

## **POLICY STATEMENT ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

### **1. Context and Rationale**

#### **1.1 The National Legislative Framework**

Nationally there is clear evidence of inequality in life chances, including inequality of opportunity in education, on the basis of colour, sex, ethnic origin, age, social class and physical disability. Such inequalities are, in part, the consequence of direct and indirect discrimination within many organisations, including educational institutions.

The national legislative framework, of which the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, the 1976 Race Relations Act and the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act are major elements, already provides one important rationale and guide for equal opportunities policies. These Acts make it illegal to discriminate, directly or indirectly on the basis of sex, colour, race, nationality and ethnic or national origin and, without lawful justification, on the grounds of disability.

#### **1.2 Institutional and Professional Context**

The mission of The University of Wolverhampton commits the institution to become the first-class regional University, which includes widening access to higher education for currently under-represented groups of students, particularly mature and ethnic minority students and to maintaining and strengthening local and regional commitments.

The majority of national educational and training organisations in higher education including the DfEE, HEFCE, CBI and CPD have publicly stated their commitment to widening access to Higher Education and to the removal of other aspects of educational inequalities.

The University as a large employer and as a provider of educational services takes into account the requirements of the law and the examples provided by the above organisations.

### **2. Policy Statement**

#### **2.1 General Principles**

University policy and practice will be concerned with the prevention of both direct and indirect, overt and covert discrimination, and the promotion of justice and equality. This necessitates both the removal of existing educational barriers and positive attempts to create new opportunities.

The University seeks to promote equality of opportunity for all, and to eliminate discrimination, particularly on grounds of colour, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, age, disability, religion and socio-economic background. The University requires staff, students and visitors to behave in a non-discriminatory manner and to support, implement and develop institutional practices and procedures that promote and reinforce equality of opportunities and treatment for all.

The University is committed to working towards the creation of additional educational and employment opportunities for groups currently under-represented among students and staff and to ensuring that access to these opportunities is not obstructed by conditions or requirements that cannot be justified.

## **2.2 Policy Priorities: Accessibility and Equity**

The widening of access to the institution will be encouraged by policies and practices which foster accessibility to:

- information;
- guidance;
- funding and financial support;
- admissions procedures;
- credit for existing skills and knowledge;
- relevant knowledge and curricula;
- buildings;
- a variety of courses and modes of study;
- differing learning processes;
- a supportive environment;
- a variety of certification and accreditation mechanisms;
- a range of vocational and occupational outcomes.

Equity for staff and students will be supported by policies and practices which foster:

- flexible and fair student admissions procedures;
- equitable recruitment and promotion procedures for all staff;
- a staff composition which reflects more closely that of the student composition;
- a non-sexist, non-racist and supportive working environment;
- a curriculum which reflects the needs and interests of a wide range of student groups;
- a monitoring and feedback system capable of pinpointing inequalities where these are occurring;
- a complaints and support system which can operate quickly, informally and with effect;
- an involvement of staff and students in the key decisions which affect their educational lives.

## **3. Implementation of Principles**

### **3.1 General**

The implementation of this equal opportunities policy is the responsibility of all members of staff and students, as part of their normal activities as members of an academic and social community.

It is the particular responsibility of the Board of Governors and the University Executive to initiate, oversee and monitor the implementation of the policy.

Implementation strategies comprise:

- 3.2 The generation, dissemination and monitoring of specific guidelines integral to furthering equal opportunities practices.
- 3.3 An Equal Opportunities Advisory Committee responsible to the Vice-Chancellor and Board of Governors and reporting to them once a year.

This committee will advise on policy matters concerning equal opportunities, particularly in terms of priorities for action, suggest new initiatives, participate in the monitoring of the effectiveness of implementation strategies and the achievements of Equal Opportunities targets, recommend positive actions policies where these are deemed to be necessary and identify extra resources for the funding of pilot projects where possible.

The committee will include representatives nominated by:

Board of Governors	1
Academic Board	1
Students	3
Recognised Trade Unions	2
Schools/Departments	11
Administrative, Professional, Clerical & Technical staff - female	1
Manual staff - female	1
Chairperson of Disabilities Action Group	1

representatives of groups within Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall, and representatives of departments with a significant role in equal opportunities are co-opted as appropriate for their expertise and interest.

The committee is serviced by the Clerk to the Board of Governors or his nominee. It is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor or his nominee.

### 3.4 Specific responsibilities

Specific responsibilities for Equal Opportunities will be written into the job descriptions of members of the University Executive, Senior Managers, and academic and administrative posts at School level. This will enable staff responsibilities to be established which:

- monitor the social composition of staff, oversee selection procedures and report regularly to Academic Board;
- maintain a rolling programme for the improvement of physical access to buildings;
- provide equipment and support to enhance the learning of students with disabilities;
- develop a marketing and publicity strategy with a clear Equal Opportunities focus;
- monitor student admissions, retention and success;
- feedback relevant and useful information for recruitment and course evaluation to Schools;
- aid the implementation of the Equal Opportunities elements in complaints, grievance and disciplinary procedures;
- facilitate the delivery of Equal Opportunities elements in staff development programmes.

### 3.5 Equal Opportunities Unit

This will be located within the University Counselling and Guidance Service, and adequately staffed for the tasks demanded of it. The terms of reference of this unit will vary in accordance with the resources available to it, but will include:

- market research, community liaison and publicity among a range of under-represented groups;
- the promotion of access and accessibility to the institution;
- counselling, advice and student support on Equal Opportunities;
- the monitoring of the responsiveness of internal systems;
- the generation of research and externally funded projects supportive of Equal Opportunities developments;
- the provision for information to staff on the needs of and resources available for students with disabilities;
- the co-ordination of admissions procedures and support for students with disabilities.

Revised Policy approved by the Board of Governors on 6th July 2000