

# **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2015 – 2018**

*Putting policy into practice*

## Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Legal Context (Equality Act 2010)
- 3 Key Priorities
- 4 Brookes' Governance and responsibility for EDI
- 5 Engagement and consultation
- 6 Reporting, publishing and review arrangements
- 7 Further information

Annex: EDI Objectives and Equality Action Plan 2015 - 2018

## INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At Oxford Brookes we are committed to ensuring the very best staff and student experience where **all** our community can flourish in a culture of respect and support, where we celebrate difference and thrive on each other's success. The University has adopted equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as core values and places all its policy development in the context of the objectives of
- ensuring that all individuals who come into contact with the University, whether as employees, students or in other capacities, are treated with dignity and respect;
  - ensuring that the opportunities the University provides for learning, personal development and employment are made on a non-discriminatory basis; and
  - providing a safe, supportive and welcoming environment for students, staff and visitors.
- 1.2 This is not just about legal compliance. **We strive to be a sector-leader in the advancement of EDI and ensure that policy is translated into effective practice.** Our aim is to integrate the principles of equal treatment and the celebration of diversity into all aspects of the University's day-to-day life, recognising that some groups may have particular and specific requirements resulting from persistent and longstanding disadvantage. The University seeks through all its policies and actions to be a genuinely inclusive organisation, and draws for this on good practice throughout the Higher Education sector and in the wider economy.
- 1.3 The University takes an evidence-based approach and uses data to identify priorities and drive change. Headline data on the University's workforce and student body are given in the EDI Annual Report 2013 – 2014. The EDI Strategy 2015 – 2018 sets out the University's priorities and approach over the next planning period.

## 2 LEGAL CONTEXT (EQUALITY ACT 2010)

- 2.1 The Equality Act 2010 aimed to reform and harmonise discrimination law; strengthen the existing law to support progress on equality; and replaced all previous equality legislation including the Equal Pay Act 1970.
- 2.2 The Act introduced the concept of "protected characteristics" and people within these groups benefit from the same level of protection against discrimination. The nine protected characteristics are:
- Age
  - Disability
  - Gender reassignment
  - Marriage and civil partnership
  - Pregnancy and maternity
  - Race
  - Religion or belief (including lack of belief)
  - Sex (previously gender)
  - Sexual orientation
- 2.3 The Act also created a new "Public Sector Equality Duty" (PSED) for public authorities across all protected characteristics replacing the previous separate PSEDs for race, gender and disability. Those subject to the PSED (also called the "general duty") must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- Foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

2.4 The Act helpfully explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics (which may involve treating some people more favourably than others).
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- Taking steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities.
- Fostering good relations and promoting understanding between people from different groups.

2.5 Public authorities, including universities, have **specific duties** to help meet the PSED in an effective and proportionate way. These are:

- To publish one or more equality objectives at least every four years.
- To publish sufficient information to demonstrate its compliance with the general equality duty across its functions. This must be done at least annually from the first date of publication.

### 3 KEY PRIORITIES

3.1 In order to meet our legal obligation and progress our work on equality, diversity and inclusion, we have developed a set of **EDI Objectives** for the period 2015-18 which outlines our key priorities and activities for the year ahead. In summary these are:

- Work towards a more diverse workforce and ensure opportunities for learning, personal development and employment promote EDI;
- Ensure all employees, students and other individuals are treated with dignity and respect;
- Reflect EDI in our governance and decision-making;
- Promote awareness of our EDI values and policy, and
- Provide a safe, supportive and welcoming environment for our staff and students.

These objectives are supported by an **Action Plan** outlining appropriate timescales and outcomes (attached annex).

3.2 The EDI Action Plan will sit alongside other University Action Plans, namely those supporting the Race Equality Charter Mark, Athena Swan and the HR Excellence in Research award.

3.3 A key to the success of the Action Plan will be commitment from the highest levels in the University as well as a collaborative and collegiate approach to EDI across the University. Each group of actions, therefore, will have a senior sponsor.

## 4 BROOKES' GOVERNANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDI

- 4.1 Responsibility for EDI lies with each and every individual who is a member of the Oxford Brookes community and more formally with the Board of Governors, senior management, faculties and directorates. However, to ensure the University meets legal requirements, actively promotes good practice and monitors progress, different areas of the University have special responsibility for developing and implementing EDI policy and practices.
- 4.2 The **EDI Advisory Group**, chaired by the Vice Chancellor and reporting to the Executive Board, is responsible for producing the University's EDI Strategy, Objectives and Annual Report, recommendations for action and developing, and monitoring equality objectives and other requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 4.3 Specific support for EDI across the University is provided by the Human Resources Directorate. In particular:
- **HR Business Partnership Manager and team** take the lead in advancing EDI policy and practice, provide advice and guidance on EDI issues as they relate to the university workforce and ensuring effective communication and understanding.
  - **The Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice (CDPRP)** is an interdisciplinary, cross-institutional centre which specialises in research and knowledge exchange in the area of equality and diversity management and carries out projects that will underpin policy developments and inform best practice in the workplace.
  - **The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development (OCSLD)** is one of the UK's largest and most established providers of staff and educational development for further and higher education. The Centre provides both a range of courses that develop an understanding of EDI issues, such as the Recruitment and Selection course and the EDI on-line course, as well as undertaking projects related to the enhancement of the student experience from a learning development perspective.
- 4.4 The **Widening Participation Advisory Group (WPAG)**, chaired by the Associate Dean (Student Experience), Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, and reporting to the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee (AESC), draws on expertise from across the University's faculties, directorates and the Students' Union in order to help develop policies and provide leadership in widening student participation at Brookes. The group pays particular attention to promoting interventions which will further the achievement of the University's ambitions set out in the Access Agreement, which is approved by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA)<sup>1</sup>. The definition of widening participation at Brookes, and therefore the work of the group, extends throughout the student lifecycle: getting in, getting through, and moving on. The group monitors university performance against OFFA milestones and commissions further research into areas of concern.
- 4.5 Support for the WPAG is provided by a range of colleagues across the institution but particularly in Student and Academic Affairs and OCSLD.
- 4.6 The University has identified the need to ensure that all efforts to advance and support EDI for staff and students are co-ordinated. Greater collaboration between academic and support departments will also result in a more holistic and effective approach to EDI.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Fair Access – sets performance targets for disabled students, students from low socio-economic groups, from ethnic minority groups, for mature students without a degree, students from low income households and students whose parent or guardian has no HE background.

## **5 ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION**

In addition to analysing quantitative data, the University recognises the importance of engaging and consulting with staff and students in order to gather the views from stakeholders to develop EDI strategies and objectives that give due regard to the needs of all groups. As well as using existing groups and committees, such as the LGBT network, the University will seek to set up other staff network groups, for example for BME and disabled staff, to serve as critical friends on proposed policies and procedures as well as providing support to members.

## **6 MONITORING, REVIEW AND PUBLISHING ARRANGEMENTS**

- 6.1 The Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group on an annual basis and an Annual Report on progress and activities made to Executive Board. The EDI Strategy will be reviewed on a three-yearly basis.
- 6.2 The University will continue to collect statistical data on the diversity profile of applicants, staff and students for all protected characteristics. This information will be published annually on the university website and analysed as part of the EDI annual report to inform future priorities and objectives at university and departmental level.
- 6.3 The EDI Annual Report, EDI Strategy and Action Plan will be published on the University's EDI webpages after approval by the Executive Board.

## **7 FURTHER INFORMATION AND COMMENTS**

We are always keen to receive feedback as we strive for continuous improvement. Comments or requests for further information about equality, diversity and inclusion should be addressed to:

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