SPSW Equality and Diversity Policy

Equality and Diversity Working Group, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York

Introduction

Equality, social mobility and social inclusion are issues at the heart of the disciplines of social policy and social work. The Department of Social Policy & Social Work at York has a long-standing commitment to policy and practice consistent with those concerns, for example through widening participation and within the curriculum. This document introduces the relevant current legal duties and university policies, and then draws on wider resources to begin developing a departmental approach to best practice. It is a working document, to be added to and amended as issues arise, in recognition that the development of good practice requires an ongoing openness to tensions and hidden perspectives, and a continuing dialogue. It is intended to facilitate action rather than be an end in itself.

Legal duties

The Public Sector Equality Duty, as set out in the Equality Act 2010 which came into force April 2011, requires Higher Education Institutions to show due regard in the exercise of their functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct
- Advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- Foster good relations between people from different groups

Protected characteristics to which all these apply are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion/belief/non-belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination also applies to marriage and civil partnership.

University policy

The University’s overarching equality objectives reflect the three aspects of the equality duty outlined above – see [www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/EqualityObjectives.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/EqualityObjectives.htm) - and there are a range of actions under way to raise awareness, train, consult, review and improve policy and practice. All University policies regarding Equality and Diversity are available online at: [www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/EqualityInformation.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/EqualityInformation.htm) - they cover the protected characteristics, and include the harassment policy, policies for employees and policies for students.

A legal duty to reduce inequality caused by socio-economic disadvantage, included in the Equality Act 2010, was never implemented and has now been scrapped. However, University initiatives for financially disadvantaged students (outlined in the Access Agreement 2013/14) include fee waivers, accommodation bursaries and the hardship fund.
Practice in the Department
This document aims to set a Departmental ethos to equality and diversity, with specific actions that complement the University policies. Both social policy and social work degree programmes are relatively successful in attracting a diverse student body. As Fletcher et al (2013) note however, from a study of the experiences of minority social work students (disabled, black and minority ethnic, and lesbian, gay and bisexual) in HEIs, such success can sometimes breed complacency whilst institutional culture still permits complex and subtle (or not so subtle) forms of discrimination and exclusion, with implications for retention and progression. The Departmental Equality and Diversity Working Group aims to prevent this by encouraging positive discussion about equality and diversity issues and supporting best practice.

Equality and diversity for staff, students and visitors
Every member of the Department will be proactive in following up any concerns individuals may have about discrimination or actions which fail to comply with the Equality Act 2010 or University Policies regarding Equality and Diversity. This may involve directing individuals to particular points of Departmental or University support, seeking advice from colleagues about a concern, or asking Departmental SMG to raise issues beyond the Department.

Specific actions for supporting students with disabilities
- **Disability Needs Assessments**: When a disability needs assessment is produced, the personal supervisor and the student should work together to produce a list of bullet points based on the needs assessment which outlines: reasonable adjustments for teaching staff, adjustments that markers need to take into account, and any other requirements the Department has a responsibility to support. This list needs to be given to the Departmental Disability Coordinator who will make this list available to teaching staff.
- **Spelling/grammar stickers on assessed work**: Staff should refer to the University's Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback, section 4.3.3, which outlines eligibility criteria and the process for a student to be eligible to use the stickers. The stickers will alert the marker that the student has such a disability and that errors of spelling or grammar should be ignored.

Next steps for the EDWG
- Use self-evaluation frameworks provided by the HEA and SWAP to review Department practice and highlight areas for improvement.
- Conduct an analysis of drop-out rates or delayed completion for students with protected characteristics.
- To ensure an Access Guide is made available for Alcuin C Block.
- To direct staff to resources for accessible practice and ensure awareness about the legal and policy context in which we work.

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