

Higher Education Equality Consortium

**Queen's University Belfast
University of Ulster
St. Mary's University College
Stranmillis University College**

Report On The Screening Of Policies

February 2004

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1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 One of the commitments within the Universities'/Colleges' Equality Schemes is to carry out Equality Impact Assessments, if required. To initiate this process the Universities/Colleges have carried out an initial screening of all of their policies, to identify which policies may have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity, or have the potential to better promote equality of opportunity, and should therefore be subject to a full Equality Impact Assessment. This process is intended to mainstream the promotion of equality within all University/College policies.
- 1.2 Consultation on the screening of policies commenced on 7 April 2003 and concluded on 4 July 2003.
- 1.3 This report outlines comments made by consultees and the Universities'/Colleges' responses to these comments.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Institutions within the HEEC adopted a range of measures to facilitate consultation. These included:

- developing screening documents, a summary sheet and response pro-forma to aid consultees
- advertising the HEEC consultation in the Belfast Telegraph
- advertising consultation internally with the use of posters, e-mails and memos
- inviting external organisations to consult
- placing the consultation documents on the Institutions' websites with an electronic response pro-forma
- inviting representatives from Public and Voluntary Sector organisations and Trades Unions to attend a consultation event to discuss the possibility of setting up a consultative panel, and the screening of policies
- consulting with a number of representatives from Voluntary Sector groups and Trades Unions directly
- holding a consultation event on 17 June 2003

3.0 Consultation

3.1 Representatives from Public and Voluntary Sector organisations and Trades Unions were asked to respond to the following questions;

- What are your views on the proposed equality impact assessment programme?
- Are there policies that could usefully be grouped together or separated out to make an impact assessment more meaningful?
- Do you think there is any other information that should be taken into account in finalising the equality impact assessment programme?
- Do you have any comments to make on the screening exercise or the conclusion reached in relation to any of the University's/College's existing policies?
- Do you think we have missed any written or unwritten policies that have an impact on your group?
- Do you have any other comments you wish to make or issues you wish to raise regarding this consultation document?

3.2 The responses to these consultation questions and feedback from HEEC are summarised in Section 4 and the substance of the comments are detailed in Appendix 1.

4.0 Summary of Comments

Responses to the consultation questions are summarised as follows:

4.1 What are your views on the proposed equality impact assessment programme?

- 4.1.1 Consultees expressed surprise at the small number of policies identified for Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).

HEEC response: Although the initial outcome of screening indicates a small number of policies for EQIA, these policies relate to large parts of the Higher Education Institutions' core business and will involve significant work.

- 4.1.2 Consultees raised issues in regard to the order in which Staff Recruitment and Student Admissions policies were prioritised.

HEEC response: Each of the Institutions needs to gain expertise in conducting EQIAs. Much of the information for the Staff Recruitment and Student Admissions EQIAs has already been gathered from internal and external sources. Given the issues involved and the information available the Institutions consider the Staff Recruitment EQIA to be an opportunity to develop that expertise. Although the Student Admissions EQIA is timetabled second it will commence relatively soon after the Staff Recruitment EQIA i.e. before July 2004.

- 4.1.3 Consultees raised issues in regard to the order in which the Physical Access for People with a Disability policy was prioritised.

HEEC response: Extensive adjustments are currently being made to the physical environment in the Universities/Colleges, with funding support from the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), in anticipation of aspects of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. Consultees should note that this programme of work will continue. The current EQIA timetable will allow for the assessment of the impact of the current programme of improvements to physical access to be determined.

The Institutions in the HEEC have programmes of EQIAs which include Staff and Student Recruitment and Admissions (which will necessitate consideration of issues in regard to accessibility of information) as well as Physical Access (which may be viewed as an Estates issue) in Years 3-4.

4.2 Are there policies that could usefully be grouped together or separated out to make an impact assessment more meaningful?

- 4.2.1 Consultees suggested that it might be possible to group some policies together using a thematic approach (for example; Human Resources, Access to information, Access to Services and Funding). It was

suggested that this would make an impact assessment more meaningful and facilitate more effective and efficient consultation with representative groups.

HEEC response: The Institutions have grouped linked policies together, where possible. For example, the University of Ulster Student Recruitment EQIA will include its policies on Student Recruitment and Admissions, the Annual Academic Planning Cycle and Widening Access and Participation. For Queen's University Belfast (QUB) the Student Admissions Policy includes Widening Access and Participation.

4.3 Do you think there is any other information that should be taken into account in finalising the equality impact assessment programme?

4.3.1 Consultees suggested that the following should be considered when finalising the EQIA programme;

- the requirements on organisations to meet the Access elements of the Disability Discrimination Act in 2004 (see EQIA timetable).
- the Social Exclusion Research commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) which examines the representation of Protestant males in Higher Education.
- Women and pensions by Eileen Evason and Lynda Spence
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland response to Government Consultation. Simplicity, Security and Choice: Working and Saving for Retirement, March 2003.

HEEC response: These will be given due consideration.

4.4 Do you have any comments to make on the screening exercise or the conclusion reached in relation to any of the University's/College's existing policies?

4.4.1 Some consultees suggested that further consideration be given to subjecting the following policies to a full EQIA:

- Publications and Printed materials
- Promotions

- Pensions
- Community Outreach/Access
- Press Relations / Communications / Advertising
- ICT
- Governance
- Staff Training And Development
- Student Support
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Childcare Provision
- Harassment And Bullying
- Membership of Council
- Car parking

HEEC response: The Institutions rigorously examined these policies in the initial screening process and have since reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. The HEEC does not feel it is appropriate to conduct a full EQIA on these policies especially since in some instances, they are outside the full control of some or all of the Consortium members eg., pensions, governance arrangements.

4.5 Do you think we have missed any written or unwritten policies that have an impact on your group?

4.5.1 Some consultees suggested that the following policies may be missing;

- Scholarships and Awards

HEEC response: This policy has been dealt with in the screening exercise and may not apply to all Universities/Colleges.

- Employment in the Students Unions

*HEEC response: The status of the Students union/Representative Bodies differs from **one** Institution to **another**. The Student's Unions, per se, are not a designated **body** for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Staff working in the Students Union at QUB are employees of the University and are therefore subject to the provisions of Section 75. Staff working in the Students Union at UU are employed under contracts of employment, issued by the Students Union. At Stranmillis, one staff member is an employee of the College, the others are employed by the Union. At Saint Mary's Students Union staff are not employees of the college.*

- Organisation of Political Societies on Campus

HEEC response: This is dealt with under a number of policies, including the Equal Opportunities policies.

- Car parking (particularly at UU)

HEEC response: The University of Ulster did not have a policy on Car Parking management at the time of preliminary screening. Since then, a Car Park Management policy has been approved by Council and subjected to the screening process.

- Finance

HEEC response: Each Institution feels that it has an adequate range of policies to deal with financial issues and these reflect the requirements of DEL and the Department of Finance and Personnel. Each of these policies has been screened appropriately.

4.6 Do you have any other comments you wish to make or issues you wish to raise regarding this consultation document?

- 4.6.1 Whilst appreciating the difficulties of producing a generic report, consultees found the document complex and suggested that further detail on individual policies was required. Consultees also felt that it was difficult to comment on policies without detailed knowledge of individual policies.

HEEC response: The generic report is designed to highlight existing policies across the HEEC and should be read as a summary document. Greater detail is included in individual Higher Education Institutions' screening reports which were available on the Institutions' websites.

5.0 Conclusion

The Higher Education Institutions greatly appreciate the co-operation, advice and support received from a range of organisations and individuals throughout the consultation process. The feedback on policies will greatly assist us in taking forward the equality agenda within the higher education sector. If you feel your views have not been reflected or are dissatisfied with the decisions taken as a result of the consultation process please do not hesitate to contact us.

In light of the comments made by consultees, the timetable for Equality Impact Assessments remains as follows:

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT TIMETABLE

POLICIES FOR EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	Queen's University Belfast	St. Mary's University College	Stranmillis University College	University of Ulster
Staff Recruitment and Selection	Year 1-2 to commence by July 2003	Year 1-2 to commence by July 2003	Year 1-2 to commence by July 2003	Year 1-2 to commence by July 2003
Student Admissions	Year 2*-3 to commence by July 2004	Year 2*-3 to commence by July 2004	Year 2*-3 to commence by July 2004	Year 2**-3 to commence by July 2004
Discretionary Pay/Accelerated Increments	Year 2 2003/04			
Student Accommodation	Year 4 2005/06			Year 3-4 2004/06
Physical Access for People with a Disability	Year 3 2004/05	Year 3 2004/05	Year 3 2004/05	Year 4 2005/06
Job Evaluation				Year 5 2006/07

* For Queen's University Belfast Student Admissions policy includes Widening Access and Participation.

***For the University of Ulster the Student Recruitment EQIA will include its policies on Student Recruitment and Admissions, the Annual Academic Planning Cycle and Widening Access and Participation.*

Comments and enquiries relating to the screening decisions can be made by post, telephone, facsimile, e-mail or on line to;

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Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit
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Shore Road
Newtownabbey, BT37 0QB

Telephone 02890 368869
Facsimile 02890 368137
Email ak.getty@ulster.ac.uk

Alternatively, you may wish to contact individual Universities/Colleges directly. Details of contacts are listed below:

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Mr. Paul Browne
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Equal Opportunities Unit
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast BT7 1NN

Telephone 02890 335139
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Website www.qub.ac.uk/community/webpages/equality/screening

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Appendix 1

A.1.0 Written comments were received from eight organisations as follows:

- Age Concern
- AMICUS Trade Union
- Disability Action
- Equality 2000
- Joint Unions, University of Ulster
- NATFHE
- Training for Women Network Limited
- Ulster Unionist Party

A.2.0 27 representatives of Public and Voluntary sector organisations and Trades Unions attended the consultation event on 17 June 2003 and made valuable comments. Comments made are included in the section below.

A.3.0 Substance of comments made by consultees and HEEC responses

A.3.1 What are your views on the proposed equality impact assessment programme?

A.3.1.1 Comment: It would be useful to have a list of all policies with explanations as to why some policies were screened out.

HEEC response: The generic report is designed to highlight existing policies across the HEEC and should be read as a summary document. Greater detail is included in individual Higher Education Institutions' screening reports.

A.3.1.2 Comment: We would wish to see an EQIA conducted in respect of policies on Governance of Institutions.

HEEC response: The Institutions rigorously examined this policy in the initial screening process and have since reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. The HEEC does not feel it is appropriate to conduct a full EQIA on this policy. In Stranmillis governance is the direct responsibility of DEL and is currently under review.

A.3.1.3 Comment: I am surprised that the list is so short.

HEEC response: Although the initial outcome of screening indicates a small number of policies for EQIA, these policies relate to large parts of the Higher Education Institutions' core business and will involve significant work.

- A.3.1.4 Comment: The Student Recruitment and Admissions and Physical Access for People with a Disability policies scheduled for EQIA in Year 2-3 and Year 3 respectively must be given a higher priority as both policies have a significant impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity and on people with disabilities in particular.

In addition, if an adverse impact were to be identified **now** it would be unreasonable to have to wait 2-3 years and the HEEC could be open to challenge by the affected groups listed under Section 75.

HEEC response: The HEEC feels that its proposed strategy is most appropriate for dealing with these EQIAs.

Extensive adjustments are currently being made to the physical environment, with funding from DEL, in anticipation of aspects of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. The current EQIA timetable, therefore, will allow for assessment of the impact of the current programme of improvements to be determined.

- A.3.1.5 Comment: It is difficult to comment on the necessity for Equality Impact Assessments and the review of policies without detailed knowledge of individual policies.

HEEC response: The generic report is designed to highlight existing policies across the HEEC and should be read as a summary document. Greater detail is included in individual Higher Education Institutions' screening reports.

- A.3.1.6 Comment: The existing timetable could be simplified for organisations that may wish to comment on a number of policies. An obvious example is disability, where groups may have input into policies on Staff Recruitment, Student Admissions, Student Accommodation and Physical Access for people with a disability. In this case, a disability group may be required to comment on policies from years one to four.

HEEC response: There are inevitable differences in the Universities'/Colleges' operational implementation of similar policies which may impact differently on the equality of opportunity within individual Universities/Colleges.

The HEEC feels that its proposed strategy is most appropriate for dealing with these EQIAs.

A.3.2 Are there policies that could usefully be grouped together or separated out to make an impact assessment more meaningful?

A.3.2.1 Comment: Given the information given to me cannot judge this.

HEEC response: The generic report is designed to highlight existing policies across the HEEC and should be read as a summary document. Greater detail is included in individual Higher Education Institutions' screening reports.

A.3.2.2 Comment: If this question refers only to those already earmarked, then the answer would appear to be no. If however this question invites us to identify related policies for which there is a NO EQIA designation, currently, then there would appear to be scope e.g. under Human Resources – Staff Training and Development.

HEEC response: The Institutions rigorously examined this policy in the initial screening process and have since reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. The HEEC does not feel it is appropriate to conduct a full EQIA on this policy.

A.3.2.3 Comment: It may be possible to group some policies together for impact assessment. However, care must be taken to ensure that such groupings are compatible and do not overshadow or disguise a policy that in reality should have a separate equality impact assessment carried out. Public Authorities must therefore give an undertaking that a full, open and transparent description of such grouped policies is available to ensure that a clear and unambiguous process has been adhered to.

Policies that could possibly be grouped together include;

Human Resources: Equal Opportunities Policy, Academic Promotions and Employee Relations

Access to Information; E-Learning, Information Access and library Services

Access to Services: Students Complaints and Appeals, Teaching and Learning and Academic Services

Funding; Purchasing/Procurement, Purchasing Accountability and Finance

HEEC response: The Institutions have grouped linked policies together, where possible. For example, the University of Ulster Student Recruitment EQIA will include its policies on Student Recruitment and Admissions, the Annual Academic Planning Cycle and Widening Access and Participation. For Queen's University Belfast (QUB) the Student Admissions Policy includes Widening Access and Participation.

A.3.3 Do you think there is any other information that should be taken into account in finalising the equality impact assessment programme?

A.3.3.1 Comment: As this is the European Year of People with Disabilities and we will be seeing greater requirements on organisations to meet the Access elements of Disability Discrimination Act next year it might be more useful to bring the EQIA on 'Physical Access for People with a Disability' forward from the date planned.

HEEC response: This legislation is already being given due consideration. The HEEC feels that its proposed strategy is most appropriate for dealing with this EQIA.

Extensive adjustments are currently being made to the physical environment in anticipation of aspects of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. The current EQIA timetable, therefore, will allow for assessment of the impact of the current programme of improvements to be determined.

A.3.3.2 Comment: Means should be developed to ensure that data collection exercises capture data useful also to Article 55 Reviews re the composition of the workforce. A standardised format should be used across all HE Institutions.

HEEC response: The Institutions will take account of information in the Article 55 Review in the programme of EQIAs. Inevitably, however, the Institutions will have different reporting structures.

A.3.3.3 Comment: Evidence (as reported by Prof. Osborne and the social exclusion research commissioned by OFMDFM) that there is a relative under-representation in H.E. of males from a protestant working class background.

HEEC response: This will be given due consideration.

A.3.3.4 Comment: Are the Institutions preparing for the European Directive on the Discrimination in Employment? Are they considering the implications of a Single Equality bill?

HEEC response: These are already being given due consideration.

A.3.3.5 Comment: This consortium covers issues affecting students but also some 6,000 staff, making them one of the largest employers in Northern Ireland. The EQIA should be done as of right when issues affecting this group come up, and should be dealt with as quickly as possible, not over the years. There should be a review of legal definitions between policy and procedures, and stating which.

HEEC response: The Institutions are acting in accordance with guidance and best practice provided by the Equality Commission. It should be noted that the HEEC was established to work collaboratively on equality issues where it is of mutual benefit. Its remit does not extent beyond equality issues.

- A.3.3.6 Comment: It is difficult to answer this question because I am not aware of exactly what information was considered. I accept that I may have missed opportunities for consultation at this stage (ie. Consultation fatigue), although paragraph 4.4 which details the process does not suggest any outside consultation took place at this stage.

HEEC response: The Institutions are acting in accordance with guidance and best practice provided by the Equality Commission.

A.3.4 Do you have any comments to make on the screening exercise or the conclusion reached in relation to any of the University's/College's existing policies?

A.3.4.1 Governance

Comment: This area of policy is not screened in for EQIA. It ought to be as it relates to other areas such as recruitment and retention, pay awards and institutional policy on all strategic issues.

HEEC response: University/College Governance encompasses a wide range of policies. The Universities/Colleges rigorously examined all policies in the initial screening process and has since reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. In this context, the Universities/Colleges do not feel it is appropriate or necessary to conduct a full EQIA on its governance.

A.3.4.2 Monitoring and Data Collection

Comment: There is a need for consistency of monitoring across H.E. Institutions and for all nine categories to be monitored. Sub-sets in data collection systems should facilitate data collection for Article 55 Reviews. Monitoring should apply to Governing Bodies and all arrangements for determining promotions/awards, monetary or otherwise.

HEEC response: Each of the Institutions in the HEEC intends to monitor on seven of the nine categories specified in Section 75. We are awaiting guidance from the Equality Commission in regard to monitoring sexual orientation and political opinion. We currently monitor promotions. In regard to the governing body, we feel that we are not required to conduct Equal Opportunities monitoring.

A.3.4.3 Discretionary Pay (QUB)

Comment: Why only at QUB? Do the other 3 not have this policy?

HEEC response: As part of the screening process QUB decided that the existing policy may potentially impact on some of the nine categories specified in Section 75. QUB therefore decided to conduct an EQIA. Each of the Institutions operate from a different policy base and each conducted its screening exercise independently. UU rigorously reviewed its policy in this area (part of its Annual Review Policy) and decided that an EQIA was not necessary.

Stranmillis and Saint Mary's did not have a policy on discretionary pay at the time of preliminary screening. This is a new policy being introduced in this academic year and is to be subjected to a screening process.

A.3.4.4 Student Accommodation – QUB & UU

Comment: Why not also at the two University colleges? Do they not have a policy on this?

HEEC response: As part of the screening process UU and QUB decided that there may be an opportunity to better promote equality and therefore decided to conduct an EQIA. Stranmillis and Saint Mary's do not have a policy on student accommodation.

A.3.4.5 Job Evaluation (UU)

Comment: Why only at UU? Do the other 3 not have this policy?

HEEC response: As part of the screening process UU decided that the existing policy may potentially impact on some of the nine categories, specified in Section 75. UU therefore decided to conduct an EQIA. Each of the Institutions operate from a different policy base and conducted its screening exercise independently. QUB, Stranmillis and Saint Mary's rigorously reviewed their respective policies and decided that an EQIA was not necessary. In addition QUB is carrying out a major review of its current job evaluation procedures.

A.3.4.6 Academic Planning and Strategy

Comment: I would have thought Teaching and Learning, Professional Development and Widening Access might require another look.

HEEC response: The Institutions rigorously examined this policy in the initial screening process and have since reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. The HEEC does not feel it is appropriate to conduct a full EQIA on this policy. Widening Access is subsumed within Admissions which will be the subject of an EQIA.

A.3.4.7 Research Strategy

Comment: If research was focusing heavily on some Section 75 groups and not on others would the sector see this as a problem?

HEEC response: Each piece of research or request for research funding is considered on its own merit. Some research is commissioned by external funding bodies through a competitive tendering process, the outcome of which cannot be predicted.

A.3.4.8 Regional Strategy and Development

Comment: Is there an intention to put policies in place where they are absent and will they be screened?

HEEC response: Each of the Institutions have different aims and objectives and will inevitably have a different policy base. Where new policies are developed they will be screened in accordance with Section 75.

A.3.4.9 Information and ICT Services

Comment: Given that older learners may have had less opportunity to avail of modern technology, do library support services recognise this in the support they provide?

HEEC response: Each of the Institutions consider that this was taken into account in the screening process.

A.3.4.10 Student Services

Comment: Does the HE sector have a view on the non-availability of student loans to people aged 54+?

HEEC response: This policy does not belong to any of the Institutions.

A.3.4.11 Human Resources

Comment: Given the extent of ageism and age discrimination we would feel that this area might require further consideration.

HEEC response: A number of policies are listed under the heading of Human Resources, some of which are to be subject to EQIA, e.g., Staff Recruitment and Selection.

A.3.4.12 Finance and Procurement Services

Comment: I know that the sector feels it is already following DEL policy on Procurement but there may well be issues here.

HEEC response: The Institutions rigorously examined this policy in the initial screening process and have since reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. All of the Institutions are required to conform to public sector requirements with regard to procurement. The HEEC does not feel it is appropriate to conduct a full EQIA on this policy.

A.3.4.13 Macro Policy Areas

Comment: It is important that strategic or macro level policies are not lost in the minutia of micro level procedural policies in this stage of the process. The latter type of policy may affect some individuals within the targeted groups, but they may not have a 'substantial' adverse impact on such groups. Care must be taken that major policy impacts are not overlooked because everyone has become lost in the detail or quantity of policies on view within screening documents.

HEEC response: The Institutions believe that they have taken account of these issues in the screening process and will screen all new policies in the future.

Comment: The HEEC must ensure that all major policy reviews are included in the full impact assessment process. This is due to the cascading, cross cutting and potentially multiplying effects on a large range of other resultant micro level policies. Disability Action believes that 'real' issues must be addressed in a meaningful way and that 'real' change, which improves equality of opportunity, is the outcome of the Statutory Duties process and this aim should always be at the forefront of all engagement activities. It is therefore the Public Authority's duty to ensure that current major reviews which impact on their service delivery to targeted groups are included in the current screening.

The Consultation Panel may be best placed to assess how the development of policies may be monitored for effective implementation and to oversee how overarching equality policies are applied throughout all policies to ensure basic standards are not lost in the minutiae of individual EQIAs.

HEEC response: The Institutions believe that they have taken account of these issues in the screening process.

Comment: A clear disparity is noticeable in the different approaches to policies by the various Institutions. Although some inconsistencies can be assumed because of structural differences between Institutions, it may be expected that there would at least be some commonality of approach where functions are similar. It is recommended, therefore, that the Institutions co-ordinate policy development and the introduction of new policies to a standard HEEC format, bringing the application of policy areas into line where organisational structures allow.

HEEC response: There are inevitable differences in the Universities'/Colleges' operational implementation of similar policies which may impact differently on the equality of opportunity within individual Universities/Colleges.

The HEEC does not think it is appropriate to have the same policies, given Institutional autonomy. It should be noted that the HEEC was established to work collaboratively on equality issues where it is of mutual benefit. Its remit does not extend beyond equality issues.

A.3.4.14 Staff Recruitment and Selection (UU)

Comment: Staff recruitment and selection (UU): Should include academic promotions and discretionary pay/accelerated increments. The impact assessment should examine retention: are staff leaving because of unequal treatment. Experience of AUT suggests that racial discrimination may be a problem.

HEEC response (UU): The University of Ulster intends to conduct an EQIA on its Recruitment and Selection Policy. This will relate to both internally and externally advertised vacancies. Academic Promotions and discretionary/accelerated increments are not included in this policy, but were screened as part of the policy entitled 'Annual Review'.. This Policy was rigourously examined as part of the initial screening. Equality monitoring information in regard to Promotions and discretionary/accelerated increments is reviewed on a regular basis. The university does not consider that it is appropriate to conduct an EQIA on its 'Annual Review Policy'.

A.3.4.15 Student Recruitment and Selection (UU)

Comment: Student recruitment and selection (UU): The impact assessment should examine retention as well as recruitment and selection.

HEEC response (UU): Information in regard to retention will be considered as part of this EQIA.

A.3.4.16 University Council Appointments (UU)

Comment: University Council Appointments (UU): The University of Ulster does not propose to conduct an EQIA. The Council nominations committee is very small. Council policy has a stipulation for one trades unionist, one person from manufacturing, one from public service in lay members on committee. No obligation on nominations committee to consult widely – to trawl representative bodies of nine categories, such as disabled, CRE, gay rights groups when selecting new lay members of Council. Composition of Council lay members should reflect diversity.

HEEC response (UU): Membership of the University's Council is prescribed by Statute (refer University's Charter, Statutes, Ordinance and Regulations 2002-2003 (Statute XVI)).

The University aims to ensure that a wide range of views are represented on Council and therefore advertises vacancies widely both in the media and by direct communication with a wide range of local organisations. The Nominations Committee, which has a majority of members who are wholly independent of the University, considers all applications received and appoints suitably qualified individuals drawn from all sections of the community to allow Council to carry out its duties and functions.

There may not necessarily be a member from each of the nine categories on Council but in carrying out its functions Council will take steps to ensure that views from the nine categories are given due regard as required by section 75.

The University rigorously examined this policy in the initial screening process and has since reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. The University does not feel it is appropriate to conduct a full EQIA on this policy.

A.3.4.17 Harassment and Bullying (UU)

Comment: Serious race-relations and other cases indicate need to review this policy.

HEEC response: The University of Ulster established a Working Group to review its policy on harassment and bullying. This Group, which included the trade unions, has developed a new policy which will be implemented in the near future.

A.3.4.18 Car Parking (UU)

Comment: The University has not consulted different groups before deciding to introduce paid car parking charges. Car parking should be subject to an EQIA.

HEEC response: The University did not have a policy on Car Park Management at the time of preliminary screening. Since then, a Car Park Management policy has been approved by Council and subjected to the screening process.

A.3.4.19 Relocation (UU)

Comment: The University has a policy that staff can be involuntarily have their workplace moved from one campus to another. This appears a-priori to have an excessive impact on women who may be more likely to have family responsibilities, and on people who have responsibility for a person with a disability. This policy should be subject to an EQIA.

HEEC response(UU): The University of Ulster does not have a policy of relocating staff. The University does however operate across four campuses and from time to time it is necessary to review where activities are carried out. This may necessitate staff relocating. The University has a Redeployment Policy which makes provision for a package of measure to mitigate the impact on personal circumstances. The University rigorously examined this policy in the initial screening process and has reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. The University does not feel it is appropriate to conduct a full EQIA on this Policy.

A.3.5 Do you think we have missed any written or unwritten policies that have an impact on your group?

A.3.5.1 Comment: As we do not have these available to us this is difficult to assess.

HEEC response: The generic report is designed to highlight existing policies across the HEEC and should be read as a summary document. Greater detail is included in individual Higher Education Institutions' screening reports.

A.3.5.2 Comment: Having looked at the detailed Appendix 3 list in the Consultation document, and finding it sometimes difficult to

determine what has been included under the six 'aggregated policies', the following areas – which may have differential impacts – may be missing:

- * Awards & Scholarships – particularly at QUB

HEEC response: This policy has been dealt with in the screening exercise.

- * Employment in the Students Unions - particularly at QUB

HEEC response: The status of the Students union/Representative Bodies differs from one Institution to another. The Student's Unions, per se, are not designated for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Staff working in the Students Union at QUB are employees of the University and are therefore subject to the provisions of Section 75. Staff working in the Students Union at UU are employed under contracts of employment, issued by the Students Union. At Stranmillis, one staff member is an employee of the College, the others are employed by the Union. At Saint Mary's Students Union staff are not employees of the college.

- * Organisation (or not) of political societies on campus – particularly at UU (I understand that policy may have been changed recently but if it has the UU probably has to publicise this more).

HEEC response: This is dealt with under a number of policies, including the Equal Opportunities policies.

- * Comment: Impact of University etc on the local communities within which they are located – e.g. the possible negative amenity effects on 'settled residents' of student accommodation/behaviour off campus.

HEEC response: The Universities/Colleges have responded to this issue through a range of actions in recent years. The Universities/Colleges are committed to promoting good relation as required by section 75 and in the wider context of student/general population interfaces e.g. the well publicised projects undertaken with students living in South Belfast.

- * Car parking – (UU).

HEEC response: The University of Ulster did not have a policy on Car Parking management at the time of preliminary screening. Since then, a Car Park Management policy has been approved by Council and subjected to the screening process.

- * Exercise of academic freedom – e.g. ability of academic staff, as academics and within their area of professional competence to freely express their views both inside the Institutions and to the outside media especially on controversial issues.

HEEC response: The Universities/Colleges recognise the right of academic staff to express scholarly opinions and other views on appropriate matters from their areas of interest and expertise. Indeed, staff are encouraged to contribute specialist opinions to journals and in the public media. A University/College is a unique source of such knowledge and its dissemination is one of the reasons for our existence. However, the impartiality and integrity of the University/College serves to give credibility to such views. For that reason, it must be made unequivocally clear that these are the views of an individual or a group of individuals and that they do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the University/College itself.

- * Finance (QUB)

Comment: We note that Pensions is included as a policy that should be considered for EQIA but we do not agree that there is no evidence to suggest that there is an adverse impact on any of the 9 categories that the legislation covers. The Retirement Benefit Plan, the University Occupational Pension Scheme for manual and support staff had a greater number of women members compared to the University Superannuation Scheme which has academics, academic related and administrative staff as members. Recently the RBP has had benefits removed unlike the USS. In particular the normal retirement age for service from 1st August 2002 has been increased from 60 to 65. This means that those members who would want to retire at the age of 60 would be financially penalised and since there is greater number of female members in the scheme they are the group that will be affected.

HEEC response (QUB): The schemes are ostensibly different. Some steps have been taken to harmonise both schemes. It is the aspiration of the University to merge the Scheme with a larger one.

- A.3.5.3 Comment: I wonder if the impact on older people within each policy area has been appropriately identified. For example, in the area of Teaching and Learning, will students be made aware of Section 75 responsibilities in areas of employment that are relevant to their courses?

HEEC response: The Institutions rigorously examined this policy in the initial screening process and have since reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. Each of the

Universities/Colleges have taken steps to make students aware of their respective Equality Schemes.

- A.3.5.4 Comment: There are areas where policies are not listed under some Institutions where there are most certainly procedures in place, such as employee relations. Although perhaps not specific policies, these procedures will have an impact on equality and would therefore need to be listed and subjected to screening.

HEEC response: Some of the differences in policies identified by individual Universities/Colleges are, in the main, due to specific policies being included in broader policy areas or policies being specific to a particular University/College.

There are inevitable differences in the Universities'/Colleges' operational implementation of similar policies which may impact differently on the equality of opportunity within individual Universities/Colleges.

- A.3.5.5 Comment: There are many other policies that would require equality impact assessments, such as in the area of communications and public affairs to ensure no groups are being disadvantaged by communication method, student support, to ensure that all students have equal access to support services, or staff training, to assess whether any groups are being excluded by procedures in that area. However, as this may be regarded as the beginning of the process, further EQIA's may be recommended in time, taking into account the logistical considerations of assessing a large number of policies.

HEEC response: The Institutions rigorously examined these policies in the initial screening process and have since reviewed the screening exercise in light of the comments made by consultees. The HEEC does not feel it is appropriate to conduct a full EQIA on these policies.

All new policies are screened as they arise.

A.3.6 Do you have any other comments you wish to make or issues you wish to raise regarding this consultation document?

- A.3.6.1 Comment: I wonder if the HE Institutions have ever looked specifically at the needs and interests of their older learners as may have been the case with other Section 75 groups? If not, is this something you might wish to consider, given this and other impending legislation.

HEEC response: the Institutions will take account of this valuable information.

A.3.6.2 Comment: Disability Action is disappointed that the HEEC has not included a text phone number with the contact details to enable deaf people the same access as those who are hearing.

Comment: Disability Action welcomes the offer of a range of accessible formats but requests the HEEC to include Braille and Computer Disk in the range available.

HEEC response: The document was offered in a range of alternative formats. The HEEC appreciates these comments and will take account of them.