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‘IF YOU HAPPEN TO BE THE RIGHT AGE, HAVE THE RIGHT COLOUR, NO DISABILITY ... YOU’RE SORTED’: SOCIAL AUDIT AND EQUALITY POLICIES FOR STAFF IN SCOTTISH FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES.

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the implications of adopting social audit approaches in order to implement equality policies in Scottish FE colleges, exploring the tension between surface compliance and deep institutional engagement. It provides a brief overview of the Scottish further education context, before turning to a consideration of social audit and equalities within the sector. The data reported comes from a research study funded by the Scottish Further Education Unit which examined college policies and practices in relation to equalities. The study involved analysis of statistical data, a questionnaire survey of all Scottish colleges and in-depth case studies in five colleges. The paper examines the pros and cons of social audit as a means of achieving institutional changes in the field of equality.

Key words: Equal opportunities, Further Education Colleges, social audit

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the impact of audit process on the implementation of equal opportunity policies in Scottish Further Education (FE) colleges. It considers whether a focus on legislation and the use of audit processes lead to effective implementation at all levels, or to more limited surface compliance. Before examining data from a research study the equality agenda, the Scottish college context and the nature of new public management are examined.

Over the past decade, there has been a growing body of policy, legislation and regulation focusing on equality issues emanating from the European Union, the UK government and the devolved jurisdictions of the UK (McKie & Riddell 2006). Within Great Britain, a discrimination law review was undertaken in 2006/2007 to explore the possibility of harmonising equalities legislation to cover the six equality strands (gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion/belief) recognised by the EU and covered by the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR). By 2007, the duty on public sector bodies to positively promote equality applied to race, disability and gender (but not age, sexual orientation and religion/belief). In Scotland, equality policy has a wider ambit than the six strands covered by the Equality Act 2006. The Scotland Act defines equal opportunities in terms of ‘the prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons on grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions, such as religious beliefs or political opinions’. This has led the Scottish Executive to be pro-active in encouraging the mainstreaming of equal opportunities (Breitenbach, 2004), with the Equalities Unit in the Scottish Executive charged with ensuring that all policy and legislation is ‘equality-proofed’. To ensure compliance with the legislation, there is a growing emphasis on social audit in the form of monitoring and target setting.

This paper draws on data from research commissioned by the Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) to examine the development of equality strategies in Scottish FE colleges, and the extent to which social justice goals can be achieved

through the application of social audit principles and practices (Riddell *et al.* 2005). Following Mackay and Bilton (2000), questions are raised about whether social audit approaches are able to bring about change within the deep structures of institutional life, or whether such approaches tend to reflect surface compliance. We first provide an overview of the Scottish further education context, before considering how institutions are fulfilling their new equality duties, including their responsibility to monitor progress.

Scottish Further Education: the wider context

Scottish Further Education colleges, currently numbering 43, were established between 40 and 100 years ago. Their traditional *raison d'être* was to serve the needs of the Scottish economy, although recently there has been a greater focus on building social capital, community regeneration and lifelong learning (e.g. Scottish Executive, 2005). Following the implementation of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, the Scottish Executive took over responsibility for the colleges from local authorities. Each college is now governed by a Board of Managers and there is a strong emphasis on the adoption of private sector management practices with a major focus on performance management.

Data collected by the Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education (SFEFC, now SFC, www.sfc.ac.uk) show that in 2004 there were a total of 13,176 permanent staff and 8,603 temporary staff in Scottish colleges. There were more full-time permanent male members of staff than female and more part-time female members of staff on part-time contracts and there are considerable gender differences in seniority and status. The majority of principals (33 out of 43) were male in 2004 and this indicated little change from 2000-2001 when 36 out of 46 principals were male. The main area of change over the past five years has been at depute principal level with an increase from 31% to 39% of females at this level. In 2003-04 around 95% of staff were white, the majority Scottish with around 5% from a non-white background. This is broadly in line with the proportion of black and minority ethnic people (BME) in the general Scottish population. However, the 2001 Census revealed that a higher proportion of children and young people in Scotland are from black and minority ethnic groups compared with older age groups, and therefore a steady increase in the proportion of BME staff in further education colleges would be expected in the future. There is currently a lack of BME representation at senior level in FE colleges.

(www.sfc.ac.uk/statistics/stats_fe_facts.htm).

New Public Management, Further Education and Equality

Since the mid-1980s, public services in Scotland and the rest of the UK have been transformed by the advent of new public management (NPM). According to Newman (2000), the term NPM refers to a series of reforms which:

reshaped the relations between public and private sectors, professionals and managers, and central and local government. Citizens and clients were recast as consumers and public service organisations were recast in the image of the business world. (Newman 2000: 45)

The management of individual and organisational performance was increasingly emphasised, with indicators being used to assess progress against pre-specified goals. The 'audit society', drawing on financial audit was extended to public services (Power 1997). Regulatory systems meant that management could be devolved to local level whilst still being controlled from the centre. In addition, accountability regimes were intended not only to ensure service effectiveness and efficiency, but also to allow consumers of public services to choose between competing providers, thus fuelling markets. Public service professionals, rather

than being distinct from managers, were increasingly co-opted into managerial roles (Exworthy & Halford 1999). According to writers such as Ball (2003), this caused considerable psychological tension as devices such as appraisal and inspection pressurised individuals to internalise responsibility for problems which were often structural in nature.

There are ongoing debates about whether modes of working associated with new managerialism (Clarke & Newman 1997), such as equality audits and target-setting, are capable of promoting social justice goals (Clarke *et al.* 2000; Exworthy & Halford, 1999). On the one hand, critics of new public management maintain that regimes which are intended to foster accountability and transparency may simply be used to limit the creativity of professionals, distort performance by encouraging minimal compliance with targets and ultimately breed a climate of mistrust (Ball, 2003; Power 1997). On the other hand, proponents of new public management argue that effective public services can only be delivered when appropriate goals and values are identified and targets used to assess progress.

Despite the misgivings of some, it is evident that equality policy and practice is increasingly couched within managerialist rhetoric and practice. For example, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Act 2005 and the Equality Act 2006 all place a duty on public sector organisations to actively promote equality. In order to demonstrate compliance with the legislation, institutions must produce action plans which present data on the social characteristics of the staff they employ, identify any disproportionalities with regard to recruitment and promotion, and set targets for rectifying any inequalities, enabling progress to be charted over time.

Equality policies in FE have, since the 1990s, been informed by business ethos and practice. Initially, the introduction of the Scottish Quality Management System, the development of new Performance Indicators and the Investors in People initiative provided the broad framework for equality policies. Subsequently, colleges worked to the SFEFC/HMIE Quality Framework (2004) (www.hmie.gov.uk/publications.asp), and more recently have adopted the approaches set out in government guidance on the new statutory duties. All of these schemes were based on the premise that greater equality could be achieved by measuring progress against quantifiable targets. More recently, GB disability legislation has provided the framework within which FE colleges operate, and this too is framed implicitly within a new public management discourse, since there is a requirement to demonstrate progress against quantifiable indicators. This paper will address the following questions:

- How have colleges responded to legislative requirement for equal opportunities policies and practices?
- How is the audit process managed in relation to equal opportunities for staff and who is involved in this process?
- To what extent are equal opportunity policies for staff translated into practice?

The Research Project

The project was conducted in late 2005 and consisted of documentary analysis of secondary sources, a survey questionnaire of all Scottish colleges and in-depth interviews with a small number of staff in selected case study colleges (Riddell *et al.* 2005).

The questionnaires were administered to human resource managers since the locus of responsibility for these policies appeared to lie with the Human Resources Directorate. The questionnaire survey sought information relating to the nature of current policies and methods used to disseminate information about EO policies to

staff, the analysis and monitoring of the policies and the impact of the monitoring on policies, procedures and practices. The response rate was high for a survey with three quarter of the questionnaires returned.

Five colleges, differing in size and geographic location, were invited to participate in qualitative research on staff perceptions of equality policies in practice. Colleges A, C and D were large, traditional FE colleges located in three different Scottish cities. College E, whilst in a city, was slightly smaller than the other three colleges. College B was small, rural and offered mainly land-based courses. The staff interviews were organised by the contact person within each college, and reflected differences in role (senior manager, academic staff, support staff).

In each college, about eight semi-structured interviews were conducted involving a total of 39 members of staff. These included four senior managers, 17 support staff and 18 lecturing staff. Support staff included librarians, administrators, clerical workers and janitors. The majority of interviewees were aged between 30 and 59 and all apart from two were white. In total, 15 men and 20 women were interviewed and most had been in post for several years, the longest serving working in the same college for 23 years. There were seven trade union representatives.

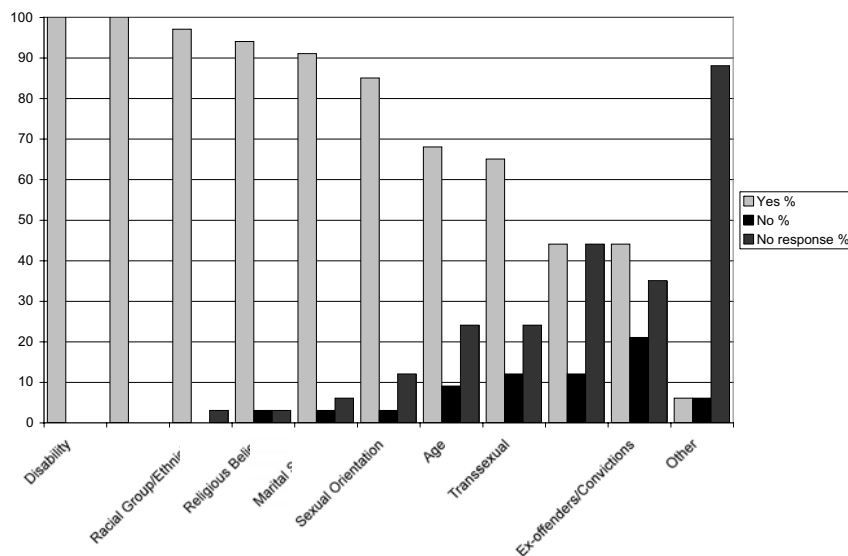
The interviews explored staff knowledge and awareness of equal opportunities policies and their impact on college culture and ethos. To ensure confidentiality, quotes from individual members of staff indicate only which college they came from and whether they were senior managers (SM), support staff (S), lecturing staff (L) or trade union representatives (TU). Staff interviews were arranged by a college contact and all staff were volunteers, therefore it is likely that interviewees were those most kindly disposed to equalities policies. It may be that there would have been more negative responses if staff had been randomly selected.

The following sections present data from the analysis of institutional policies, questionnaire survey and case study interviews to examine the extent to which the audit process has led to surface compliance with legislation or whether there is evidence of practices developing as a result of the process.

Equal Opportunities Policies: strands covered and dissemination to staff

Data from the survey showed that gender and disability were covered by all colleges and race was included by all but one the colleges (see Figure 1). However, this college was in the process of finalising its race equality policy. In contrast, only 44% of policies dealt explicitly with equal pay. Around 95% included religious belief, whereas only 85% of the colleges dealt with sexual orientation. Age was included in equal opportunities policies in about 70% of the colleges. Additional areas covered by some colleges included the rehabilitation of offenders, socio-economic group and rurality. One college stated that trans-gender issues were covered by the umbrella term sexual orientation.

Figure 1: Equalities strands addressed in college equal opportunities policies



The questionnaire responses also indicated that there were mechanisms for informing staff about equality policies and any changes to these policies. 85% of the colleges reported that they communicated all policies to staff, including management, and provided training in equal opportunities for managers. It appeared that in most colleges staff were informed about equality policies at induction or during training although this meant that most communication was with new staff and those attending training, with the attendant danger, particularly in the latter case, of ‘preaching to the converted’. Only a small number of colleges used departmental or team meetings or trade unions to inform staff about equality policies, although these may provide better opportunities for informal discussion. Other places where information could be found, such as the staff handbook and/or the website, were mentioned by about two thirds of colleges as means of communicating with staff. However, it is evident that such mechanisms provide few opportunities for debate and discussion.

The interview data indicated that staff were aware of the policies and also that some strands of equality policy had a higher profile within the institution than others:

Although there is no particular prioritising/neglecting of any area, I am more aware of disability and race. With regards to the other areas, the policies are there on the internal internet, but I don't know ...People need some training on these areas. It is necessary to raise awareness here too. (College A, L 2)

Legislation was seen as a main driver for policy development:

New legislation on race and disability makes it necessary for the college to develop policies about it. Age, it's there, but it's not high on the agenda. From the college's point of view the EO policy includes all strands, but people's awareness of these strands may not be high. (College A, L1)

However, some interviewees felt that students – the consumers – were the main reason for the development of equality policies. This would indicate the influence of the new managerialism where educational establishments are expected to run as

businesses with students as the consumers and the top priority for the college is to enrol students on courses.

... the main priority is delivering the curriculum to the students – but in doing so you have to ensure that you are not discriminating against either staff or students. The priority is getting students in [to the college] to teach ... we are not actively recruiting minority groups, there is no targeting of specific groups. (College B, S6)

This emphasis on students was also noted in relation to equality training (see Riddell *et al.* 2005) and comments were made that the existence of policies did not necessarily lead to changes in practice.

Yes in terms of policies but there is the issue of implementing the policies. (College, C, S9, TU)

Whilst staff showed awareness of the policies there was far more limited evidence for engagement with policymaking at grassroots level. There was a strong feeling that policy formulation fell within the remit of senior management, and was of no concern to staff at lower levels. Some were not concerned about their lack of involvement:

No [not involved]. I think there is a committee ...if I was interested in it, I could join the EO committee that deal with this. (College C, L7)

However, another member of staff felt that she would have welcomed the opportunity to participate:

I put myself forward to look at governance, including equal opportunities policies. I don't know if they'd let me be part of the formulation process, I just don't know. Sometimes they tend to involve more senior members of staff and not always look at the expertise in the college. They don't always recognise expertise that individual members of staff have. (College C, L8)

There was some evidence of trade union involvement, particularly in one college:

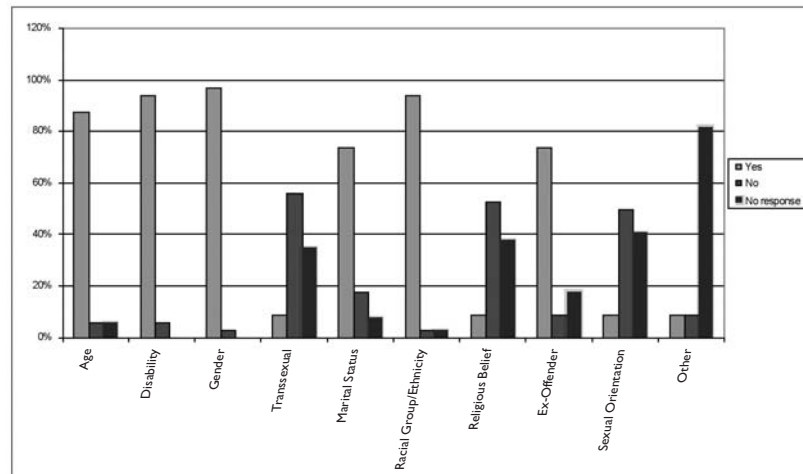
Union officials regularly take part in looking at and improving all the policies. They are actively involved. (College A, L1)

Staff interview responses thus showed awareness of equality policies and they also supported the documentary analysis showing greater emphasis on disability, gender and race/ethnicity. Interviewees felt that, whilst the equality agenda was clearly seen as important, the concern to maximise income might take priority. The trade union representative quoted above noted that whilst it was vital to have policies in place, this did not mean that implementation and action would automatically follow. In addition, there was limited evidence for grassroots involvement in development of policies. For some this was of no concern whilst others would like to be involved but had not been included on the relevant committee.

Implementing and Monitoring Equality Policies

It was also evident from the survey that for recruitment and promotion monitoring purposes, data were gathered principally in relation to gender, disability and race (see Figure 3). Only a few colleges gathered data on religion and sexual orientation which were regarded as lying within the private, rather than the public sphere. So whilst there were written policies for some of the new strands, the monitoring process covered only the old strands.

Figure 3: Data gathered by HR for monitoring purposes



Policies were thus in place for the strands covered by legislation but a smaller proportion (75%) had an action plan and/or an employee complaints procedure. Additional documentary analysis from the case study colleges showed that four of the five colleges had an action plan in relation to race and one had an action plan in relation to disability. Typically, the race equality plans aimed to monitor and review staff and student recruitment to identify any disproportionalities relative to the wider population and to use the data to inform future strategic planning. Action plans did not generally identify quantifiable targets to be reviewed within a given timescale, but often identified the task of establishing ‘monitoring and effective evaluation procedures’ as one of their goals. There was no mention in this documentation of positive action programmes to increase the participation of particular groups of staff or students; however, there was some evidence for it from the interview data (see p. 8).

Many of the colleges said that they would adapt work practices, for example, making accessibility adjustments for disabled people and reducing working hours for those with family or caring responsibilities. It was noticeable that staff discussion or action groups were generally not used and the action plans reviewed tended to be aspirational.

Very few complaints or grievances had been reported to the colleges (as the employer) in relation to any of the equality strands in the past three years. Of those reported four related to ethnicity, three to gender, and one to disability. One HR manager declared that ‘most complaints are raised by students’. This suggests that the notion of the student as customer has percolated into general awareness, but staff were rather less likely to see themselves as having rights in this regard. Most complaints and grievances were handled informally and investigations were carried out internally. Colleges reported that routes of redress such as internal employment tribunals, external investigations or external tribunals had been used on only one occasion or never, and only one college reported that formal grievances had been increasing.

Colleges were asked about the location of responsibility for monitoring the impact of equality policies. Since patterns of recruitment and promotion were used as performance indicators in relation to equality policies, the college human resources department was generally responsible for the gathering and analysis of data. Information was subsequently disseminated to a range of college committees,

for example the equality and diversity committee, the senior executive team, and the Board of Management. It appeared that most information dissemination was to management committees particularly those involved in personnel, and grassroots staff were not necessarily kept up to date with data and trends, nor were they engaged in discussion of possibly controversial areas.

The majority of the colleges used the data collected on the social characteristics of staff newly recruited or promoted when writing HR reports, for benchmarking activities and to inform policy decisions. Around half of the colleges reported simply keeping equality data on file without further analysis and only one third used information when setting targets for employment of under-represented groups.

To summarise, the survey data showed that colleges appeared to have made considerable progress in the development of equal opportunities policies and their information systems; however, formal data collection was restricted to areas which were deemed to lie within the public domain and were covered, or were about to be covered, by the public sector duty. There was clearly a greater degree of nervousness in seeking data on the sexual orientation and religion and belief, which were regarded as relating to the private sphere. Information about equality policies was disseminated to staff through formal channels such as induction programmes and handbooks, and there did not appear to be a great deal of grassroots engagement with such information flows. The monitoring of staff characteristics was restricted to the areas currently covered by legislation and the information flow included various tiers of management. Legislation was clearly driving an audit process that had led to the development of policies that were required by law, there were systems for monitoring equal opportunities in certain areas and staff were informed of the policies. However, the monitoring process did not seem to feed into action plans with clearly specified targets, e.g. for recruitment or promotion of underrepresented groups. In a sense the audit process could be considered incomplete; in addition, whilst staff were informed of policies it was not clear the extent to which policies affected practices and how much influence staff had on development of policy.

The Daily Impact of Equality Policies

The interviews explored the extent to which staff felt that equality principles covering all the strands were reflected in college practice and ethos on an everyday basis. In relation to gender, there were mixed views. In two of the colleges there had been an increase in the number of female staff in senior management, however, this did not represent the national scene as there had been little change in the pattern of women's representation in senior management:

Higher level positions are mainly female, e.g. Principal and Vice Principal. Support staff is pretty equally distributed male/female (College C, S7)

Looking at our figures there are slightly more males in promoted posts, but more and more females. CPD has enabled women to get into promoted posts. Family friendly policies help. (College D, SM3)

It was acknowledged in the same college that there had been very little change in the gender balance of staff in particular subject areas:

Stereotypes in vocational areas are still there, limited change. There are no male teachers in care, no female teachers in construction. (College D, SM3)

There seemed to be a perception amongst staff that there were more women in promoted post but statistical data does not fully support that. In addition, there is clearly a gender imbalance in vocational area reflecting the wider labour market. As the data on p. 2 show, labour market conditions are also reflected in the type of

contracts that men and women have with far more women on part-time contracts. In spite of this, none of the colleges seemed to have any positive action plans to encourage more women into the most senior positions or to deal with contractual issues. This could suggest that whilst policies exist and monitoring takes place, there is limited action taken to address more deep-seated structural gender inequalities.

This more superficial approach to implementation was also suggested in relation to disability and race. Generally staff felt that issues relating to disability had been addressed, however, further discussion revealed that disability was viewed narrowly in terms of physical impairment:

The college has responded well to the DDA, toilets, lifts and evacu- chairs in case of fires etc. for disabled staff. One member of staff has a hearing impairment. (College E, L18, TU)

It was also noted by one respondent that adjustments had to be requested rather than being automatically provided:

We have the facilities and would anticipate it. Sometimes adjustments are not made for me (I have arthritis), I have to go and ask and then it will get done, e.g. coldness of room, etc. (College E, S15)

Whilst in one college it was felt that there was good representation of BME staff, this was not the case in the others. In particular, under-representation in senior posts was noted:

No, there is massive room for improvement here. We have only one senior lecturer who is BME. Personally I think that is shocking. (College A, L2)

And:

There is not a good representation of BME staff. But ...the BME population in this city is around 4%, that is more or less the same percentage of BME staff that are employed in the college. BME staff are better represented in particular posts but not at different levels. We tried to address this by asking BME staff how they perceive the college. We also send recruitment information to all ethnic minority organisations in the city. We do try to promote the college to different communities. (College C, L10)

There is evidence of some positive action in relation to BME staff but a senior manager in another college implied that colleges could not be expected to shoulder responsibility for the low proportion of BME staff. In addition, there was a suggestion that attitudes towards BME staff were not necessarily positive and that measures to redress the imbalance were not needed:

I feel that people should be employed based on ability. Maybe it is coincidence that people with the jobs are white and there were no 'good ones' under BME applicants. It is probably not very helpful to push without justification. It has the adverse effect if you hire someone just for their colour. (College E, L16)

And:

A few [BME staff] there are not that many, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. (College A, S1)

Awareness in relation to religion and belief focused almost entirely on provision for Muslims though in one college there was a mention of sectarian conflict. Again provision was seen as adequate by some, since prayer facilities were available:

Yes, the Racial Equality Officer is Asian Muslim, he brings religious events to the attention of the management. There is no prayer room, but staff would get leave, lecturers as well. (College E, SM4)

The college is situated near a mosque where staff [can go along]. There is also the possibility to get a room for praying. There is a good atmosphere here. (College E, L17)

However, another member of staff in the same college felt that there was a lack of in-depth awareness of issues in relation to religion and belief:

Yes and no, staff don't really talk about religion, there is a high level of Asian population of students and staff. At Ramadan they are allowed to go to the mosque. What people feel privately is another thing. This part of the country has a lot of the Catholic/Protestant thing. (College E, L18, TU)

This sense that there was a difference between what was seen on the surface and deeper attitudes also emerged strongly in relation to sexual orientation. This was regarded as a sensitive topic pertaining to the private sphere of people's lives, and should therefore not impinge on work activity.

I don't think the workplace is the right place to talk about sexuality, it doesn't strike me as a topic that people would discuss in the workplace ... There are homosexuals in this college and it has never caused any problems. (College D, L11)

Not aware of any member of staff being openly gay, haven't been here very long. Leads me to suspect that it's not something they chat about in the college. (College E, SM4)

The survey data suggested that colleges were reluctant to gather data on sexuality and this reluctance to engage with the issues was also evident amongst staff. However, the extent to which colleges will be able to ensure equality in this area may be hampered by this reluctance to be open about the issues.

Engaging Hearts and Minds

There were conflicting views about the extent to which interviewees felt that staff in general engaged with equality issues. Some felt that it was not seen a top priority and, as can be seen from above, the focus on students and teaching may serve to make equalities for staff less important:

Some do, some don't. It's down to attitudes. The college is doing what [it] can. (College D, S10)

I think there are varying degrees of 'buy in', some staff are more aware/supportive than others. Some still think it is an unnecessary distraction from the core issues of the college. (College E, SM4)

People probably think [EO] is ... important but it's not at the top of the agenda ... (College C, L10)

A further reason for the lack of staff engagement was a general lack of awareness of minority group experiences:

The main obstacle [to implementation of EO] is that staff may not have any problems. If you happen to be the right age, have the right colour, no disability ... you're sorted. That's why it is necessary to have more training to sell the need for support for all EO areas. Because 'normal' people are not aware what these issues really mean and how they affect the people concerned and how they can be an obstacle for people applying for jobs and promotion. (College A, L2)

In contrast to this, a number of members of staff indicated that the colleges were trying actively to promote the equality agenda. One of the colleges had recently appointed an equality officer who was working on raising the profile of equalities issues within the colleges. One college had undertaken research to explore how they could encourage more applications from BME staff. However, when interviewees were asked about the extent to which staff in general were aware of and supported equalities issues, there was a sense that there was limited 'buy-in' and that, amongst teaching staff, there were other priorities.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to consider the impact of the social audit process on the implementation of equal opportunities for staff in Scottish colleges by considering the following questions:

- How have colleges responded to legislative requirement for equal opportunities policies and practices?
- How is the audit process managed in relation to equal opportunities for staff and who is involved in this process?
- To what extent are equal opportunity policies for staff translated into practice?

Considering the first question, it could clearly be argued that considerable progress has been made in relation to formulating equality policies in Scottish colleges. There have been some limited changes with regard to the representation of women in senior management positions, and all colleges now have equality policies in place and are engaged in some form of monitoring. Discussions with staff revealed some degree of confidence that colleges were playing their part in working toward a more equal society, and responsibility for residual inequalities could not be laid at their door. However, the extent to which this permeates practice across all areas is unclear.

In relation to the second question, monitoring of equal opportunities is taking place and action plans are being developed. However, recruitment data tend not to be systematically analysed and the patterns in staff recruitment are not fed back to staff. In addition, action plans are often couched in rather vague terms and generally do not include targets derived from the quantitative data which are available. From one perspective it could be argued that that audit process is having a benign impact but that it is not fully embedded. Proponents of social audit might also argue that once target setting becomes more precise, then the system will become more effective.

Responding to the third question, a more critical look at the data suggests that there is still further work to be done in terms of embedding awareness of equality issues in everyday practice and ensuring that staff are actively engaged with the issues, so that compliance does not remain at a minimal level. In most colleges, responsibility for equality tended to lie with senior managers, with the human resources directorate taking the lead in formulating and monitoring policy. Whilst there is clearly an important role to be played by human resources staff, the danger is that other staff may come to regard equality issues as lying outwith their domain. Information about recruitment and promotion patterns did not filter down to academic and support staff and there was little evidence of active staff engagement. There was a strong suggestion that the homogeneity of staff, particularly at senior levels, might lead to a lack of awareness of structural inequalities. Some issues were viewed rather narrowly, for example, in some colleges it was felt that the provision of a prayer room was sufficient to address problems relating to discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. Perhaps most importantly of all, staff felt that time pressures within the college meant that core activities such as teaching had to take priority over more peripheral issues such as promoting equality.

Questions arise about the effectiveness of applying new public management approaches to the equality agenda. On the one hand, advocates of equality and human rights have grounds for great optimism in that their concerns are no longer seen as marginal to the mainstream political agenda. Despite the problem associated with the culture of audit embodied in new public management, there remain strong arguments for using targets to monitor progress towards equality. For example it is easy for institutions to express a rhetorical commitment to equality, but unless hard evidence is gathered against benchmarks over time, these commitments may be superficial. Whilst this study shows clearly that data on equalities are now being gathered, it is evident that in many institutions they are not being closely interrogated and used to inform future strategy. A commitment to gather hard evidence signals a new seriousness in relation to achieving greater equality, but clearly there is a danger that the adoption of managerialist approaches may reduce the equality agenda to an area where formal compliance is prioritised over serious debate and systemic change. Morley (2003), for example, argued that if the equality agenda associated too heavily with quality audit it may become yet another form of regulation and surveillance. However, equality movements have always been driven by a desire for social transformation, and preserving this spark will obviously be a major challenge as the new layers of legislation and regulation come into force.

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