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Cylchlythyr

Circular

HEFCW Equality Scheme Consultation

Date: 26 March 2008
Reference: W08/11HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in
Wales
Response by: 25 April 2008
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This circular invites comment on the draft HEFCW Equality Scheme.

This document is available online, in large print, Braille, on CD and on audio CD and cassette. Should you or someone you know require this in an alternative format, please contact us on (029) 2068 2280 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk.

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Introduction

1. This circular invites comment on the draft HEFCW Equality Scheme (ES) which sets out HEFCW's plans for meeting its statutory responsibilities with regard to the 2000 Race Relations Amendment Act, the 2005 Disability Discrimination Act and the 2006 Equality Act.

Background

2. In 2007 the three equality commissions – the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission – merged to become the single Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The EHRC was established to:
 - bring together equality experts to act as a single source of information and advice;
 - be a single point of contact for individuals, businesses and the voluntary and public sectors;
 - help businesses by promoting awareness of equality issues, which may prevent costly court and tribunal cases;
 - tackle discrimination on multiple levels - some people may face more than one type of discrimination; and
 - give previously under-represented groups, such as older people, a powerful national body to tackle discrimination.
3. With the 2006 Equality Act there has been a legislative steer towards pan-equality approaches to this agenda. Like many other public authorities HEFCW in its Equality Scheme aims not simply to bring together our existing equality schemes and action plans for disability, gender and race, but also to provide information on our work in the areas of age, religion and belief, sexual orientation and equality more generally, whilst also detailing our intentions to go beyond mere compliance with the legislation. By engaging with all strands in a coherent and holistic way we hope to reduce bureaucracy, encourage effective implementation, and most importantly ensure that equality is properly mainstreamed into our core activities.
4. Although there are similarities within the different strands of equalities legislation, there are also significant differences in the current statutory obligations that need to be met. Differences exist between the duties on implementation dates, gathering information, action plans, objective setting, reporting arrangements and consultation and involvement, as well as HEFCW's sector monitoring role. We ensure that while we co-ordinate our equalities work wherever possible – particularly to promote a unified

approach, cross-strand working and address multiple identities – each equality strand retains its own distinct identity within the ES, ensuring that we do not lose sight of the individual requirements of the legislation.

Consultation

5. As the body which funds higher education in universities and colleges in Wales, we recognise the huge benefits which can be gained from improving diversity in the education system and, in particular, in higher education. These are benefits both for the educational institutions themselves and also for the wider economy and society of Wales and beyond.
6. Higher education institutions have traditionally attracted a diverse range of applicants. We work closely 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 will monitor institutional actions and sector performance but we will also provide support to enable improvements in sector performance in equality.
7. We will be establishing mechanisms to consult and involve as widely as possible with interested groups and individuals, as well as with the institutions and providers that we fund, and our key partners. We would very much welcome information about what you feel are the key issues for equality in HE and welcome any comments you may have on this draft scheme, particularly responses that may help us to shape and develop our forthcoming Action Plan.

Timetable

8. Responses on the HEFCW Equality Scheme can be made by post or email by Friday, 25 April 2007.

Further information / responses to

9. For further information, contact Vikki Burge (tel 029 2068 2218; email vikki.burge@hefcw.ac.uk).