

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

1 LEGAL DUTIES

The University currently has a duty to assess the impact of its policies and practices on different racial groups, disabled people and in relation to gender issues. The legislation will continue to develop to ensure that any decisions the University takes, policies it develops or practices it implements will have to be assessed for impact on equality and diversity. The University has taken the decision to undertake one single impact assessment for each area or policy. As far as possible, all six of the main equality strands will be covered by the impact assessment:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender
- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Religion and belief

Assessments should be done on proposed policies and practices, existing policies and practices and policies and practices that are under review. Impact assessment is an on-going process which should be reviewed every three years. An impact assessment should involve minority groups in terms of prioritisation and in the consideration of an assessment.

2 WHAT IS AN IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An impact assessment is a detailed and systematic analysis of the potential or actual effects of a policy or practice to ascertain whether it has a differential impact on identifiable groups of people.

Assessment should take place not only of all formal policies and practices, but also informal ones because of the need to eliminate indirect discrimination. Impact assessment is an anticipatory process that will allow the University to predict possible barriers faced by equality groups.

3 WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

A report should be compiled at the end of each impact assessment process by the policy owner and widely disseminated detailing:

- The reasons for the assessment taking place
- The results of the involvement of and consultation with groups
- Detail of any impact identified
- Any changes to a policy as a result

The reasons for this are to raise awareness of the University's commitment to equality and diversity, to comply with equalities legislation to undertake and publish impact assessments, to develop open and clear systems of assessment and to ensure that staff and students are aware of changes to working practices.

Impact assessments should be seen as a continuation of our quality control mechanisms.

4 STEPS TO IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Identify aims of policy (Is it equality relevant?)

All policies could potentially have an impact on equality. However, in terms of prioritising it is reasonable to assess those which clearly could have a significant impact on different groups.

Analyse available data

This involves identifying the data that is required to undertake an impact assessment and asking whether the data exists. If the data is not available, the start of the impact assessment could be to establish monitoring of the policy. However, it may be reasonable and practical to identify potential impact of a policy/decision without specific monitoring data e.g. by using qualitative data such as anecdotal evidence, the implications of changes in legislation, conducting consultation, involving minority groups or asking for the opinion of experts. If quantitative data is already collected, then how can it be used to identify whether groups are adversely affected?

Assessing impact

We need to assess whether the policy has, or is likely to have, a differential impact on relevant equality groups. Differential impact can be positive or negative, direct or indirect, and indicates that the policy affects a given group or groups in a different way to the majority. The key aspect to look for is any evidence of adverse or negative impact as this could indicate discrimination even though entirely unintentional.

Adverse impact can be identified by looking for:

- A lower participation rate of equality groups compared to others
- Certain groups having lower success rates in particular processes
- Whether eligibility criteria appear to disadvantage certain groups
- Whether access to services and benefits is reduced or denied in comparison with other groups
- Whether a group faces increased difficulty or indignity as a result of a policy
- Whether a policy reduces benefits disproportionately for one group

If an adverse impact is found then steps should be taken to eliminate it or, where legally permissible, mitigate the impact as far as possible.

Eliminating or reducing any adverse impact

The adverse impact of a policy can be mitigated by:

- Making changes to the policy itself
- Making changes to the method of its implementation
- Replacing the policy and using an alternative one which meets the same aims

Publication of impact assessment and findings

Under the duties of the legislation we have to publish all of our equality policies in order to emphasise institutional commitment to equality and diversity, to draw attention to the work we are doing in this area and to reinforce the rights and responsibilities of the whole University community. The duty to publish also applies to the results of impact assessments, monitoring and consultations undertaken.

A report should be produced summarising the impact assessment process for each policy assessment. The following points could be included in the report:

- Aims of the policy
- Assessment of the policy based on qualitative and/or quantitative data
- Mitigation of any adverse impact
- Results of involvement and consultation
- Amendments to the policy
- Timetable for next review

The publishing requirement is an area in which there is scope to promote the positive duty.

Appendix A shows the form to be used for the impact assessment and Appendix B shows how the implementation would operate at the University.

5 PROGRESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

A pilot process has been undertaken, during which 9 policies/areas have been initially impact assessed (see Appendix C).

Most of these assessments have highlighted issues which need to be addressed before a full assessment can be undertaken. For example, where no consistent monitoring system is in place, this has been flagged as an action to take forward. These assessments will have to be re-visited regularly until all the actions are complete. Appendix D shows those required to be undertaken.