

Meeting	Agenda Item	Reference No
12/03/10	27	HEFCW/10/34

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## **1 Issue**

- 1.1 The paper presents to Council our proposed response to the recommendations made within the sector overview report following our review of Welsh higher education institutions' Disability Equality Schemes (DESS) (**Annex A**).

## **2 Corporate Planning Implications**

- 2.1 The Council's Corporate Strategy and Corporate & Operational Plan (2008-11) contained a commitment for 2008-09 to review HEFCW's arrangements for supporting equality and diversity work in higher education in Wales. HEFCW's single equality scheme (SES) action plan includes a commitment to commission a review of institutions' Disability Equality Schemes.

## **3 Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Council is invited to:
- i. note our proposed responses to the HEFCW-specific recommendations.

## **4 Timing for decisions**

- 4.1 Not applicable.

## **5 Council members' interests**

- 5.1 No conflicts of interests have been declared in advance of the meeting.

## **6 Further information**

- 6.1 Contact Vikki Burge (Tel 029 2068 2218; email [vikki.burge@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:vikki.burge@hefcw.ac.uk))

## **7 Background**

- 7.1 Higher education institutions have traditionally attracted a diverse range of applicants. We work with the institutions to ensure that they are working to secure equality of opportunity for both their students and their staff. This requires action over a wide range of areas and effective coordination. We monitor institutional actions and sector performance but we also provide support to enable improvements in sector performance in equality.
- 7.2 The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005 introduced new disability equality duties applying to all public bodies. This differs from previous legislation as it requires public bodies to make cultural change incorporating disability equality holistically into strategic and operational activity. The creation and delivery of Disability Equality Schemes underpins this approach and supports the delivery of disability equality.
- 7.3 In April 2009 HEFCW commissioned IMPACT Associates to undertake an evaluation and review of all eleven Welsh higher education institutions' (HEIs) Disability Equality Schemes (DES), action plans and 2008 annual reports. This evaluation was timed to provide support to Welsh HEIs in preparing their second DES, due to be published in December 2009. This review is the direct outcome of an action within HEFCW's own single equality scheme (SES) action plan.
- 7.4 The aims of the evaluation were for HEFCW to have confidence that Welsh HEIs are complying with the current Disability Equality Duty (DED), moving towards inclusion for disabled people and are appropriately preparing for the forthcoming single equalities legislation. The review also aimed to identify good practice in developing disability equality, and effective ways of sharing this practice.
- 7.5 On completion of the review, confidential review reports were sent to institutions. These included recommendations on how the DES could be improved. A summary sector report was published in August 2009 (circular W09/29HE).

## **8 HEFCW's role and the sector**

- 8.1 HEFCW has assisted the higher education institutions in Wales to develop, maintain, monitor, and report on the operation of their DESs. Given our wider statutory responsibilities with regard to the governance and management of funded institutions, we have also adopted an active role in monitoring compliance with the requirements of the DDA and assisting institutions to go beyond their statutory duties to secure the benefits of diversity. HEFCW will be working with individual institutions over the coming months to support the continued development and improvement of their DESs and the implementation of the recommendations contained within their individual reports.

## **9 HEFCW's recommendations**

9.1 The DES review report also included some recommendations for HEFCW. These were primarily concerned with:

- Helping HEIs to prioritise and implement the report recommendations, particularly for those HEIs where compliance levels are low; and considering which aspects of disability equality are best delivered through a disability specific approach and which by a single generic equality approach;
- Working with senior managers and governing bodies to assist HEIs to raise the profile of disability equality;
- Working with HEIs to deliver effective and appropriate collaborative activity;
- Providing support to HEIs to consider how they can address the resource implications of delivering disability equality; and
- Considering approaches to help those HEIs who wish to move beyond compliance by supporting the development of action research projects to further advance disability equality.

## **10 HEFCW's response**

10.1 The recommendations for HEFCW – and our proposed responses to them – formed the focus of a discussion at our sector dissemination event in Cardiff on 20 October 2009. A written summary of the recommendations was also included in the delegate pack, and guests were invited to respond to our proposals and indicate if they wished to be alerted to subsequent involvement and consultation exercises.

10.2 Additionally, a formal consultation was held between November 2009 and January 2010.

10.3 A full list of the recommendations and our responses to them is attached at **Annex A**.

## **11 Financial implications**

11.1 The costs for the DES evaluation were met by a bespoke programme 2009/2010 budget line, originally set at £50k but later reduced to £35k. The project was delivered to schedule and within the reduced budget.

- 11.2 The proposed Equality Statistical Event in April 2010 (*see recommendation 3 in Annex A*) will be run in partnership with our colleagues in Widening Access, and the costs will be met by the WA budget. Costs for other projects that cannot be met within the scope of the Senior Equality and Diversity Manager budget line will be requested on an individual basis by way of the Chief Executive's budget.

## 12 Communications implications

- 12.1 Our response to the recommendations will be published as a circular and clearly identifiable on HEFCW's web site in the E&D section. We ensure that most materials pertaining to E&D are available in a variety of formats – online, large print and electronic and audio CD – so that these documents are accessible to people with visual impairments and/or learning difficulties. We also make key documents available in community languages upon request to aid comprehension for those reading English as a second or other language. The anticipated cost of transcribing these materials annually would be minimal and could be produced on request and in a timely manner.

## 13 Diversity implications

- 13.1 Provision of equalities advice and information to the sector, and monitoring sector's performance on these, is at heart of these proposals.
- 13.2 We have a legal responsibility to assess the impact of our work on equality groups (age, disability, gender, race, religious belief and sexual orientation), and to set out how we will monitor or address any possible negative impact.
- 13.3 Any further work undertaken as a result of these recommendations will be screened and impact assessed in line with our current EIA procedures.

## 14 Risk Assessment

14.1

Risk	Action to address risk
Failure to comply with statutory responsibilities for E&D with respect to the sector and to provide effective support for developing the sector's E&D plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult sector and others on way forward</li> <li>• Identify clear objectives and performance targets for post.</li> <li>• Strong emphasis on outcomes and on development of clear criteria and evidence base for assessing institutional progress on E&amp;D matters.</li> <li>• Continue to seek regular feedback on effectiveness of</li> </ul>

	support and advice role (from HEIs, ECU, etc)
Perceived failure to respond to the DES review recommendations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish circular</li> <li>• Circulate widely to interested stakeholders</li> <li>• Senior E&amp;D Manager engagement on one-to-one basis with individual HEIs on their own DES review recommendations</li> <li>• Consultation event, October 2009</li> <li>• Publish on website</li> </ul>
Failure to properly consult/involve disabled people in development of proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EIA all proposed projects</li> <li>• Circulate invite for involvement exercises widely</li> <li>• Work with the sector in developing priorities</li> </ul>