Equality Challenge Unit

- Established in 2001 to promote equality for staff in higher education in the UK
- Remit extended in 2006 to include students
- Funded by the 4 UK higher education funding Councils, Universities UK and GuildHE
- 16 staff, based in London

Promoting equality and diversity in higher education
ECU Mission

- Equality Challenge Unit supports the higher education sector to realise the potential of all staff and students whatever their age, disability, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation to the benefit of those individuals, higher education institutions and society.
Context

- First substantive anti-discrimination legislation over 40 years ago
- Changing understanding over time:
  - Developing understanding of concepts: direct, indirect, victimisation, harassment
  - Cultural and systemic
- New Equality Act 2010

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Protected characteristics

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief (including lack of belief)
- sex
- sexual orientation

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Timescales

- Majority of the Act brought into force October 2010:
  - Provisions on employment, facilities, goods and services and education
  - Harmonisation of basic framework of protection
  - Some changes in definitions
- Public Sector Equality Duty, expected from April 2011
- Ban on age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities, services and public functions, expected 2012

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Increased protection

- Change in definition of discrimination
  - Association (protection of carers)
  - Perception
- Extension of protection to new characteristics
- New types of disability discrimination
- Strengthening the powers of employment tribunals
- Harmonised voluntary positive action measures
- Third party harassment
- Pre-employment health questionnaires

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Public Sector Equality Duty

- Covers all protected characteristics apart from marriage and civil partnership
- General duty to:
  - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not
  - Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not

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Specific duties (proposals)

- Annual publication of data from 04 April 2011 replacing schemes/actions plans (awaiting EHRC standards)
- Use evidence to set specific and measurable equality objective(s). To be renewed at least every four years.
- Assessments of impact of policies and practices on general duty; will need to publish information used in assessing impact
- Does not prescribe methods of engagement or consultation but have to show how they have done so
- No specific duty on procurement
- Overall focus is on transparency and public accountability
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