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Review of the Equality Challenge Unit

Report by PricewaterhouseCoopers to HEFCE

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Executive summary

Introduction, context and methodology

Purpose of the review

The Equality Challenge Unit, ECU, was established in 2001 and currently supports the higher education (HE) sector to maximise the potential of all staff and students, whatever their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief or age.

The Unit comprises 13.4 full-time equivalent staff and is based in London. The ECU Steering Board governs the activity of the Unit and comprises members of a diverse range of institutions.

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) was engaged by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), along with the other funding organisations of the ECU, to undertake an independent review of the Unit. This review was delivered between March and June 2009.

The scope of the review was to evaluate the Unit on its performance and stakeholder satisfaction, with a particular focus on the future demands on and potential role of the Unit. The ultimate objective of the review was to establish the required role and shape of the ECU for the period beyond December 2010, when the current funding expires. HEFCE set out a number of criteria (see Appendix 1) which framed the review and these formed a guide to the research that was undertaken during the course of this review.

Context of the review

The review in 2005 laid down additional challenges for the Unit, and it is clear that the recruitment of the new Chief Executive and the careful management of the Unit have taken its performance to a new level. It is important to note that on June 8th 2009 it was announced that Nicola Dandridge, the Chief Executive of the ECU, is to become the new Chief Executive of Universities UK (UUK). This announcement occurred a substantial way into the review and did appear to have some impact on the feedback received from certain stakeholders. However, the bulk of the information gathered within the review does not reflect this announcement.

Other contextual considerations included:

- The sharp UK and global economic downturn, and a concern around increased demand by potential students. During the review, institutions received communications from HEFCE indicating a further tightening of funding for the sector and the need to focus on core activities.
- The news that the Scottish Funding Council was going to cease the funding of Equality Forward, the Scottish equality and diversity body, and it would cease to operate from July 2009.

Methodology and project management

The research was undertaken independently by PwC consultants, applying the following methodology:

- [desk-based research](#) of relevant documentation;
- [63 confidential face to face and telephone interviews](#) with a sample of institutions, mission groups and key interested parties (including staff and student unions, and equality bodies);
- [a web-based, online survey](#) of 492 institutional HE leaders which generated 188 responses;

- a focus group with National Union of Students members; and
- a focus group with HE diversity practitioners from the Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network.

A review project steering group was established which met at agreed intervals throughout the project (see Appendix 5 for composition).

Interim findings were shared with the ECU Board and the ECU Funders Forum on April 29th and 30th 2009 respectively.

Future options for the ECU

Summary

The review of the ECU has concluded that:

- There remains a need for a discrete focus on equality and diversity issues within the sector.
- There is progress to be made within the sector in relation to a number of key strategic equality and diversity strands.
- The ECU has enhanced its performance over the past few years, specifically creating a positive relationship with the sector and building a strong reputation as a valuable resource.
- The sector believes that the ECU has achieved its objectives in providing quality products and services and raising the profile of equality and diversity issues within the sector.

Therefore, this review recommends that the ECU continue to deliver equality and diversity services to the sector through the existing funding arrangements. Funding for a further five years is recommended, with the review process commencing in year three. This will enable the review to evaluate the impact of the new three-year strategy.

Outstanding issues for consideration

The review has also raised a number of questions that need to be considered as part of the strategic planning cycle, in order to provide a clear indication of the future role and structure of the ECU. These are:

- The ultimate aim of the Unit is to make equality and diversity a mainstream* issue that is part of 'day to day' sector business. The Unit needs to work towards mainstreaming itself as well. There therefore needs to be a continuous debate on when this can feasibly happen.
- The sector values the role the ECU plays on the student agenda and there is call for further presence in this area. Additionally, there is some call for consideration of equality and diversity issues within the curriculum. This is currently outside the remit of the ECU. Thought needs to be given as to how the ECU will address these issues, through policy, partnership and/or prioritisation.
- With the closure of Equality Forward, will the ECU now be taking on a truly national role (extending support to Scottish institutions) and if so what will be the impact on funding arrangements?

*For the purposes of this report, mainstreaming means that equality and diversity is a theme that influences the design and delivery of all sector activities rather than treated as a stand-alone consideration.

Strategic options for consideration

This review recommends the continuation of the ECU. A key concern highlighted throughout the review was the perceived dependence on the Chief Executive. Given this concern and in light of a number of observations, the review has been asked to consider a range of different strategic options for the ECU, in terms of position within the sector. The options are:

- Option one – the ECU as a stand-alone unit;
- Option two – the ECU integrated into another agency body; and
- Option three – the ECU as a stand-alone entity but in a co-located shared service model.

The evaluation of the options should be undertaken with reference to the following design criteria. That is, observations within the review indicate that the ECU needs to:

- maintain or increase the profile of the equality and diversity agenda within the sector;
- enable both student and staff equality and diversity issues to be covered effectively;
- influence at a senior level within the sector; and
- be seen to provide value for the sector.

Given these criteria, options one and three would meet the needs of both HEFCE and the sector, with option three providing the opportunity to achieve financial efficiencies.

High level findings

Findings: the ECU's current aims, role and strategy

Strengths

- The level of awareness of the ECU is high within the sector and the Unit is regarded as a trusted source of diversity and equality advice, good practice and thought leadership by both practitioners and institutional leaders. In the survey, 88% of respondents stated that they had used the ECU guidance or good practice in the last three years, and the same percentage stated that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the specialist advice or support received (see Appendix 9, Graph 1).
- Partner organisations and bodies representing staff and students commented on a range of positive projects that have been identified and/or delivered in partnership with the ECU. This has included collaborative projects with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) on Ethnicity, Gender and Degree Attainment, and with the Higher Education Statistics Agency on Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report.
- The feedback from interviews indicated that both the ECU's strategy and the methods by which it engages with institutions at all levels were “positive rather than punitive” and conducive to long term relationships which promoted the diversity and equality agenda. Some 74% of survey respondents agreed that the ECU was meeting its objectives, and 81.1% of those who had used ECU services agreed that the ECU had been successful in raising the profile of equality and diversity (E&D) in the sector (see Appendix 9, Graph 3).
- Stakeholder interviews indicated that the Unit's current role in the area of diversity and equality related to HE employment was well developed.
- The inclusion of students within the ECU's remit was unanimously seen as a positive step, although still evolving. This is a key issue for the sector, with many institutions regarding developing a welcoming and inclusive environment for students as much a commercial imperative as a diversity issue. However, feedback received from student representatives indicated that there was little current activity directed towards supporting greater diversity and equality in the HE curriculum or individual courses (an area outside the ECU's current remit). This is not an issue of quality but rather quantity – there is a need for a greater presence in this debate.
- From a technical perspective, the Unit was considered to be progressing towards becoming an authoritative voice in the sector, promoting and delivering change through information and influence.
- There is synergy of the ECU's role with a range of equality, voluntary and national bodies (see Appendix 8 for further information on the high level mapping exercise undertaken). The equality and diversity agenda is important to a number of agencies, as evidenced by the range of joint projects undertaken. Although the word “overlap” was applied by participants, this was seen as mainly an overlap in agenda rather than activity. Equality and diversity are important for a number of stakeholder groups and are therefore part of their strategy; however, there was no evidence of duplication of projects.

Considerations

The ECU's ability to make a significant impact at sector level is somewhat limited, in that:

- Although a very positive 66.7% and 63.2% of survey respondents thought that the services provided by the ECU helped their institution to deliver equality to staff and students respectively, one-third of respondents doubted the level of contribution (see Appendix 9, Graph 3).

- Although 57% of survey respondents stated that the active involvement of the ECU did “not really” (i.e. “to a limited extent”) or “not at all” free up any internal resources (see Appendix 9, Graph 4), in the interviews there was recognition that the ECU provided services that would have to be undertaken locally if not provided centrally.
- In relation to its aims, survey respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” (see Appendix 9, Graph 2) that the ECU is:
 - developing an authoritative system for strengthening the evidence base for equality and diversity within the HE sector (60.3%);
 - supporting higher education institutions (HEIs) in implementing effective equality practices for the benefit of the whole sector (73.7%); and
 - proving to be an effective advocate for the development of equality and diversity practice in the sector (62.7%).
- In the context of more pressured finances, some respondents commented on “yet another agency” and the increased need to demonstrate added value.
- The further linkage of sector good practice was requested, as was engagement with a wider range of institutions to support ECU projects.

Findings: the ECU’s current performance

Strengths

- Stakeholder interviews reinforced the view that under the leadership of the current Chief Executive the Unit is perceived to have made significant improvements to its operations and reputation, as well as its acceptance level among sector institutions.
- Overall, current performance levels and outputs are perceived to be high, particularly in relation to the quality of the outputs produced. The services most valued by survey respondents were: the central repository of expertise (94%), sector-wide intelligence and good practice (91%), and raising the equality and diversity profile in the sector (82%) (see Appendix 9, Graph 5).
- Key performance indicators (KPIs) were established in 2006 and regular monitoring and reporting occurs against them.
- The current range of ECU activities and products (i.e. projects, conferences, publications and guidance) were deemed by stakeholders to be of good quality and delivered in a timely manner. Many diversity practitioners quoted the ECU as their preferred reference source.
- The Athena SWAN programme is seen by participating organisations as a positive vehicle for engaging senior management in gender and wider equality issues.
- The Unit is perceived by its stakeholders to be delivering well in the area of staff diversity and equality, and is developing a greater leadership role in the student arena.
- In undertaking activities, the Unit has developed strong collaborative relationships with a range of institutions and HE sector bodies, which ensures both that issues are identified and that resources and knowledge are applied efficiently.

Considerations

- The KPIs appear to be largely output focused. There needs to be a review of all KPIs to ensure that the appropriate processes are in place to measure success. An example of this is the KPI around reducing legal challenge in the sector – this may be happening, but it cannot be confirmed as there is no system in place to capture this information.
- The outcomes of the ECU's research and interventions are difficult to measure, making the demonstration of value challenging. Similarly, although the direct impact of the Unit's work (i.e. feedback on the usefulness of conferences, research etc.) is relatively easy to collect and analyse, measuring the ECU's impact on strategic HE diversity and equality issues remains a relatively intangible ambition. Consideration needs to be given to the extent to which the ECU wishes to engage in outcome-based KPIs.
- Although the interviews were largely positive in relation to devolved administration support, over one-third of survey respondents, across all three administrations, felt that the ECU had not been responsive to the concerns of their devolved regions. Note: the ECU provides limited services to Scotland because of the historical existence of Equality Forward.
- It is noted that in transforming the ECU following the 2005 review and implementing the strategy of the new Chief Executive, a deliberate workforce strategy was adopted to change the capability levels within the team.
- However, some HE diversity and equality practitioners fed back that they not only perceived the ECU staff turnover to be high but also that the turnover of external facing ECU officers had impacted on the development of deep sector knowledge within the team and had, on occasions, caused delays to external facing activity.
- In addition, there was a perception that when staff join the ECU they require further development in order to lead sector diversity and equality agendas.
- Note: the findings reported here merely reflect the perceived impact of the workforce strategy on the sector rather than the success of the strategy itself.
- A successful conference offered an excellent profile raising opportunity for the ECU; however, the Unit has had only moderate success in raising its service awareness within the sector via its communication strategy (i.e. only 14% of respondents who used ECU publications' (see Graph 6) "strongly agreed" that the communication strategy had been successful (see Appendix 9, Graph 6). This finding needs to be balanced with the size of the organisation and the level of resources that can be devoted to communications.
- The majority of eligible HEIs are not Athena SWAN programme members, although the level of awareness does appear high among this wider group. In addition, recent information suggests that application rates are increasing. It is noted that recent programme coordination has been impacted by long term staff illness.

Findings: governance

Strengths

- The ECU organisation is led by Chief Executive Nicola Dandridge who reports to the Board. Respondents commented positively on her strong leadership style and the positive way in which she interacts with a range of individuals, institutions and external bodies.
- The ECU Board is led by Chairperson John Brooks and comprises diverse institutions, observers from funding bodies and input from unions. The Board meets regularly and acts in a decision making capacity on strategic issues.

Considerations

- There was a perception of high reliance on the Chief Executive which may present a strategic risk to the ECU.

Findings: future of equalities in HE and impact on ECU demand

- 45% of survey respondents believed that there were currently gaps in the provision of equality and diversity support within the sector (see Appendix 9, Graph 7). However, no one area stood out as a consistent gap. The gaps were perceived to be:
 - regional/local support and quality of advice and support (18%) across all geographical regions and devolved authorities;
 - increasing the awareness of diversity and equality (16%); and
 - benchmarking (14%).
- Respondents also reported a greater need for practical solutions.
- Respondents agreed that, while overall progress has been made in the HE sector, there are still some fundamental strategic diversity and equality issues that remain unresolved (including the numbers of women and ethnic minorities in senior academic and institutional management roles, the under-representation and underperformance of students from certain backgrounds and the lack of students from certain groups studying certain subjects).
- Looking forwards, issues likely to place further diversity and equality demands on the HE sector include:
 - new legislation (quoted by 30% of survey respondents, 18% in relation to the new Equality Bill);
 - Single Equality Schemes, mentioned by 20%, and an increased emphasis on the new diversity strands of age, sexual orientation and religion/belief;
 - internationalisation (both from increased visiting student numbers and via institutions establishing a greater overseas presence);
 - increased focus on socio-economic issues and access (when general demand for places appears to be increasing); and
 - the changing student demographic, across the range of equality and diversity strands as well as the socio-economic agenda.
- 79.5% of survey respondents said that they were likely to use the ECU's services over the next three years.
- Equality Forward would be ceasing operations in July 2009 and Scottish institutions may require additional support from the ECU.
- The wider human rights agenda is increasingly becoming an issue within the sector, and the impact of this on the resources of the ECU is still unknown.
- Conversely, further economic pressure on universities and changes in the political landscape may change the priority, level of attention and level of resource that diversity and equality receives within individual institutions.
- There were no strong views on required changes within the ECU; however, four key areas were identified by survey respondents as requiring changes in the role of and/or services provide by the ECU:

- more practical support and advice (22%);
- more visits and involvement with HEIs (13%);
- more training and workshops – leadership, regional/onsite (11%); and
- timeliness and relevance of advice – ensuring that there is less time between new legislation and the provision of sector guidance (10%).

Findings: future funding models

- The ECU is currently centrally funded, largely by HEFCE, with additional funding coming from UUK, GuildHE and the funding councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The sector is facing significant funding challenges in the medium term.
- The current ECU funding model and other options were discussed with senior respondents and assessed for viability. The views in relation to each of these models were:
 - A mandatory subscription-based approach was seen to potentially increase bureaucracy without adding particular benefits. In addition, there were thought to be some issues around the Unit's ability to provide appropriate challenge to the sector, although this was seen to be a lesser issue than in the case of the discretionary option.
 - Splitting core and non-core services was not considered viable because of the current small size of the Unit and therefore the ability of the team to split resources in line with this approach.
 - Sharing services with another institution was discussed and although services such as conference administration and website management could be jointly undertaken this was viewed as adding additional layers of complexity to the operation. It is worth noting that the conversations largely focused on 'front office' as opposed to 'back office' services (i.e. those services that would draw on specialist equality and diversity knowledge and experience).
 - A genuinely discretionary institutional subscription was seen to be a good test of the Unit's value, but was thought to present the ECU with a significant funding risk as institutions increasingly prioritise services and activities. In addition, this model may impact the Unit's ability to provide appropriate challenge to the sector.
 - Income generation activities, such as training, could augment the current funding model. However, in the current climate, with no immediate issues driving demand and with many institutions having established provider contracts in place, this activity appears unlikely to yield significant revenues in the medium term.
 - Note: these findings should be read in conjunction with the Equality Challenge Unit Annual Report of March 2009.

Strengths

Most senior respondents believed that the current funding model was the most appropriate for the Unit and the sector.

Considerations

Half of all survey respondents said that they would be unwilling to pay for ECU services.

Findings: responses from stakeholder groups

- The views of vice chancellors and institutions' senior managers were broadly that the Unit is well perceived and that a central HE equalities body, if efficiently run, will continue to provide a useful shared resource for the sector.

- The [HE diversity and equality practitioners](#) consulted identified a range of longstanding issues yet unresolved by the sector and a number of emerging challenges which remain to be resolved. They strongly supported the current work of the ECU and the need for it to continue to support change through its influence within the sector.
- Overall, [unions](#) supported the role and objectives of the Unit, and the [National Union of Students](#) would welcome a greater focus on the issues facing students. All agreed that the current level of ECU performance and partnership working was generally good.
- [External bodies](#), including the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), supported the need for a central body and were positive about current works.
- In [Northern Ireland](#) the equalities legislation is broader than in the rest of the UK, and the issues that need to be addressed are somewhat different. The ECU is perceived to have understood the differing requirements and is responding well.
- Within the interviews in [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#) institutions gave positive feedback on their inclusion by the ECU and its understanding of regional differences. However, the survey results provided more mixed feedback. It is worth noting that with the presence of Equality Forward, Scotland did not receive any significant support from the ECU. In addition, it is worth reiterating that the funding for Equality Forward ceased in July 2009.

Conclusions

The ECU's current role, strategy and aims

- The ECU is perceived to fulfil its current strategic objectives and its defined role as a centrally shared HE equality and diversity resource.
- The Unit provides a range of support for the sector and is seen by many as the resource of choice for HE diversity and equality advice, good practice and thought leadership, with a strong evidenced-based approach.
- However, long term HE sector diversity and equality challenges still remain for the sector (i.e. better representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in senior management and key subject areas, and ensuring consistent legal and policy compliance). Several respondents thought that the current strategy would support only a moderate pace of change, particularly in the absence of an HE-wide body with a diversity and equality compliance role.

The ECU's current performance

- Against the review's criteria we conclude that the ECU is currently meeting its remit and is perceived to do this efficiently. Respondents noted a considerable improvement in positive engagement and impact since the last review.
- The current KPIs are output, rather than outcome, focused and appear difficult to measure objectively (e.g. systems are not in place to gather the data). Consideration needs to be given to the extent to which the Unit wishes to apply outcome-based measures and the extent to which this is possible.
- The Unit's products and services are valued by the sector, with the Athena SWAN programme and the data collection research particularly perceived to be positive exercises which move the sector forward. The ECU team are perceived to be knowledgeable and responsive to the range of sector needs.
- However, demonstrating value and tangible outcomes as a result of ECU interventions remains difficult to measure and some respondents questioned whether the Unit is going far enough to address the sector's equality and diversity issues.

- ECU staff turnover has been relatively high over the past three years (50% of the ECU team in 2008/09) and there is a perception that this has periodically impacted upon the Unit's performance.

Governance

- The current governance arrangements appear to be satisfactory to guide the delivery of the ECU's current remit.
- The perception of a significant reliance on the ECU Chief Executive in many of the Unit's activities may present a strategic risk to the consistent performance of the ECU.

Future of equalities in HE and impact on ECU demand

- Student bodies believe that there appears to be no coordinated approach to embedding diversity and equality into the curriculum. This is currently outside the remit of the ECU.
- The international agenda is increasing for many institutions, in terms of recruiting the best academic staff, attracting overseas students and establishing an overseas presence. Operational issues, such as the requirements for greater immigration checks, are currently being managed by Universities UK. There were no strong views on how the ECU could support this agenda beyond basic cultural awareness – this was very much seen as an issue for the institution to address.
- The medium term demand for ECU products and services appears to be constant and stable given the current remit and climate. However, in the longer term, new legislation and a potentially changing political agenda may reshape the demand and need. This should become clearer within the next 12-18 months.

Future funding model

- In conclusion, the majority of respondents agreed that the current model, particularly in this economic climate, provides the ECU with guaranteed funds and allows the Unit to focus on core business. This central funding model also appears to provide institutions with an efficient way of accessing a central shared diversity and equality resource, which is perceived to avoid duplication of activity at an institutional level.
- Future demands on the ECU described above need to be reviewed in the context of the current economic environment and the need for the ECU to demonstrate value to the sector. Given these competing demands, it is concluded that an increase in funding would be inadvisable at this point.
- Through the development of a new strategy and the prioritisation of activities, the current level of resourcing of the ECU appears satisfactory to deliver on the current remit. However, any change of remit (e.g. expansion of student agenda, taking on Scottish institutions, taking a more proactive change role) would require the model to be revisited.

Recommendations

Overall

- The ECU should continue to provide equality and diversity services to the sector within the current funding arrangements.
- Funding for a further five years is recommended, with the review process commencing in year three.
- To respond to the comments regarding pace of change and the need to provide added value, the ECU should focus its activities on the sector's key equality and diversity issues – prioritising activities and resources accordingly.

- As part of the new cycle of strategic planning, one of the key discussion points should be the mainstreaming of equality and diversity activities – creating clarity on the extent to which this is an objective for the Unit and a timescale for its achievement.
- The strategic planning cycle should also consider the implications of raising the profile of the student agenda, including supporting the equality and diversity issues associated with the curriculum, for example by working in partnership with existing organisations which already have this remit. In addition, the strategic planning cycle should consider taking on the provision of services to Scottish institutions.

A strategic decision on the issue of equality and diversity in the curriculum and the ECU's role in achieving that aim is required.

ECU role, strategy and aims

- In light of the current economic situation we recommend that the ECU should clearly articulate the key current and medium term diversity and equality issues facing the sector and how the ECU will approach each area. This clarity of purpose will both raise awareness within the sector and identify any unforeseen areas of overlap with other sector bodies.
- The ECU should develop a new three-year strategy that is tightly focused on areas of strategic need and which recognises the different legal frameworks and operating issues faced by institutions. In addition, the strategy should consider the mainstreaming agenda.
- It is recommended that the ECU's student remit continue to be developed with close cooperation with institutions, student representative bodies and partner organisations.
- The ECU strategy of engaging with senior institutional stakeholders (to raise awareness and understanding as well as encourage compliance and good practice) and providing support and guidance to diversity practitioners should continue.

ECU performance

- The Unit's KPIs should be updated to better reflect the current operating environment and the strategic objectives of the Unit. These KPIs should include clearly measureable output indicators related to programmes and activities.
- There should be a debate on the extent to which the ECU adopts outcome measures in relation to staff and student representation across a range of subjects (thereby evidencing the extent to which institutions have acted upon the ECU's work and the desired impact has been achieved).
- The Unit should continue to actively seek opportunities to develop and run activities and research in partnership with institutions and other bodies, both to ensure institutional engagement and to deliver the programme of activity efficiently.
- The Unit should seek opportunities to embed equality and diversity into national systems and processes so that activity becomes part of core business. This may include the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's quality reviews.
- The ECU's communication strategy and plan should be developed around key messages and priorities.

- The Athena SWAN programme should be continued and the opportunity to extend the methodology to other subject areas or other under-represented groups from other diversity strands should be considered. Consideration should include the priority of the diversity strand, the business case for investment and the presence of a partner body to support the programme.

Governance

- In line with good practice, a Board Effectiveness Review should be undertaken which would provide an independent assessment of how well the Board is contributing to the delivery of the ECU's remit.
- A succession planning exercise should be undertaken for key ECU roles, although it is recognised that the size of the Unit may be a constraint on this activity being successful.

Future of equalities and ECU demand

- The Unit should continue to scan the horizon for emerging issues, and critically appraise potential new projects and resource allocation to maximise the benefits to the sector. Emerging equality themes for the sector appear to be religion, gender, social mobility/widening participation and supporting institutions in dealing with conflicting agendas (e.g. the individual and collective freedoms presented by religion and sexual orientation).
- In the absence of Equality Forward in Scotland any extension to the ECU's role should be agreed with the funders.
- An impact analysis should be undertaken in relation to potential changes in the political and legal landscapes, with strategic and operational adjustments made accordingly.
- Any changes in demand should be reviewed in the context of the Unit's key priority areas.

ECU funding model

- The current funding model should remain unchanged for the reasons outlined earlier in this section.
- The current funding level should be maintained, but the activities of the ECU should be prioritised to ensure greatest value for the sector and greatest impact on key equality and diversity issues.
- The current level of ECU resources should be maintained.
- An ECU salary benchmarking exercise was undertaken by PwC for the two senior management roles of Head of Policy and Programming, and Head of Resourcing. It is suggested that a further exercise for the remaining staff should be undertaken with comparator groups to include HE diversity and equality practitioners.
- The Unit should continue to scan the horizon for emerging trends and issues, and critically appraise potential new projects and resource allocation to maximise use of funding and the benefits to the sector. The ECU should work with the funders in this regard.

Considerations: strategic options for the ECU

Overall

This review has concluded that there is a need for the ECU to continue to provide equality and diversity services to the sector. However, there is some debate around the most effective way of positioning this service within the sector. The following pages summarise the different models that have been discussed and the associated advantages and risks.

Each option needs to be considered in parallel with the following design criteria, which represent a summary of the key characteristics perceived to be required in the ECU. The ECU needs to:

- maintain or increase the profile of the equality and diversity agenda within the sector;
- enable both student and staff equality and diversity issues to be covered effectively;
- influence at a senior level within the sector; and
- be seen to provide value for the sector.

Option one – a stand-alone unit

Description of option

The ECU maintains its status as a stand-alone unit providing equality and diversity advice/products/services direct to the sector. A new Chief Executive is sought who can maintain the momentum that has been created by the previous incumbent. The new Chief Executive develops a strategy that delivers the overarching objectives of the ECU and responds to the issues raised within this review.

Key features/considerations

- Funding is provided through current means – at the current level dependent on the extent of additional requirements (e.g. on Scotland and students) and level of prioritisation.
- To the extent that it is possible, the Unit addresses the risks raised within this review.
- The 'attitude' of the Unit is determined by the level of satisfaction with progress on key equality and diversity strands.

Pros of option one	Risks of option one
The importance of equality and diversity as an issue continues to be emphasised.	The operational risks associated with the size of the Unit remain.
There is a critical mass of individuals focused on this issue and knowledgeable on the specific strands – taking a leadership role.	High dependence on finding the 'right' Chief Executive and a risk that momentum is lost in the time it takes to find that individual.
The student and staff agenda is fully covered (excepting issues surrounding the curriculum).	The Unit is still limited in its ability to operate at a senior level in the sector.
The ECU provides an advisory service and acts as mediator between the sector and the EHRC.	
There is clarity on where to go to for equality and diversity products and advice.	

Option two – integration into another agency body

Description of option

Within this option the Unit is moved into a larger agency body where economies of scale can be achieved and the Unit can take advantage of the connections and relationships that exist within the wider organisation.

Key features/considerations

- Funding is provided direct to the wider agency, at a somewhat reduced level to indicate savings in resources and infrastructure.
- The communication strategy of the team becomes increasingly important to ensure that the messages are still heard when within a larger organisation.

Considerations: strategic options for the ECU

- The selection of the relevant agency is key and needs to be considered with reference to the design criteria set out on the previous page.

Pros of option two	Risks of option two
The Chief Executive will have established credibility within the sector thereby maintaining momentum on interactions.	The move undermines the message that equality and diversity is an important issue and that progress still needs to be made.
It will be easier to access senior stakeholders in the sector through the wider remit of the agency.	The ECU loses its status as an independent body and becomes linked to the agenda of the wider body.
The operational risks are mitigated because of the size of the new agency.	Other agencies become disenfranchised with the agenda if they are not chosen as the successful recipient of the Unit.
	The savings achieved will be minimal given the scale of the organisation at present.
	The function head would hold a directorship role and therefore in themselves have less power or influence to push forward change.

Option three – co-located shared service model

Description of option

This option suggests the bringing together of a number of sector agencies, through co-location, to enable the sharing of back office functions such as human resources, finance, information technology etc. These agencies would retain a separate identity when facing the sector but would share those resources that are not core or specialist in the delivery of their remit. Therefore, this option retains the advantage of option one but makes steps towards efficiencies through shared services.

Key features/considerations

- Funding procedures remain as is, with some reduction because of the efficiencies of shared resources.
- The ECU would still need to source a Chief Executive of equivalent standing to the current incumbent.

Pros of option three	Risks of option three
There is a critical mass of individuals focused on this issue and knowledgeable on the specific strands – taking a leadership role.	High dependence on finding the 'right' Chief Executive and a risk that momentum is lost in the time it takes to find that individual.
The importance of equality and diversity as an issue continues to be emphasised.	The Unit is still limited in its ability to operate at a senior level in the sector.
The student and staff agenda is fully covered.	The savings achieved will be minimal given the scale of the organisation at present.
The ECU provides an advisory service and acts as mediator between the sector and the EHRC.	There may be some loss in knowledge/focus of the back office functions.
There is clarity on where to go for equality and diversity products and advice.	

Conclusions

Consideration of the three options against the design criteria suggests that either option one or option three would be the most appropriate strategy. Option one reinforces the importance of equality and diversity in the sector and maintains a quorum of employees able to tackle the technicalities of the agenda. Option three would provide an opportunity for realising efficiencies among agencies, but would require further work to identify suitable bodies and the extent of the savings that could be achieved.

Introduction and background

The ECU review

Background to the Equality Challenge Unit

The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) was established in 2001 with the aim of supporting the higher education (HE) sector to maximise the potential of all staff (and subsequently students), whatever their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, or age.

The ECU has a clearly defined strategic plan (2006-10) that focuses on:

- developing an authoritative system for identifying and measuring progress on equality and diversity;
- supporting higher education institutions (HEIs) in implementing their equality and diversity initiatives;
- developing programmes that support sustained institutional change; and
- advocating development of equality and diversity practice.

In order to achieve its objectives the ECU works in conjunction with a wide range of stakeholders, develops publications, leads or participates in conferences, and conducts surveys and several specific projects aimed at promoting equality and diversity.

A full independent evaluation of the ECU was conducted at the end of 2005 in order to establish the extent to which it was delivering against its mission and how it should evolve. It was as a result of this review that the ECU's remit was extended to include the student body and its status was amended to a company limited by guarantee.

Today, the ECU is based in London, has a headcount of 13.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and is led by Chief Executive Nicola Dandridge.

Specification of the current review

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), along with the other funders of the ECU, engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) to undertake an independent review of the ECU.

The scope of the review was to evaluate the Unit's performance and level of stakeholder satisfaction, with a particular focus on the future demands on and potential role of the Unit. The ultimate objective of the independent review was to establish the required role and shape of the ECU for the period beyond December 2010 when the current funding expires.

HEFCE set out a number of criteria that were to shape the review and these formed a guide to the research undertaken. They are listed below.

The review criteria

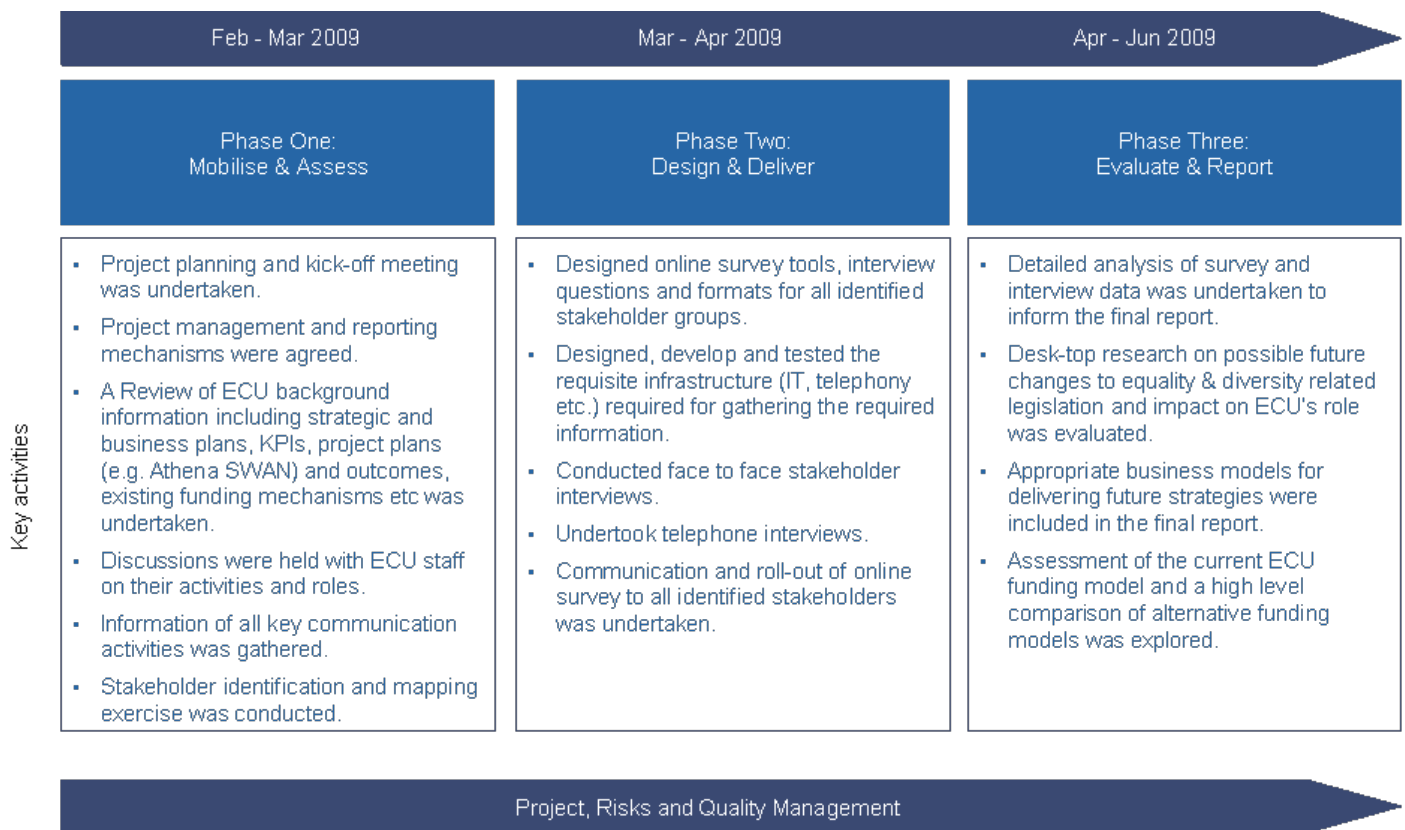
- **Criterion 1:** Report on and evaluate the ECU's activities and outcomes/achievements (including the Athena SWAN programme, where appropriate) in 2006-8 against their Business Plan and key performance indicators (KPIs) including considering the ECU's performance in the different UK regions, countries and sectors (i.e. university or colleges of higher education) of the UK.
- **Criterion 2:** An evaluation of the appropriateness of the Unit's current KPIs.

- **Criterion 3:** An evaluation of the ECU's communications activity and how effective this has been in promoting awareness of their work among key sector groups.
- **Criterion 4:** Consideration of the ECU's role in an increasingly international equality agenda.
- **Criterion 5:** A stakeholder survey, possibly including structured interviews and a questionnaire, to gauge the satisfaction and perception of the Unit's key user groups and stakeholders (including its relationship with bodies like Equality Forward).
- **Criterion 6:** An evaluation of how well ECU has delivered on its new remit for equality for students in HE (extended from being focused on staff only in 2006).
- **Criterion 7:** Clarification and evaluation of the overlap around ECU role in the sector and boundaries for ECU work programmes and other sector bodies (e.g. students vs staff). Produce a high level mapping exercise for diversity-related activities which includes potential overlaps and funding streams.
- **Criterion 8:** To assess the likely future demands on the ECU (informed by an awareness of the expressed demand for support from institutions and future legislation) and compare them with the level and structure of the current resources available (both in pay and non-pay costs). In the context of these findings, to suggest annual funding levels and sources of funding as appropriate.
- **Criterion 9:** To recommend how best ECU services can be delivered and what might be the appropriate business model for future delivery requirements of equality in the HE sector.
- **Criterion 10:** Produce a report of a standard suitable for publication summarising findings and recommendations for the Funders Forum by 30th June 2009.

Methodology

An overview

The diagram below illustrates at a high level the approach and timelines applied to deliver this review.



The approach

Introduction

In conducting our review we sought to gain the views of a representative sample of interested parties from within institutions, and from organisations both within and outside the sector. These organisations included mission groups, unions representing HE staff and students, diversity and equality bodies including the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), and other interested education sector bodies.

We were guided by the ECU towards the organisations and individuals that should be involved. This list evolved as the research was undertaken and further relevant bodies emerged. Data was collected confidentially to allow respondents to provide fair and honest feedback. A full list of the organisations that were consulted is included in Appendix 3.

We presented the interim findings to the ECU Board on 29th April 2009 and the Funders Forum on 30th April 2009. Our interviewee list was expanded based on the feedback received from these groups.

Our approach for this review employed the following methodology.

Phase one: mobilise and assess

Mobilise project

- During this stage we aimed to establish a collective understanding of the requirements of the project, and the approach to be adopted. We also introduced project disciplines to ensure that the delivery of the project was subject to rigorous control. Disciplines included:
 - development of a project initiation document that detailed the activities and outputs of each stage of the project;
 - creation of a detailed project plan, highlighting milestones for decisions and reporting;
 - creation of a risk register for the project; and
 - confirmation of project reporting mechanisms.

Assess the ECU

- Having launched the project, our first aim was to build a robust understanding of the ECU, its programme of work, KPIs and stakeholders. This understanding helped us to identify and design research tools that were fit for purpose and targeted in terms of the stakeholder groups. In order to build on our understanding, the following activities were undertaken:
 - conducted a desktop review of relevant documentation (e.g. KPIs, strategy documents, summary of current equality and diversity programmes, reports from previous organisational reviews, communications to stakeholders);

- interviewed members of the ECU to build a more in-depth understanding of the way in which the organisation operates, the current funding model and the specific activities the individuals are responsible for; and
- undertook research on future areas of demand for the ECU and trends in equality and diversity legislation.

Phase two: design and deliver

Design tools

- Based on the information gained from phase one and building on our knowledge of the organisation, we decided to apply the following methodology. We were conscious that the solution must:
 - measure the elements that would help us shape the future position for the ECU;
 - address any concerns raised in the risk register;
 - encourage open and honest answers; and
 - be robust and both quantitative and qualitative in nature.
- To achieve this we worked closely with the steering group to develop the final solution. More detail on this is provided in the next section.

Delivery of research

- Based on our experience in this field and our understanding of the requirements of the review, the following steps were included in the overarching approach:
 - Step one: relevant desk-top research on the key areas of demand for ECU services;
 - Step two: 63 face to face and telephone interviews with a range of senior stakeholders which included HEI vice chancellors, sector body chief executives, principals, chairs and unions representing staff and students;
 - Step three: two focus groups consisting of higher education equality practitioners and National Union of Students policy officers; and
 - Step four: online survey of 492 identified stakeholders within all HEIs (including equality practitioners and human resource (HR) directors) which generated 188 responses.

Phase three: evaluate and report

Analyse findings

- We undertook an analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from phase two of the project to assess the impact and effectiveness of the ECU as perceived by its stakeholders. We were also able to 'cut' the data in a number of different ways, thereby understanding the perceptions of stakeholders by, for example, region, type of institution and project involvement.
- Within this stage of analysis we also drew on:

- PwC-held and any other data available in the public domain to compare the ECU with similar units within other public sector bodies (e.g. health, local and central government departments);
- existing best practice models to assess viable alternatives to deliver an equalities service to the HE sector; and
- additional research to define the future equality demands on the sector.

Develop options

- The previous stages of the review gave us a solid understanding of the current performance of the ECU and a range of opinions on the likely future demands on the ECU. The information enabled us to develop three options for the future remit of the organisation which would need to be debated and would inform the associated structures of the ECU.

In developing options we:

- considered other models of equality and diversity management/input;
- took into account the wider demands on the sector (e.g. economic pressures); and
- worked closely with the steering group to understand the political pressures and wider dynamics that the solution needs to acknowledge.

This report is the output of our methodology.

Survey

Building on insights into working practices gained in the in-depth interview phase of this review, a mixed-mode approach was adopted to the design of the survey. This comprised an online survey, with the option for respondents to download a paper-based pdf version.

The survey was targeted at four key respondent groups across UK HEIs:

- heads of human resources;
- heads of institution;
- heads of student admissions;
- equality and diversity practitioners; and
- those with responsibility for widening participation.

To further increase response, participants were encouraged to forward an anonymous online survey link to colleagues who had experience of the ECU, and who may not have been included in the initial contact list.

The online survey was launched on 16th April, and closed four weeks later on Friday 15th May. Owing to the nature of the survey's distribution, a response rate can only be determined for the personalised survey.

Survey	No. of responses	No. of valid e-mail addresses	Response rate
Online personalised	103	492	21%
Online anonymous	85	N/A	N/A
Total	188		

Survey respondents were from a variety of levels within their institutions:

Respondent type	No. of respondents
Vice chancellor	14
Pro vice chancellor	8
Head	52
Manager	47
Officer	43
Other	24
Total	188

With four respondents withholding the name of their institution, we are aware that 184 respondents participated from 120 HEIs across the four UK devolved governments.

Region	No. of responding institutions	No. of institutions per region*	Response rate
England	98	168	58.3%
Northern Ireland	2	5	40.0%
Scotland	12	22	54.5%
Wales	8	14	57.1%
Total	120	209	57.4%

*Source – www.hero.ac.uk . Accessed April-May 2009

Region	No. of responding institutions	No. of institutions per region*	Response rate
Russell Group	11	20	55.0%
1994 Group	17	18	94.4%
GuildHE	13	21	61.9%
University Alliance Group	20	24	83.0%
Million Plus	18	28	64.0%

Analysis – weighting the data

- As the survey potentially targeted up to four groups within HEIs, we were cognisant of the need to ensure that each institution was treated equally in the analysis.
- In order to account for institutions where two or more targets responded, we have applied weighting to the data to ensure that each HEI has equal weighting in the analysis.

All bases quoted are unweighted (maximum of 188 respondents); all data quoted is weighted (maximum of 120 institutions).

Findings

Interviews

Background

Structured interviews were conducted with a sample of senior institutional stakeholders, mission group, union and equality body representatives by face to face interview and by telephone. A full list of participating institutions is provided in the Appendices. We summarise the arising themes below.

The ECU's current role, strategy and aims

Respondents commented positively on:

- the significant level of improvement achieved since the last review (in terms of both engagement style, which was seen as positive rather than punitive, and the quality of outputs);
- the strength of the ECU brand within the HE sector; and
- the value of individual ECU products and services, with particular mention of ECU-run conferences and regular information updates.

These findings were supported by the online survey and the Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network (HEEON) focus group responses.

Respondents questioned:

- how the ECU can create a perception of value added in a crowded market;
- the role of the ECU within the sector – whether it should be more policing or continue in an enabling role; and
- ways in which the ECU could maximise its student remit.

The ECU's current performance

Respondents commented positively on:

- the ECU's core strength of products and their evidence-based approach;
- the strength of the Unit's leadership and the Unit's presence within the sector;
- the value of the ECU team to the sector; and
- a positive perception of inclusion from Welsh and Northern Ireland partners (although this finding was less well supported by anonymous survey data).

Respondents questioned:

- how to address the ultimate measure of the ECU's performance (i.e. being measured against outcomes rather than outputs).

Staff turnover

Staff turnover on an establishment of 13.4 full-time equivalent staff appears high. The figures for the last three years are:

- 2008/09: 7
- 2007/08: 5 (including 1 redundancy)
- 2006/07: 6 (including 1 redundancy, 1 retirement and 1 secondee).

We note that further details on the organisation's activities and financial performance are provided in the Equality Challenge Unit Annual Report and Financial Statements dated 31st March 2009.

Governance

Respondents commented on:

- risks and controls:
 - board structure and strategy being fit for purpose;
 - supportive Non Executive Director's willingness to share knowledge and skills with ECU management team; and
 - well-represented and diverse board membership.
- resource and performance management:
 - regarded as relative to the aims of the ECU; and
 - ECU accountability – the need for accountability for outcomes as well as outputs and the extent to which this was possible.

We note that the Board's Terms of Reference are being updated.

“The role of the Board is to provide entrepreneurial leadership within a framework of prudent and effective controls which enables risk to be assessed and managed. The Board should set the company's strategic aims, ensure that the necessary resources are in place for the company to meet its objectives and review management performance. The Board should set the company's values and standards and ensure that its obligations to its stakeholders are understood and met.” www.fsa.gov.uk

Comparative operating models

In order to compare the UK's Equality Challenge Unit with those of other countries, the legal, social, political and cultural context of each country must be considered in conjunction with the strategic and policy aims of the relevant higher education sector. One of the key differentiators between countries is the level of equalities legislation with which each education sector must abide and the level to which these requirements are promoted or enforced. The importance of the topic of diversity and equality to each HE sector and the relative importance of particular issues and diversity strands appear to determine the governmental response.

Our research demonstrated that there are many national bodies with a lead responsibility for the legal and policy framework and enforcement of diversity and equality; however, we found no international organisation which is comparable with the ECU in relation to HE diversity and equality. We note that the experience of the ECU has been sought internationally (e.g. Australia).

Looking towards UK comparators within the public sector, local authorities provide a comparable sector model in terms of both the size of the employee base and the independence of the institutions. In this case, local authorities call on the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA) for advice and guidance on equality and diversity issues. The IDeA runs two accreditation schemes with an equality and diversity focus – firstly, the Beacon scheme which seeks to identify exemplary authorities as measured through a number of organisational activities (equality and diversity being just one element). Secondly, the IDeA runs the Equalities Framework which specifically accredits authorities based on their maturity in addressing the equality and diversity agenda. With the exception of the Athena SWAN programme, the ECU does not provide this accreditation approach for the education sector. In addition, the IDeA covers a range of subject areas and therefore acts as a single point of contact for a number of people and performance issues. Its running costs are around £49 million with about 310 staff. The ECU presents a unique model of support by specifically focusing on equality and diversity issues.

Future demand for diversity and equality support, and for ECU services

The sources of potential future demand highlighted were:

- New legislation, in particular the Single Equality Bill. This legislation is progressing through Parliament (2009/10) and may become law next year (possibly extending a range of current requirements placed on organisations in 2011). If successful this legislation could increase demand for ECU advice and guidance in the medium term – however, there is a common view that the legislation is merely the bringing together of a number of strands.
- The increasing internationalisation of HEIs – both the student and staff experience, and institutions establishing an overseas presence. The ability of institutions to recruit the best academic staff from a competitive global market and to attract and retain overseas funded students has become a significant commercial issue for many organisations, rather than an organisational development opportunity. The impact on the ECU's current remit appears limited.
- The trend towards mainstreaming equalities whereby issues and solutions are integrated within HEIs' business activity. In practical terms this may mean that activities such as service delivery, project management, policy development and audit routinely consider the equalities implications of their activity. This area represents an opportunity for the ECU and could drive project-based demand.
- The dominating challenges of religion, gender, social mobility and widening participation and balancing conflicting agendas (for example, individual versus collective freedoms). Linked to legislation and social change, this area will continue to require ECU focus.
- Impact of the recession on student demographics. The current economic situation is expected to increase demand and potentially competition for HE places. This demand may arise from the traditional age groups but also from mature students retraining. The ECU may support efforts in widening, or maintaining, the participation of a range of students. The issue may not impact ECU demand significantly.

Future funding model

A number of alternative funding options were discussed during the interviews; these included:

- **Existing model** – a centrally funded model whereby the ECU budget is agreed with the Funders Forum. Respondents noted that this provided a simple funding approach that was administratively light for institutions.
- **Subscription models** – where membership is mandatory and paid for through an annual levy. Alternatively, membership is optional with institutions able to opt in or out of working with the ECU. Respondents believed that moving to a mandatory arrangement would add bureaucracy and little benefit, while a genuinely optional model would add administration and require senior management effort.

In addition, there was a feeling that making the subscription optional, and thereby testing the value of the ECU to the sector, would not generate a favourable outcome – that is, during difficult economic times the ECU would not be high up the spending priorities of institutions. There is also the possibility that a subscription model may impact the Unit's ability to provide appropriate challenge to the sector.

- **Combination of subscription model supported by income generating activities such as provision of training programmes** – within this option the ECU would be able to top up core funding (provided through subscription) with additional services or products. However, respondents commented on the range of existing local arrangements in place to meet their diversity training needs. In addition, there was a view that demand for diversity training would be reduced in the current economic climate. If a future need (e.g. emerging or new legislation) required significant training, an ECU training function that offered subsidised training to the sector may be an economic option, but this was not seen as a significant source of funds for the ECU.
- **Shared services** – whereby some activities may be shared with, or outsourced to, other organisations. Only some specific services, such as conference administration or website management, were seen to be suitable for outsourcing or sharing on a project by project basis. Respondents commented on the small size of the current Unit and the likely additional levels of coordination and communication that would be required in this model. Shared services were not seen as a viable option in this context. However, it is worth noting that discussions largely focused on front office services (i.e. those that require some level of equality and diversity input) rather than the more generic back office services (e.g. HR, IT, finance).
- **Split of core and non-core business** – within this model, the ECU has a core suite of activities that are funded through one means (e.g. central funding, subscription model) and an additional suite of activities that are funded through different means (e.g. paid-for products or services). Respondents were challenged in thinking of the way in which the services of the ECU could be split, seeing the advantage in the multi-role staffing model currently adopted (i.e. that one individual covers a range of activities).

We could not find a similar organisation in another sector to draw direct comparison with.

Overall, there was no appetite or perceived rationale for a change to the existing funding model.

Practitioners focus group

Background

A focus group was held on 11th May 2009 with nine HE diversity and equality practitioners from HEEON. Diversity and equality practitioners are a key point of reference for staff and student diversity and equality strategies, practices and issues within their institutions. Their views were specifically sought to inform this review.

Current state findings – sector diversity and equality challenges

- The number of full-time equivalent diversity and equality practitioners ranged from one to four, the average being two per institution. Most relied on external networking and support to inform good practice and avoid unnecessary replication or duplication.
- The absence of a regular HE sector-wide external assessment of institutional diversity and equality progress (such as an OFSTED report in the schools sector), the lack of historic legal challenge of progress against public duties in the sector and a lack of links to the national audit framework currently provide few 'levers' for practitioners to use to drive the agenda.
- Ensuring consistent compliance with current legislation remains an issue, and there is nervousness about the readiness of institutions to implement requirements of legislation to cover sexual orientation, age, belief/religion and socio-economic issues.
- There was agreement that the level of political focus and local priority at vice chancellor level given to equality and diversity impacted on resources and progress on the agenda. In particular, there was also uncertainty about the impact that a change of government may have on the Single Equality Bill which is currently making its way through Parliament.

ECU performance in the current funding period

- All participants agreed that the ECU has performed well in the current funding period in both meeting its strategic objectives and progressing the HE diversity and equality agenda.
- There was a high level of awareness of the ECU's products and services, and the knowledge and credibility of ECU staff were considered good, with the outputs of the ECU considered relevant, of good quality and timely.
- Work on staff diversity was agreed to be progressing well, with student diversity perceived to be a still expanding issue.
- Participants' perceptions were that ECU staff turnover was high, affecting the depth of the team's sector knowledge (possibly due to ECU officer salary levels being below those of institutional practitioners, regular funding reviews creating uncertainty about job security).
- There was a perception of some overlap of activities with the Higher Education Academy (in the area of research and inclusion issues) and the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) (for example, in relation to flexible working), and to some extent with the Leadership Foundation and HEFCE itself.

Future demand for diversity and equality services in HE

There was recognition that institutional diversity and equality resources may be vulnerable in the current climate of budget constraints.

"Why does ECU have to justify its existence every 5 years, the issues are not going away? A secure organisation could think and behave more strategically." HEEON focus group participant

“Do you think your need for ECU support over the next five years will increase, decrease or remain the same?”

- 50% stated that they thought their need would remain the same
- 50% stated that they thought their need for support would increase

A number of equality and diversity issues were raised that would require a continued institutional focus; these included:

- Ensuring compliance with the current public sector duties, particularly related to ensuring consistent, high quality and output-driven Equality Impact Assessments:
 - Single Equality Schemes;
 - widening participation and social class agenda;
 - internationalisation, including managing emerging communities (e.g. those from Eastern Europe); and
 - increasing complexity of multi-strand/multi-discrimination issues.

Recommendations

The group recommended the following points.

- The ECU to continue to provide strong leadership by:
 - mainstreaming diversity, for example by working with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to embed diversity and equality requirements into its review activities. Encouraging diversity links to strategic planning and risk management without the ECU becoming the ‘equality police’, which would change the positive relationship with institutions;
 - ensuring that the need for sector policy, guidance and associated tools is identified early and developed in a timely manner by the ECU and its partners, rather than multiple individual institutions devoting time and resource to the same issue;
 - monitoring ECU staff turnover in order to build the team’s sector knowledge;
 - seeking or maintaining external relationships and partnerships, including working with the new Institute for Equality and Diversity Practitioners; and
 - increasing and updating information on the website about current projects. Providing an overview and descriptions of activities (i.e. who is involved and how to get involved).

Future research topics could include:

- equality strands of age, religion and belief, and sexual orientation and their links/inter-relationships to existing strands;
- retention of female senior management;

- impact on the new academic research criteria (four citations disadvantaging those on extended absence from workplace);
- student bullying and harassment;
- diversity and performance management; and
- religious/sexual orientation-related hate crime.

Future products and activities could include:

- development of positive action toolkit;
- encouraging greater flexible working for men; and
- encouraging private companies to support schemes/centres of excellence, fellowships and placements.

Survey

Profiling

- 43% of respondents were from institutions employing between 1,001 and 3,000 staff; 53% of 1994 Group respondents were from institutions employing between 1,001 and 3,000 staff.
- Respondents' main areas of work were identified as equality and diversity (40%) and human resources (21%). While equality and diversity were a part of respondents' roles, they were not necessarily their main role.
- Respondents from larger institutions were more likely to mainly work in equality and diversity. In addition, 58% of Russell Group respondents, 54% of manager level respondents and 61% of officer level respondents mainly worked in equality and diversity.
- Within small institutions, respondents were more likely to work in human resources.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents (63%) were at least manager level within their institutions. While officer level respondents accounted for around one-quarter of all respondents, they were most likely to work for institutions with between 5,001 and 15,000 students (33%).
- Just over 70% of respondents had responsibility for both staff and students. This rose to 82% for those whose main area of work was equality and diversity.

Use of the ECU

- As with the 2005 ECU review, highest awareness was recorded for ECU guidance and good practice – three-quarters of all respondents were highly aware of the service. Of those who were aware of this service, 88% had also used ECU guidance and good practice in the last three years. Unsurprisingly, this was also the most frequently used service – 44% of all respondents who used the service used it every month.
- The lowest levels of awareness were recorded for the ECU's work with trade unions and Athena SWAN Charter Mark. However, usage of the ECU's Athena SWAN Charter Mark services in the last three years was highest for 1994 Group (43%) and Russell Group (39%) respondents.

- In general, awareness of the ECU's services was highest among officer level and vice chancellor respondents, and lowest among head level and pro vice chancellor respondents. Awareness also tended to be lower among respondents from smaller institutions.
- Overall, 92% of respondents had used at least one of the ECU's services in the last three years.
- Just over half of respondents who had used the ECU's services in the last three years had used the ECU's support and advice via e-mail and telephone (51%), rising to 66% among 1994 Group respondents.
- Around one-third of those who had used the ECU's services in the last three years had used the ECU's administration of sector networks and liaison groups (37%), or accessed the ECU's workshops (32%), research (32%) or involvement in projects (31%).
- Respondents were asked to rate the frequency with which they used the ECU's services:
 - monthly – ECU guidance and good practice publications (44% overall, 70% Welsh respondents);
 - every six months – administration of sector networks (54%);
 - every year – provision of workshops (52%); and
 - less often than every year – consultancy/specialist support to institutions (33%).

Use of the ECU – continued

- Highest mean scores for quality ratings (on a scale of 1 to 5) were:
 - provision of consultancy workshops and specialist support to institutions (4.6);
 - ECU guidance and good practice publications (4.57); and
 - research (4.51).
- Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements relating to the importance of the ECU's services to their institution's equality and diversity agenda, and how those services have helped to deliver equality and diversity for staff and students.
- Officer level and Welsh respondents were most likely to agree with the statements, and were most positive about the support provided by the ECU.
- For those who had used the ECU's services in the last three years, over 80% agreed that "The ECU has been successful in raising the profile of equality and diversity in the sector" (mean score of 4.15).
- The mean score for this measure rose to 4.49 for 1994 Group respondents and 4.56 for GuildHE respondents.

Specialist support and advice

- Two-fifths of respondents had had an equality and diversity issue that required them to seek specialist support or advice from the ECU in the last three years. This rose to 50% for officer level respondents, 68% for Russell Group respondents and 74% for Welsh respondents.
- Accessing ECU support did not necessarily free up internal resource – 57% stated that the active involvement of the ECU had "not really" or "not at all" freed up their internal resource.

- However, 88% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the specialist support or advice provided by the ECU. Of those who were either very or quite satisfied, over two-thirds stated that it was because the ECU provided sensible advice that was clear and context specific.
- While there were high levels of satisfaction with the support they received, half of all respondents would not have been willing to pay for the service.
- This was particularly prevalent among the smaller institutions; 70% of respondents from institutions with fewer than 500 staff and 87% for institutions with fewer than 5,000 students stated that they would not have been willing to pay for the service. However, 87% of respondents from institutions with more than 25,000 students would also not have been willing to pay for the service.

The ECU's publications and communications

- The ECU's publications were widely used (89% usage overall) and highly rated.
- Used by over three-quarters of respondents, the ECU's website was the most used resource; it was particularly used by respondents who were manager level (90%) and officer level (91%).
- While the least used publication was Equalitylink (50% of respondents), the most likely users of this publication were officer level respondents (81%). Although usage levels were lower, 85% of those using Equalitylink used it every month.
- In terms of the quality of the publications, highest ratings tended to come from officer level and Scottish respondents; the lowest ratings tended to come from head level and English respondents. In general, the respondents from the smaller institutions also recorded lower quality ratings.

The ECU's publications and communications – continued

- For those using the ECU's publications, 70% agreed that the ECU's material helps to support equal opportunities monitoring in their institution. However, the availability of benchmarking data was a concern for respondents; only 56% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that the ECU produced material that helped their institution to benchmark against the rest of the sector (mean score – 3.58).
- The ECU has had moderate success in raising its service awareness via its communication strategy – only 14% strongly agreed that its communications strategy had been successful, with a further 49% just agreeing (mean score – 3.65).
- The highest scores for this measure were from GuildHE respondents (3.92), those from institutions employing fewer than 500 staff (3.94), and officer level respondents (4.15).

The ECU's objectives

- Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which the ECU was meeting its objectives. The ECU's support of HEIs in implementing effective equality practices for the benefit of the whole sector was the most positively rated activity (74% agreement, mean score of 4.07).
- However, respondents were less convinced that the ECU was developing programmes that support sustained institutional change in relation to equality and diversity (51% agreement, mean score of 3.68).

- In general, Welsh respondents and officer level respondents were the most positive; the smaller institutions (fewer than 5,000 students) were the least positive.
- Opinion was divided over the ECU's responsiveness to regional concerns. While two-thirds were content with the level of service, over one-third of respondents from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland felt that the ECU had not been responsive to the concerns of their region.
- Again, the highest level of positive response was from Welsh respondents (mean score of 4.0), compared with an overall mean score of 3.09.

Demand for the ECU's services

- The aspects most valued in a sector-wide equality resource such as the ECU were:
 - providing a central repository of expertise (94%);
 - providing sector-wide intelligence and good practice (91%); and
 - raising the profile of equality and diversity within the sector (82%).
- If the ECU did not exist, respondents would be most likely to turn to the Equality and Human Rights Commission for advice and support (78%). Officer level respondents were most likely to access support from all the listed sources, except internal resource.
- 45% of respondents felt that there were gaps in the provision of equality and diversity support within the sector. This rose to 51% for head level respondents, 53% for officer level respondents, 57% for institutions with 15,001-25,000 students, 62% for Russell Group respondents, 71% for institutions employing between 3,001 and 5,000 staff, and 75% for Scottish respondents.

Overall

- Overall, 72% of respondents were satisfied/very satisfied with the services provided by the ECU (mean score 4.11). This rose to 4.55 for officer level respondents, 4.44 for GuildHE respondents and 4.65 for Welsh respondents.
- Over the next three years, it seems that the level of support required from the ECU will remain largely unchanged – around 80% likely/very likely to use the services of the ECU.

Athena SWAN

Summary

The Athena SWAN Charter was established in 2005 to recognise excellence in science, engineering and technology (SET) employment in higher education, with a particular objective around the advancement and the promotion of the careers of women.

www.athenaswan.org.uk

Strengths

- 38 institutions, 25% of eligible organisations, are members and it is anticipated that the number will increase given the number of applications received by the ECU in 2008/09.

- The programme was seen as positively supporting greater female representation in academia by all respondents.
- Participating institutions believe that it has helped their institution to:
 - engage senior institutional stakeholders in the equalities agenda in a positive manner;
 - identify gaps in human resource policies, processes and activity;
 - develop positive action programmes including coaching, mentoring and training;
 - gain recognition of the work undertaken at a departmental level to promote the development of a more representative senior academic profile; and
 - expand female networks and raise the profile of senior female academics.
- The Athena SWAN branding was quoted as being useful during external requirements exercises, such as kitemark.
- The data-based approaches were quoted as being well received by senior scientists, providing persuasive evidence-based arguments.
- The ECU was seen to be a positive supporter, aiding institutions in their submission process.

Considerations

- All consulted stated that they thought the Athena SWAN principles and methodologies could be applied to other under-represented groups, including areas of male under-representation. Indeed, many organisations had applied Athena SWAN methodologies to their approaches on race and disability strands. Careful consideration needs to be given to how the methodology could be extended.
- Some respondents commented on the lack of direct communication about programme application criteria changes.
- There was one instance cited of a department withdrawing from the accreditation process because of the perceived “onerous nature” of the process. Participants also believed that the application process requires 100% commitment by the organisation at management and administration level, a factor which may also deter some potential candidates. However, this finding was contradicted by another institution which thought that the bar for accreditation at Bronze level was set very low.
- Respondents pointed to other schemes such as Project Juno, which seeks to address the under-representation of women in physics.
- It is noted that an external, formal evaluation of the Athena SWAN programme is planned in 2010/11.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Conclusions began to be formulated in early June 2009 in the context of a rapidly changing political and economic environment. The reader should therefore be mindful of the ECU's 'current state' environment when reviewing this report.

The ECU's current aims, strategy and role

- The ECU is perceived to fulfil its strategic objectives and its defined role as a central shared HE equality and diversity resource. This was evidenced across the results of all research methods and across the mixture of stakeholders consulted.
- Questions raised by a minority, but perhaps important, group of stakeholders around the mainstreaming of equality and diversity within the sector and the extent to which the ECU's current model as a stand-alone unit need to be explored – debating the extent to which it is appropriate for the medium term strategy of the sector.
- The Unit provides a range of support for the sector and is seen by many as the resource of choice for HE diversity and equality advice, good practice and thought leadership, with a strong evidenced-based approach.
- The independent identity of the ECU allows it to emphasise the importance of its agenda within the HE sector. Therefore, to maintain this position it must continue to build strong relationships within the sector in order to lead on current thinking, address sector challenges and avoid duplication of activities with other sector bodies.
- This finding was supported by positive feedback in relation to the majority of activities that the Unit undertakes.
- However, long term HE sector diversity and equality challenges remain key issues (i.e. better representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in senior management and specific subject areas, and ensuring consistent legal and policy compliance).
- Several respondents thought that the current strategy would support only a moderate pace of change on equality and diversity issues, particularly in the absence of an HE-wide body with a diversity and equality compliance role.
- Desk research confirmed perceptions that there are significant areas of under-representation of ethnic minorities and women in the majority of senior academic and institutional management roles.

The ECU's current performance

- Against the review's criteria we conclude that the ECU is currently meeting its remit and is perceived to do this efficiently. Respondents noted a considerable improvement in positive engagement and impact since the last review.
- Against the Unit's KPIs and against stakeholder perceptions the Unit appears to be performing well. The KPIs are, however, largely output (activity undertaken) rather than outcome based (direct impact on deliverables and equality outcomes), which makes the measurement of impact difficult to assess. Similarly, objectives are not based on tangible outcomes. Consideration needs to be given to the extent to which the ECU wishes to take on outcome-based measures.
- The Unit's products and services are valued by the sector, with the Athena SWAN programme in particular perceived to be a positive exercise which moves the sector forward. The ECU team were perceived to be knowledgeable and responsive to the range of sector needs.
- The conferences, publications and ad-hoc advice were all perceived to be of high quality and of increasing consistency. They were deemed invaluable by diversity practitioners and informative by senior management.

- However, demonstrating value and tangible outcomes due to ECU interventions on sector diversity and equality remains difficult to measure and some respondents questioned whether the Unit was going far enough to address the issues.
- The Unit currently fulfils an advisory and promotional role, and its value and outcomes are most easily measured in relation to each intervention.
- The Unit's relationship with senior institutional leaders was reported to be established and constructive, yet not challenging enough.
- ECU staff turnover, at 50% in the last financial year, appears high and has been perceived to periodically impact upon the Unit's performance.

Governance

- The current governance arrangements appear to be satisfactory to guide the delivery of the ECU's current remit.
- It is noted that a review of Board effectiveness has not been recently conducted. This would suggest that an appropriate review should be undertaken.
- The significant focus on the ECU Chief Executive in many of the Unit's activities presents a strategic risk to the Unit.
- The Chief Executive plays a prominent and significant part in many aspects of ECU activity. Planning should commence regarding replacing this role with reference to the future strategic direction and required credentials.

Future of equalities in HE and impact on ECU demand

- Student representatives stated that there appears to be no coordinated approach to embedding diversity and equality into the HE curriculum. This is not within the current remit of the ECU.
- The international agenda is increasing for many institutions, in terms of recruiting the best academic staff, attracting overseas students and establishing an overseas presence. Operational issues, such as the requirement for greater immigration checks, are currently being managed by Universities UK.
- From information gathered in stakeholder interviews it would appear that international students were historically an 'add on' to institutional 'business as usual'. Today, associated revenues often form a significant part of many institutions' income streams and therefore diversity and equality (in particular creating an inviting, attractive and inclusive environment for all) becomes a commercial issue. Given this change, the international agenda is of importance to institutions and the associated equality and diversity issues are likely to be locally addressed.
- We gathered no unequivocal evidence from [senior institutional leaders and mission groups](#) on the need for a change to the ECU remit or the need to provide additional services.
- The majority of respondents from this group were comfortable with the current remit of the ECU. In particular, there was no appetite for increasing the Unit's 'policing role'. The level of service provision was also seen to be appropriate.
- The medium term demand for the ECU's products and services appears to be constant and stable given the current remit and climate. New legislation and a potentially changing political agenda may reshape the demand and need. This should become clearer within the next 12-18 months.
- The wider human rights agenda is increasingly becoming an issue within the sector and the impact of this on the resources of the ECU is still unknown.

- Weighing up the current remit and external influences we conclude that the general level of demand is likely to be stable. Any changes in remit or strategy would require a reassessment of priorities.

Future funding model

Several methods of funding the ECU were assessed:

- **A mandatory subscription-based approach.** Respondents believed that changing to this funding model would “move money around the system” – potentially increasing bureaucracy without adding particular benefits. It was also thought that it would not significantly change the level of engagement with institutions or the desired diversity and equality outcomes. However, there were thought to be some issues around the Unit’s ability to provide appropriate challenge to the sector, although this was seen to be a lesser issue than in the case of the discretionary option.
- **A genuinely discretionary institutional subscription.** It was thought that although this would offer a good test of the Unit’s value it could present the ECU with significant funding risks as institutions increasingly prioritise services and activities. By extension, the strategic aim of moving the entire sector forwards could also be lost if only a certain percentage opted to become involved. In addition, there was some concern about the extent to which the Unit could provide appropriate challenge to the sector under this model.
- **Splitting core and non-core services.** Making such a split in an organisation of this size (13.4 FTEs) was not considered viable because of the lack of critical mass within the organisation. It was also thought that this would undermine the effectiveness of a functioning Unit.
- **Sharing services with another institution.** Service sharing arrangements were discussed. Services such as conference administration or website management could be undertaken externally, but it was viewed as adding layers of complexity to the operations of the ECU and therefore may result in losing the focus and momentum established by the group. It is worth noting that the conversations largely focused on ‘front office’ as opposed to ‘back office’ services (i.e. those services that would draw on specialist equality and diversity knowledge and experience).

In conclusion

- The majority of respondents agreed that the current model, particularly in this economic climate, provides the ECU with guaranteed funds and allows the Unit to focus on core business.
- The central funding model also appears to provide institutions with an efficient way of accessing a central shared diversity and equality resource, avoiding additional activity at an institutional level.
- Given the competing demands of future equality and diversity requirements and the current economic environment, the current funding levels should not be altered. The existing level of resourcing of the ECU appears satisfactory to deliver on the current remit. Should that remit change, funding levels should be reviewed.

Recommendations

Overall

- Based on the value that institutions and stakeholders place on the ECU and in light of the work that remains on the equalities agenda, the ECU should continue to act as the central diversity and equality body for the HE sector.
- Funding for a further five years is recommended, with the review process commencing in year three.
- It is recommended that the ECU focus its activities and resources on the core equality and diversity challenges for the sector.
- As part of the upcoming strategic planning cycle, the ECU should consider:
 - the mainstreaming agenda;
 - the extent to which the student agenda should be extended; and
 - the impact of taking on Scottish institutions.

ECU aims, strategy and role

Response to the current and future HE diversity and equality challenge

- In light of the current economic situation facing the ECU and HEIs it is recommend that the ECU should clearly articulate the key strategic short and medium term diversity and equality issues facing the sector.
- The ECU should then develop a new three-year strategy which is tightly focused on areas of strategic need and which recognises the different legal frameworks and operating issues faced by institutions.
- The ECU is on a successful journey and it is recommend that a full review should be undertaken after a five-year period, with assessment commencing in year three.

Embedding the ECU's role and approach

- We recommend that the ECU's student remit continue to be developed in close cooperation with institutions, student representative bodies and partner organisations, thereby increasing its presence within this field.
- The ECU strategy of engaging with senior institutional stakeholders (to raise awareness and understanding and encourage compliance and good practice) and providing support and guidance to diversity practitioners should continue.
- The remit of the Unit in relation to supporting the diversity and equality agenda in the curriculum should be debated, with the benefits, risks and challenges of increased intervention in this area being assessed.

ECU performance

The ECU's key performance indicators

- The Unit's KPIs should be updated to better reflect the current operating environment. We recommend that once the next three-year business plan is agreed the new performance measures should be agreed jointly by the ECU Board to ensure a consensus on how success shall be demonstrated.

- There should be a debate about whether these measures should include outcomes, thereby evidencing whether or not institutions have acted upon the ECU's work and the desired impact has been achieved. This should include processes whereby HEIs can feed back to the ECU on the relevance and appropriateness of the ECU's programme of activity, ensuring that future programmes are targeted to the needs of the sector.

Programme delivery

- In order to support efficient delivery, the Unit should continue to actively seek opportunities to develop and run activities and research in partnership with institutions and other bodies. This will achieve both further institutional engagement and the delivery of an efficient programme of activity.

Policy development versus delivery

- The Unit should seek opportunities to embed equality and diversity into national systems and processes so that activity becomes part of core business. This may include influencing the HE audit framework (QAA) and institutional policy development as well as having a wider influence on the public sector equalities agenda.

Athena SWAN

- The Athena SWAN programme should be continued and the opportunity to extend the principles and/or the programme brand to other subject areas or under-represented groups from other diversity strands should be considered. Consideration should include the priority of the diversity strand, the business case for investment and the presence of a partner body to support the programme.

Future of equalities and ECU demand

Future demand

- The Unit should continue to scan the horizon for emerging issues, and critically appraise potential new projects and resource allocation to maximise the benefits to the sector. At present, the emerging themes appear to be religion, gender, social mobility/widening participation and supporting institutions in dealing with conflicting agendas (e.g. the individual and collective freedoms presented by religion and sexual orientation).
- In the absence of Equality Forward in Scotland (from July 2009) future Scottish requirements and any extension to the ECU's role should be agreed with the funding bodies.
- An impact analysis should be undertaken in relation to potential changes in the wider environment and legal landscape, and strategic and operational adjustments made accordingly.

Governance

Board efficiency

- In line with good practice, a Board Effectiveness Review should be undertaken which would provide an independent assessment of how well the Board is contributing to the delivery of the ECU's remit.

Leadership and succession

- A recruitment exercise for the Chief Executive and a succession planning exercise for key ECU roles should be undertaken, although it is recognised that the size of the Unit may impact the successful production of such a plan.

ECU funding model

Funding model and levels

- The current funding model should remain unchanged for the reasons outlined earlier in this report.
- The current funding level should be maintained and an exercise in prioritisation should be undertaken to ensure maximum value for the sector and greatest impact in key equality and diversity areas.

Resourcing

- The current level of ECU resources should be maintained and an ECU salary benchmarking exercise should be undertaken with comparator groups, to include HE diversity and equality practitioners, to market test salary levels of ECU officers.

Appendices

Responding to the review criteria

Review criteria	Response location
Criterion 1: Report on and evaluate the ECU's activities and outcomes/achievements (including the Athena SWAN programme, where appropriate) in 2006-8 against their Business Plan and key performance indicators (KPIs), including considering the ECU's performance in the different UK regions, countries and sectors (i.e. university or colleges of higher education) of the UK	Section 4: Findings Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations
Criterion 2: An evaluation of the appropriateness of the Unit's current KPIs.	Section 4: Findings Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations
Criterion 3: An evaluation of the ECU's communications activity and how effective this has been in promoting awareness of their work among key sector groups	Section 4: Findings Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations
Criterion 4: Consideration of the ECU's role in an increasingly international equality agenda	Section 4: Findings Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations
Criterion 5: A stakeholder survey, possibly including structured interviews and a questionnaire, to gauge the satisfaction and perception of the Unit's key user groups and stakeholders (including its relationship with bodies like Equality Forward).	Section 3: Methodology Section 4: Findings
Criterion 6: An evaluation of how well ECU has delivered on its new remit for equality for students in HE (extended from being focused on staff only in 2006).	Section 4: Findings Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations
Criterion 7: Clarification and evaluation of the overlap around the ECU role in the sector and boundaries for ECU work programmes and other sector bodies (e.g. students vs staff). Produce a high level mapping exercise for diversity-related activities which includes potential overlaps and funding streams	Section 4: Findings Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations
Criterion 8: To assess the likely future demands on the ECU (informed by an awareness of the expressed demand for support from institutions and future legislation) and compare them with the level and structure of the current resources available (both in pay and non-pay costs). In the context of these findings, to suggest annual funding levels and sources of funding as appropriate.	Section 4: Findings Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations
Criterion 9: To recommend how best ECU services can be delivered and what might be the appropriate business model for future delivery requirements of equality in the HE sector.	Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations
Criterion 10: Produce a report of a standard suitable for publication summarising findings and recommendations for the Funders Forum by July 2009 .	Herein

Participating individuals and organisations (equality and diversity practitioner focus group)

Name	Job title	Institution
Lorna Carson	Equality and Diversity Assistant	Coventry University
Angeline Carozza	Equality and Diversity Manager	University of the West of England
Caroline Kennedy	Harassment Officer	University of Oxford
Syd Kent	Equality and Diversity Officer	University of Essex
Mel Landells	Head of Equality and Diversity	University of Plymouth
Michelle Montgomery	HR Business Partner	Oxford Brookes University
Helen Murdoch	Equality and Diversity Manager	University of East Anglia
Jill Scott	Equality and Diversity Advisor	Birmingham City University
Christine Yates	Equality and Diversity Consultant	Imperial College London

Participating organisations (telephone and face to face interviews)

Institution	Institution	Institution	Institution	Institution
Higher Education Funding Council for England	Cambridge University	Higher Education Race Action Group (HERAG)	Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA)	Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)
Equality Challenge Unit	Queen Mary and Westfield University of London	Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network (HEEON)	Universities Personnel Association (UPA)	Stonewall
Bradford University	University College London	Association of University Administrators (AUA)	Universities and Colleges Union (UCU)	GuildHE
University of York and St.Johns	University of Ulster	Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE)	UNISON	Russell Group
University of York	Keele University	Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)	UNITE	94 Group
Birmingham University	Imperial College	Association of Heads of University Admissions (AHUA)	National Union of Students	MillionPlus
Leicester University	University of Bedfordshire	Scottish Funding Council	Committee of University Chairs (CUC)	Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)
University of Exeter	Association of Graduate Careers and Advice (AGCAS)	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	Universities UK (UUK)	Alliance Group
University of Surrey	Higher Education Academy (HEA)	Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)	Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE)	Dept of Education Northern Ireland

Board membership

Institution	Role
Universities UK	Observer status
GuildHE	Observer status
Higher Education Funding Council for England	Observer status
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	Observer status
Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland	Observer status
Scottish Funding Council	Observer status
Higher Education Academy	Observer status
Leadership Foundation for Higher Education	Observer status
Universities and Colleges Employers Association	Observer status

Name	Institution
Professor John Brooks	Chair, VC Manchester Met Universities UK nominee
Professor Grace Alderson	Bradford University
Professor Janet Beer	Oxford Brookes University Universities UK nominee
Professor Chris Brink	Newcastle University Universities UK nominee
Dr. Felicity Cooke	Oxford University
Professor Tariq Durrani OBE	University of Strathclyde
Christina McAnea	UNISON
Professor Paul Olomolaiye	University of Wolverhampton
Professor Colin Riordan	University of Essex Universities UK nominee
Barbara Stephens OBE	Open University London
David Williams	Swansea University
Professor Elaine Thomas	University College for the Creative Arts

Project steering group membership

Name	Institution
Alison Johns	Head of Leadership Governance and Management Project Sponsor HEFCE
Fariba Dashtgard	Policy Advisor Equality and Diversity Project Manager
Mel Landells	Head of Equality and Diversity Plymouth University
Paul Clark	Director of Policy Universities UK
David Allen	Registrar Exeter University

Organisational objectives and key performance indicators

Organisational Objective	Key performance indicator
To develop an authoritative system for measuring progress on equality and diversity within the higher education sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritative reference document • Resource utilised by sector • Development by the sector of meaningful KPIs, benchmarks and objectives • Development of meaningful KPIs and objectives by ECU • Increased sector and media profile for E&D practice
To support HEIs in implementing effective E&D policies and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEI sector performance on E&D, as measured against KPIs [developed in objective 1] • Involvement and support of HEI s in programmes • Reduction in legal challenges in sector • Feedback to ECU as to usefulness of initiatives and service provided • Targeted impact on specific institutions and subject matters in ECU programme • Support and engagement of staff and students in each equality group in E&D programme • Engagement of Wales and Northern Ireland in ECU programme
To support sustained institutional change in relation to equality and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly and consistently articulated case for E&D in HE sector • Creation of partnership projects inside and outside HE sector
To be an effective advocate [and effective organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E&D embedded in sector priorities • Coherence and clarity in sector for ECUs role and programme • ECU influencing E&D issues in the media • Improved credibility of ECU within and outside sector • Achievement of strategic plan

Data collection methods to inform review evaluation criteria

ECU Review 2009	Source of Evaluation Data				
ECU Evaluation Criteria	Desk research	Face to face interview	Telephone interview	Online survey	Workshop
Criteria 1: Report on and evaluate the ECU's activities and outcomes/achievements (including the Athena SWAN programme, where appropriate) in 2006-8 against their Business Plan and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) including considering the ECU's performance in the different UK regions, countries and sectors (i.e. University or Colleges of Higher Education) of the UK.	√	√	√	√	√
Criteria 2: An evaluation of the appropriateness of the Unit's current KPIs	√	√			
Criteria 3: An evaluation of the ECU's communications activity and how effective this has been in promoting awareness of their work among key sector groups.	√	√	√	√	
Criteria 4: Consideration of ECU's role in an increasingly international equality agenda	√	√			
Criteria 5: A stakeholder survey, possibly including structured interviews and a questionnaire, to gauge the satisfaction and perception of the Unit's key user groups and stakeholders (including its relationship with bodies like Equality Forward		√	√	√	√
Criteria 6: An evaluation of how well ECU has delivered on its new remit for equality for students in HE (extended from being focussed on staff only in 2006)	√	√	√	√	
Criteria 7: Clarification and evaluation of overlap around ECU role in the sector and boundaries for ECU work programmes and other sector bodies (e.g. Students vs staff). Produce a high level mapping exercise for diversity related activities which includes potential overlaps and funding streams.	√	√	√	√	
Criteria 8: To assess the likely future demands on the ECU (informed by an awareness of the expressed demand for support from institutions and future legislation etc) and compare them with the level and structure of the current resources available (both in pay and non-pay costs). In the context of these findings, to suggest annual funding levels and sources of funding as appropriate.	√	√	√	√	√
Criteria 9: To recommend how best ECU services can be delivered and what might be the appropriate business model for future delivery requirements of equality in the HE sector.		√			√
Criteria 10: Produce a report of a standard suitable for publication summarising your findings and recommendations for the Funders Forum by July 2009.	Developed from evaluation data				

High level mapping of diversity-related activities within the sector agencies

Background

To address Criterion 7, a high level mapping exercise was undertaken to establish whether there were any overlaps or duplication in the work of the ECU and other sector agencies. To inform our findings we applied a number of research methodologies to gather our information. This included the following.

Methodology

- **Face to face and telephone interviews** – questions to interviewees on where they saw the overlap or duplication between the work of the ECU and other sector agencies.
- **Focus groups** – posing similar questions to focus group attendees and exploring with them their perceptions on the nature of the work of the ECU compared to other sector bodies such as the Leadership Foundation or the Higher Education Academy.
- **Online survey** – including questions within the online survey to understand which other agencies HEIs would access for information apart from the ECU, to understand if similar services or information were accessible elsewhere.
- **Web-based research** – commissioning the PwC internal research unit to undertake internet research to identify any overlap or duplication in projects or services existing within other HEI sector agencies, as evidenced through publically available information.

Research methodology	Findings
Interviews	No evidence of overlap or duplication in the work of the ECU and other sector agencies was found; however, a number of examples of collaborative working on common themes existed. These examples were a testament to the good working relationships of the sector agencies enabling them to achieve synergies within the wider equalities themes such as race and gender.
Focus groups	There was a perception of some focus group attendees that there was some overlap of activities with the Higher Education Academy (in the area of research and inclusion issues) and UCEA (for example, in relation to flexible working), and to some extent with the Leadership Foundation and HEFCE itself. However, this could be attributed to some of the common cross-cutting held agendas of the organisations.
Online survey	The online survey findings suggest that other than the ECU, E&D practitioners would look for information from a variety of specific organisations, including Equality Forward, Amian, ACAS, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Action on Access, Universities and Colleges Employers Association, Universities UK, unions or within their own organisations. If the ECU did not exist the majority would refer to the EHRC – a body outside the sector.
Web-based research	Internet research highlighted that many of the ECU collaborative projects were undertaken with the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation and this would be entirely logical given the synergies within their remits (see next page).

Web-based research – further detail

The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

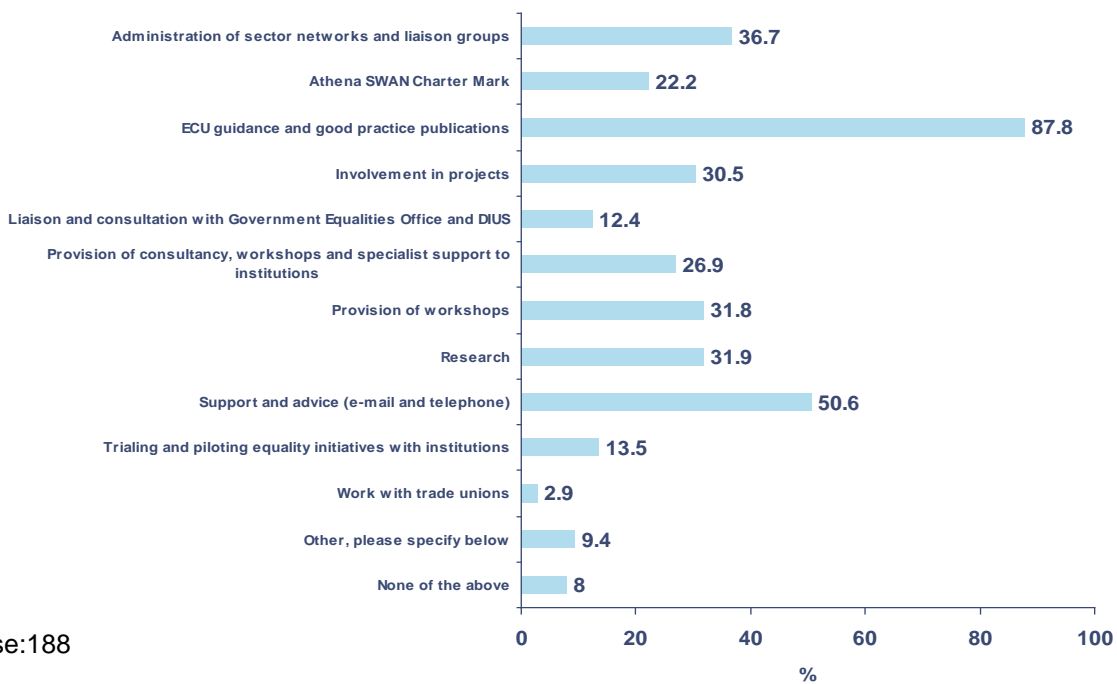
- Recently released an invitation to tender for the provision of research into 'Leading culturally diverse communities in higher education'.
- Currently working with the Equality Challenge Unit to jointly fund research into 'The role of governing bodies in promoting equality and diversity in HEIs', due for completion in summer 2009.
- Undertaking research into 'Diversity in higher education leadership'. The report was expected to be published in July 2009.

Higher Education Academy

- The Disability Equality Partnership (DEP) was funded on a three-year basis by HEFCE until December 2008. This was a tripartite agreement between the Higher Education Academy, the Equality Challenge Unit and Action on Access. The aim of the partnership was to provide a comprehensive service to help embed disability issues in all aspects of HE. A review revealed a low take-up of services and so funding has been stopped, with minimal funding continued until July 2009 to cover specific student-based activities.
- 17 research seminars are being held in 2009 in UK HEIs to promote access and success for students. These are being provided by the Higher Education Academy in association with the Equality Challenge Unit and Action on Access, building on the series of seminars offered as part of the DEP.
- Further projects that are currently being worked on by the Higher Education Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit include a Summit Programme for HEIs to enhance student access and a programme to help HEIs in involving disabled students in the creation of institutional policy and practice.
- The two bodies (ECU and HEA) previously worked together on research into ethnicity and degree attainment, with the results having been published in January 2008.

Graph 1 – use of the ECU

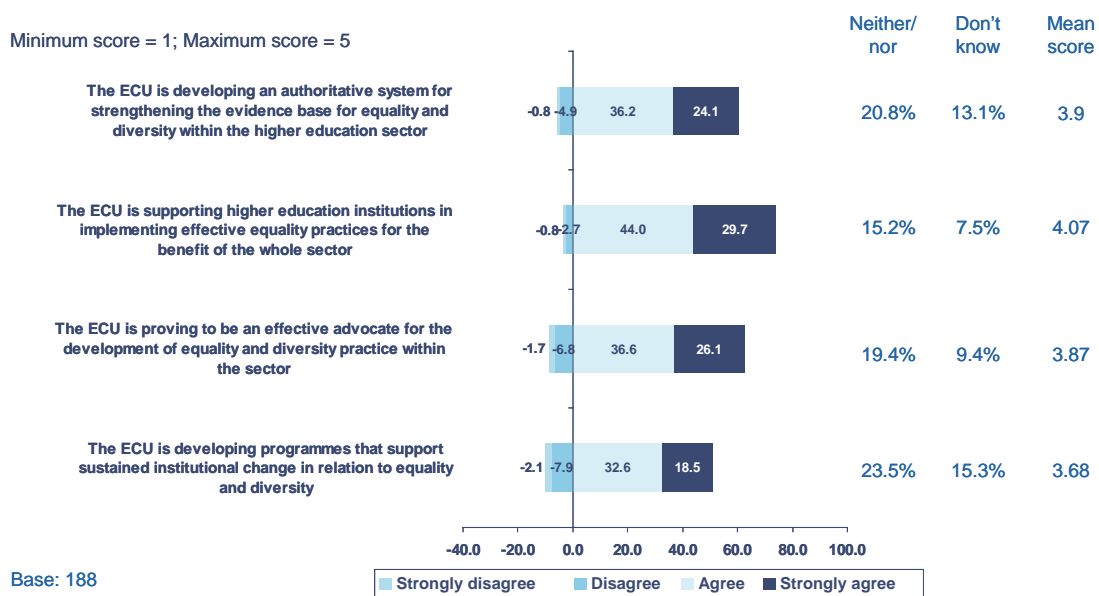
Which ECU services have you used in the last 3 years?



Multiple response question – total exceeds 100%

Graph 2 – the ECU’s objectives

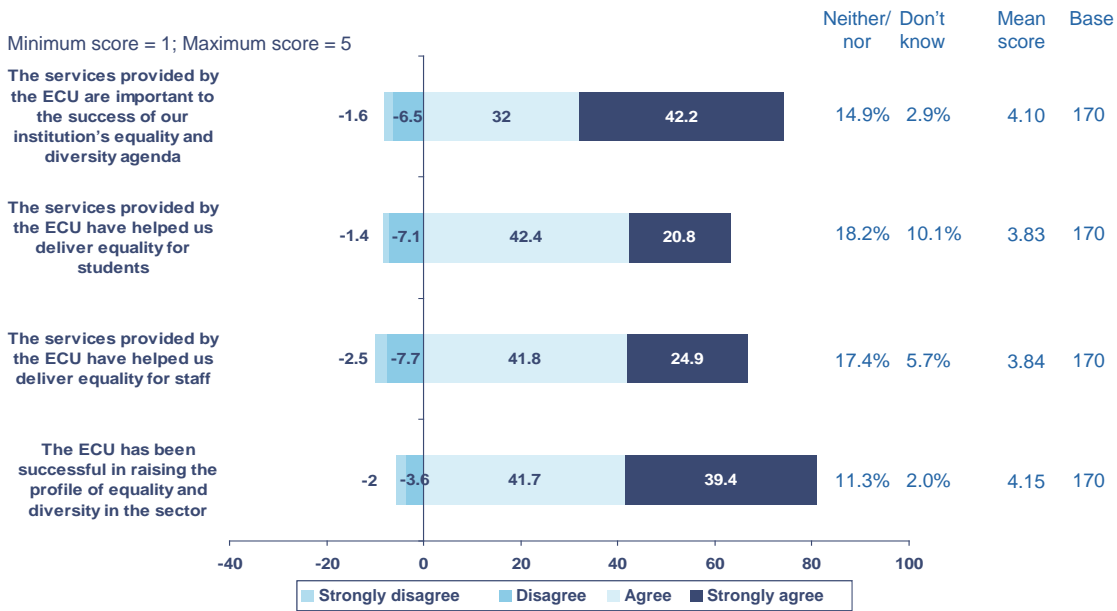
As the ECU is midway through the current review period, please rate the extent to which you agree that the ECU is working to meet its revised aims and objectives.



Graph 3 – use of the ECU

Level of agreement with the following statements

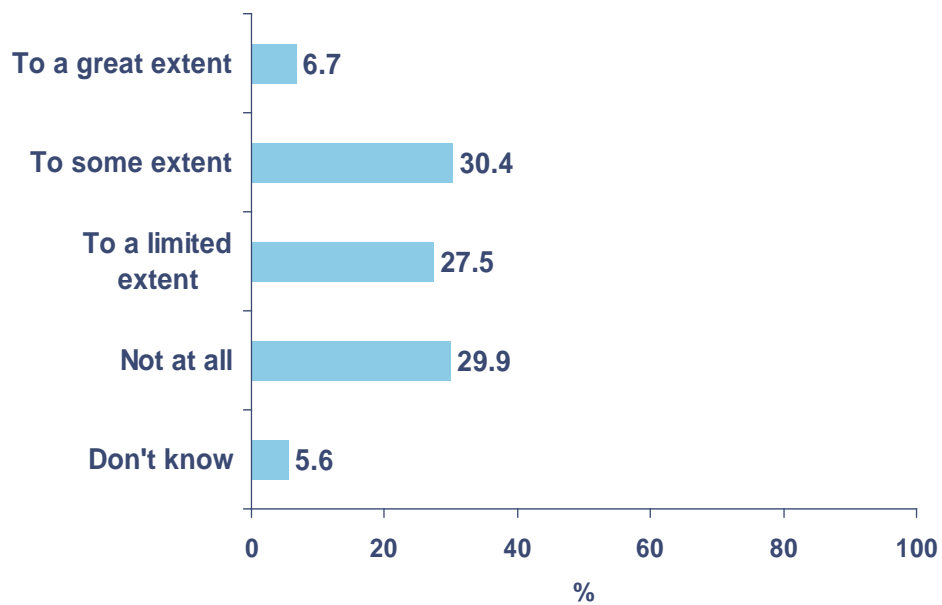
Only asked of those who **have** used ECU services in the last 3 years.



Graph 4 – specialist support and advice

To what extent did the active involvement of the ECU free up internal resource in your institution?

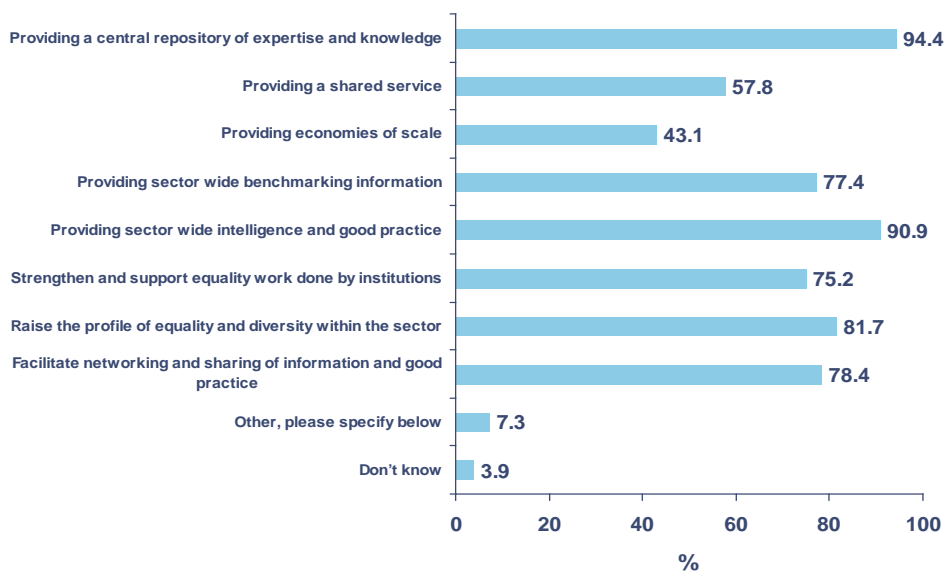
*Only asked of those who **have** sought specialist advice from the ECU in the last 3 years*



Base:68

Graph 5 – demand for ECU services

In your opinion, which of the following do you value in a sector-wide equality resource such as the ECU?



Base: 188

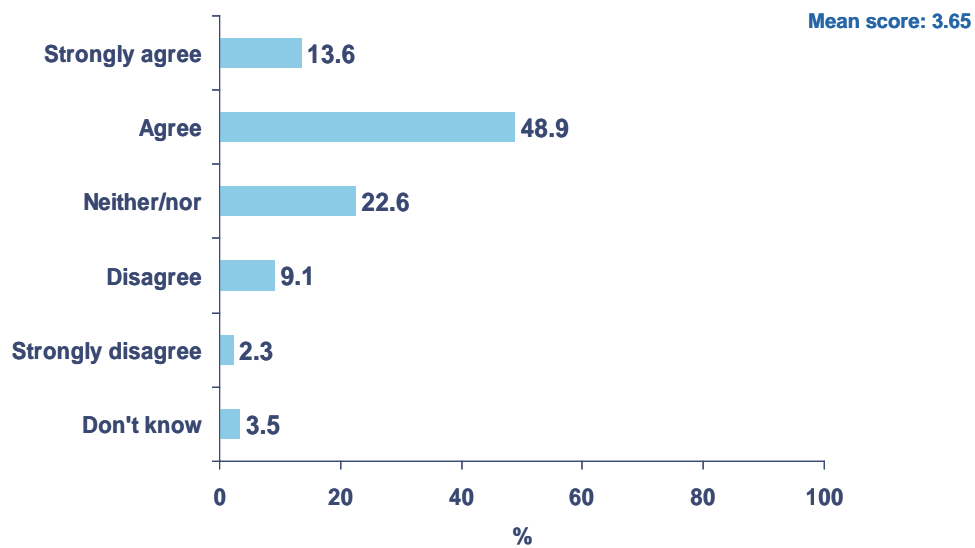
Multiple response question – total exceeds 100%

Graph 6 – the ECU’s publications and communications

To what extent do you agree that the ECU’s communication strategy is successful in raising awareness of its services?

Only asked of those who **use** ECU publications

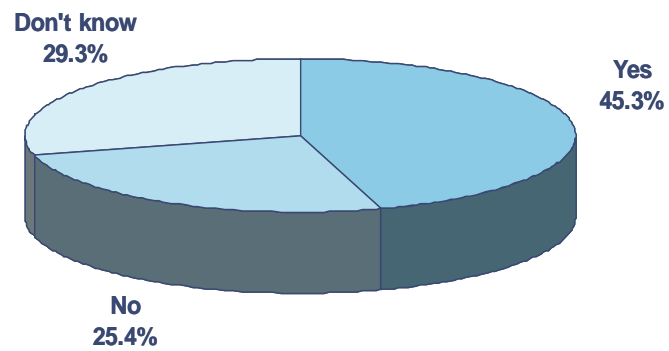
Minimum score = 1; Maximum score = 5



Base:168

Graph 7 – demand for the ECU's services

Do you feel that there are gaps in the provision of equality and diversity support within the sector?



Base:188

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