

Considering the Equality and Diversity Implications of Agenda Items

Cardiff University is committed to creating an inclusive culture based on the values of dignity, courtesy and respect, and as a public body, it also has duties under equality legislation. Its committees, both within Schools and at institutional level, have a crucial role to play, and the following guidance is intended to support committee members, secretaries and Chairs in their work.

Summarising the requirement

The following clause has been inserted into the terms of reference of every committee:

'To ensure that, in conducting its work, the XXX Committee will integrate consideration of equality and diversity issues into each item of business, with a view to valuing and promoting equality and diversity and eliminating discrimination.'

Some policies or decisions will have obvious equality relevance because they aim to address a discrimination issue or imbalance by providing opportunities or adjustments to specific groups (e.g. specific provision for disabled students in examinations). In other cases, we may be used to considering equality implications (e.g. shortlisting candidates for a job vacancy).

However, it may seem at first glance that many items do not have any equality or diversity implications. In order to ensure that nothing is missed, the Committee should assure itself that for each agenda item the following questions have been addressed in full:

1. **(a)** Who will be affected by this decision? What information is there about its likely effects on them?
(b) Have you consulted with people who might be affected?
(c) Could this decision affect some groups of people more than others? In particular, is it likely to have a disproportionately bad effect on some groups?
(d) Could the proposal be amended to avoid or reduce this disproportionate effect?
2. Could the decision be seen as 'favouring' a particular group or denying opportunities to another? Might it cause tensions or resentment between people? How could this be addressed?
3. Does this decision offer an opportunity to promote equality? Does it offer an opportunity to promote good relations between different groups of people?
4. Accessible environments
(a) Physical access: will the decision affect how and when different groups of people are able to use a room or building? Has the committee taken advice on improving access for disabled people?

(b) Access to information: does the decision involve communication or publication of information? Has the committee taken advice on producing accessible formats?

5. After a period of time, decisions should be reviewed to see what effects they have actually had. Do you need to make arrangements now so that information will be available for this review?

When to consider...

...as early as possible! The equality implications of every agenda item should be identified as part of the preparation and drafting of any paper or report for the committee. This will include reviewing any relevant monitoring, research or consultation information in order to build in any implications to the report.

In the case of major items, such as new policies or significant financial decisions, an equality impact assessment screening should be completed at an early stage, and if necessary, a full equality impact assessment conducted. Results from the screening and/or impact assessment will help the Committee to address the questions above.

It is good practice to include a summary of equality information and implications on the cover sheet of reports (example included in Appendix A). If the author of the report has not done this, the chair, or any other member of the committee, should raise the questions above at the meeting.

Whose needs should we consider?

In practice, many of the steps taken to address inequality, discrimination or harassment against a particular group will also have broader inclusive effects, but you should consider the needs of:

- people from all age groups;
- people from black and minority ethnic groups;
- women, men and transgender people;
- Welsh speakers;
- people of all nationalities;
- lesbian, gay and bisexual people;
- people from different socioeconomic groups;
- people with different family or caring responsibilities;
- disabled people and people with long-term health conditions who are likely to be covered by the Disability Discrimination Act;
- people with different religious or philosophical beliefs.

In addition, the equality agenda is often extended to include social inclusion, community cohesion, widening access and issues relating to fairness and justice.

What to consider

In general, the University is required to eliminate discrimination and harassment on any of the protected grounds. Recent equality legislation also gives us specific duties relating to gender, disability and race, including a duty to promote equality and good relations between groups (see the University's Equality Schemes at www.cardiff.ac.uk/cocom/equalityanddiversity/index.html); however, the University aims to promote equality in relation to all the strands. In addition there is legislation providing positive rights under the Human Rights Act which may have relevant implications.

How big a task is this likely to be?

That depends on the policy or decision at issue. Our obligation is to pay **due** regard to the need to promote equality and eliminate unlawful discrimination, and this means that the consideration of equality issues should be proportionate to the item in question. In some cases, the questions above will require only the briefest of answers, while at the other end of the scale, a full equality impact assessment will be needed. As an institution and as individuals we will take time to get the balance right, and to start with, you may need to seek advice from the Equality and Diversity Team.

Examples

1. (a) Who will be affected by this decision? What information is there about its likely effects on them?
(b) Have you consulted with people who might be affected?
(c) Could this decision affect some groups of people more than others? In particular, is it likely to have a disproportionately bad effect on some groups?
(d) Could the proposal be amended to avoid or reduce this disproportionate effect?

Example: The question before the committee is whether to close down the snack bar in a School.

(a) People affected would include, for instance: customers (staff, students, possibly members of the public), the staff who run the snack bar, companies delivering food and supplies, people with offices nearby, shops/snack bars nearby which might pick up its business...

Useful information would include things like: current opening hours; who uses it and when; what they buy; any complaints received; whether there are alternative shops or snack bars nearby; whether it attracts people into a social space like a common room or staff room which they might not otherwise use...

(b) The committee might carry out a survey of building users to see what the demand is; to investigate whether altering the hours or the choices of snacks would increase use; and to find out whether people depend on the snack bar or have

other viable alternatives. Or the committee might ask the relevant building user group and the student panel to comment on the proposals.

(c) Closure might particularly affect, for instance:

- people whose timetables don't leave much time between commitments, who might be unable to go to another building;
- people with mobility difficulties (particularly if nearby alternatives aren't accessible);
- people with specific dietary requirements (if, for instance, nearby alternatives don't offer vegetarian or halal options);
- students or others who don't live on campus and use the area for socialising and group work;
- people attending night classes who use the snack bar when other facilities are closed;
- people who have offices nearby who are currently disturbed by the noise of deliveries and the numbers of people coming and going;
- the staff working in the snack bar (perhaps its location or its hours of opening are particularly important to them, and redeployment won't be easy)...

(d) The committee could consider options like:

- reducing opening hours rather than closing completely
- providing vending machines
- providing a place for people to store and eat their own food
- working with nearby shops/snack bars to make sure they offer a range of options (e.g. vegetarian, halal)

2. Could the decision be seen as 'favouring' a particular group or denying opportunities to another? Might it cause tensions or resentment between people? How could this be addressed?

Example: The question before the committee is whether to set aside an additional four parking spaces close to the building for use by people with mobility difficulties.

Given that parking spaces are in short supply, and most people have to park ten minutes' walk away, the committee is concerned that this decision could cause resentment.

The committee could look for ways to explain to all building users that this is not a 'perk', it is for people who genuinely need it, and to address common misconceptions, like the idea that if someone doesn't use a wheelchair they aren't really disabled. It could also take the opportunity to remind people of ways it supports other transport options, like cycling or car share.

3. Does this decision offer an opportunity to promote equality? Does it offer an opportunity to promote good relations between different groups of people?

Example: The committee is making arrangements for the annual staff away day.

The committee could:

- check dietary provision, ensuring that there are at least some options for vegetarians and vegans, and that people are invited to disclose any more specific dietary requirements;
- provide standard response form for attendees to detail access and accessible information requirements;
- consider timing: will people have time to drop off children at school first, or pick them up afterwards?
- consider whether childcare could be provided;
- provide a quiet room at the venue which could be used for prayer or rest;
- ensure that the venue is accessible – for instance, access for people with mobility difficulties; an induction loop for people who are hard of hearing;
- design activities so they are accessible for disabled people: e.g. captions on videos; written instructions for group activities; handouts provided at the start for any PowerPoint presentations;
- produce materials in bilingual (Welsh/English) format where appropriate
- make clear the expectation that people will treat each other with dignity and respect – can be particularly important if there are controversial issues being discussed, or challenging teambuilding activities;
- ensure there are social spaces and activities at lunchtime, to avoid half the attendees sloping off to the pub at lunchtime, splitting the group and risking some people feeling left out.

4. Accessible environments

a. Physical access: will the decision affect how and when different groups of people are able to use a room or building? Has the committee taken advice on improving access for disabled people?

Example: The committee is discussing the purchase of new tables and chairs for the seminar rooms.

The committee should ask:

- will they be easy to rearrange or stack out of the way so the room can be used for a wide range of teaching activities?
- are the chairs designed to provide adequate support for people sitting for long periods?

- will they be suitable for people who are left- or right-handed (e.g. if they have an attached writing surface)?
- will the tables be suitable for wheelchair users?
- will the colour of the new furniture contrast with the walls and carpets so they are easier for people with visual impairments to see?

b. Access to information: does the decision involve communication or publication of information? Has the committee taken advice on producing accessible formats?

Example: The decision to stop providing handouts on paper and start posting all course materials on BlackBoard

The committee should consider:

- effects on people who do not have easy access to computers;
- how to ensure that files are posted in an accessible format (for instance, so that people with vision impairments who use text-to-speech software can read them);
- the impact on poorer students of additional costs in printing;
- how far in advance materials will need to be posted, for students to have a sufficient chance to get them;
- how the new policy will be communicated to students, especially continuing students for whom it may be a big change.

5. After a period of time, decisions should be reviewed to see what effects they have actually had. Do you need to make arrangements now so that information will be available for this review?

Example: materials on BlackBoard – when posting materials, make sure that tracking of usage is enabled.

Example: staff away day – consider including questions about access and inclusion in the evaluation questionnaire