



## **Putting People at the Heart of the College Community - Harlow College Equality Scheme 2011-15**

### **Foreword**

Harlow College is pleased to present this Equality Scheme and four-year action plan, which seeks to ensure that equality and diversity goals are embedded throughout our college. It is especially appropriate that we publish this scheme at a time when the government has introduced new measures in the Equality Act 2010, requiring public authorities, such as our college, to promote equality and prevent discrimination, across a wider range of characteristics that represent the diversity of our communities.

It is very important for us to hear the ideas and views of our students, staff, stakeholders and community on whether our focus and policies are right. Together we can shape provision to address the more pronounced circumstances of disadvantage that are experienced by some groups within our society. Such consultation has shaped our priorities for the next four years and we will continue to seek the views of our community in monitoring our policies and practices.

**Ruth Braysher**

**Chair, Harlow College Equality and Diversity Steering Group**

## Harlow College Equality Scheme 2011-2015

### Background

Harlow College is a tertiary college, providing a very wide range of courses for students aged 14-16, 16-19 and over. Like all public bodies, Harlow College had a statutory duty to develop equality frameworks for the promotion of race, disability and gender equality, and to publish race, disability and gender equality schemes, which set out how the College intended to meet its statutory duties. The requirement to promote equal opportunities was also set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000. Following wide consultation with members of the college community and its staff, Harlow College published its first Equality Scheme and action plan in March 2007<sup>i</sup>, detailing overarching equalities objectives, and including measures to strengthen and promote community cohesion and social inclusion. In the period October 2010 – March 2011, the college reviewed its schemes for race, disability and gender and consulted on its equality priorities for 2011-2015.

The Equality Act 2010 which came into force in October 2010, strengthens and simplifies discrimination law. It introduces new statutory duties to promote equality whereby Harlow College must, in the exercise of its functions, pay due regard to the need to promote equality in relation to: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation (known as the “protected characteristics” in the Act). The Government has announced the framework for the General Equality Duty to come into effect in April 2011. The new general equality duty does not require the college to set equality objectives relating to each protected characteristic, but rather, to use evidence to determine our priorities and the areas of greatest relevance to promoting equality. From April 2012, the college will be required to publish our equality priorities for the next four years.

### Our Equality Priorities

The equality objectives outlined in this scheme (SES) are drawn from our previous Equality Schemes, for race, gender and disability. These documents and a review of them are archived on the Harlow College website. Taking into account all the evidence the college has gathered through our research, consultation and equality impact assessment, some key priorities have emerged. These include the following:

- Legislative changes are reflected in our policies and provisions
- Employment and student policies reflect the new provisions of the equality act 2010
- Data and management information systems capture details, where possible, on the new protected characteristics
- Student involvement and feedback
- Business case for equality with employers
- Equality and diversity training and awareness for all staff and students
- Development of inclusive and accessible physical and social environments

- Development of networks/support for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) staff and students
- Advancing equality of opportunity to the minority gender where there is a recognised gender divide.

Each of these thematic priorities is addressed in the colleges' 2011-15 equality action plan.

### **Engagement and Involvement**

We recognise that by taking a more inclusive approach, involving our key stakeholders, the college is better placed to ensure that our services and employment practices meet the needs of all members of our community, and of all our staff.

Our vision is to ensure that all members of our college community are provided with a real opportunity to participate fully and to contribute to all areas of college life. Key to this is to ensure that all our learners and staff are able to have their say to influence the work of the college. We achieve this through consultation, using the feedback and comments to inform the development of our policies and the design of accessible and appropriate learning programmes. We are constantly reviewing our methods to ensure we communicate without barriers, and in accessible formats, as required.

### **Leadership**

The college has a strong ethos to encourage and inspire both our staff and learners to give their best and achieve high levels of success. Our Governors set and monitor the College strategy and task the executive team the responsibility of delivering it. Within each academy and service area and in other positions of responsibility, we ensure there is adequate provision within the college plans to give equality and diversity a high public profile, and ownership. The college is committed to ensuring that its' staff is knowledgeable and committed to the broadest principles of equal opportunities and to mitigating potential discriminatory barriers limiting individuals from achieving their aspirations.

We have taken steps to ensure our Governing body reflects the diversity of our college and local community. The profile of the Corporation reflects the skills required to ensure the overall functioning of the College, quality of service, financial health, proper use of public funds and effective management and that this is achieved by a Governing Body that is made up of men and women of a range of ages, ethnic origins and beliefs.

The Corporation is responsible for ensuring that all the relevant equal opportunities policies and procedures are in place, and that their importance is given high profile by key staff. Governors are ultimately responsible for ensuring that there is no unlawful discrimination, that reports are made as required by the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and that the College acts positively where appropriate, that there is awareness of diversity issues and that the College responds to a diverse student body and community at large.

### **Monitoring**

The college has established an Equality and Diversity (E&D) Steering Group, and developed sub group activities, to ensure there are frequent opportunities for staff, students and others working in partnership with the college to discuss, evaluate, review and influence our policies and performance. The E&D Steering Group has representation that includes governors, staff and students, and meets quarterly. In addition, there is an Equality Impact Assessment team represented by teaching and service areas across the college. This group consults each term with students, staff and external stakeholders on progress with equality impact assessment. Finally, the college produces an Annual Report on Equality and Diversity to the corporation.

### **Review**

Our previous Single Equality Scheme was reviewed in July 2010 and was put out for consultation via our college website and consultation with students, staff, partners and external stakeholders between October 2010 and March 2011. A copy of this and reviews of the Gender, Race and Disability schemes, can be found on the college website. [www.harlow-college.ac.uk/aboutus/equality](http://www.harlow-college.ac.uk/aboutus/equality)

### **Equality Scheme Action Plan 2011-2014**

This scheme will be monitored and reviewed annually and is attached at Annex.1

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<sup>i</sup> Harlow College's Equality Scheme, 'Putting People at the Heart of the College Community' December 2006-December 2009