



**Equality Impact Assessment
on the
Student Residential
Accommodation Policy**

Consultation Report

January 2008

Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	3
1. Background	6
2. Section 75	9
3. The Student Residential Policy	11
4. Consideration of Available Data and Research	17
5. Assessment of Impacts	27
6. Preliminary Recommendations	31
7. Consultation	33

Appendices

A	University Residential Accommodation Buildings
B	Student Accommodation EQIA Sub-group Membership
C	Allocation Criteria
D	The Rules of Residence
E	Residential Services Student Charter
F	Equality Monitoring Data
G	'Instep' Questions and University of Ulster Response

Executive Summary

Introduction

This Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been carried out as a result of the University's initial policy screening exercise. The University of Ulster established an EQIA Sub-group in January 2007 to conduct this exercise.

The Policy

The University of Ulster Residential Services Policy aims to offer high quality accommodation for students in University residences. Residential Services will allocate spaces fairly and without bias basing their decision upon the information provided by the applicant on the application form. Residential Services are committed to encouraging diversity and inclusion within University residences.

Data Collection

In conducting the EQIA, the Sub-group considered a wide range of data including existing quantitative and qualitative institutional data, research reports, data gathered from pre-consultation meetings and student focus groups, and miscellaneous anecdotal data. The majority of students living in University residential accommodation during 2006/07 were first year full time undergraduates. Therefore the EQIA Sub-group focused on this group for further analysis. The Sub-group felt that data on students living away from home would provide an appropriate comparator against which student intake to University accommodation could be assessed to identify if there are adverse or differential impacts on any Section 75 categories. The Sub-group also reviewed data on postgraduate students who reside in University residential accommodation in comparison to the overall postgraduate population.

Summary of Assessment of Impacts¹

The EQIA on the Student Residential Accommodation Policy showed **no negative or adverse impacts** in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories. However a

¹ The Sub-group has used the definition of differential and adverse impact included at paragraph 3.6 of the Equality Commission's Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment: "Differential impact suggests that a particular group has been affected differently by the policy (either favourably or unfavourably), while adverse impact is an indication that the effect is less favourable (i.e. negative) and is potentially unlawful".

differential impact was identified with regard to the category of religious belief as data show a lower percentage of Catholic students living in University accommodation at Jordanstown compared with the overall percentage of Catholic students that lived away from home. This is due to external factors beyond the control of the University as explained in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 of the report.

Preliminary Recommendations

Notwithstanding the fact that no adverse impacts have been identified, the University wishes to respond positively to the EQIA. With that in mind the following actions are recommended:

- to develop an information booklet for the University of Ulster in relation to students with a disability applying for University accommodation;
- within the University's Disability and SENDO Strategies, training on SENDO, the Disability Duties and the new Disclosure Policy and guidelines² will be provided to accommodation staff, Wardens and Resident Assistants;
- to review and improve the data collection methods for monitoring international students so as to reduce the percentage of 'not known' data;
- to include specific questions relating to equality of opportunity and good relations in future annual student residential accommodation surveys; and
- to review the practice of accommodating international students together and look at ways to increase cultural integration and awareness.

Consultation

This consultation report has been made available as part of the formal consultation stage of the EQIA. The University welcomes any comments which you may have in terms of this EQIA, including the preliminary findings with regard to assessment of impacts and preliminary recommendations.

² It is anticipated that this Policy will be drafted by February 2008.

If you have any queries about this document, and its availability in alternative formats, please contact: The Equality Policy and Practice Unit on Tel: 028 703 24745 or e-mail Claire McCarron: c.mccarron@ulster.ac.uk

The Consultation Report and a response pro forma are available to download at <http://www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/consultation.html>

The consultation ends on **Friday 28th March 2008**.

1 Background

The University of Ulster

- 1.1 The University of Ulster was established by Royal Charter in 1984 and operates across four campuses: Coleraine, Jordanstown, Belfast and Magee in Londonderry. The governing body of the University is the Council.
- 1.2 The Vice-Chancellor is the Chief Accounting Officer of the University. Professor Richard Barnett is the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor is supported by four Pro-Vice-Chancellors who are appointed by Council.
- 1.3 The Pro-Vice-Chancellors are responsible for Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation, Academic Development and Student Services, and Communication and Institutional Development. Six Directors³ are responsible for the administrative functions of the University. In addition, there are three Provosts, one with responsibility for Coleraine campus, one for Magee campus and one for Jordanstown and Belfast campuses. The University is academically organised within six faculties⁴ and each faculty is headed by a Dean. The above staff comprise the Senior Officers of the University.

The University's Vision

- 1.4 The University of Ulster's Vision is to be *a University with a national and international reputation for excellence, innovation and regional engagement*. The University makes a major contribution to the economic, social and cultural advancement of Northern Ireland as a region within a national and international context and plays a key role in attracting inward investment. Core business activities are teaching and learning, research and technology transfer and academic enterprise.

³ The Directors have responsibility for Communication and Development; Finance; Human Resources; Information Services; Physical Resources & Corporate Planning and Governance.

⁴ The six faculties are Arts; Art, Design and the Built Environment; Business and Management; Computing and Engineering; Life and Health Sciences and Social Sciences.

University Accommodation

- 1.5 The University has 2,396 University owned/managed bed spaces available on campus at Coleraine, Jordanstown, and Magee⁵. These include
- "traditional" halls of residence, where students are allocated a study bedroom with shared use of communal kitchen, WC, bathroom/shower, and Common Room;
 - apartment type settings, where occupants have their own en-suite facility with internet connections in apartments of up to six study bedrooms that share communal facilities within a purpose-built complex; and
 - student houses or flats.
- 1.6 The University does not own any accommodation in the Belfast area; however students may make use of accommodation facilities on the Jordanstown campus which has good transport links.

Residential Services

- 1.7 Residential Services is a self-financing semi-autonomous unit within the University's Physical Resources Directorate. The Service has offices and staff at each of the University's campuses, and the Director of Physical Resources has overall responsibility for the service. The Head of Residential Services, based at the Magee campus, has executive control of the Service and, along with Accommodation Officers at each campus, looks after the policy and day-to-day business.

Cost of Accommodation

- 1.8 The accommodation budget is a self-financing budget which cannot under Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) guidelines be subsidized by the University. The costs for accommodation provision are recouped through the fees raised through student rents and conference lettings income. The average cost of a room for 2006/07 was £50.89 per week. This figure includes utilities costs and a housekeeping service. The University offers self-catered accommodation only. It

⁵ Appendix A lists the University's residential buildings within the scope of the EQIA.

is significantly less than the UK average for rent in student accommodation, which is approximately £66 per week.

2 Section 75

Section 75 Duties

- 2.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the University of Ulster in carrying out its functions, relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:
- Between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
 - Between men and women generally;
 - Between persons with a disability and person without; and
 - Between persons with dependants and persons without.
- 2.2 In addition, and without prejudice to its obligation above, the University must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Screening of the Policy

- 2.3 In 2001 the University was designated by the Secretary of State as a public authority, for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Subsequently the University produced its Equality Scheme, which was approved by the Equality Commission in July 2002, and then proceeded to screen all its policies to assess:
- whether there was any evidence of higher or lower participation or uptake by different groups;
 - whether there is any evidence that different groups have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the particular policy;
 - whether there was an opportunity to promote equality of opportunity or good relations better by altering the policy or working with others in government or the wider community; and
 - whether consultations with relevant groups, organisations or individuals indicated that the policy creates problems which are specific to them.
- 2.4 As a result of this screening exercise it was agreed that a full EQIA should be carried out on the Student Residential Accommodation Policy. The decision to

conduct an EQIA was based on the need to ensure that the accommodation available meets the needs of all students and is fit for purpose.

The EQIA Process

- 2.5 The University established an EQIA Sub-group to conduct the exercise. The Sub-group is chaired by Professor Robert Hutchinson, Dean of the Business & Management Faculty, and is made up of representatives from Residential Services, Student Support, Physical Resources, the Student's Union, School of Policy Studies and the Equality Unit. The Sub-group membership is listed in **Appendix B**. Work commenced on the EQIA in January 2007.
- 2.6 The Sub-group has carried out this Equality Impact Assessment to consider:
- Differential and adverse impact upon any of the nine categories set out in Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act;
 - Where adverse impact is identified, to assess measures which might mitigate the adverse impact; and
 - The potential for alternative action(s), which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.

Stakeholders

- 2.7 The main stakeholders who are affected by this policy are students; parents; and local residents.

Relevant Legislation

- 2.8 In the operation of this policy the following legislation is also relevant:
- The Sex Discrimination (NI) Orders 1976 and 1988;
 - The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (as amended);
 - The Disability Discrimination (NI) Act 1995, including the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order 2005;
 - The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (as amended);;
 - Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003; and
 - Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006.

3 The Student Residential Policy

Policy Aim

- 3.1 The University of Ulster aims to offer high quality accommodation for students in University residences. Residential Services will allocate spaces fairly and without bias basing their decision upon the information provided by the applicant on the application form. Residential Services are committed to encouraging diversity and inclusiveness within University residences.

Allocation Criteria

- 3.2 The policy sets out the allocation criteria used in the allocation of student accommodation to students when **demand exceeds supply**⁶ (see **Appendix C**). When residential places are in high demand, it will not be possible to offer accommodation to everyone who makes an application. At these times, the following allocation criteria are brought into use to ensure that those applicants with greatest need are given priority.
- 3.3 The allocation criteria are weighted towards students:
- pursuing a full-time undergraduate degree course at the University;
 - who are new to the University;
 - who live too far away to be able to find private rented accommodation;
 - and
 - who have additional/specific social and physical needs.

First Year Undergraduates

- 3.4 Priority is given to new full-time first year undergraduate students. However, the University cannot guarantee accommodation (when demand exceeds supply), so students who have a conditional firm offer of an academic place at the University will be guaranteed an offer of residential accommodation provided they make the

⁶ It is important to note that demand for student accommodation has not exceeded supply in the past three years and therefore the University has not used the allocation criteria during the timescale of this EQIA.

University of Ulster their first choice and return their completed accommodation application form by 1 July.

- 3.5 Applicants who are not offered campus accommodation may opt for University-managed houses and apartments off-campus. Assistance may also be given, if necessary, in helping to secure suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.

Returning Students and Post-Graduate Students

- 3.6 A number of residential places are set aside for returning final year and post-graduate students. Dedicated blocks of accommodation removed from the residences of first year students, are available for postgraduate students.
- 3.7 Again, all such students cannot be guaranteed accommodation when demand exceeds supply, and other criteria will be used to determine which applicants can be offered places. Previous residence periods, if any, may be taken into consideration in this process (and for example, previous disciplinary action whilst living in residences).

Students from outside UK/Ireland

- 3.8 The University **guarantees** an offer of accommodation to all international students for the duration of their full time study at the University. This guarantee only applies to students who are categorised as 'overseas' for fee purposes, and whose completed application form and Booking Fee of £100 are received by 1 August in the year of admission⁷.
- 3.9 Students from outside the European Union who apply to the University under the Exchange or Study Abroad programmes for one semester only, will also be guaranteed an offer of accommodation provided that their completed application form and Booking Fee of £100 are received before the deadline required for that semester in the year of admission⁸.

⁷ Some applications may be accepted after the 1 August deadline, subject to availability.

⁸ For Semester 1 applications should be received by 1 August in the year of admission; an offer of accommodation for Semester 2 is guaranteed provided an application form is received by 30 November in the year of admission (applications may be accepted after the deadlines, subject to availability).

- 3.10 Students from within the European Union on exchange or other programmes, (for example ERASMUS), may be offered accommodation, provided there are vacancies remaining. Such students will also be given assistance in helping to find accommodation locally.
- 3.11 The University appreciates that students from overseas countries have particular needs and an International Student Handbook was designed to help and assist international students, by providing useful information about the facilities provided for accommodation as well as medical care, counselling and support, sport and recreation activities, etc. The University and the Students' Union also provide a comprehensive international student orientation programme to familiarise students with University policies, procedures and working practices, thus helping international students to settle into life at the University.

Disabled Students

- 3.12 The University aims to provide the greatest level of care and support for every University of Ulster disabled student⁹. The University has fully accessible rooms at Jordanstown, Coleraine and Magee campuses which are suitable for a wheelchair user or student with mobility difficulties. The University is committed to ensuring that other accommodation may be modified to suit individual requirements. For example, in 2005/06 an onsite needs assessment with a disabled student, their Occupational Therapist and social worker resulted in adaptations to the accommodation to the value of £25,000. These adaptations enabled the student to live independently. Other adaptations for disabled students could include:
- additional space for specialist equipment;
 - a mini cooler to store medication; and/or
 - a flashing fire alarm and rumble pillow (for hearing impaired students).

Some accommodation blocks also offer facilities to accommodate carers if required. Disabled students are advised to provide information to Residential

⁹ Reference to 'disability' includes a wide range of impairments and conditions including physical or sensory impairments; mental health difficulties, e.g. depression; specific learning difficulties, e.g. dyslexia; and health conditions, e.g. epilepsy.

Services and the University's Disability Officers as soon as possible to discuss individual needs and requirements¹⁰. Any disability information given by students for use by Residential Service is treated as confidential¹¹.

Student Parents, Couples and Families

- 3.13 Most accommodation is in the form of single study bedrooms. However, on all campuses there are flats and apartments, and applications from student parents and families can be considered where suitable accommodation is available. Double bedded rooms and flats may, on request, be made available to couples. On-campus nurseries operate at Jordanstown, Coleraine and Magee Campus.

Rules of Residence

- 3.14 The Rules of Residence (**Appendix D**) contain important information relating to University of Ulster residences. Students who accept a place in University residences agree to abide by the Rules of Residence as part of their Accommodation/Student License Agreements. It is important to note that students who sign such agreements are licensees not tenants, and fall outside the scope of the Rent (NI) Order 1986.

Residential Services Student Charter

- 3.15 The Charter (**Appendix E**) sets out the standards of provision that the University aims to provide for its students in University residences. Performance will be measured against key indicators contained within the Charter. The University regularly measures the effectiveness of residential provision through student surveys and discussions with the Students' Union. The Charter also sets out the responsibilities placed on students who chose to live in University residential accommodation.

Promoting Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations

¹⁰ A wide range of individual support and evaluation is available, from assessment to adaptive technology. The University has Disability Officers, a Signing Development Officer as well as Welfare, Guidance and Health Centre Teams.

¹¹ Under the University of Ulster's SENDO Strategy (2007-2012), the Equality Unit in conjunction with Corporate Planning and Governance is currently developing a Disclosure Policy and guidelines.

- 3.16 Within the Residential Policy students are reminded that by choosing to live in University accommodation, they are opting for a shared living environment where a level of tolerance and compromise is required. Students are advised that they will be part of a community of people from varying backgrounds and many different countries and cultures.
- 3.17 All Residents must agree to endorse and abide by the University's Equal Opportunities and Bullying and Harassment policies. Bullying and Harassment will not be tolerated. This includes the display of any material/emblems, behaviour, or use of language which may cause offence. Wardens and Resident Assistants assist in dealing with any incidents of bullying and harassment and monitor the outcome of any cases. No formal complaints of bullying or harassment within residential accommodation were made during 2006/07.
- 3.18 There is a standard of discipline which all students must respect and abide by, and which is enforced by Wardens and Resident Assistants, who live in the same accommodation and who are trained in the University's equality policies. The Wardens and Resident Assistants will also help students settle in and provide an invaluable source of help and guidance on all matters related to University life¹².
- 3.19 In areas where University accommodation is adjacent to residential areas of the local community, students are made aware that it is particularly important that respect is given to neighbours. The onus is on students to behave responsibly and with consideration for other members of the community. All students are made aware of the consequences of unacceptable behaviour and the impact that this has on local residents¹³.

Students Residents Committee

¹² All students are entitled to make use of the associated Student Support services located on campus. These range from the Health Centre, Counselling & Guidance Service, Careers Advisory Service, Welfare, Chaplaincy, Disability Support, and the International Office.

¹³ Police are made aware of complaints and may take appropriate action as necessary. It should be borne in mind that where the conduct of an individual student is deemed to have brought the University into disrepute, the University may invoke disciplinary proceedings in relation to the student(s) concerned, in addition to any measures taken by the police.

3.20 The primary purpose of the Residents Committees is to ensure that the welfare, well-being and rights of Students living in University residential accommodation are paramount. The Committees have open forum think tanks, which provide a voice for students paying rent while residing in University accommodation. The Committees also encourage and promote good citizenship practices among students residing in University accommodation.

Associated policies

3.21 The Student Accommodation Policy is associated with the University's Widening Participation Strategy. A successful accommodation policy which provides the right quality, quantity and type of residential accommodation, will assist the University in meeting its widening participation objectives.

4 Consideration of Available Data and Research

4.1 In conducting the EQIA, the Sub-group considered a wide range of data including existing quantitative and qualitative institutional data, research reports, data gathered from pre-consultation meetings and student focus groups, and miscellaneous data.

4.2 In conducting the EQIA, the Sub-group took account of data and research from the following sources:

- data on the type of University residential accommodation available on campus;
- monitoring data on University of Ulster students living away from home and students living on campus during 2006/07;
- data on early leavers from University residential accommodation during 2006/07;
- data collected as a result of previous consultation exercises;
- data from the University's student residential accommodation survey in 2005/06;
- data collected as a result of pre-consultation meetings;
- information from research reports; and
- data collected from focus groups with undergraduate students at Jordanstown in October 2007.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Profile of Accommodation Available

4.3 There are currently 2,396 University owned/managed bed spaces available at Jordanstown, Coleraine and Magee. The residential accommodation application form enables students to choose from a range of accommodation types including single study rooms in Halls of Residences, self-contained apartments, student houses or flats. The breakdown of accommodation available by campus is illustrated in the table below:

Table 1

Bed spaces	Jordanstown	Coleraine	Magee	Total
Fully Accessible ¹⁴	5	9	8	22
Self-contained/ Family/Couples	27	23	18	68
Houses	166	20		186
Flats	299	820	532	1651
Halls/Tower Blocks	397		72	469
Total	894	872	630	2396

4.4 Following an ongoing review of residential accommodation, the University agreed to replace the existing accommodation at Jordanstown with high quality en-suite accommodation, including the provision of an unlimited broadband service.

4.5 This development is taking place on a phased basis to minimise the disruption and provision of accommodation to existing students. The first phase will open in January 2008 providing 274 bed spaces with the final phase opening in June 2009 giving a total of 624 en-suite bed spaces. The new accommodation will be built in apartment style and will impact positively on disabled students, as there are 20 fully accessible accommodation units available in the first phase. Dropped kerbs are provided throughout the site, and car parking spaces for disabled drivers are adjacent to the fully accessible accommodation. Provision has also been made on site for an accommodation office, a laundry and a retail unit.

Monitoring Data on University of Ulster Students Living Away From Home

4.6 The student population in University residential accommodation for the academic year 2006/07 is made up as follows:

- 59% are first year full time undergraduate students;
- 20% are second year full time undergraduate students;
- 14% are third year full time undergraduate students;
- 2% are fourth year full time undergraduate students; and
- 5% are postgraduate students.

¹⁴ Accommodation that is fully accessible for a wheelchair user or student with mobility difficulties.

- 4.7 The majority of students (59%) living in University residential accommodation during 2006/07 were first year full time undergraduates. Therefore the EQIA Sub-group focused on this group for further analysis. The Sub-group felt that data on students living away from home would provide an appropriate comparator against which student intake to University accommodation could be assessed to identify if there are adverse or differential impacts on any Section 75 categories. Available equality data on first year full-time undergraduates (hereafter called entrants) living in University residential accommodation on campus (n =1,298) were compared to all first year undergraduates living away from home (n= 2,729).
- 4.8 The Sub-group also reviewed available equality data on postgraduate students who lived in University residential accommodation during 2006/07 (n=93). The data showed the majority of postgraduate students (75%; n=70) living in University residential accommodation are overseas students. Even though the Policy prioritises applications from overseas students who are guaranteed a room if they apply within the time frames, the Sub-group compared the equality characteristics of postgraduates living in University residential accommodation to the overall postgraduate population in 2006/07 (n=1,268).
- 4.9 The University collects monitoring data from students with regard to gender, religion, disability, ethnic origin, age, marital status and persons with dependants. The University does not currently monitor on the basis of political opinion or sexual orientation, and therefore no quantitative analysis is available for these groups.

Section 75 Categories

- 4.10 The tables for equality data relating to first year undergraduates and postgraduates are presented in **Appendix F**.

Gender

- 4.11 The gender data show that the percentages of males and females living in University residential accommodation compared to the percentage of students living away from home was broadly similar across campuses (Table 2, Appendix

F). However, females living in University residential accommodation recorded a slightly higher percentage (60%) compared to those living away from home (58%).

Religious Belief

- 4.12 Religious affiliation is not a mandatory monitoring question and has a high non-response rate of 15% for entrants living in University Residences (Table 3, Appendix F). The available data suggested that, at the Magee campus, a slightly higher number of students from a Protestant background lived in University residential accommodation (26%) compared to those living away from home (22%).
- 4.13 At Jordanstown, the percentage of students from a Catholic background who lived away from home (76%) is higher than the percentage of Catholic students who lived in University residential accommodation (58%).

Disability

- 4.14 Overall 8% of students living in University accommodation considered themselves to be disabled (Table 4, Appendix F). The University's monitoring data showed that there is no difference in the percentage of disabled students living in University residential accommodation compared to those living away from home at all campuses.

Racial Group

- 4.15 The University's monitoring data show that there was a variation in the percentage of missing or 'not known' data by campus in relation to ethnicity. Magee campus recorded the highest percentage of 'not known' data at 14% (Table 5, Appendix F). The available data show no significant differences in the overall percentages of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) entrants living in University residential accommodation compared to those living away from home.

- 4.16 At the Coleraine campus a slightly lower percentage of BME entrants lived in University residential accommodation (1%) compared to those who lived away from home (3%)¹⁵. The highest number of BME students lived in University accommodation at the Jordanstown campus (15%); and this was higher than the percentage of BME students who lived away from home (7%). The data analysis showed that the largest minority ethnic group living in University residential accommodation across campuses was Chinese.
- 4.17 The analysis of postgraduate students living in University residential accommodation showed the majority (60%) are from a Black or Minority Ethnic Group¹⁶ (Table 6, Appendix F).

Persons with Dependants

- 4.18 Although the majority of accommodation provided is in single study bedrooms, there are two person flats and also apartments available for multiple occupancy use. The available data on first year undergraduate students with dependants showed that a very low percentage of students with dependants (1%) lived away from home (Table 7, Appendix F). The data analysis showed that in University residential accommodation four students had dependants but this figure was too small to be represented as a percentage. The data on postgraduate students in University accommodation showed 7% had dependants (Table 8, Appendix F).

Age

- 4.19 The data showed that the majority of entrants living in University accommodation are aged between 18 and 21 years (Table 9, Appendix F). As expected this is similar to the age profile of students living away from home. An analysis of postgraduate students showed the majority are aged between 21 and 40 years (Table 10, Appendix F).

¹⁵ These percentages relate to small numbers of students.

¹⁶ This calculation was based on known data, not known data of 37% was excluded.

Marital Status

- 4.20 The data showed that the overwhelming majority of entrants in University accommodation (90%) and those who lived away from home (93%) were single (Table 11, Appendix F). There were no significant differences in the overall percentages of entrants living in University of Ulster accommodation with those living away from home at Coleraine or Magee. At Jordanstown, the data showed a lower percentage of single students living on campus however this is probably a result of missing data. Data on postgraduate students showed that 75% were single, 14% were married and 11% were either 'other' or not known¹⁷ (Table 12, Appendix F).

QUALITATIVE DATA

- 4.21 The Sub-group considered a range of qualitative data with regard to the residential accommodation policy. The extent and sources of each category are given in the following paragraphs.

Student Focus Groups

- 4.22 As a result of findings from the statistical analysis with regard to religious belief, the Sub-group arranged focus groups in October 2007 with first year Protestant and Catholic students living in University accommodation at Jordanstown and private rented accommodation in Belfast to gather qualitative information on factors influencing choices of accommodation.
- 4.23 No student participants attended the arranged focus group sessions, and therefore participants were sought by approaching students in the Student's Union and in University residences on-campus at Jordanstown. Three students living in Belfast who had hoped to attend the first focus group were also contacted by telephone. A total of 23 students participated in focus groups and interviews. The breakdown of students by religious background is as follows: students from a Protestant background who had lived or were living in University accommodation (n = 9);

¹⁷ 'Other' includes the following groups – co-habiting with partner, divorced, living as married, separated, widowed.

students from a Catholic background who had lived or were living in University accommodation (n = 7); and Catholic students living in private rented accommodation in Belfast (n= 7)¹⁸.

4.24 Recurring themes from the focus group were:

- students living in University accommodation at Jordanstown tended to come to University on their own or with one other student from their school or local area;
- students are more likely to share a house and live in private rented accommodation in Belfast if there were three or more students from the same school or local area travelling to study at Jordanstown;
- students from University of Ulster and Queen's often share a house in Belfast; the determining factor is that they all know each other from school or home;
- advantages of living in University accommodation included meeting a wide variety of other students, convenient for lectures, fun living in a communal environment, accommodation comfortable and reasonably priced, good religious and cultural mix;
- students living in University of Ulster accommodation tended to socialise both on campus and in Belfast; and
- disadvantages to living in University Halls related to restrictions, for example, the times when friends could visit and cooking late at night in communal kitchens (these issues should be addressed with the new apartment style accommodation at Jordanstown).

University of Ulster Student Residential Accommodation Survey

4.25 The University surveys students who are resident in accommodation on an annual basis to collect information on student views and opinions and to measure performance against indicators outlined in the Student Charter. Students are surveyed online and in 2005/06 the return rate was 9%. Respondents are asked to provide background information with regard to their gender, age-group, country of origin, campus, accommodation building and room type. No specific questions

¹⁸ Students were not asked a direct question with regard to their religious belief/community background, the data was obtained by proxy using the secondary/grammar school attended as an indicator of community background.

relating to equality of opportunity or good relations have been included in the annual survey to date.

- 4.26 The findings from the 2005/06 survey showed that a majority of respondents (86.36%) indicated that they were happy with the quality and location of University accommodation. An overwhelming majority of respondents (91.42%) indicated a high satisfaction with the accommodation booking process and application procedures. Furthermore 64.14% of respondents felt that wardens and resident assistants were approachable and friendly.

Data Collected from Previous Consultation Exercises

- 4.27 In 2006 the University of Ulster undertook a good relations audit in conjunction with the Higher Education Equality Consortium (HEEC). In addition to a staff/student survey, the University held focus groups and conducted telephone interviews with students to gather their views¹⁹. The results of the audit indicate that some of the international students living in University accommodation felt they should be given more information about local facilities and administrative procedures. Furthermore, the practice of accommodating international students together, often in separate residences from local students, was mentioned as a potential barrier to promoting good relations, as some international students felt they would have preferred to share accommodation with local students.
- 4.28 The Sub-group also considered focus group data collected by the University during a survey of students living in the 'Holylands' area of Belfast in December 2006. In this, students in the focus group were asked why they did not choose to live in University accommodation at Jordanstown, especially for their first year of study. Students reported that they felt that rent in the private sector was reasonable and that the accommodation in the 'Holylands' was near to the city centre and nightlife. Also students felt that transport to the University was good with buses from the 'Holylands' area of Belfast to the Jordanstown campus. In addition some students felt that living in Halls could be restrictive with too many rules and regulations, and

¹⁹ A total of 28 students participated in focus groups and interviews. 14 participants were from a minority ethnic background.

some students were reluctant to live in Halls as they didn't know anybody living in University accommodation. The University also surveyed first year students living in the Holylands in October 2007 to ascertain why they did not choose to live in University accommodation; the results were similar to the 2006 survey. No issues in relation to religious belief were raised during the 2006 survey or as a result of the recent survey.

Pre-consultation

- 4.29 Pre-consultation meetings were arranged with students in April 2007 to gather information on any issues relating to equality of opportunity or good relations within University residential accommodation. Three students attended the meetings overall. When asked about issues in relation to the S75 groups, the only issue raised was that the students felt there was possibly not enough family accommodation²⁰. The students who attended stated they had no issues with regard to discrimination or harassment.

Research Data

- 4.30 The Sub-group considered the results of a student accommodation demand analysis survey by the Centre for Applied Research and Development at Belfast Metropolitan College (formerly Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education). The survey was completed online by 1,044 students from the University of Ulster²¹. 80% of University of Ulster respondents lived away from home and 42% of this group lived in University accommodation. Respondents from the University of Ulster reflected the composition of the student population with 40% male and 60% female. The majority of respondents (87%) from the University of Ulster were under 25 years old and 85% of all respondents were full-time students.

²⁰ Very few applications for family accommodation are made by students. Applications for this type of accommodation are generally made by postgraduate international students. Any requests for such accommodation during 2006/07 were provided.

²¹ The report was published in March 2007. A total of 2,056 students completed the survey, 1,044 Belfast Metropolitan students; 1,004 students from the University of Ulster and 8 students from Queen's University Belfast. Due to the low response rate from Queen's University, they were not included in the study, giving a total of 2,048 valid responses, 51% of whom were from Belfast Metropolitan and 49% from the University of Ulster.

- 4.31 The survey explored a range of issues relating to residential accommodation. Students were provided with a series of factors and asked to rate them by level of importance in relation to selecting accommodation. The most important factor for University of Ulster students was public transport within a ten minute walk. A regular bus service to the city centre, washing facilities, late night bus service from the city and cash machines on site were among the top five priority issues for University of Ulster students. A mini supermarket on site, shared social areas and access to the internet were also given some importance.
- 4.32 The EQIA Sub-group considered an article from the Education Law Magazine 'Instep' on disability discrimination legislation and property considerations²². The article provided a checklist of questions to consider. The EQIA Sub-group requested that the University's Residential Accommodation Service respond to these questions and the results are provided in **Appendix G**.
- 4.33 The Sub-group reviewed information on early leavers from University accommodation for the academic year 2006/07. The majority of students (62%; n=67) left University accommodation because they withdrew from their studies. Similar proportions of students left accommodation due to medical (n=14), financial (n=11) or family (n=11) reasons²³. A small number of students left to go on placement (n=4) or as a result of eviction following a disciplinary investigation (n=2).

²² Published Autumn 2006.

²³ Students who use a medical condition as a reason to leave University accommodation are required to present a doctor's certificate when terminating their accommodation contract with the University. Medical reasons include moving home to attend doctor/hospital appointments, pregnancy, and mental illness such as depression. Family reasons can include care for a family member due to family illness, care of an elderly relative or child whose medical condition has deteriorated. It can also include supporting a parent following marital breakdown, family financial hardship following the loss of employment by parent/guardian or other personal/family issues

5 Assessment of Impacts

- 5.1 An assessment of the possible impacts of the University's Residential Accommodation Policy is set out below. This assessment takes into account consideration and analysis of the available data and research.

Gender

- 5.2 The Sub-group found no evidence to suggest that the Residential Accommodation Policy adversely impacts on students on account of their gender. The statistical data showed that overall females living in University residential accommodation (60%) was slightly higher than those living away from home (58%). This may be due to female students preferring the security of University residences and on-site welfare support provided by Wardens and Resident Assistants for their first year of study. The Policy also makes provision for students to choose to live in single sex accommodation, for example, for reasons related to religious belief or culture.

Religious Belief

- 5.3 Student data showed that a lower percentage of Catholic students live in University accommodation at Jordanstown compared with the overall percentage of Catholic students that lived away from home. Focus group data showed that this may be as a result of first year Catholic students planning and choosing to live in a shared house in Belfast with other students from their school or local area. The focus groups indicated that students who lived in University accommodation at Jordanstown tended to come 'on their own' or with one other student from their school or local area.
- 5.4 The data also indicated that students coming to University 'on their own' are more likely to be Protestant students²⁴, and are therefore more likely to live in University accommodation at Jordanstown.

²⁴ This reflects the findings of the 2006 EQIA on the University of Ulster's Student Admissions Policy, which highlighted that Protestant students are twice as likely as Catholic students to leave and study outside Northern Ireland. The result of this pattern of migration is that Protestant students are more likely to come to the University of Ulster 'on their own'.

5.5 The Sub-group found no evidence to suggest that the Residential Accommodation Policy adversely impacts on students on account of their religious belief.

Disability

5.6 The University's monitoring data showed that there is no difference in the percentage of disabled students living in University residential accommodation compared to those living away from home. The Policy positively impacts on students with a disability as the University is able to offer a high standard of specialised accommodation for students with a disability, such as mobility difficulties. The University is also committed to ensuring that other accommodation may be modified to suit individual requirements.

5.7 The new residential accommodation at Jordanstown campus will also increase the number of specialised accommodation units for disabled students and will therefore have a positive impact on students with a disability. The Sub-group found no evidence to suggest that the Residential Accommodation Policy adversely impacts on disabled students.

Racial Group

5.8 The Sub-group found no evidence of adverse impact with regard to racial group. The available statistical data show no significant differences in the overall percentages of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) first year entrants living in University residential accommodation compared to those living away from home. Postgraduate data shows that overall there is a higher percentage of BME students in University residential accommodation (38%) compared to postgraduate entrants (9%)²⁵. This reflects provision for overseas students within the Policy, as the University guarantees an offer of accommodation to all overseas students for the duration of their full time study.

²⁵ See Table 6, Appendix F.

5.9 Qualitative data from the Good Relations Audit indicated that some international students felt they would have preferred to share accommodation with local students. We welcome any comments from international students and local students on this issue.

Persons with Dependants

5.10 The available data showed that the overwhelming majority of students living in University accommodation did not have dependants²⁶. The data showed that postgraduate students living in University of Ulster accommodation are more likely to have dependants (8%)²⁷. Although the majority of accommodation provided is in single study bedrooms, the University provides two person flats and apartments at each campus which are available for students with dependants. At the Jordanstown campus there are also houses available to rent. Three international students attended pre-consultation meetings in April 2007 and suggested there was not enough family accommodation. Overall the Sub-group found no evidence to suggest that the Residential Accommodation Policy adversely impacts on students with dependants.

Age

5.11 The Sub-group found no evidence to suggest that the Residential Accommodation Policy adversely impacts on students with regard to age. The statistical data showed the overwhelming majority of first year students living in University accommodation are aged between 18 and 21 years²⁸. As expected this is similar to the age profile of first year students living away from home. An analysis of postgraduate students in accommodation showed the majority are aged between 21 and 40 years²⁹. Students can choose whether they would prefer to live in accommodation reserved mostly for undergraduates or postgraduates.

Marital Status

²⁶ 1% of first year undergraduates living in University of Ulster accommodation had dependants, this was the same as the percentage of first year undergraduates with dependants living away from home, see Table 7, Appendix F.

²⁷ Table 8, Appendix F.

²⁸ Table 9, Appendix F.

²⁹ Table 10, Appendix F.

5.12 The statistical data showed the overwhelming majority of entrants in University accommodation (90%) and those who lived away from home (93%) were single³⁰. A higher percentage of postgraduate students in University accommodation are married (14%)³¹. Most accommodation is in the form of single study bedrooms, however some accommodation blocks offer double bedded rooms to accommodate couples, if required. The Sub-group found no evidence to suggest that the Residential Accommodation Policy adversely impacts on students with regard to marital status.

Political Opinion

5.13 The University does not collect quantitative data on political opinion. The Sub-group found no evidence to suggest an adverse impact in respect of a person's political opinion.

Sexual Orientation

5.14 The University does not collect quantitative data on sexual orientation. Although there have been no formal complaints in respect of sexual orientation, the University has taken action to ensure that Wardens and Residents Assistants are trained in anti-discrimination legislation (including Employment Equality Sexual Orientation Regulations (NI) 2003 and the University's Bullying and Harassment Policy³²). The Sub-group found no evidence to suggest that the policy has an adverse impact in respect of a person's sexual orientation.

³⁰ Table 11, Appendix F.

³¹ 11% are either 'other' (this includes co-habiting with partner, divorced, living as married, separated, widowed) or not known; 75% are single.

³² In 2005/06 the Coalition for Sexual Orientation and the University's student LGBT Society assisted the University in developing and delivering training.

6 Preliminary Recommendations

- 6.1 The EQIA on the Student Residential Accommodation Policy showed no negative or adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories. However a differential impact was identified with regard to the category of religious belief as data show a lower percentage of Catholic students living in University accommodation at Jordanstown compared with the overall percentage of Catholic students that lived away from home. This is due to external factors beyond the control of the University as explained in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 of the report.
- 6.2 Notwithstanding the fact that no adverse impacts have been identified, the University wishes to respond positively to the EQIA. With that in mind the following actions are recommended:
- to develop an information booklet for the University of Ulster in relation to students with a disability applying for University accommodation;
 - within the University's Disability and SENDO Strategies, training on SENDO, the Disability Duties and the new Disclosure Policy and guidelines³³ will be provided to accommodation staff, Wardens and Resident Assistants;
 - to review and improve the data collection methods for monitoring international students so as to reduce the percentage of 'not known' data;
 - to include specific questions relating to equality of opportunity and good relations in future annual student residential accommodation surveys; and
 - to review the practice of accommodating international students together and look at ways to increase cultural integration and awareness.

Consultees are asked for their views on these preliminary recommendations.

³³ It is anticipated that this Policy will be drafted by February 2008.

7 Consultation

7.1 In accordance with its Equality Scheme and the requirements of Section 75, the University now wishes to consult on this EQIA. It is our intention that the consultation should be appropriately focused and that all those affected parties are given an opportunity to respond to the consultation. Accordingly it will consult by the following means:

- the University's standard Section 75 consultee list will be updated to include relevant additional stakeholders. Consultees will be notified of the consultation exercise by letter (hard copies of the document will then be sent on request);
- the consultation will be advertised in local newspapers;
- An all-staff and all-student email will be posted to advise of the consultation exercise;
- notice of the consultation exercise will be posted on the Equality Unit's webpages;
- representatives of the EQIA sub-group will try to meet with interested parties on request; and
- the HEEC Consultative Panel will be notified of the consultation exercise.

7.2 We would welcome your comments and specifically your views on the questions in the table below. Please complete the response pro forma and return by **Friday 28th March 2008**. The consultation document and response forma are available to download at www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/consultation.html. If you require the consultation document in an alternative format please contact the Equality Unit on 028 70 324725 or email Claire McCarron at c.mccarron@ulster.ac.uk

Consultation Questions

1	Are there any needs, issues or adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in this equality impact assessment? If so, what are they?
2	Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts that you have highlighted.
3	Do you have any comments on the preliminary recommendations (p.31 of the Report) and/or suggestions to improve the promotion of equality of opportunity for the nine categories and/or good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?
4	Do you have any comments on the Residential Accommodation Policy (Appendix 4)?
5	Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to this pro-forma or the consultation process?

7.3 Please send any comments to the following address:

Ms Maria McGilloway
Equality Officer
University of Ulster
Cromore Road
Coleraine
BT52 1SA

Telephone: 02870 323314

Fax: 02870 323459

Email m.mccgilloway@ulster.ac.uk

The outcome of this Equality Impact Assessment will be posted on the University website: www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/consultation.html