



**Equality Impact Assessment
on the
Student Residential
Accommodation Policy
EQIA Review Report
January 2011**

This document can also be made available on request, in alternative formats (including large print, computer disc and Braille), and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English.

In accordance with its Equality Scheme the University of Ulster concluded that the Student Residential Accommodation Policy should be subject to an equality impact assessment (EQIA). The 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 inclusiveness within University residences. The University regularly measures the effectiveness of residential provision through student surveys and discussions with the Students' Union.

The policy also sets out the allocation criteria used in the allocation of student accommodation to students when demand exceeds supply¹. 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 priority².

An EQIA Consultation Report and response pro-forma were prepared and made available in January 2008. The consultation period of 12 weeks closed on 28 March 2008. The University received three responses, from Help the Aged, Disability Action and Convocation within the University of Ulster. A final EQIA report was published in June 2008.

Based on the evidence it considered, the University concluded that there were 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.

The University concluded that this was due to external factors beyond the control of the University³. Notwithstanding this, the EQIA Consultation Report included recommendations regarding possible actions to further promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

This report presents a review of the actions agreed as a result of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the University of Ulster's Student Residential Accommodation Policy.

An electronic copy of this report is available on the University's website at <http://www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/scheme.html>

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ Focus group data showed that a lower percentage of Catholic students living in University accommodation 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. The data also indicated that students coming to University 'on their own' are more likely to be Protestant students, and are therefore more likely to live in University accommodation at Jordanstown.

EQIA Action Plan and Report on Progress

1. Review and update information for staff and students with regard to residential accommodation and disability issues to include:

- **A review of existing documentation from student support services;**
- **A review of existing documentation from Residential Services;**
- **Implementation of the new Disclosure Policy and Guidelines;**
- **A review of web-based information from Residential Services web pages; and Review of the provision of information in alternative formats.**

A review of documentation relating to accommodation was completed by the Head of Residential Services and the Disability Support Co-ordinator in Sept 2008. This included information on accommodation provided by Residential Services through hard copy and online as well as information available through Student Support.

Revisions to the documents and the website aimed to make residential accommodation more welcoming for students with disabilities. Changes included images of disabled students and amending editorial to make the University more welcoming to prospective students with a disability.

There is ongoing dialogue with disabled students through Disability Services. Prospective students are invited to visit the accommodation with their Occupational Therapist and/or Social Worker to familiarise themselves with the accommodation and flag up any significant adjustments that may be required. Liaison with these students is ongoing until confirmation is received that they have been accepted on to a course of study and require accommodation.

In 2010/2011 the number of students in accommodation that have disclosed a disability is 85, this has increased since the EQIA. Each campus has a small number of units which have been specially built or adapted to mobility standards, and the University states clearly on its website and application forms for accommodation that it is committed to ensuring that accommodation may be modified to suit the particular needs of students who are disabled or have a long term health condition.

The numbers of disabled students requiring accessible or adapted accommodation or equipment in 2010/11 are 5 at Coleraine, 5 at Jordanstown and 4 at Magee.

2. Training on SENDO, the Disability Duties and the new Disclosure Policy and guidelines will be provided to accommodation staff and Resident Assistants.

Training on SENDO, Disability Duties and the University Disclosure Policy was provided to all staff in December 2008 at a Residential Services Away Day. This training is provided by Equality and Diversity Services to Night Support Assistants and Resident Assistants at their annual induction each September. This information has been included in the Disability Strategy and Action Plan and as part of the Annual Section 75 Progress Report.

3. Review and improve the data collection methods for monitoring international students so as to reduce the percentage of 'not known' data.

The ethnicity categories in the student accommodation database is linked to the student records system and is based on the HESA ethnicity categories. At the time of the EQIA, approximately 20% of ethnicity data for students was 'not known'. However by 2009/10 this figure had fallen to around 14%.

4. Include specific questions relating to equality of opportunity and good relations in future annual student residential accommodation surveys.

As an outcome of the EQIA the following question is now included in the annual survey of students in University accommodation:

“Finally, the University is committed to promoting equality of opportunity. Have you encountered problems during your stay because of your race, gender, marital status, religion, political opinion, sexual orientation, age or disability? If you wish to discuss any issue in confidence please contact the Head of Equality & Diversity Services on Tel. 02890368137 or email equality@ulster.ac.uk.”

Any responses to this question are presented to the Student Charter Review meetings on an annual basis. To date there have been no equality of opportunity issues raised by students in response to this question.

5. Review the practice of accommodating international students together and look at ways to increase cultural integration and awareness.

The practice has been reviewed and international students are given the opportunity to integrate with local students or reside with other international students. Most international students integrate well with local students however there continues to be reluctance amongst Asian students and local students to integrate.

A number of measures have been implemented to increase integration and cultural awareness for example icebreaker events at the beginning of the year such as sports events, trips to local leisure centres etc. Within the accommodation blocks communal space is available for all students to meet and mix in a relaxed environment. Throughout the year various events are supported and promoted through Residential Services such as UNESCO Mother Language Day, Residential Formals and tourist trips which aim to attract students from different cultures. The Students Union continue to fund the International Students Society which encourages cultural awareness and integration as well as organizing coffee mornings for international and local students to meet up informally.