

Results of an Equality Impact Assessment on the Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy

February 2007

**This report is also available on the University's website at
www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/consultation.html**

It can also be made available on request, in alternative formats including Braille, computer disc, audiocassette, and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English. Please contact Mrs Janine Gregory – 028 90368137; j.gregory@ulster.ac.uk

Executive Summary

This report presents the results of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the University's Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy. The University established an EQIA Sub-group, consisting of staff with relevant professional experience, to conduct this exercise.

Based on the evidence it considered, the Sub-group concluded that the profile of student entrants reflects general Northern Ireland demographics. The Sub-group identified some under-representation with regard to gender, religion, and racial group. However, these were considered to be differential rather than adverse impacts. The EQIA Consultation Report included suggestions regarding possible mitigating actions for consideration.

An EQIA Consultation Report and Response Pro-forma were prepared and made available for distribution to the public on 10 February 2006. The consultation period of 12 weeks closed on 5 May 2006. During the consultation period, the University held two public consultation meetings, one at the Jordanstown campus and the other at the Magee campus. Participation in the meetings was disappointing as only 4 organisations attended. However, the University did receive useful comments from those who attended.

The University received two written responses, and held a face-to-face meeting following a request from an individual consultee. The University embarked on a further period of consultation with representatives from political parties, and business leaders in the Derry City Council area. The Chair of the Sub-group, Professor Jim Allen, met with representatives over 2 weeks from 9 May 2006 to raise awareness of the consultation exercise and to invite comments.

Pre-consultation meetings were also held with a number of organisations including the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Findings from the consultation exercise did not indicate that the Sub-group had misinterpreted or overlooked any data, nor was any new information received. No substantive comments were received on the draft Admissions Policy. As a

result of the findings of the consultation exercise, the University will commit to implementing the mitigating actions presented in the EQIA Consultation Report.

The University has also formally approved the revised Admissions Policy; however the University intends to review the Policy following the publication of the QAA Code of Practice on Recruitment and Admissions¹.

The University would like to thank all those who contributed to this EQIA.

¹ The QAA Code of Practice on Recruitment and Admissions will be published by December 2006.

Introduction

- 1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires the University, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland 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 persons without; and
 - between persons with dependants and persons without.

- 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.

- 3 In its Equality Scheme the University set out how it proposed to fulfil its statutory duties. It carried out a detailed policy screening exercise, in which it identified five policies that would be subject to Equality Impact Assessments over a five-year period. Following consultation on the screening exercise, the University decided to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the five policies, including its Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy.

- 4 The University is fully committed to the fulfilment of its Section 75 obligations in all of its functions, including its objectives as a teaching, research and examining body within the provision of its Charter and Statutes. The University ensures that effective implementation of these obligations is supported with the necessary resources in terms of people, time and finance.

- 5 In accordance with its Equality Scheme, an EQIA Sub-group was established to determine the impact of the policy on the nine Section 75 groups. This Sub-group was chaired by Professor Jim Allen (PVC, Communication and Institutional Development) and consisted of a range

of staff with relevant professional experience. Work commenced on the EQIA in November 2003.

- 6 Based on the evidence it considered, the Sub-group concluded that the profile of student entrants reflects general Northern Ireland demographics. The Sub-group identified some under-representation with regard to gender, religion, and racial group. However, these were considered to be differential rather than adverse impacts. The EQIA Consultation Report included suggestions regarding possible mitigating actions for consideration.

- 7 This report outlines the results and outcomes of the Equality Impact Assessment.

The Policy

- 8 The University is required by its Charter to provide for the advancement of education through a variety of patterns, levels and modes of study. A written Admissions Policy was developed by the University in 1996; it was subsequently revised and updated in 2001 and 2005.
- 9 The policy is based upon principles of equality of opportunity. It outlines the need to apply impartial and transparent academic selection criteria for all applicants. General and course specific entry requirements are set out in the annual prospectuses, and programme-specific entry requirements are prescribed in programme regulations.
- 10 The revised policy was included in the consultation exercise. Since then the University has agreed to make further revisions to it, to reflect both recent legislative developments and advice from the QAA, whose Code of Practice on admissions is due to be published shortly.

The Aims of the Policy

- 11 The aims of the revised Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy are:
 - to provide a wide range of flexible educational and training opportunities, designed to meet the needs of the community in Northern Ireland and elsewhere;
 - to provide opportunities to access and progress to higher-level study developed in line with market demand and higher education guidelines and equality legislation;
 - to ensure that selection is based primarily on academic criteria/competencies;
 - to provide equitable and fair access for adult learners to higher education; and
 - to provide a suitable learning environment for all students, including those students with a disability.

- 12 The University recognises that some applicants, particularly adult learners, may not satisfy the general entry requirements for admission to courses by way of formal qualifications, but may have relevant prior experiential learning to bring to university studies. The University has now in place a policy and guiding principles with regard to the accreditation of prior learning.

Associated policies

- 13 The Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy is closely associated with the Academic Planning Cycle, the Widening Participation Strategy and the Access Agreement.

14 Academic Planning Cycle

The Academic Plan is updated, revised and circulated within the University on an annual basis to ensure that under or over recruitment of students is avoided. After students are recruited each autumn, targets are set for recruitment to courses in the following academic year.

15 Widening Participation Strategy

The Widening Participation Strategy aims to increase accessibility by developing mechanisms which create pathways into higher education for those who are under-represented or disadvantaged.

16 The Access Agreement

Following the introduction of variable deferred fees which are being implemented from September 2006, the University has also introduced its Access Agreement. It will top-slice one third of the additional income accrued from variable fees to safeguard and promote fair access. The Access Agreement fund will be allocated across three categories of support and enhancement, to bursaries, scholarships and outreach.

Data Collection

- 17 The University took account of the following data and research prior to conducting the assessment of the impact of its Student Recruitment & Admissions Policy:
- a) University of Ulster Student Equality Monitoring Data (2000/01 to 2004/05);
 - b) Universities and Colleges Admissions (UCAS) data (2003/04);
 - c) 2001 Census Data;
 - d) Data collected as a result of pre-consultation meetings;
 - e) Research reports; and
 - f) Relevant legislation.
- 18 Based on the evidence it considered, the Sub-group concluded that the profile of student entrants reflects general Northern Ireland demographics. The Sub-group identified some under-representation with regard to **gender, religion, and racial group**. However, these were considered to be differential rather than adverse impacts.
- 19 The University's student equality monitoring data showed that generally 40% of entrants to the University were male. This has changed little since 2000. In Northern Ireland, significantly more females leave school with 2 or more 'A' levels than males.
- 20 The data collected showed an under-representation of Protestant students across all faculties and campuses, particularly at the Magee campus. This was explained by a range of external factors, largely beyond the control of the University. For example, patterns of migration show that Protestant students are twice as likely than Catholics to leave and study outside Northern Ireland.

- 21 UCAS data for 2003/04 showed that Black and Minority Ethnic students represented 1.1% of applicants and 0.7% of enrolments². Pre-consultation with the Chinese Welfare Association indicated that the shortfall in Chinese student enrolments may be due to the fact that applicants from the Chinese community are more likely to attend Universities in England and Scotland; and had applied to UU as a reserve choice, with little real intention of taking up a place.
- 22 The University identified in the consultation report proposed measures to mitigate the differential impacts identified. Consultees were invited to comment on the actions as follows:
- a) To develop links with the Chinese Welfare Association, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities and other ethnic minority groups as appropriate, in order to collaborate in events such as Open Days and Recruitment Fairs (Lead Agents – International Office and Student Recruitment Services);
 - b) To hold meetings with Head Teachers of Protestant schools which have been identified as providing low numbers of applicants, to arrange talks/information days and to develop outreach measures and marketing activities, in conjunction with Academic Development and Student Services (Lead Agents – Provosts and Student Recruitment Services);
 - c) To hold meetings with influential individuals or community organisations from the Protestant community to encourage applications from pupils in Protestant schools (Lead Agents – Provosts and Student Recruitment Services);
 - d) To take cognizance of data on entrants to Magee campus in the development of the North West Development Plan (Lead Agent – Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Communication & Institutional Development);
 - e) To include information on entrants in informing future decisions on the location of future course provision (Lead Agent – Student Recruitment Services);
 - f) To review the marketing strategy for the Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy in relation to the nine categories under Section

² The relatively low numbers make the interpretation of data relating to Black and Minority Ethnic Groups difficult.

75 (Lead Agents – Public Affairs, Student Recruitment Services, Access & Educational Partnerships and Student Support Services); and

- g) To monitor student entrants to each campus on an annual basis (Lead Agents – Corporate Planning & Governance and Equality Policy & Practice Unit).

In addition, the University has agreed the following action:

- h) The Faculty of Engineering should consider action to increase female participation (Lead Agents – Faculty of Engineering and Equality Policy & Practice Unit).

Consultation

23 In accordance with the University's Equality Scheme, an EQIA consultation report and response pro-forma were prepared and made available for distribution to the public on 10 February 2006. The following actions were subsequently taken:

- A letter was sent directly to 467 stakeholder consultees (consisting of 211 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, 12 professional bodies, and 244 equality groups, public bodies and community/voluntary organisations) to advise of the consultation exercise and to invite stakeholders to attend the public meetings;
- Prominent advertisements were placed in the seven local and regional newspapers inviting the public to comment and to attend the public meetings;
- The University held two public meetings. The first meeting was on 20 March 2006 at the Magee campus and the second meeting was on 22 March 2006 at the Jordanstown campus;
- All-staff and all-student emails were posted to advise of the consultation exercise;
- Posters were displayed in prominent locations across the University's five locations to encourage staff and students to respond;
- Notice of the consultation exercise, the consultation document and the response pro-forma was posted on the University's website;
- Representatives of the EQIA Sub-group made themselves available to meet with interested parties/individuals on request (one request was received); and
- The report was made available by request in alternative formats (no requests were received).

- 24 The 12-week consultation ended on 5 May 2006. Two written responses were received - from a University of Ulster student and from Disability Action. Four representatives from Public and Voluntary Sector organisations (RNIB, Thornhill College, The Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Society and College of Radiographers) attended the public meetings at Magee and Jordanstown. In addition, the Equality Unit met with an individual consultee who could not attend the public meetings.

The University embarked on a further period of consultation with representatives from political parties, and business leaders in the Derry City Council area. The Chair of the EQIA Sub-group, Professor Jim Allen, met with representatives over 2 weeks from 8 May 2006 to raise awareness of the consultation exercise and to invite comments.

Key Findings

- 25 The response to this consultation was lower than expected. However, the Sub-group has considered carefully the findings of the consultation exercise, and the outcomes in Table 1 have been agreed by the University.

Recommendations

- 26 As a result of this EQIA, the University will:
- a) Implement the measures to mitigate differential impacts outlined in the consultation report and under paragraph 21 of this report;
 - b) Implement the actions identified in response to the key findings from the consultation process; and
 - c) Work with the Equality Commission to implement an appropriate programme of action.

- 27 The University will refer its existing Admissions Policy to the Department of Academic Development and Student Services for review, following the publication of the QAA guidelines and taking cognizance of recent relevant legislative developments. The University will also continue to monitor student progression and retention rates; these monitoring data will contribute to a review of the effectiveness of the University's admissions procedures.

Table 1 Summary of Key Findings from Consultation

Key Findings	Response
<p>The majority of consultees felt that the University should meet with representatives from local political parties and local business leaders to address the issue of Protestant under-representation at the Magee campus.</p>	<p>The University embarked on a further period of consultation to raise awareness of the report over two weeks beginning 8 May 2006. No additional actions were identified. The University will continue to hold meetings with influential individuals and community organisations to encourage enrolments from the Protestant community. The University will also introduce measures to widen access in relation to religious affiliation as part of its Widening Participation Strategy.</p>
<p>One consultee from the Protestant community felt the Magee campus was in a relatively neutral and safe location.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>Consultees supported the outreach work that the University is carrying out with schools in Northern Ireland. Consultees felt that targeted outreach (with Protestant schools) was important.</p>	<p>This comment will be forwarded to staff in Academic Development and Student Services. The University is committed to reviewing the lists of schools that participate in outreach activities on an annual basis to identify any under-representation of schools from either the Protestant or Catholic community. The University will meet with Head Teachers from Protestant schools who do not currently engage with outreach activities to encourage participation;</p>

	and to identify ways to increase the number of entrants from the Protestant community.
One consultee felt that outreach activities with younger pupils (for example at Key Stage 3 and 4) would contribute to marketing the University and the wide range of courses available.	The University does have some contact with KS4 pupils, mostly through attendance at year 12 career events. The University is extending its Tutoring in Schools programme to target primary and secondary schools where progression to Higher Education is low. The University is also introducing a primary school programme around the theme 'University Student for a day' targeting years 8, 9 and 10 across a range of academic disciplines.
One consultee recommended that the University enlist the help of students from the Protestant community to act as role models during outreach activities/open days to encourage applications from the Protestant community.	Student Recruitment Services are currently reviewing the presentation used to market the University with post-primary students. It is proposed that a revised presentation will include video clips of current students from a range of backgrounds. The use of video clips and role models will be considered as part of a wider review in relation to marketing activities.
Consultees supported a review of marketing activities.	Forwarded to Academic Development and Student Services
A student with a disability studying at the University commented that <i>"I have found that my disabilities have not had an impact on my enjoyment of</i>	Noted. Comment will be referred to staff in PR/marketing to use in University literature (following approval from student).

<p><i>my course. Student support services have been excellent throughout my time as a University of Ulster student. I feel that the University has an excellent record in encouraging participation from disabled students”.</i></p> <p>The consultee was also from the Protestant community and felt conscious of being a Protestant in a mainly Catholic city, but felt there was no evidence of sectarianism within the University.</p>	
<p>One consultee with a disability believes that prospective students’ with disabilities may feel nervous when applying for a University course and felt that support should be given to disabled students at the beginning of the admissions process.</p> <p>The consultee recommended that university lecturers, including part-time lecturers, should receive training on disability awareness to ensure a greater understanding of the different types of disability and associated needs.</p>	<p>Student Support are made aware of prospective students who have a disability through UCAS, or on information supplied through direct entry forms. Student Support then contacts the student regarding support required.</p> <p>A SENDO³ Project team has been established with representation from faculties and support departments.</p> <p>The Equality Unit has produced and disseminated a Staff Guidance Booklet on SENDO, outlining staff and student responsibilities</p> <p>The University is also planning to survey all non-disabled staff to assess knowledge of disabilities and to help identify training needs for staff (including the option of on-line</p>

³ Special Education Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005

<p>The consultee also suggested that a seminar on the assistive technology available to disabled students would be useful.</p>	<p>training, which may be useful for staff such as part-time lecturers).</p> <p>Student Support has recently developed an interactive CD which provides an introduction to the whole field of assistive technology and will help students determine whether a particular piece of software will be useful to them.</p>
<p>Disability Action recommended that a text phone facility be made available to consultees.</p>	<p>The University had a text phone facility in the past but recorded a low number of users. The University believes that modern trends and new technologies (such as mobile phones and e-mail) have superseded the need for a text phone facility.</p>
<p>Disability Action commends the range of different modes of study offered by the University and the greater flexibility and choice with the introduction of the modular degree structure; as such flexibility should benefit students with disabilities.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>Disability Action suggests that disabled learners should be included in the Admissions Policy.</p>	<p>Applicants and students with a disability are included in the policy statement (section 2), under the aims of the policy (section 4) and in sections 6 to 10 - 'Applicants with Disabilities'</p>

<p>Disability Action note that 10% of the Access Agreement Fund will be allocated to outreach activity covering five targeted areas, one of which is disabled students. Disability Action requested more information on how outreach funds will be allocated and what criteria will be used.</p> <p>Disability Action requested more information on the Protocol for Disabled Students.</p>	<p>The Department of Academic Development and Student Services will lead outreach activities. No money has been specifically earmarked for outreach with disabled students. However, the University is exploring a range of outreach projects, targeting students with disabilities and their carers to raise aspiration, expectation and support to progression in Higher Education.</p> <p>This is an internal procedure document for staff, which outlines the processes involved in the provision of support for prospective/current students who have a disability.</p>
<p>Disability Action believes that students with a disability (5.4%⁴ in 2004/05) are under-represented given that, according to the 2001 population census, 20% of the population in Northern Ireland has a disability.</p>	<p>Information from the 2001 census shows that the majority of persons in NI with a disability are aged 50 years and over. At the University of Ulster, the majority of entrants are aged between 18-24 years. According to the 2001 census, 6.8% of the NI population aged between 18-24 years have a limiting long-term illness⁵.</p> <p>However, the University has identified disability as a key target group to</p>

⁴ The University wishes to clarify that the correct figure is 5.4% for 2004/05 as stated in paragraph 69 of the report.

⁵ At the time of the consultation report the percentage of students with a disability at the University in 2004/05 was 5.4%. As stated in the consultation report, this figure is lower than previous years as the University identifies students with a disability throughout the academic year, for example, as a result of tests for dyslexia. A recent University analysis of students with a disability for 2004/05 shows the figure has increased to 6.5%, this is similar to proportions for the academic years 2002/03 (6.2%) and 2003/04 (6.8%).

	<p>which the Widening Access Strategy relates. The Widening Participation Division will, in consultation with faculties and departments, encourage participation by entrants with a disability.</p>
<p>Disability Action welcomes the inclusion of disabled students in the Student Support Fund.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>