

## **EQUALITY STEERING GROUP**

### **Minutes of the Fifteenth Meeting of the Equality Steering Group 3 July 2003**

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**Present:** Albert Pratt (Chair)  
Mary Ainscough (Equality Director)  
Martin Conry  
Lisa Looney  
Richard O'Doherty

**1. Apologies:** Ellen Breen  
Claire Byrne  
Padraig MacNeela  
Maeve O'Byrne

The Chairman and the Group welcomed incoming Students Union Welfare Officer, Richard O'Doherty, to the ESG.

**2.** Minutes of the Meeting of 4 June 2003 were approved.

### **3. Matters Arising**

#### **3.1 Code of Practice for the Employment of People with Disabilities:**

The Equality Director informed the Group that having enquired of Dr Padraig Walsh as to the issue raised at Governing Authority in relation to the Code, the issue involved remains unclear.

The Chairman will seek clarification from the HR Director and report back to the Group.

#### **3.2 Request from DCU Gay and Lesbian Community**

Following the agreement of the ESG in relation to this request, the Equality Director brought the matter to the University Secretary, who brought the matter forward to a meeting of the Management Group.

The Secretary informed the ESG of the reaction of homosexual people on campus when they were appraised of the request to fly the friendship flag. It was perceived as tokenism, and it was stated that if the University wished to address the issue of gay and lesbian concerns on campus, flying a flag was not the answer. Gay staff and students fear for the consequences of proclaiming [their sexuality] openly. Fear of perception and consequences preclude gay people on campus from participating in the G&L society at DCU.

The Equality Director agreed that it is emerging that gay staff, and, most particularly, young gay students suffer gravely due to their sexual orientation, and are fearful of openly proclaiming their sexuality. It is also the case that those individuals (staff) requesting the flying of the friendship flag were singularly motivated by a desire to reduce the fear and isolation felt by students, rather than a desire to promote "the gay agenda". The Equality Director has begun to explore the possibility of initiating a G&L task/working group, composed of staff and student members, with a view to finding ways to solve problems and improve the quality of life of the G&L community on campus.

The Equality Director informed the Group that the decision to fly any flags on campus rests with the President. A code of practice exists at DCU in relation to the flying of flags. The President is sympathetic to the request and is in discussions with the Equality Director on the matter.

The Group expressed concerns regarding the potential precedence of flying the flag of any one interest group. Alternatives, representative of diversity, were discussed.

It was agreed that the President will respond to the request.

### 3.3 Display of Posters and Graffiti on DCU Campus

The Equality Director has arranged to meet with the Societies Officer and representatives of the Students Union to make progress on the matter of a code for the display of posters and related material on campus.

The Equality Director has made contact with the Buildings Office in relation to the writing of *graffiti* and will report back on the issue of minimizing the appearance of *graffiti* in due course.

### 3.4 Evaluation: DCU Access Service

The Equality Director reported that she and Access Officer, Maeve O'Byrne, and fellow ESG member, Dr Padraig MacNeela, had met to begin the process of bringing forward projects or initiatives relevant to the findings of Access Evaluation Report.

## **4. Chairman's Business**

There were no topics for the Meeting under this item.

## **5. Policy Review And Development**

### 5.1 DCU Policy to Promote Respect and Protect Dignity:

In response to issues raised by the equality auditors, the University's legal adviser, John O'Dwyer, had made a number of amendments to the Policy. These had been circulated to the Group.

The Equality Director raised concerns with two of the proposed amendments, and circulated a proposal to refine the two amendments in question:

(A) Section 6.2.1 (a) deals with the initial examination of a complaint. The proposed new wording from John O'Dwyer stated "the complaint should be subject to an initial examination by a designated member of Management who can be considered impartial ..."

The issues of "who" makes the designation, and the need to adhere to principles of natural justice were discussed. Following discussion, it was agreed that the HR Director would designate the member of Management. It was further agreed that the wording be changed to "the complaint should be subject to an initial examination by a member of Management, *designated by the HR Director*, and who can be considered impartial, *and independent and who is, within reason, acceptable to the persons involved ...*"

(B) Section 7 Confidentiality: the proposed new wording (italics) from John O’Dwyer stated “*All individuals involved in the Informal or Formal Complaints Procedures (especially Listeners and Contact Persons) referred to above are expected to maintain the utmost confidentiality on the subject, however DCU will of course be obliged to disclose the details of any complaint to such persons and to such extent as is necessary to investigate the complaint*”

The Equality Director informed the Group that such a change to the provisions on confidentiality would have ramifications for the conduct of the DCU *Listeners* service. *Listeners* are bound by confidentiality as outlined at Section 6.1 (a) of the Policy, and had been trained according to the principle of confidentiality as exists in a client/counsellor relationship. This amendment as proposed would now affect the confidential basis of the *Listeners* relationship with the individuals consulting them.

After much discussion, the Group agreed there is a need for greater clarity regarding the area of confidentiality in Section 7 of the Policy, as it relates to *Listeners*.

It was agreed that further legal advice be sought from John O’Dwyer concerning the assurance of confidentiality surrounding the relationship between the *Listener* and the individual seeking their help.

(C) It was agreed to further define the role of Listener at Section 6.1 by amending the Policy to state: “ *It is not the role of the Listener, however, to act as a mediator*”

It was agreed that it would not now be possible to forward amendments to the Respect and Dignity Policy to Executive and Governing Authority for adoption before September next

## **6. Equality Review and Action Plan**

### **6.1 Progress on the Equality Review:**

The Equality Director informed the Group that the Interim Report will be available end July. The Report will provide the basis for the drawing up of the Equality Action Plan. The auditors hoped to proceed with this work through August in collaboration with a DCU Equality Action Plan working group.

The likely availability of DCU personnel during August was discussed. It was agreed to proceed with setting a date in the last week of July for the presentation of the Interim Report.

## **7. Any Other Business**

None

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

The Equality Director and the Chairman will liaise with the Group by email on a possible date end July.