

Accounts Commission for Scotland

Annual report on gender equality

A progress report for July 2008 to June 2009

June 2009

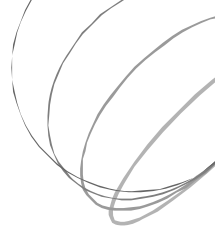


 ACCOUNTS COMMISSION



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Introduction

Background

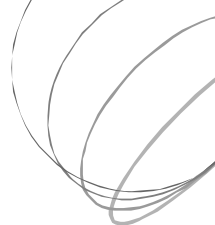
1. The Accounts Commission is a statutory, independent body which, through the audit process, assists local authorities in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources. The Commission has four main responsibilities:
 - securing the external audit, including the audit of Best Value and Community Planning
 - following up issues of concern identified through the audit, to ensure satisfactory resolutions
 - carrying out national performance studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government
 - issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information they are required to publish.
2. The Commission secures the audit of 32 councils and 41 joint boards (including police and fire and rescue services). Local authorities spend over £19 billion of public funds a year. Together with Audit Scotland and the Auditor General, we ensure that the Scottish Government and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

Accounts Commission members

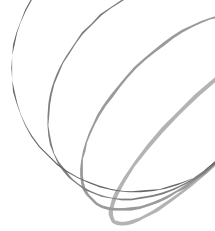
3. The Accounts Commission can have between six and twelve members appointed by Scottish Ministers. The Commission does not employ any staff, but Audit Scotland supports the Commission in its work.

The Gender Equality Duty

4. The public sector equality duty for gender, introduced in June 2007, requires the Accounts Commission to have a gender equality scheme and action plan, and to report progress against it annually. Our current gender equality scheme and action plan is for 2007-10. This report provides an update on progress against our gender equality scheme.
5. The Accounts Commission as a whole has overall responsibility for its gender equality scheme. Since we do not employ any staff the employer's duty does not apply, and this is reflected in our gender equality scheme. Responsibility for implementation of the scheme rests with Audit Scotland.



6. Audit Scotland has its own gender equality scheme, and this report should be read alongside Audit Scotland's annual report on gender equality. Audit Scotland, as the delivery agency and employer, are engaged in a wider range of work to promote gender equality through audit.



Progress to June 2009

Members of the Accounts Commission

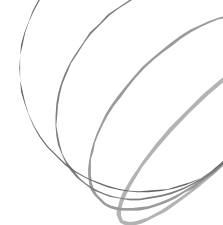
7. Accounts Commission members are appointed by Ministers, with support from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, and so the process of appointment has regard to gender equality. Members of the Commission are appointed on a single set of terms and conditions, and there is a single gender-neutral set of arrangements for induction, re-appointment, allocation to Accounts Commission committees, and engagement with best value reports and public reporting studies.
8. There are currently 11 members of the Accounts Commission, three of whom are women (27 per cent). In Scotland, 36 per cent of board members of public bodies are women.¹
9. As Audit Scotland is the body that delivers work on our behalf, and to support our work, we maintain an overview of Audit Scotland's approach to diversity and equality to ensure that its work on our behalf promotes equality.

Accounts Commission equality schemes

10. We are required to publish equality schemes and action plans, detailing our approach to addressing key equality issues. We currently have three schemes in place for Race, Disability and Gender covering staggered three year periods, linked to when the duties were introduced.²
11. During 2009, we will progress to a single equality scheme, covering all six equality strands. This will give further momentum to the equality agenda, and will allow us to respond more effectively to the anticipated requirements of the Single Equality Act. A single scheme will also allow us to take better account of the range of diversity issues (such as multiple discrimination effects) in our work. To date, Audit Scotland, on our behalf has established a project team to lead this development and work has started to review the previous schemes in place. It is anticipated that we will publish our single equality scheme in autumn 2009, following appropriate communication and involvement activity.

¹ Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland Annual Report 2007/08

² Available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



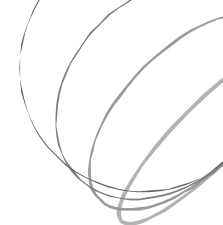
Best Value 2

12. The Statutory Guidance on Best Value provides ten major criteria, one of which is equal opportunity arrangements. The first round of Best Value audits (BV1) reported judgements on councils' arrangements for providing equality of opportunity.
13. During 2008, we have been reviewing our Best Value audit approach and the way Audit Scotland carries out Best Value audits. This review highlighted that equalities was an area that should be further developed in the second round of Best Value audits (BV2). We are working with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and other interested parties to develop a consistent and coherent approach to addressing equalities within BV2.
14. As part of our consultation on the approach to BV2, we have published an equalities audit framework.³ This framework outlines the key questions which may be explored as part of a BV2 audit, such as:
 - How well does the organisation know the profile and needs of its diverse communities?
 - Does the organisation and its partners lead improvements in equality effectively?
 - Does the organisation have a modern, diverse workforce which reflects the local community?
 - Are services responsive to their diverse communities?
 - Does the organisation deliver positive outcomes for its diverse communities?
15. The equalities audit framework applies across all strands of equality and, depending on the outcome of the risk assessment process, has been designed to allow auditors the flexibility to focus specifically on equality issues (e.g. gender, race, disability) or to make equalities judgements under other Best Value areas such as community engagement, scrutiny, and people management.

Public Reporting Group studies

16. In order to realise the opportunity to promote equality in externally focused work, we ensure that Audit Scotland make consideration of equality and diversity mandatory in developing project and study briefs. In order to ensure the right questions are asked, a guidance booklet entitled 'Building diversity and equality into our work' has been developed by Audit Scotland. The booklet raises awareness about gender considerations alongside other equality strands. It also gives explicit guidance on how to consider diversity and equality at every stage of research.

³ Consultation documents (March 2009) can be found at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



17. Equality impact considerations are included within Audit Scotland's forward work programme. Where appropriate, the equalities audit framework that is being developed as part of BV2 will be used to assess the performance of public bodies in performance audit studies.

Statutory Performance Indicators

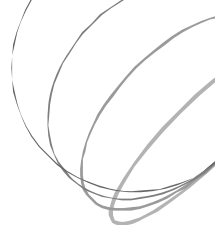
18. The Accounts Commission specifies statutory performance indicators (SPIs) which all councils, police forces and fire and rescue services must publish. During 2008, we reviewed the SPIs, in order to ensure councils are reporting on those aspects of performance that are of most importance to local communities, service users and citizens.
19. This review resulted in a significant reduction in the range of information councils must report. However, we maintained the SPI relating to gender (the number and percentage of the highest paid two per cent and five per cent of earners among council employees that are women), demonstrating our commitment to promote gender equality.

Impact assessments

20. Audit Scotland carries out impact assessments on our behalf. Impact assessments include consideration of impact in relation to gender to determine if any unjustified discrimination exists. Progress has been made in ensuring that equality impact assessments (EqIA) are integral to Audit Scotland's activity and a co-ordinated approach is evident across the organisation. As part of the developments toward developing a single equality scheme, Audit Scotland recently undertook work to identify priority policies or activities from across Audit Scotland, including those which relate to the Commission, which require full equality impact assessments, to ensure these are being carried out. For example, Audit Scotland is currently undertaking an equalities impact assessment of the BV2 audit process, on our behalf.
21. The Scottish Government's EqIA tool has been adopted by Audit Scotland, and customised to meet its needs and supporting documentation has been produced for staff undertaking EqIAs. A training programme has been developed in support of EqIA, and this has been delivered to staff involved in current EqIA activity (including BV2). Further training events have been organised throughout 2009. The EqIA tools, training and supporting materials all include an emphasis on ensuring individual strands, such as gender, are effectively considered as part of the EqIA process.

Delivery Infrastructure

22. Audit Scotland's Diversity and Equality Working Group has now been superseded by a Diversity and Equality Steering Group, which has a more strategic remit to help mainstream diversity and equality within Audit Scotland and ensure a co-ordinated response to this agenda. This group is supported by



delivery teams across the business to reinforce the fact that responsibility for delivery on diversity and equality is shared across the whole organisation. Leads have been established for each equality strand including gender, and it is the remit of that individual to ensure that gender is effectively represented as an equality strand, particularly with regard to developments such as the single equality scheme.

Communication

23. Our approach to communication is designed to ensure inclusivity in language and to avoid gender bias in the terminology used. Audit Scotland has recently developed a summary of published guidance on the acceptable and sensitive use of language in relation to diversity, which includes guidance on language, related to gender, and has made this available to Audit Scotland staff. This guidance is considered with regard to Accounts Commission publications and consultation exercises.

Next steps

24. As we are moving towards a single equality scheme, this will be the final annual report specifically on progress against gender equalities.