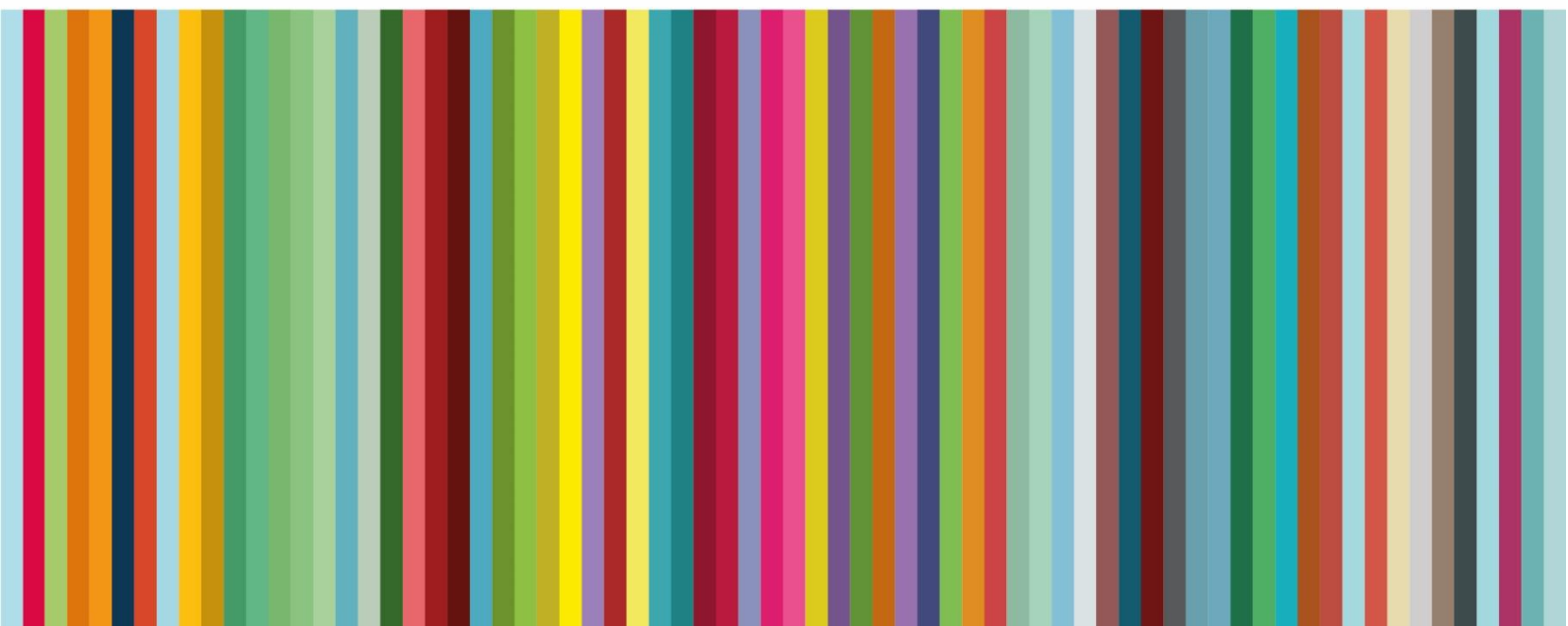


HEFCE Equality and Diversity Statement and Objectives 2016-17

March 2016/05



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To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of HEFCE-funded further education colleges HEFCE staff
Of interest to those responsible for	Equality and diversity interest groups (national groups, institutional committees, staff networks) HEFCE-related bodies Staff responsible for equality and diversity Student union officers and student representatives Higher education institutional representative bodies in England Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
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Introduction

1. This document sets out the legal and policy context for HEFCE's equality and diversity work, our rationale and approach to this work, and the objectives we have set for the next two years. It replaces HEFCE's Equality and Diversity Scheme 2012-2014 (HEFCE 2012/03)¹.
2. All of the objectives and actions presented in this document link to the work packages laid out in the HEFCE Business Plan 2015-20², with the student interest at the heart of the document's development. HEFCE's internal equality objectives relating to our role as an employer will be published separately on the 'Equality and Diversity' pages on the HEFCE website³.

The legal framework

3. The Equality Act 2010 puts a **general duty** on public sector bodies (including HEFCE and higher and further education institutions) to:
 - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who do and do not share a protected characteristic
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share a protected characteristic.
4. Public bodies must meet this general duty both as employers and as providers of public services, and show 'due regard' to the duty across all of their functions. It is referred to as the 'public sector equality duty'.

¹ Available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2012/201203/.

² Available at www.hefce.ac.uk/about/plan/.

³ See www.hefce.ac.uk/workprovide/ed/.

5. The nine 'protected characteristics' referred to are:
- age
 - disability
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage and civil partnership
 - pregnancy and maternity
 - race
 - religion or belief
 - sex
 - sexual orientation.
6. The general duty is underpinned by **specific duties**, for which there are the following requirements:
- a. To publish annual information demonstrating compliance with the general duty. This should include information on employees and people affected by HEFCE's services who share a protected characteristic. HEFCE fulfils this by publishing its Annual Equality and Diversity Report.
 - b. To publish objectives setting out how HEFCE will meet the requirements of the Act at least every four years. This document fulfils this legal obligation.
 - c. To ensure that such published information is accessible to the public. HEFCE achieves this by ensuring that both our Annual Equality and Diversity Report and our Equality and Diversity Statement and Objectives are published on the HEFCE website.
7. HEFCE also promotes equality between different socio-economic groups, as well as other groups under-represented in higher education. This has long been part of our widening participation policy, as people from less privileged socio-economic groups are generally less likely to go into higher education, and experience worse educational outcomes once there.

Context: equality and diversity in the higher education sector

8. Much progress has been made towards greater equality and diversity in the higher education sector in recent years, especially since the advent of the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010. There is also a growing political imperative to address disparities in participation and outcomes, as well as improving social mobility. The success stories span all protected characteristics (as well as socio-economic background) and can be seen in all facets of university activity.
9. For instance, there is a trend towards greater diversity in the professoriate, with more female and black and minority ethnic (BME) professors than ever before. Similarly, an increasing number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds are entering higher education. Governing bodies are becoming more diverse, as is the pool of researchers put forward for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014.

10. However, certain positive trends should not obscure the fact that the pace of change is slow and large disparities and inequalities remain in many areas. For example, if the proportion of female professors continues to increase at the same rate as it has over the past 10 years, it will take another 40 years for women to reach parity with men. The proportion of female vice-chancellors and principals is stuck at 19 per cent, the same figure for the past three years. On average, 16 per cent more white undergraduate students achieve first or 2:1 degrees than their BME counterparts. There is also a growing awareness of intersectional inequalities: for example, white boys from the most disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are the least likely of the young population to enter higher education. An analysis of the most recent equality data can be found in HEFCE's Annual Equality and Diversity Report 2015.

11. Beyond these numerical illustrations of inequality, there are questions of institutional cultures and staff and student experiences. Recent research by the National Union of Students has revealed the extent of sexual harassment and hate crime on campuses, in response to which the Government has convened a working group led by Universities UK. In a similar vein, the Equality Challenge Unit has carried out various pieces of qualitative research showing the day-to-day inequalities faced by transgender staff and students and those with disabilities.

Rationale

12. Beyond legislative compliance, HEFCE has developed a clear rationale for working to enhance equality and diversity in the higher education sector.

13. This has two key tenets, the first of which is the **business case**. Embedding equality of opportunity and fostering diversity are essential for creating the conditions for an excellent higher education system. This has already been recognised in HEFCE's Business Plan, as well as in government targets for widening participation. For society at large, it is vital that academia draws on all available talents for the development of human capital, and there remain a number of obstacles to this. Moreover, a wealth of research shows that more diverse communities of staff and students are more productive.

14. Secondly, there is the **social justice case**. HEFCE is uniquely placed to support the higher education sector in addressing wider social inequalities and ensuring that staff and students are treated fairly. Equality should lie at the foundations of academia, as required by the public sector equality duty; neither students nor staff should be discriminated against or inhibited on the basis of any protected characteristic. Universities should also be taking active steps to foster good relations between equality groups.

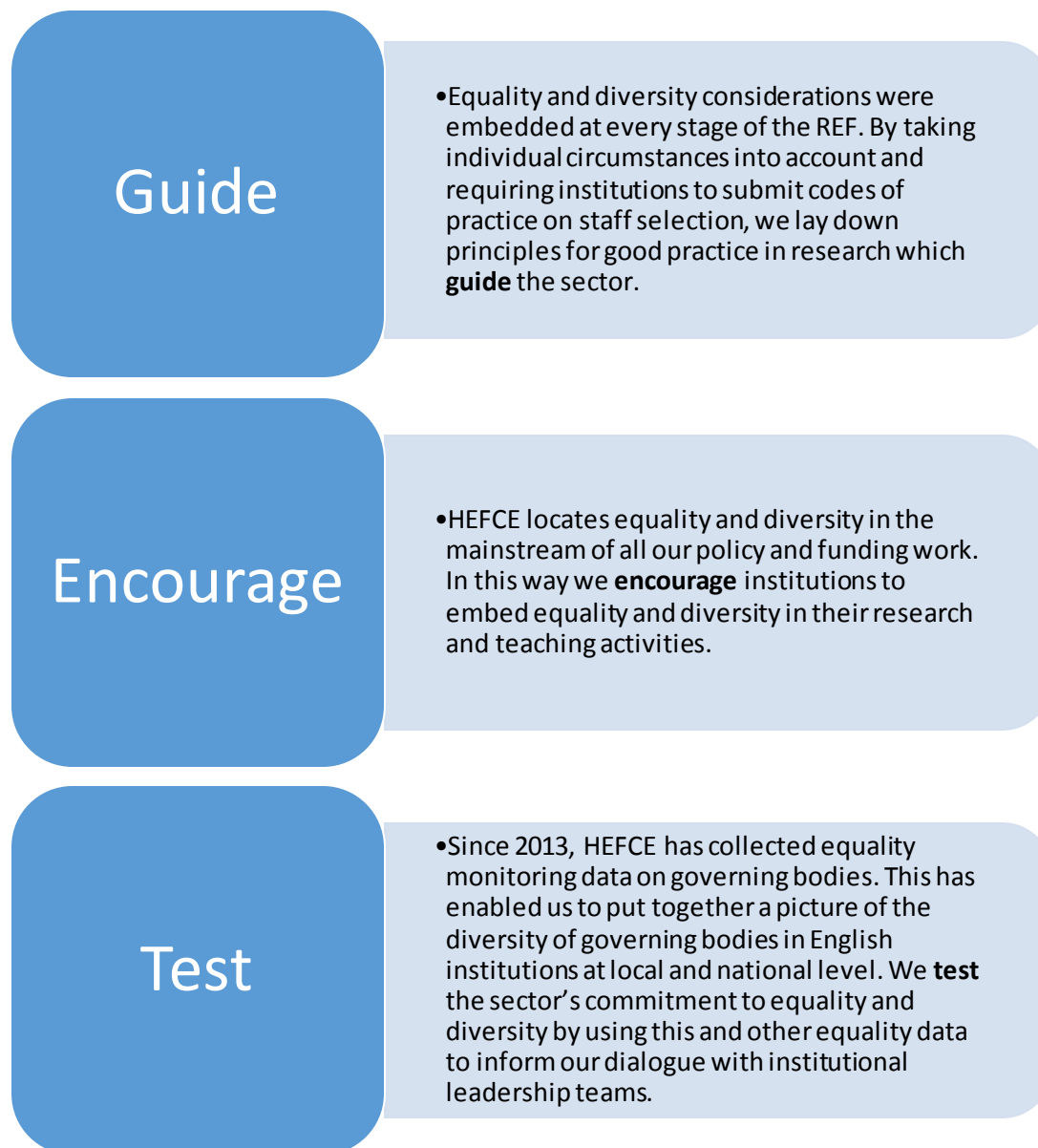
Approach

15. Our approach to equality continues to be **to guide, encourage and test** that equality is being considered across the sector, while recognising that each institution is responsible for its own compliance and judgment as to what actually needs to be done.

16. With the exception of one specific and numerical equality objective, included in our Business Plan as a spur to address the chronic under-representation of women on university governing bodies, in general our approach to equality and diversity **does not include target setting** for institutions. While HEFCE promotes an active and conscientious attitude to equality across the sector, institutions should prioritise the

challenges they face individually and develop their own actions to address them. Compelling all institutions to focus on specific issues would infringe their own legal obligation to demonstrate due regard to the public sector equality duty, and reduce their capacity to tailor their own equality strategies.

Figure 1: Examples of HEFCE's approach to equality and diversity



Working in partnership

17. We adopt a partnership model in our equality and diversity activities, working with numerous sector bodies and providers to apply our approach to equality. Some examples of this approach are described below. We aim to work and engage with a broad set of stakeholders, including sector bodies and representative groups, student and trades unions, and HEFCE-funded organisations. In institutions we speak to a range of contacts, liaising with senior leaders on strategic approaches to equality challenges and with equality practitioners on specific issues. This approach has the advantage of taking a

diversity of views into account and enabling us to access hard-to-reach groups and networks. We also liaise with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and relevant public authorities, including Research Councils UK and the Office for Fair Access, on emerging equality priorities.

Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)

ECU is regarded as the key advisory and policy organisation on equality and diversity for the higher education sector. It was funded by HEFCE from 2002 to 2015, and is now funded in England via institutional subscriptions. ECU has advised us during the formulation of this statement and objectives.

Diversity Summit

Following a request by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills in HEFCE's 2013 grant letter, to address the lack of diversity in governing bodies and senior leadership roles, HEFCE brought together the chairs and chief executives of the organisations which represent the higher education sector's leadership and governance to tackle the diversity challenge⁴. Among other activities this group has commissioned research on university leaders' rationale for equality and diversity⁵, and organised a symposium on diversity drivers in higher education in 2014. The group is currently engaging with the 30% Club⁶ and Women on Boards⁷ to share learning and good practice between the corporate and university sectors. The summit provides a forum for collaboration and for support to each other's existing equality strategies.

Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE)

Since its establishment in 2004, HEFCE has been a core funder of the LFHE, on whose agenda equality and diversity have always been high. HEFCE continues to provide grant funding to the LFHE for a range of leadership and governor development initiatives in the sector, including those which support equality and diversity. For example, in academic year 2015-16, HEFCE is supporting an expanded Aurora programme for aspiring female leaders, and the development of a new programme for future BME leaders.

⁴ Convened by HEFCE, this group includes the Committee of University Chairs, the ECU, Guild HE, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, the Universities' and Colleges' Employers Association and Universities UK.

⁵ 'The rationale for equality and diversity: How vice-chancellors and principals are leading change', ECU 2014, available at www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/rationale-equality-diversity-vice-chancellors-principals-leading-change/.

⁶ See <http://30percentclub.org/>.

⁷ See www.womenonboards.co.uk/.

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The EHRC is the principal regulator and monitor of the public sector equality duty, as well as the public authority responsible for protecting and promoting equality and human rights in the UK. We have a positive and constructive relationship with the EHRC and engage in its regulatory forum and working groups, where we can advise on the content of guidance for the higher education sector. The commission was engaged in the development of our equality and diversity objectives, and we regularly discuss emerging policy challenges with it, such as the implementation of the 'Prevent' duty in higher education.

Accountability and reporting progress

18. We ensure equality activity is taken into account across HEFCE's various policy fields by embedding it through our Equality and Diversity Steering Group. The steering group is chaired by HEFCE's Head of Human Resources, who is a member of the Executive Group.

19. The responsibility for implementation within a policy area rests with the relevant HEFCE directorate. Progress towards meeting objectives is reported to the HEFCE Board on an annual basis.

HEFCE's Equality and Diversity Objectives 2016-17

20. The table below presents HEFCE's 10 top-level equality objectives, along with actions in support of each of them. They cover the calendar years 2016 and 2017. An action plan laying out further details and timeframes for these actions will be published on the HEFCE website and updated annually.

Objective 1

To maintain and develop our equality objectives and action plan, and take an active approach in addressing key equality and diversity challenges as they arise in the higher education sector.

- We will use our authoritative voice to draw attention to sector-wide equality issues arising from analysis by our Analytical Services Directorate of a range of sources of data (for instance from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, the National Student Survey and the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey). We will also reflect institutional-level data in our dialogue with individual institutions. Where system-wide issues persist, we will advise the Government on creating innovative and effective solutions.
- We will ensure that equality impacts are monitored across all fields of policy, including through our impact assessment process, and respond to any equality challenges arising from these assessments.
- We will support and advise the Government in monitoring progress towards and meeting national equality aspirations and targets.

Objective 2

To support the sector in achieving a diverse and representative higher education workforce, especially at leadership level and in other areas where specific under-representation is apparent.

- Building on the success of the Aurora programme for future female leaders, we will provide funding to the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education to establish positive action development programmes, including a BME leadership programme.
- We will analyse and report publicly on the representation of equality groups at different levels of academic and professional career pathways in higher education, to raise awareness of the disparities (including intersectional disparities).
- We will enhance our understanding of “what works” in achieving tangible progress towards greater equality and diversity in the higher education workforce (such as charter marks, training and development, and positive actions), and work with partners.

Objective 3

To support the sector in addressing inequalities in research.

- We will work with a range of stakeholders to identify opportunities to raise awareness of equality and diversity in research careers.
- We will continue to work with Vitae and other funding bodies, including Research Councils UK, to implement the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers⁸.
- We will build on the success of equality measures implemented through REF 2014 to further embed equality and diversity in research, with a particular focus on ensuring that future research assessment processes promote and encourage equality and diversity.
- We will gather evidence on research culture, assessment and management, and develop policy that encourages good practice in promoting equality, for example by raising awareness of unconscious bias and protected characteristics.

⁸ See <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat-to-support-the-career-development-of-researchers>.

Objective 4

To support the sector in diversifying its governing bodies.

- We will actively seek to promote greater diversity on university governing bodies: HEFCE has already set a target of 40 per cent for the proportion of women on governing bodies by 2020, and we will encourage progress toward greater ethnic diversity and across other protected characteristics. As part of this, we will investigate ways of enhancing the equality monitoring of governing bodies.
- We will continue to convene the Diversity Summit partnership, through which we will identify further actions to make progress in this area, such as:
 - Supporting research into the role of executive search firms in recruiting to senior positions in higher education.
 - Forming partnerships with relevant organisations from the corporate world to share good practice and identify solutions.

Objective 5

To re-focus the Student Opportunity allocation to provide more funding to institutions with higher proportions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and to deliver a geographically-targeted national programme of collaborative outreach from 2016-17 to 2019-20. This will directly support the Government's ambitions to double the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds entering higher education by 2020, compared with 2009, to increase the number of BME students going into higher education by 20 per cent by 2020, and to improve the participation of young white men from lower socio-economic groups.

Objective 6

To translate into practice the evidence we have gathered on differential outcomes – in terms of retention and success in higher education, and progression to postgraduate study and employment – by supporting a significant improvement in the scale and dissemination of interventions to address these disparities.

Objective 7

To support the Government to implement the new masters loans scheme, including through evaluation of its take-up and impact among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We will explore through our teaching funding consultation the possibility of introducing funding to support progression to postgraduate education by students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Objective 8

To support the Universities UK Social Mobility Advisory Group to identify challenges, develop sector ambitions, and determine actions to improve access and success among students from disadvantaged groups, and to support the sector and Government on the implementation of the Group's advice.

Objective 9

To continue to conduct robust and influential research and analysis into issues across the student lifecycle, identifying the key challenges and responses for participation and student success in higher education.

Objective 10

To stay alert to potential equality and diversity impacts arising from relevant higher education bodies' compliance with the Prevent duty.

- We will work with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to identify how equality and diversity will be taken into account in HEFCE's monitoring framework for the Prevent duty, specifically in fostering good relations between different groups.