

## **RESPONSE to the SFC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT “EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY SUPPORT IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES”**

### **The next stage for equality support**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The following outlines the response from James Watt College in respect of the SFC’s equality and diversity support proposals. It consists of a generic comment followed by answers to the overarching question and questions 1 – 5 in the consultation document.

#### **GENERIC COMMENT**

There is agreement around the strategic focus of the consultation however this pre-supposes that individuals, institutions, sectors and partners are clear about what they need in terms of equality support around their own strategic planning focus and how that complements the SFC’s aspiration to drive forward equality improvements across the sectors.

This could have an impact on the shape of the proposals identified under different operating levels of provision.

#### **OVERARCHING QUESTION**

***Is the four-level approach to equality and diversity an appropriate structure around which to design and implement future delivery mechanisms and initiatives?***

On reading the four levels it is hard to resist the temptation to interpret them as a ladder of achievement against which the sectors can self assess and be measured against.

The reality is more of a continuous improvement cycle which can be challenged by an institution’s ability to demonstrably evidence structural progress, sustainability and societal impact.

The progress being made within institutions will doubtless dictate the different levels of access and engagement depending upon what support they are looking for.

Regarding the references to:

- Developing core standards
- Monitoring and measurement
- Demonstrating leadership and ownership across institutions
- Peer led quality enhancement and/or external assessment

It's not clear but it could be interpreted within the document that there is thinking around linking the proposals to funding to institutions' ability to demonstrate through assessment improvements against the levels.

### ***Operating levels and areas of focus***

#### ***Level 4***

Clearly the SFC is considering how it might measure this aim and identifies external standards assessment as well as peer-led enhancement mechanisms.

It may be that as part of the consultation this thinking gets clearer but the aspiration to mainstream equality is to be welcomed and in particular the acknowledgement of making connections across institutional functions.

Some associated questions are:

- Is the SFC proposing to produce a set of external standards for colleges and universities to self assess against?
- Is the SFC proposing to influence existing external assessment mechanisms to incorporate agreed equality standards?

A corresponding observation is:

- Standards only gain credibility if they are applied consistently and subject to 'fit for purpose' measurement frameworks.

#### ***Level 3***

The ownership and visibility around equality beyond the institution specialist is also welcomed as is the representation of equalities within institution leadership roles.

This will provide opportunities for leading work around equality and diversity which will make connections and understand the big issues such as the ways in which education can and should have an impact e.g. on job segregation within society.

Related questions are:

- What will the knowledge exchange proposal look like?
- How will the representative leaders be identified?

#### ***Level 2***

Capacity building through research, support and guidance is a given.

The development of core standards and measures for monitoring as outlined would instil a performance improvement perspective around the equality

agenda which could be shaped through the development of 'key equality targets'.

The reference to partnership work is interpreted as the process through which the standards and measures will be produced using the knowledge which exists around assessment frameworks.

This should link in to the aspirations for systemic change outlined at level 4 and is to be welcomed.

The question and comment arising in this connection are:

- Is there scope in this proposal to include equality specialists in the development of any standards and monitoring procedures?
- Identifying need, opportunity and impact will require some freedom and flexibility at local level to provide institutions with the ability to formulate actions to address local demographics and experiences.

### ***Level 1***

There is a value in providing a range of sources of advice and guidance and this is recognised in the proposal through website/toolkits/reports/events and seminars.

It may be that equality practitioners will choose to informally gather to share expertise and common challenges. In recognition of this the SFC may wish to consider this as a natural consultative network around specialist equality practice or an Equality Community of Practice role for Scotland's Colleges. As such it will require a level of resourcing.

The comment and question here are:

- That an over – reliance on self managed learning and development might disadvantage practitioners new to the equality and diversity field without the support of a contact network.
- More practically - how will the maintenance of the proposed website be achieved?

### ***How this approach will be delivered***

The new support system being proposed will be subject to best value performance measurement and again this is to be welcomed. It would be useful if the SFC share this best value measure and the way in which it will be monitored and reported on.

It is suggested that more thinking needs to be done around the implementation of the proposed strategic framework including who the partners might be and how delivery can be shared with other agencies and who they might be.

It is accepted that funding is yet to be finalised and will be informed by the consultation.

**What follows is the James Watt College response against each of the questions in the consultation.**

*Question 1*

*What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in the implementation of Level One – Advice and Information?*

- a. How will implementation of Level One impact on governance?*
- b. How will implementation of Level One impact on learning and teaching?*
- c. How will implementation of Level One impact on student/staff support and experience?*
- d. What mechanisms might be used to enable the implementation of Level One?*

**The challenge here is ‘if individuals don’t know what they don’t know’ is this the best way to fill the knowledge gap?**

**For the proposals at level 1 to work E&D requires to be built into the institution’s processes and systems. This will provide the ‘trigger’ for individuals to consider E&D as a part of practice or decision making and/or change in order to test that their level of knowledge is up to date.**

*Question 2*

*What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in the implementation of Level Two – Targeted development and capacity building?*

- a. How will implementation of Level Two impact on governance?*

**The development of core standards offers the structure to provide a framework for performance on E&D.**

**Partnership opportunities offer the potential to enhance the impact of equality and diversity work at community/local and regional levels.**

- b. How will implementation of Level Two impact on learning and teaching?*

**The opportunities to target research, support and guidance could be beneficial to measuring how educational interventions have impacted on society as a whole e.g. work on gendered learning choices having an impact on job segregation.**

c. *How will implementation of Level Two impact on student/staff support and experience?*

**Research support and guidance can be measured against equality data to test if different learners have different experiences. The quantitative data can be used to identify appropriate actions for change. However methods of capturing qualitative data through group or electronic means would enhance the hard data findings.**

**Attainment and achievement levels by equality data is also another way of testing the value and impact of learning on different groups of individuals.**

**Learner engagement is encouraged as part of the process as an internal 'critical friend' to measure the experience of learning and education delivery.**

d. *What mechanisms might be used to enable the implementation of Level Two?*

**Having a measurement framework approved which has been put together by a range of contributors from education. This would help with ownership and 'buy-in' in making use of the framework.**

**The measurement framework could be used as a self assessment model supported by external peer assessment.**

### *Question 3*

*What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in the implementation of Level Three – Equalities Leadership?*

a. *How will implementation of Level Three impact on governance?*

**The opportunities contained within this option are to have a visible means of demonstrating ownership of equality and diversity within the governing systems, structures and processes.**

**The challenges for organisations will be:**

- **leadership confidence to represent and take forward and expand the equality agenda.**
- **leadership capacity where confidence is an issue**

b. *How will implementation of Level Three impact on learning and teaching?*

**Implementation offers opportunities to embed E&D within the different professional sectors through sound quality management processes.**

**Again the challenge will be one of confidence to represent and take forward equality issues outwith the professional specialism.**

*c. How will implementation of Level Three impact on student/staff support and experience?*

**If leadership on E&D exists at every level then the impact on staff and students would be significant.**

**E&D would cease to be a parallel process but be integral to the issues and matters of importance for staff and students.**

**The subsequent impact on organisational culture would also be significant.**

**Again the challenge will be one of confidence to represent and take forward equality issues outwith the professional specialism**

*d. What mechanisms might be used to enable the implementation of Level Three?*

**The key mechanisms here are:**

- **Communication**
- **Education**
- **Engagement.**

*Question 4*

*What do you see as the opportunities and challenges in the implementation of Level Four – Systemic change/Integration?*

*a. How will implementation of Level Four impact on governance?*

**The key opportunity here will be the inter-connectedness of equality and diversity with the organisation's operational and strategic functions. It should create a 'line of sight' through which E&D will be a connecting and integral thread.**

**The challenge for institutions is that often the change driver is not founded on issues of values and behaviour but rather capacity and finance issues.**

*b. How will implementation of Level Four impact on learning and teaching?*

**The key here is quality and equality being considered as the same function – there cannot be quality education service delivery without recognising the impact of equality.**

**The challenge for organisations will be one of:**

- **quality confidence to represent and take forward, integrate and expand the equality agenda**
- **quality capacity where confidence is an issue.**

*c. How will implementation of Level Four impact on student/staff support and experience?*

**It comes back to inter-connectedness.**

**Students are able to make connections through their learning and experience. What is said – is reflected in experience.**

**Staff are able to understand how equality impacts on the ‘job that I do’.**

*d. What mechanisms might be used to enable the implementation of Level Four?*

**Having a measurement framework in place which is:**

- **considered to be relevant and practicable**
- **used with consistency**
- **helpful rather than unhelpful**
- **simple and straightforward**

**Having a measurement framework in place which adds value and is not considered cumbersome and a ‘tick-box’ exercise.**

*Question 5*

*What other mechanisms or level of support should be considered by SFC with regards to equality and diversity?*

*Please use your response to include any other areas of work that you believe SFC should know about and understand in order to make an informed decision on equality and diversity support.*

**There may be some mileage in looking at the Audit Commission Equality & Diversity website under the IDeA (Improvement and Development Agency).**

Celia Sweeney, Equality & Diversity Project Manager,  
2<sup>nd</sup> October 2009