

Some FAQs on the Gender Equality Duty

Q1. When does it come into force?

The duty will come into force on 6 April 2007. But public bodies (including colleges and universities) do not have to have their gender equality schemes published until 30 April 2007. This is because the code of practice was only finalised in December.

Q2. Who does the GED apply to?

It applies to all public authorities, including colleges and universities, and to private bodies carrying out a public function, thus covering many services contracted out to the private sector.

Q3. Is the GED only concerned with women's rights?

No. All the guidance relating to it stresses that it is about addressing issues of inequality and disadvantage for men as well as women. It also covers equality for trans people in relation to employment and training, but not yet in relation to goods and services, which will come into being in October 2007.

Q4. What does the GED consist of?

Like the duties for race and disability, the GED consists of a general duty and specific duties.

Q5. What is the general duty?

'To eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment. To promote equality of opportunity between women and men.'

Q6. What are the specific duties?

To prepare and publish a gender equality scheme, setting out gender equality objectives. In preparing the scheme, the college/university must gather information on the effect of its policies and practices on women and men, address the causes of any pay gap, do gender equality impact assessments on existing and new policies and practices, and consult relevant groups, including trade unions.

- To implement the actions set out in the scheme within three years.
- To report annually on progress, and to review the scheme every three years.

Q7. Why is the GED important?

It is the first major change to sex discrimination legislation for thirty years. Like the race and disability duties, it shifts the onus away from individuals complaining of unfair treatment, and instead puts a positive duty on colleges and universities to promote gender equality in all their policies and practices.

Q8. Who will it affect in colleges and universities?

Everyone. The GED applies to our institutions both as employers and as service providers. Gender equality must be aimed for in relation to staff, students, potential students and visitors.

Q9. What should the branch/LA be doing?

The GED is superior to the race and disability duties in one respect – it contains a legal requirement to consult trade unions. UCU needs to take full advantage of this at local level. If you have not yet been consulted, demand immediately to know what is happening, as institutions will certainly be working on drawing up their schemes now.

Questions you might like to ask include:

- What has been done so far?
- What monitoring information are they gathering?
- What are the priority areas for gender impact assessment?
- What is the plan for addressing the gender pay gap? (There is bound to be one.)
- What will the main aims of the action plan be?
- What are the consultation arrangements?
- On all these areas, UCU should be consulted. You might want to ask for a steering group to implement the equality duties – either three separate ones, or one overarching one.

Q10. What is UCU doing nationally?

More detailed advice is available from the website and don't forget to read Equality News for updates. In addition, staff from the Equality Unit are happy to come to regions to deliver a one-day or half-day training on the GED if there is a demand.

Q11. Where can I get more information?

The statutory code of practice produced by the Equal Opportunities Commission, available from: www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=19689.

General information on the GED is at www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=17686.

There is also information put out by the government's Women and Equality Unit at www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/cehr/gender_duty.htm.