Discrimination Act (1975) has been amended to include a requirement to produce a Gender Equality Scheme by 30 April 2007. A code of practice in respect of the Gender Equality Duty can be found on the Equal Opportunities Commission website⁶.

Race Equality

The Race Relations Act 1976 makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person, directly or indirectly on racial grounds in employment, education and housing and in the provision of goods, facilities and services. This legislation was amended in 2000, as a result of which HEIs have a general duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good relations between persons of different racial groups.

The legislation also requires institutions to have a race equality policy and to publish the results of their work in this area. HEIs are required to monitor the admission and progress of students, and staff recruitment and career progression by racial groups, and to assess the impact of all institutional policies on different racial groups.

³ The information in this section is drawn from guidance published by SKILL (www.skill.org.uk/), the Equality Challenge Unit (www.ecu.ac.uk/), the Equal Opportunities Commission (www.eoc.org.uk) and the Commission for Racial Equality (www.cre.gov.uk/). These sites provide further information about the legislation and its implications for higher education.

⁴ www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/guidancepublications/GeneralGuidanceNoteonAgeandStudentIssues.pdf

⁵ www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/guidancepublications/200701-age_discrimination.pdf.

⁶ www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/GED_CoP_Draft.pdf

Religion and Belief

The Equality Act (2006) introduced provisions to protect people on the grounds of religion and belief. It replicates similar legislation in the areas of race and disability. In the HEI context, it means that, for example, provision offered in the area of accommodation and dietary requirements may be subject to this legislation.

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations (2003) also provide a protection for people on the grounds of religion and belief. The Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006) ensures that protection is provided to people against harm because of their religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs, and makes it an offence to stir up hatred against persons on religious grounds.

Sexuality

In recent years legislation (including the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and the Civil Partnership Act (2004)) has been introduced in order to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. This legislation, inter alia, draws attention to the importance of challenging both overt and covert homophobia and means we must ensure that in the information, advice and guidance offered by Student Services, any assumption of heterosexuality is avoided.

Student Services Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2006-8

Objective 1: to provide specific resources and services that support UEA's commitment to widening access and ensuring equal opportunities for all students to demonstrate and achieve their potential.

- Contribute to the review and further development of UEA's equal opportunities policies and procedures including the development of a UEA Disability Equality Scheme.
- Ensure that all Student Services materials and resources are accessible to students with physical or sensory disabilities and specific learning difficulties.
- Develop staff awareness and understanding of the difficulties experienced by students with disabilities through staff development opportunities and written resources.
- Work with the Academic Division to ensure that examination and other assessment arrangements offer appropriate adjustments for students with disabilities.
- Provide advice and guidance to Schools to encourage and help them make the appropriate adjustments to curricula, teaching and learning methods, and assessment tasks in order to ensure accessibility to students with disabilities and non-native English speakers.
- Review student use of Student Services to ensure accessibility, currency and relevance to all student groups.
- Pilot and evaluate an Introduction to Study for Mature Students day.
- In collaboration with the Estates and Buildings Division and the UEA Islamic community develop a long-term solution to the provision of appropriate prayer facilities for Muslim students and staff.

- Ensure all Student Services staff members have relevant training on cultural diversity, disability awareness and equal opportunities.

Objective 2: to make a specific contribution to the recruitment and enhancement of the experience of international students.

- Support the establishment of INTO through joint development and delivery of a range of services for INTO students.
- Develop and implement an email 'buddying' scheme for prospective international students.
- Enhance the range of academic and career-related resources specifically aimed at international students.
- Review and further develop a range of 'acclimatisation' resources (Shopping in Norwich; Surviving the Winter; Driving in the UK; Contacting Home etc).
- Develop and distribute a regular newsletter to international students.
- Develop an online newsletter for parents, guardians and sponsors.
- Expand the range of social and cultural opportunities offered principally to international students.
- Consider ways of providing language exchange opportunities for students to practise their conversational English.
- Provide information and guidance for academic staff on responding to the academic challenges faced by non-native English speakers.

Objective 3: to undertake a more systematic and detailed monitoring and evaluation of Student Service provision

- Complete the development of, and pilot, an institution-wide student experience survey in order to improve the range and consistency of feedback on the quality of educational provision and facilities.
- Consult regularly with diverse client groups; improve the collection of other formal and informal feedback on, and usage of, Student Services' provision for monitoring and evaluation purposes and to inform future developments.

Further information

If you require further information in relation to the work of UEA Student Services in general, or this policy document in particular, please contact either the Dean of Students, Dr Annie Grant (extension 2492; email annie.grant@uea.ac.uk) or the Deputy Dean of Students, Mrs Linda Shepherd (extension 2493; email l.shepherd@uea.ac.uk).

