



Review of the Single Equality Action Plan 2012

I am delighted to publish this review of our first Single Equality Action Plan. The plan for 2012 built on our achievements through our disability equality scheme, race equality action plan, and gender equality scheme, and focussed on reviewing existing policies and our decision making and review processes. Progress has been made against all of our objectives. The Governing Body continue to be committed to fulfilling our obligations under the public equality duty whilst fulfilling our mission to promote scholarship through teaching and research.

We will continue to work to remove any barriers, real or perceived, which might deter people of the highest ability from applying to the College, either as staff or students, and we will continue in our aim to assist our students and staff in reaching their full potential, providing an inclusive environment which values diversity and maintains a working, learning and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all our staff, students and alumni are respected.

Dr Alice Prochaska
Principal

Summary of progress

Single Equality Duty and Action Plan

'Publish the Single Equality Duty 2012-2015 and the Single Equality Action Plan 2012 on the College intranet and website, monitor and evaluate progress'

The Governing Body approved the Single Equality Duty and the Action Plan for 2012 and these have been published on the College's website. In Trinity Term we revisited the terms of reference for the College's Equality Committee and updated these to promote the delivery of our public duty across all activities of the College. As part of our commitment to monitoring and evaluation of our Plan, an additional meeting of Equality Committee has been added to the agenda of College committees and Equality Committee will now meet twice a year.

Policy and decision making

'College committees to consider the implications for equality in respect of policies and decisions made; to review the impact of decisions made and take action to address any unintended consequences'

In order to promote the consideration of equality as an integral part of decision making, the Equality Committee recommended the following statement should be included on all College agendas by way of ensuring due regard has been given to equality matters before decisions or policies were finalised: *'before decisions or policies are agreed by this committee, due regard should be given to assessing their impact on equality and compliance with the general equality duty'*.

The impacts of decisions made have been assessed and concerns about unintended consequences addressed. For example Hilary Term saw the implementation of a new admissions policy to St Paul's, the College Nursery. The Nursery Committee reviewed the impact of this new policy in September 2012 and

agreed that the policy was not, in practice, promoting equality on the grounds of maternity and paternity. The admissions policy was amended and applications to St Paul's since have soared.

'Provide information and training on the legal requirements of equality and diversity'

Mandatory training on data protection was provided to all Support staff, including the Principal and the Senior Managers, to ensure that those working with sensitive personal data understood fully their obligations to safeguard these data. This was an important first step for Support staff in raising their awareness of legal requirements relating to equality and diversity.

HR and Equality Policies

'Review the Integrated Equality & Diversity Policy (2008) and publish an updated policy; review and update the equality and diversity pages on the College website'

The Single Equality Scheme, published in January 2012, supersedes all other equality policies. The previous equality action plans and policies relating to race, gender, and disability have been removed from the College's website and have been replaced by the new Equality scheme documents.

'Provide links to other websites'

Links to useful equality information have been provided on the College website under the 'Publication Scheme'.

1. **Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)** - this links to the EHRC website and provides general advice and guidance on rights, responsibilities and good practice, based on equality law and human rights.
2. **Equality - your rights** - this links to the EHRC website and guides individuals through their equality rights and what to do if they experience discrimination.
3. **Public Sector Equality Duty** - this links to the Home Office website and provides an explanation of the Public Sector Equality Duty and to whom it applies. This website also contains links to equality publications and other related websites.

'Review employment policies within the Support Staff Handbook (2009)'

A review of the employment policies has been completed and most were found to be compliant. However, consideration of the sick pay policy for Support staff found that the current policy may have the potential to allow indirect discrimination on the grounds of gender, disability, and pregnancy and maternity. The Governing Body have endorsed the publication of an updated policy which allows for more generous sick pay arrangements to be applied in certain circumstances, particularly those involving hospitalisation and care for critical illness.

In addition, the default government retirement age no longer applies for Support staff and reference to this will be removed in the next edition of the handbook. References to the list of protected characteristics will be updated throughout the handbook to include those covered by the Equality Act 2010.

Equal Opportunities

'Improve mechanisms for gathering and using equality and diversity information'

In Trinity Term a significant investment was made into the purchase of a new human resource information system (HRIS). Questionnaires to capture personal data were sent out in Michaelmas Term to stipendiary and non-stipendiary academics, and to support staff. The HRIS will provide a much needed improvement to the recording of equal opportunities data and the facility to analyse and report on these data. Once the

system goes live, equal opportunities data will be collected from candidates at the time of application thereby improving the collection mechanism for information on academics and support staff employed.

'Conduct an equality survey to examine perceptions and experiences of Academic members and Support staff in relation to equality and diversity'

Surveys have been completed for Support staff and Academics members. External consultants Spa Future Thinking were used to carry out the survey in order to promote confidence in the survey. The surveys revealed that awareness of the College's Equality policies was poor, as was awareness of the work of the College's Equality Committee. Although disappointing, the results of the survey provided an opportunity to improve communication within the College. The first step has been taken by launching the College's first newsletter for staff - the 'Somerville Grapevine' - in Michaelmas Term 2012 and this has received very positive feedback.

Trusts and Special Funds

'Review all trusts and special funds'

Somerville College was founded in 1879 to give women the chance to benefit from an Oxford education as at that time women were excluded from membership of the University. The College admitted men in 1994 and now has an equal mix of female and male students.

Somerville's heritage means that it has a number of trusts and special funds that have been bestowed by alumni prior to the College becoming a mixed college, and the wording of some of these trusts and special funds restricts their use to the education of women only. We have received advice that it is not possible to alter the wording of these trusts and special funds retrospectively.

Whilst we acknowledge that it is not ideal to accept the use of trusts that have a gender restriction, not to use these funds for the education of women would be a waste of valuable financial resource for the education of women. However, what is key is our methodology for identifying recipients for funds that contribute to scholarships and bursaries. We don't start by looking at the funds and seeing who we might give the income to. Instead, we make decisions about awarding scholarships and bursaries without reference to the specific funds available in the first instance. We then search through our restricted funds for ones that match nominees and apply those restricted funds to the selected students who are eligible to hold them. If there are any nominees who do not match the criteria for any of the restricted funds, then their bursaries or awards are paid for from unrestricted funds. If no students are nominated for an award that matches a restricted fund's criteria then the income from that fund is not spent that year and accumulated until a year when there is an award nominee who qualifies for support from the fund. Thus, no student is favourably supported through bursaries, scholarships, exhibitions or prizes by virtue of matching the gender or any other criteria for recipients from any of our restricted funds.

And in addition ...

The installation of a hearing loops was welcomed in the College Chapel (which is non-denominational) and a further hearing loop will be available in Flora Anderson Hall when it is re-opened in January 2013 after completion of the 2012 building works. The hall will be fully accessible via a ramp and will include fully accessible WC facilities. Further work to improve accessibility to Margery Fry building has been completed during the year.