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# Promoting diversity at the University of Wolverhampton

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The 'general duty' of the UK's Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA) 2000 came into force for all public bodies in April 2001. It requires public services to be proactive in tackling racial discrimination, in promoting equal opportunities and good race relations. The 'specific duties' for further and higher education institutions were brought in through a Home Office Statutory Order in December 2001. Each institution was required to produce a written statement of its policy by the end of May 2002 and to have in place arrangements for fulfilling its specific duties 'as soon as is reasonably practicable'. The duties are to:

- a) assess the impact of its policies, including its race equality policy, on students and staff of different racial groups
- b) monitor, by reference to those racial groups, the admission and progress of students and the recruitment and career progress of staff
- c) include in its written statement of its race equality policy an indication of its arrangements for publishing that statement and the results of its assessment and monitoring under a) and b)

The Commission for Race Equality (CRE) has published a guide<sup>1</sup> to support further and higher education institutions in addressing fundamental issues about:

- meeting students' needs, encouraging them to achieve their full potential, and raising educational standards
- taking action to tackle differences between racial groups in achievement, admissions and assessment
- improving staff morale and performance as part of creating a positive, inclusive atmosphere

- preparing students for full citizenship in our multi-ethnic society
- making the further and higher education institution workforce more representative of the communities it serves
- avoiding losing able staff and
- making full use of skills/knowledge of people from different groups

The CRE guide aims to raise awareness of the duties which the Act confers on our governing bodies. It gives helpful markers on individual aspects of the education business where we need to undertake focused action to tackle discrimination and under-representation and to promote good race relations. The issues raised for universities by the guide include:

- Admissions policies
- Curriculum design and content
- Learning and teaching methods
- Learning styles
- Classroom values
- Assessment processes
- Student progression and retention rates
- Student work placements
- Ethnic minority staff balance.

So, what action is the University of Wolverhampton (UW) taking around this agenda? The institution has a strong commitment to contributing to social and economic prosperity through the communities living where we operate in the Black Country and in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. A snapshot of the university community in academic year 2001/2 shows a population of 23,000 students, approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  part-time and with 27% declaring an ethnic minority background. The university has ten academic schools distributed across five campuses and four hospital sites.

Within the schools the ethnic minority student population ranges from 11% in sport, performing arts & leisure through to 59% in computing and IT. Other highly popular disciplines for ethnic minority students include business (54%), law (48%) engineering & built environment (30%). The overall make-up of our ethnic minority student community is:

- Indian 11%
- Black Caribbean 4%
- Pakistani 4%
- Chinese 3%
- Black African 2%
- Asian Other, Bangladeshi, Black Other 1% each.

It is clear that our student community profiles present us with fertile ground for action. Wolverhampton comes with something of a history in the area of race relations and the council from which the polytechnic, now the university, emerged has been an inspiring force in our race equality agenda. Action taken by the university over the past four years includes:

- *Wolverhampton Leadership Challenge 1998*  
CRE initiative led by the council with the university as a signatory
- *Black and Ethnic Minority Experience project (BEME) 1999 (ongoing)*  
BEME is a partnership of the local council and further education colleges, the Race Equality Council, the Lighthouse Media Centre and the university. It lies at the heart of the council's New Direction mission to implement and support community-based and local initiatives which embrace race equality and promote cultural diversity. Its aim is to retrieve the hidden histories of Wolverhampton's black and minority ethnic communities through a video archive, to record and celebrate their contribution to the economic, social, political and cultural life of the city. An important measure of its impact on the local area is its active use in the university curriculum particularly in humanities and social sciences.
- *Ethnic Minority Staff Forum 2000 (ongoing)*  
The CRE guide for further and higher education institutions emphasises the need for extensive and intensive monitoring to assess the impact of institutional policies on racial groups and to explain and address differences. In Wolverhampton our Vice-Chancellor has over the past 2 years instigated this forum which meets 3 times a year. Among the significant areas for change management emerging from the forum are:
  - staff promotion - access to more senior posts
  - recruitment panel training – awareness raising and presence of ethnic minority staff on panels
  - wider cultural issues – eg celebrating a broader range of religious festivals and moving away from an exclusive focus on Christian dates in the calendar.

- *Senior Managers Mentoring Project 2001 (ongoing)*

Another example of positive action which started last year in partnership with Coventry University to improve overall leadership skills of senior managers and in particular those of women and ethnic minority staff.

- *UW biennial Higher Education and Equality Conference launched 1998 (ongoing)*

The university's 3rd conference in March 2002 took the RRAA as its theme. The conference brings together schools and services from the university to focus on equality and diversity and to devise and review equal opportunities strategy and action. This year the event included input from University UK's Equality Challenge Unit. Other sessions focussed on staffing issues – in particular the balance in our staff profile, student employability and support for fulfilling their potential, and finally curriculum issues with lessons learnt from the BEME project and how this can inform work in other curriculum areas.

- *Desired Staffing Profile 2000 (ongoing)*

The university's executive identified the need to improve the balance of our staffing profile a couple of years ago. The aims of the initiative are to:

- improve the proportion of ethnic minority and female staff in all areas of UW business and at all levels
- reflect the student communities we serve in our staff profile more closely

This staffing profile priority works within a wider external context. A recent study by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) at Westminster University on ethnicity in higher education<sup>2</sup> focused on academic employment. An interesting issue emerging from the study was the lack of national data gathering in higher education institutions on ethnicity and gender among non-teaching staff. The PSI report's general findings in relation to ethnicity noted inequalities between ethnic groups and that ethnic minority staff are more likely to be on fixed-term contracts and less likely to hold professorial appointments. It found the Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities considerably under-represented and Indians less so. Against this it noted some over-representation of Black Africans and considerable over-representation of Chinese and Asian Other groups in higher education.

Grade	University current profile	Learning Centre current profile excluding student employees	Learning Centre current profile including student employees	University desired profile
APTC to grade 6	10.3%	3.25%	14%	12%
APTC SO/ PO grades	2.3%	0%	0%	7.6%

A range of issues and recommendations were presented in the PSI report:

- even where groups not under-represented, some minority groups may be
- monitoring needs to encompass job levels and promotions as well as recruitment
- racial equality work needs to engage with attitudes and organisational culture not just formal practices
- racism must be seen as an institutional problem not just for ethnic minority staff and students
- monitoring needs to be extended to non-academics i.e. at national level.

Behind all these developments at national and local level, a range of practical initiatives emerged for the University of Wolverhampton to address in terms of its own ethnic balance among staff. Central initiatives have included:

- Development of career maps for academic schools and services
- Limiting applications to a specific ethnic group where a post is aimed at supporting that group
- Open discussion with staff on how the Desired Staffing Profile (DSP) can be achieved/ where barriers exist
- Aspiration to involve ethnic minority staff in all recruitment panels

Moving from the institutional to the local service perspective, it may be helpful to draw a quick thumbnail sketch of Learning Centres and outline why DSP is such a pressing issue for staff in our service and, as we see it, beyond into LIS at national level.

University of Wolverhampton has:

- 9 learning centres

- Service focus: LIS, individual & peer group learning space, open access IT (500 PCs), central learning support
- 132 ftes: 246 staff and student employees

The ethnic profile of learning centre staff is poorer than any other area of university as illustrated by the table above:

This profile has provoked some deep soul-searching for managers in learning centres. It is clear that our student employees make a significant and welcome though transitory impact on our profile. We have looked at what may lie behind that and how it might inform solutions in other parts of the workforce. Of the 47 students we employed this year 26 came from ethnic minorities. The focus of their work is IT peer support. Interestingly a *Student Living Survey* reported in the *Times higher education supplement* in February this year included a question on part-time work preferences. 21% of ethnic minority students and 18% of 'white' students selected library work. There is also the fundamental issue of how to grow the applicant pool for more senior jobs. We are conscious that solutions will not include many easy and quick fixes and so we are tackling issues in chunks.

The first supporting initiative we have undertaken is Career Mapping, a university-wide process on which we were the first major service area to complete. The idea is that there should be a set of interlocking maps for the whole university, both services and schools. The career map is intended to provide information for applicants to get a job and move on from one to another. It enables familiarisation with the service or academic area, and outlines routes and connections between jobs. It acts as a long-term career-planning tool, offering advice at entry and beyond, with the aim of optimising development opportunities for individuals.

Our second major initiative was to ask an external consultant to look at our HR process. We chose People Matters, a company with experience of the higher education sector who had conducted an audit for the university on attitudes to race relations. The report from People Matters set out a range of professional and practical issues. People Matters found that the professional image of LIS is poor among ethnic minorities. There is evidence of some progress in public libraries but little national debate or action in other LIS areas. The LIS professional body LA/CILIP numbers only 2.2% ethnic minority members.

Areas for development at a local level within our service emerged from the holistic investigation carried out by People Matters which validated the perspectives of senior managers, operational team leaders and staff on the ground. Some of our student employees also contributed to this, offering both their views as students and employees. An emerging overview of good practice was tempered by a range of recommendations in all areas of human resources management: pre-recruitment, encouraging applications, advertising, shortlisting, interviewing, other selection processes, post interview follow-up, retention & supportive infrastructure.

Turning the recommendations into action requires input from all levels in our service. We have set up an internal DSP Steering Group which is actively involving ethnic minority staff in its work. The group made an initial progress report at the Learning Centres biennial staff conference this summer and the action plan has been mounted on our intranet for feedback. In addition to membership of the Diversity Council and work with CILIP at national level, we have started cross-sectoral work in this area with local public library services. We are keen to work with other higher education institutions facing the challenge of achieving better balance in their ethnic staff profile and on the broader issues for LIS generated by the RRAA agenda. We need to work at all levels and through all our sectors professionally to inform real change at national, regional and local level and to address the challenge of improving the image of our profession to the diversity of a multi-ethnic Britain.

#### Note

This article is based on a presentation to the Diversity Council at a meeting on 15 March 2002 on the theme *Change the World*. The Diversity Council applied in March to set up a Diversity Group of CILIP which will be open to all mem-

bers. The council continued to maintain its own separate identity as a federation of organisations with an interest in broad issues of diversity independent of CILIP to enable it to carry forward aspects of the agenda which a group within CILIP would not be able to do.

- 1 Commission for Racial Equality (May 2002) *The duty to promote race equality: a guide for further and higher education institutions (non-statutory)*. London: Commission for Racial Equality. [http://www.cre.gov.uk/pubs/cat\\_duty.html](http://www.cre.gov.uk/pubs/cat_duty.html) (accessed 29/7/02)
- 2 J. Carter, S. Fenton, and T. Modood, *Ethnicity and employment in higher education*. London: Policy Studies Institute, 1999