Environmental Information (EIR) Publication Scheme Review

A meeting of the Group was held on 7 April 2009 at 10.00am in Whiteknights 220.

Present: Ian Cruickshank (IC), Lee Shailer (LS), Kim Stock (KS)

09/01 Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs): definitions, scope and the publication scheme

i. The group noted the following definition of environmental information as given in the EIRs:

"environmental information" has the same meaning as in Article 2(1) of the Directive, namely any information in written, visual, aural, electronic or any other material form on -
(a) the state of the elements of the environment, such as air and atmosphere, water, soil, land, landscape and natural sites including wetlands, coastal and marine areas, biological diversity and its components, including genetically modified organisms, and the interaction among these elements;
(b) factors, such as substances, energy, noise, radiation or waste, including radioactive waste, emissions, discharges and other releases into the environment, affecting or likely to affect the elements of the environment referred to in (a);
(c) measures (including administrative measures), such as policies, legislation, plans, programmes, environmental agreements, and activities affecting or likely to affect the elements and factors referred to in (a) and (b) as well as measures or activities designed to protect those elements;
(d) reports on the implementation of environmental legislation;
(e) cost-benefit and other economic analyses and assumptions used within the framework of the measures and activities referred to in (c); and
(f) the state of human health and safety, including the contamination of the food chain, where relevant, conditions of human life, cultural sites and built structures inasmuch as they are or may be affected by the state of the elements of the environment referred to in (a) or, through those elements, by any of the matters referred to in (b) and (c);

ii. The group noted the definition of dissemination of environmental information given in the EIRs:

4. - (1) Subject to paragraph (3), a public authority shall in respect of environmental information that it holds -

(a) progressively make the information available to the public by electronic means which are easily accessible; and
(b) take reasonable steps to organize the information relevant to its functions with a view to the active and systematic dissemination to the public of the information.

09/02 Review the current scheme: ‘plugging the gaps’

i. The group reviewed the current [environmental publication scheme] and agreed that the following items should be added by LS: buildings on the FMD site, the development plan, and the car sharing initiative under ‘Travel plan’.

ACTION: LS
ii. IC to provide annual recycling statistics to LS. 

ACTION: IC

iii. IC to ask Chair of the Environmental and Travel sub committee if the minutes and the environmental reports can be published.

ACTION: IC

09/03 How to keep the publications scheme systematically updated

i. The group noted the DEFRA code of practice sections on proactive dissemination:

4. Under Regulation 4, a public authority has a duty to progressively make the information available to the public by electronic means which are easily accessible, and to take reasonable steps to organize information relevant to its functions with a view to active and systematic dissemination.

5. Consideration should be given to making web sites accessible to all and simple to use, so that information can be readily found, for example by enabling search functions and having an alphabetical directory as well as tree structures. Information should not be ‘buried’ on a site.

6. Public authorities should consider how to publicise applicants’ rights to information, for example as part of general information on services provided by the authority.

7. When public authorities are considering what information to disseminate proactively, they should not restrict themselves to the minimum requirements as listed in the Directive. For example, consideration should be given to disseminating frequently requested information, which will reduce individual requests for such information in the future.

ii. The group felt that the University's existing publication scheme was broadly in line with the code of practice. The ‘systematic dissemination’ in Section 4 of the code would be helped by a more coordinated response to publishing and the inclusion of new staff into the review process.

iii. Given that the ‘Clean and Green’ part of the website was maintained by Communications, it was agreed to ask Lucy Chappell would be invited to further meetings. Andy Stafford from FMD would also be asked to attend.

ACTION: LS

iv. IMPS staff to continue to update the publications scheme.

ACTION: IMPS

v. IC to send new information and updates as they happened.

ACTION: IC

vi. IMPS staff tested the search functions on key words ‘environmental information' (and similar terms) and found these to be within the first 10 google hits on the University's website which indicated that the 'search functions' referenced in point 5 of the Defra code of practice were enabled.

09/04 Next meeting for EI publication scheme review

i. LS to arrange for approximately six months time.