

Audit Scotland Annual Report Disability Equality

December 2007

Background

Equality legislation has developed significantly over the last forty years and in particular over the last five years with a move to a more proactive approach to addressing prejudice and discrimination through the public sector equality duties.

There are three public sector equality duties for race, disability and gender. They place a positive duty on public authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and promote equality of opportunity. These duties aim to ensure that public policies, practices and services take into account the different needs of ethnic groups, disabled people and women and men in their development and delivery and make real improvements to people's lives.

Audit Scotland disability equality scheme

We published our first disability equality scheme by 4 December 2006. It sets out our commitment to disability equality and the steps that we have taken and will take to meet our disability equality duties over the period 2006 to 2009.

The development of the scheme was led by our Diversity Working Group and it was developed with the involvement of staff with a range of disabilities.

Our disability equality scheme is available on our website.

As part of our disability equality duties we are publishing this annual report containing a summary of:

- the steps we have taken to fulfill our disability equality duty;
- the results of the information gathering we have undertaken, and;
- what we have done with the information gathered.

Summary of Actions Taken

Management & Leadership

Mainstreaming equality and diversity across Audit Scotland depends, to a significant extent, upon the actual experiences that staff, clients and visitors have when interacting with our organisation. Leaders and managers are key to achieving a positive outcome.

In 2007 we implemented our Management Development Programme (MDP) which includes a carefully designed module which specifically deals with the promotion of equality. Both legal aspects and experiential aspects are covered and delivered by external specialists. As at December 2007 almost all of our senior managers will have completed the MDP with the final cohort already underway.

All managers across Audit Scotland, including those with informal responsibility for staff supervision, will have completed our on-line training package *Managing Equality & Diversity* by the end of December 2007, which includes interactive training and case studies.

We have scoped and launched our project plan for the redefinition of our Competency Framework. The project team have now met and work is underway. We have researched and benchmarked best practice in this area in order to learn from other employer organisations. Equalities will appear as a specific competency theme and one which will be woven across the rest of our Competency Framework in 2008.

People

We have explored and developed relationships with external organisations to help us understand the impact of our policies and processes. We will use this facility as part of our programme of Impact Assessments using our toolkit. This will include the impact assessment of Recruitment & Selection policies and processes with effect from January 2008.

In order to better understand the profile of our own staff across Audit Scotland, we included specific demographic questions concerning disability within our 2007 staff attitude survey. We also asked all of our staff for their views upon how Audit Scotland was performing in this area. The results have now been obtained and we have asked our managers and teams to use this data to explore how we can improve. We are using the staff demographic data to inform and refine our strategies for employee support.

All staff have or are in the process of completing our on-line learning Diversity and Equalities learning package as part of our mainstreaming diversity and equalities strategy. Time has been scheduled across team meetings during January and February 2008 for teams to discuss the results and what they have learned from the training.

Front of house staff have begun customer service training and this will continue in 2008.

Policy & Strategy

Our draft IT strategy now incorporates meeting diverse needs as a key principle and we have been pilot testing a wider range of equipment in 2007 so that we can support diverse needs more effectively.

Following the refurbishment of one of our main offices, we ensured that a proportion of workstations included features that would be helpful for people with disabilities – e.g. height adjustable settings. The layout of this office was designed to ensure that passages, including those between desks, are suitable for use by people with wheelchairs. All fixtures and fittings were designed and installed to ensure guidelines were followed for use by people with disabilities. This included careful selection of colour schemes so that different parts of the workplace were easily discernable through contrast. An audit of our other premises has been completed and recommendations are now being taken forward for implementation.

At another office, we have improved the availability of an accessible, ground floor meeting room place.

We have continued to benchmark and learn from other organisations such as the Wales Audit Office, National Audit Office and the Audit Commission. This has covered projects and policies. For example, sharing and learning in respect of communication strategy and diversity and equality.

Our complaints policy and procedure has been reviewed.

We undertook a six-month stock take of all activity across our disability, gender and race equality schemes during mid-2007. We have procured additional specialist external resource to advise upon progress and assist our Diversity Working Group during 2008. We reprogrammed our planned impact assessments work to bring in additional support and advice and now have a revised programme from January.

Partnerships & Resources (Including Communication)

As already explained, we have a new IT strategy. The pilot process has involved staff in trials, including staff who may have previously found earlier equipment sub-optimal.

Our procurement guidance now includes equality and diversity requirements.

We commissioned the RNIB to do an accessibility audit on our old website in late 2006 and we used the findings from this to guide the design of our new site which was launched in September 2007. Our plan is to have another audit carried out in the first half of 2008 to make sure we have achieved what we wanted and gain accreditation for this. All pages within our website should comply with the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Priority Level 1 and 2 guidelines and many Priority Level 3 guidelines have also been followed in the creation of this web site, and we intend to improve upon this in the future. CSS is used throughout to control layout rather than HTML tables. The accessibility statement on our website contains the following information and also practical information for users such as how to enlarge text through browser controls.

Wherever possible, and without compromising design, text has been used instead of images on this website. Navigation, page titles and subtitles, links and other elements have all been created using accessible HTML text. To allow full user control over how text appears on screen, this site has been created using relative text sizes. All non-background images include descriptive ALT text attributes.

The site has been tested to ensure that pages provide sufficient contrast when viewed by users with colour blindness or when viewed on a black and white screen. No information is conveyed through colour alone.

Publications are available in both PDF and RTF format. We also produce 'podcasts' which take the form of interviews with report authors. Transcripts are produced for these and are also made available on the website.

Processes

The availability of training is now clearly explained within our Learning and Development annual report and forward plan – accessible to all staff. Staff have confirmed through our 2007 attitude survey that they have high approval of access to learning and development opportunities.

Our management information on our recruitment attraction and selection processes includes information on disability and is being used as part of our scheduled dialogue with our recruitment agency and candidate selection partners.

People Results

Information concerning disability data (additional to gender, race and age) was included in our Equality Monitoring Report for 2006, published in 2007. This will again feature in the 2007 Report and we are seeking to expand this to capture further areas of disability monitoring during 2008.

We met with our Advertising Agency and invited them to present to our Diversity Working Group in order to explore how we could better market Audit Scotland to a more diverse labour force. We are now preparing proposals which will be reviewed in 2008 and adopted, as appropriate, to ensure we reach a wider audience, including people with disabilities.

Customer Results

We have undertaken our stock take to ensure that our work for 2008 is comprehensive and includes guidance from our retained external specialist advisor. This will benefit from the research and contacts we have managed to establish during 2007, including external contacts that represent people with disabilities to supplement our own internal involvement group.

Society Results

We are working to implement some of the recommendations of the Crerar Review about joint working between audit and inspection agencies.

Conclusion

Much work has been undertaken during 2007 to eliminate discrimination and promote equality. We have made substantial progress against our targets, particularly on learning and development, communication and accessibility. In Summer 2007, we reprogrammed our work on impact assessment and now have a revised programme. This will be a main focus of activity for 2008.

Progress has been made although we acknowledge that there is still more to be done. Audit Scotland will update its detailed action plan during January 2008, as previously stated within our Disability Equality Scheme action plan. This will be published alongside our scheme and our next Annual Report will be published in December 2008.