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Equal opportunities and diversity for staff in higher education

Cross-national equality and diversity

Project 5

Overview report to HEFCE, SHEFC, HEFCW by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

Overview report for cross-national study

Contents

1   Introduction

Background

1.1   Over the last five years, legislation[1] at both the EU and the national level has meant that the equality and diversity agenda has gathered in importance. Hence the need to consider what lessons can be learnt from the international scene.

1.2   PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), supported by the funding councils in Scotland and Wales, to carry out a cross-national comparative study to investigate how equality and diversity initiatives in other countries have led, or failed to lead, to significant change, and to establish any lessons that could be effectively applied to HE in the UK.

1.3   PwC worked with five partners in Australia, Belgium, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States[2]. These countries were selected for a variety of reasons. In the case of Australia and New Zealand, PwC worked with academics that have an international reputation for their research into equality and diversity issues.   South Africa was included because of its unique position in regard to the transformation process that is happening at every level of its society, and because its minority culture is the majority culture. The United States was selected because of its long history of grappling with the equality and diversity agenda. Belgium was selected to ensure there was coverage of the European dimension, and because the partner institution has worked closely with a British academic who is well known in the field of equality and diversity research.

1.4   Case studies were carried out in a total of 17 higher education institutions[3] (HEIs). These involved interviews with staff who ran or played a central role in embedding equality and diversity in their HEI. The interviews were supplemented by focus groups with a representative cross-section of the institution's staff, data collected through a pre-interview questionnaire, and other relevant documentation collected at the interview such as copies of

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[1] New race discrimination regulations came into force on 19 July 2003; sexual orientation discrimination regulations came into force on 1 December 2003; religious discrimination legislation came into force on 2 December 2003; new Disability Discrimination Act regulations came into force on 1 October 2004; sexual and sex-related harassment legislation comes into force on 5 October 2005, and age discrimination legislation comes into force on 2 December 2006.

[2] HEIs in South Africa and the United States requested anonymity, so in examples relating to those countries they are not mentioned by name.

[3] Details of how each case study institution was selected are given in the methodology section of each country report.

the equality policies. This approach was designed to ensure triangulation of our findings as far as possible.

1.5 This document provides an overview. A more detailed picture of the situation in each country can be found by consulting the country report. This rest of this section sets the scene for the reader by giving the context for the study, an outline of the methodology used at a high level, and a flavour of the findings in each country. The second section draws on a through analysis of the findings in each country in order to establish the principal cross-cutting themes of special interest. It examines the key factors[4] that underpin the success or otherwise of the equality and diversity agenda transnationally, although it should be noted that not every theme was relevant to every country.

Rationale

1.6 The purpose of the study was to provide a number of cross-national comparisons to facilitate the identification of effective policies and best practice which might be applied to the UK HE sector. The study aimed to benchmark progress of other countries which could be mapped onto that of the UK in order to provide meaningful and helpful comparisons. The study also aimed to identify barriers and obstacles which other cross-national institutions have faced, and in particular to identify the ways in which institutions have overcome such barriers – in order that this practice may be transferred to the UK. The recommendations from the research identify the ways in which such practices might transfer to the UK sector.

Methodology

1.7 A two stage approach was adopted for the case studies carried out within the HEIs. The first stage was an in-depth interview with an individual in each HEI who played a central role in equality and diversity within the institution. This was then followed up by a focus group, aiming to capture the views of a broad range of employees from the HEI.

Data collection document and interview

1.8 For the in-depth interview it was important to develop a standardised research tool to provide a common framework in which to capture findings. The data collection document (DCD) was developed through a process of consultation with the partner countries and HEFCE and the sub-steering group. The DCD was sent to interviewees in advance so that they could complete the information sought and prepare fully for the interview, consulting colleagues as appropriate. The individual within the organisation was asked to provide organisation details, staffing numbers and costs and details of equality and diversity activity. All of this information was collected through a structured questionnaire. Interviewees were also asked to provide any supporting documents such as copies of appropriate policies and

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[4] One of the key factors in the mainstreaming of equality and diversity is funding. This is implied in the report through the importance placed on top level commitment and the extent to which training activities are funded within individual HEIs.

procedures, examples of monitoring reports, the outline of any training programmes and general communication information. The final part of the DCD aimed to capture the level to which the HEI had embedded equality and diversity within its culture and structure (from Engagement to Excellence) against ten criteria:

- Top level commitment;

- Management systems and organisation;

- Organisational culture;

- Business aims and strategy;

- Communication and awareness;

- Training;

- Accountability and ownership;

- Equality/diversity action planning;

- Monitoring and adjustment;

- Problem solving.

1.9   The interviewee was asked to score each criterion and to provide evidence to support the score against each of the ratings, to identify obstacles that the organisation had encountered in arriving at its current score, and to provide information on any initiatives or activities which had enabled it to reach this level. Once the DCD had been completed, the country researcher met with the representative at the HEI in order to:

- Fully understand the information presented in the DCD and help the individual complete any sections which might have been proving problematic;

- Provide challenges to what had been presented, where appropriate;

- Request further information/evidence where this was required; and,

- Talk through the organisation and logistics of the follow-up focus group.

Focus group

1.10   Following the completion of the DCD and the interview, the interviewee was requested to set up a focus group with a range of employees from the organisation. It was requested that the group should reflect a diverse mix of employees, particularly in terms of hierarchy and where the individual sat within the organisation, as well as ethnicity, religion, gender and

sexual orientation, as far as it was possible to select. The focus group was facilitated by the individual country researcher and aimed to capture the views of the participants as regards the organisation's performance against the ten criteria set out in the maturity profile. Following an explanation of the project and a guarantee that all information would be treated in confidence, each of the criteria was defined by the researcher and then the group were invited to discuss the organisation's progress against it. At the end of each of the discussions, the group were invited to score the organisation's performance on a scale of 1-5 against the criterion. The group were not informed of the outcomes of the DCD that had been filled in, or of the scorings that the original interviewee had given for the organisation. This was in order that the group could give an impartial score which could be used as a point of triangulation against the information and scoring provided in the DCD.

Potential challenges to the methodology

1.11   The methodology adopted, although considered to be as robust as possible, has a number of potential challenges which it is important to be aware of.

Impartiality

1.12   It was important, due to the subject matter of the study, to interview in each HEI an individual who had a key role in the implementation and mainstreaming of equality and diversity initiatives within the institution. Evidently such an individual would be highly "switched on" to the equality or diversity activity within that institution, and might have a more positive view of progress under a number of equality and diversity criteria than other individuals within the organisation who were perhaps less centrally involved. Wherever possible, in providing views and scorings, the researchers requested evidence of such activity in order that the ratings could be objectively backed up. The interviewer aimed to challenge the interviewee to ensure that the DCD reflected an accurate and unbiased picture of activity within the institution.

Selection of focus groups

1.13   The research was carried out, in the majority of instances, in institutions to which the researcher did not belong. The researcher was therefore dependent on their contact within the institution (usually the individual with equality and diversity central to their role) to select the participants who would attend the focus group, and thus there was little control of this process from the researcher's perspective. Whilst it was requested that the group reflect the diversity of the institution, because of lack of control in selection the focus group may not have been fully reflective of diversity. For example, one possibility could have been for the contact to select individuals within the organisation who were particularly aware of equality or diversity initiatives, and who thus might have a biased view. The group might also not reflect the full hierarchy of the organisation – for example, support staff such as cleaners and caretakers might not be represented. It is for this reason that the researchers attempted to collect as much information pertaining to role and seniority as possible, in

order that intelligent comment might be made on the mix of the group and any bias this might suggest in views expressed.

Overview of the equality and diversity practices by country

1.14 Below we have identified in summary the areas of strengths and weaknesses in practice within each country. For more detail we recommend readers refer to the individual country reports.

1.15 The Australian case studies tended to focus on gender, in part because nationally there is the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) which requires annual returns from HEIs. There are also initiatives with indigenous people but these appear to be less well established and are less likely to be successful. For example, running an Indigenous Australian staff network has proved difficult when there are few Indigenous Australians in an institution. There was little evidence of projects addressing other equality areas such as disability or sexual orientation.

1.16 In Belgium the primary focus has also been on gender, in particular the under-representation of women at more senior levels - to the exclusion of other equality areas. This has been reinforced by the development of gender training for top level management to ensure there is agreement around the vision.

1.17 In New Zealand too the focus for equality and diversity initiatives has been on gender, and there is not a strong tradition of collecting and monitoring data. Although there is a significant indigenous population, there are sensitivities around what can and cannot be said about ethnicity. This is reflected in New Zealand census data where ethnicity is by self-identification and many individuals have yet to see that there is a reason for self-identifying. Although the Human Rights legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of race or disability or sexual preference, individuals often prefer not to disclose this personal information because of feelings of vulnerability in their work environment. Thus it is not surprising that the tertiary sector struggles to capture ethnicity data for staff.

1.18 The South African case studies are from so-called Historically White Institutions only. Historically Black Institutions were approached but felt that due to resource constraints they had not really even started to tackle this issue. The culture in the institutions with respect to equality and diversity was described in a generally negative light, as "hostile, complacent and equality unfriendly". It appears that the external legislative context has a great impact on the institutions, with a great deal of time being spent on compliance with requirements. In addition the equality and diversity function was often structured within human resources (HR) - which has tended not to prove effective.

1.19 The distinguishing feature in the United States was the role of its national agency in embedding equality and diversity, which is far more extensive than the role of many agencies involved in the collection of institutional datasets. Equality and diversity initiatives

relating to gender and ethnicity are well established and there is evidence of initiatives for disabled staff, as well as lesbian, gay and transgender staff.

2   Cross-cutting themes

Introduction

2.1   Below are the key themes which have emerged from a comparison of the case studies from the five countries in this research project. These themes are seen to represent the main success factors in embedding equality and diversity initiatives in HEIs in each of the countries profiled. The findings show, however, that each theme is not present in every country. For example there was no evidence of external networks in South Africa. There are therefore different levels of emphasis on the themes in each country, which we have endeavoured draw out.

External drivers for change - role of the national agency

2.2   In some countries in the study a key driver for change came through initiatives led by national agencies, which are often equivalent bodies to the HE funding councils in the UK. Often their remit included the collection of specific datasets, but as these tend to be driven by legislative requirements they are dealt with in the next sub-section. What is interesting here is the extent to which national and state agencies participate in diversity and equality policy-making and practices.

- In the United States, organisations lobby on behalf of HEIs at the national and state levels and bring together groups of institutional presidents and/or senior level administrators to address a range of issues including diversity and equality.

- The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) in Australia recognises HEIs that are leaders in their field with regard to embedding equality and diversity initiatives, by listing them as an 'employer of choice'.

The role of the American Council on Education (ACE)

ACE seeks to provide leadership and a unifying voice on key higher education issues and to influence public policy through advocacy, research, and programme initiatives. Access, Success, Equality, and Diversity is seen as one strand of activity which is a focal point for ACE.

Of particular interest for this study is the work of ACE's Commission on Advancement of Racial and Ethnic Equality, which advises the Council and its Center for Advancement of Racial and Ethnic Equality (CAREE) on various issues related to diversity in higher education. The Commission contributes to programmes and activities co-ordinated by CAREE and provides leadership in areas such as raising awareness, reviewing research studies around diversity, acting as mentors in leadership programmes, and facilitating connections amongst academic, corporate and philanthropic partners to promote diversity.

In addition ACE's Office of Women in Higher Education (OWHE) provides the national direction for women's leadership development and career advancement through programmatic initiatives and activities. These aim to: identify women leaders in higher education, facilitate leadership development activities for women in higher education, encourage women leaders to make full use of their abilities, advance women to senior-level positions, link women leaders at all levels to one

another, and support the retention of women in higher education.

ACE/OWHE National Leadership Forums play an important role in the continuing identification and promotion of women for senior-level positions, especially presidencies. Forums are by invitation and are held twice each year. Approximately 200 women of around 1,000 who have attended a Forum have subsequently become college or university presidents.

2.3   The example given above documents the approach taken in the United States because it provides the most comprehensive example of this type of external driver.

Key learning point

2.4   National agencies including the HE funding councils in the UK have the opportunity to stimulate change in institutions by spearheading complementary initiatives.

Legislative driver

2.5   This section focuses on the role of legislation in developing institutions' responses to equality and diversity. It is clear from the study that statutory requirements have increased awareness about equality and diversity; what is less clear is the extent of their impact on the implementation of the equality and diversity agenda.

The role of legislation at state level

The two HEIs from New South Wales indicated that external requirements had helped internal processes, and Wollongong University in particular related this to its Equality and Diversity Action Planning processes, where internal issues are examined in light of statistics and reports prepared for OEDOPE[5]. The Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Committee of the university uses this combination of information to prepare annual business and action plans for equality, which in turn form the basis for monitoring and adjustment to practice.

2.6   It has been observed that compliance has been a major activity of equality personnel in most higher education institutions studied. This is evident in the types of activities and in the data collected at institutions.   Often no more than the categories which are required by the legislation are actually collected in HEIs. For example, in Australia mandatory annual reporting on a national level to EOWA since 1986 has focused on women only, and has probably been the most significant consistent driver behind the introduction and maintenance of programmes aimed at increasing the level of participation of women in the workplace. The example below illustrates the benefits of sharing data across institutions.

Benchmarking project

A project to benchmark the progress of women staff and students over a three year period was undertaken by Auckland University with the University of Melbourne, Queensland University of

[5] Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment (ODEOPE) receives annual reports from all public bodies which address each equality target group (women, indigenous Australians, disabled people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds).

2.7   It is interesting to note the consequences of legislation on voluntary activities in equality and diversity. It may be argued that legislation and the consequent emphasis on compliance may absolve institutions from devising innovative voluntary equality and diversity activities.

2.8   A further consequence of national legislation is that it may contribute to the development of a climate in which there are higher expectations of change in organisations. This could result in staff (particularly from under-represented groups) expecting the implementation of equality and diversity. A lack of development in the institution could result in high levels of frustration, particularly within those groups that expect to benefit. This was particularly evident in some of the focus group discussions in which the slow pace of change was lamented by participants, who expected their institutions to change for their benefit

Key learning points

2.9   If there is a legislative requirement to send annual reports to a state agency, it can act as an enabler to ensuring that equality and diversity issues are raised at HEIs.

2.10   Change driven by statutory requirements does not guarantee a change in organisational cultures, as the focus is on compliance.

Institutional infrastructure

2.11   This section looks at where the person or team responsible for equality and diversity sits in the organisation. There is a range of approaches across the countries – in some HEIs the role or team report direct to the Vice-Chancellor or a Pro Vice-Chancellor, in others they are located within HR. There is more evidence to support a structure with direct links to senior management.   The exception was South Africa where there were no particular trends to note.

2.12   As well as reviewing the formal structures that operate, this section demonstrates that success is often dependent on the adoption of a number of more informal structures.

Advantages and disadvantages to being part of the HR department

- Being in HR, which is often a big department, and having access to the resources of a whole department, helps. However, there is a lack of independence.

- Being outside HR can lead to a lack of formal articulation with the HR department and hence the inability to have "line command".

Advantages of reporting direct to the senior management

- In New Zealand, the Auckland case study shows that having a unit that reports directly to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equality), who is a member of the senior management team with a strong commitment from the Vice-Chancellor, clearly works. The high visibility of such a unit also means that it is taken seriously rather than seen as a token gesture towards equality.

- In the US, in HEIs where diversity and equality were priorities, a position in the Office of the President existed or was established to provide leadership and advocacy for issues of diversity and equality. This senior-level administrator oversaw programme and policy initiatives and set the standards for diversity leadership. In two of the American HEIs, where no such position existed, diversity initiatives remained "on the ground" and did not move beyond diversity committees or particular departments and units. An example of how this operates in practice is given below.

Institution E, US

This institution was the most proactive in its approach to embedding diversity. As a large organisation, many initiatives have to be decentralised. The President's Cabinet includes a Vice-President who is also special assistant for diversity and equality. This special assistant oversees the major diversity initiatives such as the President's commissions: there are commissions for disability issues, ethnic minority issues, women's issues, and lesbian, gay and transgender issues. The Vice-President also oversees the Office of Human Relations, The Conflict Resolution Network, and the Equality Council.

Each college has an equality officer who sits on the Equality Council. The Council provides leadership in the articulation and development of affirmative action policies and procedures for the campus community. A particular focus of the Equality Council is to review and recommend, as appropriate, search and selection policies and procedures for the university and its colleges and departments.

Informal structures

2.13 A key success factor in New Zealand is the ability of those spearheading the equality agenda to establish personal links and relationships with the key change agents – generally seen to be senior academic and administrative people in the organisation. Those who did it indicated that whilst this took time, it was probably the single most effective way of influencing sustainable change.

2.14   In Australia one of the primary reasons for success in each of the four HEIs profiled came through the existence of a high level equality committee, chaired by a member of senior management that reported to the executive. Membership of the committee was usually representative of different equality and diversity interests, and included union representation, enabling issues of strategic significance to be addressed as part of the overall university management processes.

Key learning points

2.15   Of importance is the relationship between equality and human resources, particularly in gaining statistical information and influencing policy development and implementation, and the relationship between equality specialists and senior managers.

2.16   Overall, however, organisations where responsibility for equality and diversity is located in the office of the President or Vice-Chancellor tend to be more successful in driving and implementing the equality agenda. This is because the location strengthens the conceptual link between the equality agenda and other processes regarded as important by the university; and thus underlines the importance of equality as a strategic imperative.

2.17   The evidence suggests that it is not only where the equality and diversity office sits within an institution that increases impact, but also what other initiatives and informal structures are present to support its activities. In short, there is a greater likelihood of success if an office is supported by semi-formal set ups such as the "mainstreaming promoters" (a male/female team of two) in every department in Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL) in Belgium.

Leadership

2.18   It is clear from all the countries that participated that it is crucial to have champions for the equality agenda to be successful. It is particularly helpful when there is dedicated commitment from the Vice-Chancellor. However, if the head of the unit responsible for embedding the equality agenda has sufficient seniority and appropriate personal qualities, this can be effective in bringing about change.

- At one South African institution, the Vice-Chancellor rescinded staff appointments that did not follow the equality policy of the institution.

- In KUL involving middle management such as deans, as well as senior management, in development of the "gender sensitisation" strategy led to faster implementation and greater success with the change initiative long term. However a change in dean could have either an adverse or a positive effect on the change initiative; it rarely had no impact.

2.19   The Australian examples below demonstrate how champions within the top leadership team at three different HEIs have moved the equality agenda forward in different ways.

Three models of involvement of senior management within Australian universities

At Flinders the previous Vice-Chancellor was not only a strong supporter of equality, but made a strategic appointment to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor's position, appointing a woman who strongly and actively supported equality programmes and initiatives, and who then became the Vice-Chancellor. She has continued to be visibly and actively committed to equality and diversity. The Vice-Chancellor has devolved responsibility for equality planning and reporting to managers, and expects them to manage, within the policy and planning framework established, or to seek assistance to advance equality agendas.

At UTS the championing of equality has been most visible through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor role, the most influential of whom, holding the position for over ten years, prompted the comment, "…he is one of the few men of his age who has a good understanding of systemic discrimination". The Vice-Chancellor is quietly supportive, and received commendation of his understanding and support for the initiatives being taken as part of Indigenous Australian staff and student programmes. The Equality and Diversity Unit has also benefited from strong and visible leadership over the past decade. The seniority of the Director's position was seen to be an important factor in the ability to influence change.

Griffith University has had a well-supported Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equality) position for over ten years, a position that has been held by three different, but equally committed women leaders. It has also had active support and commitment from the current Vice-Chancellor during his three-year period of leadership. A female Chancellor actively committed to equality leads the University Council at Griffith, and there is a general expectation, led from the top, that Griffith will be a leader in equality and diversity. This is particularly illustrated in the place that equality and diversity have in the university's long-term vision statement, The Griffith Project, and in its strategic plans. The impact of this leadership is illustrated in the recent growth in the percentage of women in senior academic positions. This has resulted from the active endorsement of the Vice-Chancellor, and executive members, and from the recommendations of a task group report that considered the factors that impacted on women aspiring to, and achieving, academic seniority and management positions.

Key learning points for HE

2.20   The South African example shows that there are occasions when it is important to take strong action.

2.21   The KUL example indicates the importance of involving middle management in key initiatives and recognises the impact of a change in personnel - and therefore shows that sustainability of cultural change is a long, slow process.

2.22   The Australian examples illustrate that there is no single recipe for success when considering leadership. Commitment and visibility are important, as are long-term vision statements and the requirement to devolve responsibility down to managers.

2.23   In large and/or decentralised HEIs it is important to recognise that the different organisational cultures within faculties, the administrative departments, and the technical services constitute a major challenge for change management, especially in relation to equality and diversity initiatives. The prevailing organisational cultures and the autonomy of the faculties and services determine to a large extent the success or failure of the policy.

Networks and mentoring

2.24   In every country apart from South Africa, there is evidence of internal and external networks; and particularly in Belgium, Australia and the United States the internal ones were a key driver in bringing about change. To a certain extent they were integrated with initiatives such as mentoring for under-represented groups, but often mentoring and career development are considered under separate programmes.

> **The power of external networks**
>
> The primary goal for ACE for more than 25 years has been to increase the number of senior-level women by expanding the pool of qualified candidates. OWHE identifies, develops, advances, and supports women leaders in higher education through the Commission on Women in Higher Education, individual state-based networks and **THE NETWORK**, a system of interlocking networks supported by campus presidents. ACE/OWHE Leadership Awards recognise outstanding and innovative programmes, colleges, universities, governing boards, research firms, and individuals who have contributed significantly to the advancement and support of women or women's issues in higher education.

2.25   In New Zealand the impetus for change is largely external through the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, whose objective is to help workplaces adapt to and embrace the diversity of the workforce through the use of EO principles and best practice. Like OWHE, the EEO Trust does not just provide information and networking, it also gives EO awards each year. Australia also has external networks – there is a practitioners' network at state and national level and a Colloquium of Senior Women in Universities. This colloquium has developed an action plan for women which is monitored and up-dated as part of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee structure[6].

2.26   Internal networking models include a very structured network of committees supported by the Equality Unit which covers areas such as disability, women, cultural diversity and reconciliation. Separate to that network there is an Aboriginal Employment Strategy group, and there is always a representative from each target group involved in consultations and action planning.

2.27   Another model is the introduction of faculty staff focus groups and focus groups for particular equality target groups. These were set up in one HEI and are used to feed back issues to deans and to influence action planning at faculty level.

2.28   A further model is to adopt appointed and voluntary commissions dedicated to advising the President/Chancellor on issues related to diversity and ethnicity. Individuals from these groups are selected by the President and/or their departments to sit on committees. These specialised units are also able to analyse and assess the status of under-represented groups on campus and in specific areas on an ongoing basis. In one example the unit's remit included a review of the equality of resource distribution – including sabbaticals, stipends, chair appointments, and professional development opportunities. It also produces a status report that outlines the progress and status of women in various areas and departments. The report, which is made public, serves as a public accountability tool because it establishes

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[6] The following website produces more detail about the work of the Australian Senior Women's colloquium. *http://www4.avcc.edu.au/database/report.asp?a=show&committee=314&sort=committee*

benchmarks against which future progress can be compared and decisions regarding diversity training can be based.

2.29 Interestingly, attempts to set up a formal Indigenous Australian staff network at Griffith University over the past five years have met with mixed success. Feedback from staff varied, ranging from, "I don't need it," and "There's not enough staff on our campus to warrant it, and I'm not going to travel just for a network meeting," to "If there's a real issue to discuss I'll come". The Co-ordinator of the Indigenous Australian Employment programme has contact with all staff, and the role itself provides a networking link from individual or groups of staff back to key equality structures.

Key learning points

2.30 All HEIs including those in South Africa recognised the importance of networks in advancing the equality and diversity agenda.

2.31 There was evidence of different kinds of initiatives to redress the under-representation of female researchers (in particular) at HEIs - which shows that women academics in particular require support from early on in their career to reach their potential.

2.32 It is not easy to establish networks, as the attempt to set up one for Indigenous Australians has shown. It is not simply a matter of bringing individuals from a particular ethnic group together; rather it is important to recognise their individuality and the diversity of their issues and needs.

Communication, awareness and training

2.33 Communication is a key element in the mainstreaming of equality and diversity as it helps to raise awareness. Without good communication channels, there is usually a lack of understanding and appetite for training around equality and diversity issues. For example in one of the South African institutions where communication was poor, the equality officer had to cancel a series of training sessions due to lack of interest.

2.34 The size and complexity of many HEIs, particularly larger urban universities, reportedly makes communication about issues and initiatives problematic. Whilst time consuming and resource intensive, most interviewees commented that face-to-face communication – whether it is via workshops, participation in faculty/ departmental meetings, or at more individual levels – is the most effective means of ensuring both knowledge and understanding of expectations and initiatives.

2.35 This is reinforced by an observation from South Africa that the closer to the top individuals are in the hierarchy, the more access to information they have, and the more positive they are about their institution's activities in equality and diversity. Senior members tend to obtain information either by attendance at meetings, through networking, or by being briefed at the committees in which they participate.

2.36 Staff in focus groups at a number of HEIs indicated that more emphasis on training for middle managers (suggestions of mandatory training were strong) would be an effective communication mechanism and would encourage more application of what were perceived to be good policy frameworks.

Climate surveys

2.37 Another communication tool used in the United States, Belgium and South Africa is the climate survey. Institutional culture or climate is an important factor influencing both the processes and the outcomes of equality and diversity. The concept of "equality and diversity friendly" HEIs suggests institutions that have a coherent and integrated approach rather than one that focuses on compliance. Organisational climate studies attempt to measure the extent to which the prevailing culture at the institution is perceived as supportive of equality and diversity. Two institutions in the South African sample reported having undertaken climate studies. One conducted a survey on staff and students while the other examined the perceptions of staff only. Whilst the methodologies deployed were different, the documentation of the culture of the institution was critical to the development of strategies for the future management of equality and diversity.

2.38 The two most frequent climate survey methods used in the States are focus group discussions and large-scale surveys. However the latter were often conducted on an ad hoc basis. For example new Presidents at American HEIs have used climate surveys to help define their strategy going forward. The approach seem to be most effective when a combined survey and focus group method is used, as the focus group element can concentrate on areas where there were gaps from the survey.

2.39 The main disadvantages of climate surveys are that staff become less inclined to respond if they feel that voicing their views previously led to no change in the status quo. The KUL experience was that although climate surveys can have a sensitizing impact, they become one more problem for the HEI to manage in terms of how it then responds in an appropriate manner to the issues raised.

Key learning points

2.40 It is worth investing time to develop a truly consultative framework for communication that allows an effective two way flow of information. This should include as much face to face interaction as possible, and it is critical to create an atmosphere where staff of whatevergrade feel comfortable about asking questions.

2.41 Climate surveys are a useful tool if used in a systematic way and as long as the results are acted upon.

2.42 Training is less likely to be effective if good communication channels are not in place.

2.43   Initiatives targeted specifically at middle management are a key enabler in embedding the equality and diversity agenda within an institution.

Key performance indicators

2.44   The use of key performance indicators (KPIs) to embed equality and diversity is not present in every country. In part it was a suggestion that came out of the interviews in South Africa as an alternative to compliance with mandatory requirements - which was seen as resource intensive.   Also there was evidence to show that achievement of equality targets could be manipulated so as to avoid real change. More importantly, there were no consequences for under-achievement of targets set by institutions themselves. It was therefore recommended that equality and diversity be a key performance indicator to which a system of reward and penalties be tied. The hypothesis was that if there was a system which gave incentives for the mainstreaming of equality and diversity, it might generate innovative initiatives. Moreover, innovation in equality and diversity could be rewarded nationally.

2.45   The need for a similar system in Australia was demonstrated in that although all four universities rely on a comprehensive and integrated planning and reporting process and policy framework, it is more guidelines than rules-based in application. Accountability and ownership levels vary, and it emerged from discussions with both interviewees and focus group participants that establishing and maintaining middle management level accountability and responsibility remains a challenge for all universities. This is largely because these academic leadership positions tend to be two or three year appointments, necessitating a continuous process of education and support.

2.46   At Griffith University however, the Executive Group endorsed the requirement that all managers must address equality-related objectives as part of their annual performance reviews in 2001. At Wollongong equality-related performance indicators are now built into senior managers' and executive positions. The use of 360-degree feedback instruments, which incorporate equality and diversity related matters, enables feedback to be provided to the Executive Group and to managers about areas that are well established and also those that require attention.

2.47   However none of the Australian institutions has introduced sanctions for **not** meeting equality targets or not having established and workable strategies in place to achieve equality goals. Nor have any introduced specific rewards for achieving goals or introducing new initiatives.

2.48   In New Zealand, both HEIs considered that a framework and principles were a crucial first stage. However, these can be seen as more delaying tactics by the staff generally and they considered that at times there was a need to mandate actions. A lot of emphasis was placed on the role of middle management where it was seen that initiatives fell down. In response to this, Auckland University started providing awards for excellence in equal opportunities for the first time in 2003. These awards are intended to raise awareness of innovation and successful practices, and to reward high achievement.

2.49   In New Zealand, University Councils (the governing bodies) are required to monitor the equality performance of their Vice-Chancellors and this is taken seriously. There are certain monitoring requirements included under the Vice-Chancellors' performance appraisal. The Ministry of Education expects submissions to them to include strategic objectives that relate to an equality programme.   This requires evidence of programmes for Maori, ethnic minority and disabled people.

Key learning points

2.50   Although a number of the countries involved in the study endorsed the principles of a reward and penalties type system, and thought it would bring greater accountability at middle and senior management levels, there was scant evidence of this type of operation in place.

2.51   Is this an area where the UK can lead the way? Or is the prospect of defining appropriate work-related outcomes too complex and too costly for HEIs?

3   Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

3.1   It is clear from the cross-cutting themes outlined in the previous section, and the illustrative examples that accompanied them, that there is a rich diversity of practice in the HEIs of the countries involved in the cross-national equality study.

3.2   It appears that in most countries the critical driver initially for HEIs was external and was a legislative one – which is similar to the UK. Often where countries have made advances in mainstreaming equality and diversity, there has been a strong legislative framework but this has been predominantly in the area of gender. The other important external player was the national agency, in particular in the US.

3.3   A further critical success factor is leadership. Both in terms of the institutional infrastructure for these kinds of initiatives – greatest success can be seen where EO offices report direct to the senior management – and in the need for visible senior level commitment to mainstreaming equality initiatives. This gives rise to our first recommendation.

3.4   Throughout the research, there was recognition that the successful mainstreaming of the equality and diversity agenda requires involvement from senior management and engagement of staff, and cannot rely on the equality unit alone. It needs to be supported through top level commitment and informal or semi-formal structures within the organisation to ensure the engagement and buy-in of all staff, particularly those from under-represented groups. This leads to our second recommendation.

3.5   It is important to recognise that most HEIs are large operations and that to embed equality and diversity within them means bringing about culture change. This carries with it a requirement to engage middle management in the process. This study has shown that the most effective form of communication in consultative organisations such as HEIs is face to face, despite the fact that this takes longer. This leads to our third recommendation.

3.6   Finally it is clear from this study that reliance on legislation and other agencies to set targets that HEIs are required to meet tends to lead to a culture of compliance. To ensure real ownership and accountability, it is important to adopt some kind of rewards and penalties system. This is the basis for our fourth and fifth recommendations.

Recommendations

1   The Funding Councils in conjunction with Universities UK and the Committee of University Chairmen should look at influencing governing bodies so that the New Zealand model is adopted in the UK. That is, Vice-Chancellors should include a KPI amongst their objectives to show how they are furthering the mainstreaming of equality and diversity within their institutions.

2   Every HEI should set up a small task force to review the way in which the equality and diversity agenda can be most effectively led and managed within the university with regard to the way that decisions are made and carried out.

3   For successful implementation of equality and diversity initiatives, communication to explain the case for change should be in open discussion forums and targeted at middle management.

4   The higher education funding councils in conjunction with the Equality Challenge Unit should look at the possibility of setting up annual awards that celebrate HEIs' success stories in implementing the equality and diversity agenda.

5   HEIs should explore the inclusion of an equality and diversity KPI within every manager's annual objectives.

This final report has been prepared in accordance with the agreed terms of engagement and for no other purpose. We do not accept or assume liability or duty of care for any other purpose or to any other person to whom this report is shown or into whose hands it may come. This is our final report and constitutes our definitive findings.