



Gender Equality Scheme

April 2007

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1. Principal's Statement

The North Highland College Management and its staff recognises that they have a responsibility to create and build an environment in which all are equally valued and treated, as well as its wider responsibility in assisting in the creation of a fair and just society. In order to achieve this, the College has a range of policies and procedures designed to ensure equality of opportunity for all, of which this Gender Equality Duty is a part.

It is our belief that no discrimination on account of Gender, disability, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religious or political beliefs, shall be shown towards any person in determining whether that person will be admitted as a student of the college, or appointed to its staff or shall hold any advantage or privilege thereof.

The college will promote opportunity for all, particularly for study, employment and involvement in its community, without discrimination on grounds of gender, sex, age, disability, religion, and socio-economic background, sexual orientation, colour, ethnic or national origin, language or nationality.

The college requires its staff, students, clients and visitors to behave and communicate in non-discriminatory ways and to support, implement and develop college institutional policies, procedures and practices which promote and reinforce equality of opportunity and fair treatment for all.

Signature.....

Date.....

Chairman, Board of Management

Signature.....

Date.....

Principal, North Highland College

2. Introduction & Policy Statement

The North Highland College is an incorporated Further Education College and an academic partner of the UHI Millennium Institute (UHI). The College provides Education and Training opportunities to the communities of the North Highlands and beyond. These opportunities are supported in an inclusive manner, and our core philosophy is to ensure that all members of the community regardless of gender, geography, or any other irrelevant criteria, can access our programmes as appropriate and receive an effective, high quality, learning experience. We will consult with various stakeholders and external organisations to enable us to continue our community profiling, in order that we can further develop our gender equality duty (GED).

The North Highland College believes that discrimination on grounds of gender is unacceptable in Scottish Further & Higher Education, whether it affects treatment of students, staff, or any of the services or provision offered by the college. Everyone who has the ability and the desire to pursue education should have the chance to do so regardless of gender. Discrimination is wrong whether it is deliberate and obvious or whether it is inadvertent or indirect. We believe that education can play a powerful role in the promotion of equality of opportunity. Through our functions we believe we have the potential to make a significant difference to gender equality in the areas in which we provide our services. We welcome the duties introduced by the gender equality duty, April 2007

2.1 The College is committed to:

- actively tackling gender discrimination, and promoting gender equality,
- encouraging, supporting, and helping all students and staff to reach their potential,
- working with other institutions, local communities and others to tackle gender discrimination and to encourage and promote good practice in achieving gender equality,

We look forward to playing our part in bringing these things about through our Mission Statement and College Aims & Values.

2.2 The College's Mission Statement

The North Highland College primarily serves the North Highland area by providing inclusive and accessible high quality lifelong learning and research opportunities relevant to the needs of students, employers and communities.

2.3 The College Value Statement

The North Highland College will, in all activities, duly reflect the core values for which it stands:

EQUALITY OF ACCESS & PARITY OF ESTEEM

The Board of Management believes that all members of the community are entitled to access lifelong learning opportunities, regardless of geographical location. The College values all its learners equally and is committed to the provision of learning, through all modes of delivery, thereby overcoming geographical and other barriers, where these exist.

QUALITY

The Board of Management's ongoing commitment to continuous quality improvement through self evaluation underpins our philosophy and has been recognised by a number of external agencies. We have an on-going commitment to investing in our staff. We will maintain and continue to develop the systems and procedures which have been endorsed by various agencies. A client focused, open and transparent environment of mutual trust, honesty and respect will be maintained.

ADDING VALUE TO COMMUNITIES

We serve and value all urban, remote and sparsely populated areas of the far north and are committed to empowering them both economically and socially through educational and training support. We are committed to work in partnership with all stakeholders and where relevant other providers from both the public and private sector.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The College is committed to providing a range of high quality learning environments. This will range from built provision in our core campuses to a virtual learning infrastructure through our web based delivery platforms.

3. College Duties

The Board of Management and College staff understand that the gender equality duty of April 2007, places a general duty on the College to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sex
- Promote equality of opportunity between women and men

Within the gender equality duty, the College also has specific duties to prepare by 29 June 2007, showing how we intend to fulfill our duties in this area by creating a 3 year Action Plan which will show how we plan to:

- Take action to achieve gender equality objectives
- Publish a gender equality scheme, report annually and reviewing the scheme every 3 years

As an employer we have a duty to monitor our teaching/support staff, by reference to the gender groups to which they belong, and to publish the results annually.

We will also monitor our student profile by reference to the male/female group to which they belong. In addition, we will analyse academic achievement by male/female groups.

We fully understand the requirements of the GED and the objectives contained therein. We are confident that both the requirements and the objectives sit comfortably within the College's existing policies and performance, with respect to equality, inclusiveness and equality of opportunity.

We are required to review the assessment of our functions and policies at least every three years. This review will be led by the Assistant Principal, Student Services, and the findings reported to the Board of Management and the Audit Committee.

4. Management: Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Management is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the institution stays within the gender equality duty of 2007 and any amendment, and meets all its duties, including the general duty and the specific duties

The Principal is responsible for:

- giving a consistent and high-profile lead on equality issues
- ensuring that the equality policy and its procedures are followed

Assistant Principals & Section Leaders are responsible for:

- putting the policy and its strategies and procedures into practice
- ensuring that all staff know their responsibilities, and receive support and training in carrying these out
- following the relevant procedures and taking action against staff or students who discriminate for reasons of gender

All Staff are responsible for:

- dealing with equality issues, and being able to recognise and tackle gender bias and stereotyping
- promoting inclusiveness, and avoiding discrimination against anyone for reasons of gender; keeping up-to-date with developments on equality issues, and taking up training and learning opportunities

5. Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of proposed policies on the promotion of gender equality

We have developed a template to review existing policies and assess new policies. We are aware that this requires improvement to the process, in order for it to become a standard part of the way in which the College operates.

We consult regularly with our staff on proposed new policies and changes to existing policies, practices and functions. We also consult through the various committees of the Board of Management prior to any final approval by the full board.

We will determine the level of assessment and consultation in each case. To decide whether we need to carry out a full impact assessment, we will make an initial assessment based on information we have. If this assessment shows that gender groups will not be affected differently by the policy, or that the policy has a very low relevance to gender equality, then we will not move to the next level of assessment.

When carrying out a full impact assessment, we will:

- set clear policy aims and objectives
- collect existing data and commission research if appropriate
- use the data to decide whether the policy is likely to affect different gender groups, directly or indirectly, in different ways
- consider changes to the policy to prevent any adverse impact or unlawful discrimination, while still delivering the aims of the policy
- consult interested parties, service users, trade unions, and members of the public on the preferred policy
- take account of all assessments and consultation before making a final decision on the policy
- monitor and review the policy and its impact and publish the results of the impact assessment, consultation, and monitoring

We consult a number of partners on policies as they evolve and are developed. Who we consult with depends on the policy. We will make sure that consultation on all relevant policies is thorough and targeted at all relevant parties.

We will decide how much we will consult in each case. We will take the following steps to consult on all relevant policies:

- Set clear aims for consultation
- Set a consultation timetable linked to decision making process
- Carry out consultation
- Analyse consultation results promptly
- Feed results into decision making process
- Amend policy as appropriate

6. Monitoring progress and updating the scheme

6.1 The College, as part of its monitoring action, and its duty to promote gender equality across our full range of activities, will ensure we cover the following:

- Staff recruitment
- Staff progression and promotion
- Staff resignations
- Staff complaints, grievances and formal disciplinary actions and dismissals
- Student admissions
- Student guidance and financial support
- Student achievement and progression
- Student dropouts
- Student complaints, grievances, appeals, formal disciplinary actions and dismissals

6.2 We already inclusively monitor most of our employment and student recruitment functions and policies. We will review the outcomes of the actions described in this scheme annually, through the College's existing operational monitoring arrangements. Our Human Resource Section will continue to monitor our statistical collections on staff, including the monitoring required by our specific duty.

The Student Registrations, Admissions, and Student Services Sections will continue to monitor the student aspects of the duty.

6.3 In order to ensure the College meets the general duty to promote gender equality and its specific duties, we will collect gender monitoring data for our relevant functions and policies. To do this, we will:

- set up monitoring systems for all relevant functions and policies;
- analyse data from monitoring;

- decide what action is needed to deal with issues identified by the monitoring data;
- change policies or functions as appropriate; and publish the results of monitoring.

We will decide the best method for monitoring each function, policy, or sets of policies according to the circumstances in each case. If we find that the impact of a policy goes against any of the three parts of the general duty, we will fully investigate that policy, and introduce alternatives or measures to stop the problem. If we did not originally give the policy high priority for review in our action plan, we will amend the timetable for reviews and action accordingly.

The annual review of the scheme will involve not only a review of progress against the actions described in the scheme, but will also involve reviewing and updating the contents of the scheme. Previous targets set will be reviewed with respect to achievement and new targets set as appropriate.

The first fundamental review of the scheme will be undertaken by April 2008.

In addition, we will undertake a more fundamental review of the scheme every three years commencing from the date above.

7. Publishing

We publish a range of information, some of which is noted below:

- Strategic Plan
- Operational Plan
- Annual Accounts
- Student Attitude Surveys
- Employer Surveys

7.1 This scheme will be published on our website, and will be distributed widely to stakeholders. It will be made available in translation on request.

7.2 We will publish annually a report on progress in relation to the scheme, together with an amended version where appropriate. The outcomes of the annual review of the scheme will be available publicly on our website and College intranet. We will also report on progress in the College's annual report.

7.3 We will endeavour to make sure that the information we publish is accessible and freely available using diverse formats.

8. Raising Staff Awareness and Staff Development

It is essential that all our staff have a good, basic knowledge of the gender equality duty. They should also have the chance to acquire the additional specialist knowledge they need to carry out their work. In this regard we will:

- put in place mandatory awareness training for all staff, including Board of Management representatives, in order to raise awareness of the requirements of the duty and the requirements it imposes on the College as an employer
- We will put in place training for staff involved in recruitment and selection, which will address issues relating to gender equality
- We will ensure that, where appropriate, training will address the issues of diversity and equality
- The gender equality duty will be included in the induction programme for new staff and our actions and commitment to diversity and gender equality will be highlighted.

The College has achieved Investors in People (IIP) accreditation, which assists us to monitor whether the training we offer is properly targeted and accessible to all staff. This also formally demonstrates our commitment to our employees' continuing professional development (CPD).

9. Who is responsible and how we will deal with complaints

- Responsibility for our gender equality policy is shared by the Board of Management of The North Highland College, The College Principal and by all staff at the College
- This document has set out our aspirations in meeting the general and specific duties. If you believe that any of our actions fall short of these aspirations, we would welcome your comments or complaint. This scheme will be an evolving one. We would therefore welcome comments at any time. Please contact Marcus Mennie, Assistant Principal, The North Highland College, Ormlie Road, Thurso, Caithness KW14 7EE, Direct Dial (01847 889301), marcus.mennie@thurso.uhi.ac.uk in the first instance.

10. Meeting our Employment Duties

The College is bound by the general duty and we must meet the specific duties for employers. This duty requires us to monitor, by gender group, the number of:

- staff currently working for us;
- applicants for employment, training, and promotion;
- staff who receive training;
- staff who benefit or suffer from performance appraisals;
- staff who are involved in grievance procedures;
- staff who are the subject of disciplinary action; and
- staff who end their service with us.

We must also publish the results of this monitoring annually and discuss this with the trade unions who represent our staff.

We will analyse any patterns of inequality shown by our monitoring of employment, and take action as appropriate. This may include taking 'positive action'. For example, if our continued monitoring of the gender of staff shows that a particular gender group is unjustifiably under-represented, we may focus our recruitment efforts on that group.