

Annual Review of Progress

Here is an abridged version of the organisation's annual review of progress for 2002-2003. The full version can be found on the Agency's website.

Strategic Implementation of S75 Equality Duties

The Agency has continued to closely follow commitments outlined in the Action Plan section of its Equality Scheme. A key element in ensuring that these commitments have been met, has been the work of a dedicated Equality Unit based at the Central Services Agency, which provides equality services to the Agency.

Work on promoting good relations has been progressed during 2003-2004 in conjunction with agency colleagues. Pilot training sessions were delivered to Agency staff during the year and it is expected that this will provide a basis for further work in this area.

Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs)

Importantly, the Agency in collaboration with other agency colleagues has carried out a Joint EQIA on Flexible working policies and is currently examining the equality impacts of delivery of its information campaigns. Much of the extensive data collection and consultation required to ensure that the EQIAs were carried out in accordance with Equality Commission guidance was complete by the end of March.

Although there are no current plans to initiate any other local equality impact assessments during the remainder of 2003-2004, each new policy being proposed by the Agency will be subject to screening for equality implications.

Communication and Training Provision

The Agency's equality scheme put in place an initial one-year plan for training all staff, across all sites, in equality awareness. This plan has been progressively delivered and the Agency has met its target of having delivered equality awareness training to all staff by the end of 2001. Focused training delivered during 2002-2003 included further training on disability awareness and a pilot training session on complaints.

Consultation

The Agency has made substantial progress on devising a more effective approach to consultation in collaboration with agency colleagues. A key feature of this approach has been a combination of more effective dissemination of information about consultation, with better targeting of efforts to secure participation from the most affected groups.

Information Provision, Data Collection and Analysis

Valuable information relating to equality was collected during work on good relations and the EQIAs. The Agency also worked closely with colleagues across the HPSS to identify the scope for collecting equality information and intends to further progress this work in the forthcoming year.

Complaints

The Agency received no complaints under the terms of Section 75 during 2002-2003.

Timetable

The Agency continues to follow closely the action plan contained in its equality scheme, with little deviation from commitments made.

Impacts and Outcomes

It is clear that EQIAs are having an important impact in levering change. For instance, the Agency is introducing initiatives to raise awareness of flexible working policies across the organisation. This will include updates in staff handbooks, information leaflets and further training on the implementation of flexible working policies for line managers.

At this stage it is clear that there has been significant progress in relation to the statutory equality duties in terms of activity, but challenges remain for all public bodies in relation to outcomes. Ultimately the implementation of the statutory equality duties has been on a continuum of development, with three stages:

- (1) Awareness – building the knowledge base about the statutory equality duties among internal and external actors;
- (2) Engagement – carrying out activities to promote engagement with those affected by the statutory equality duties (eg through consultation);
- (3) Change – producing new outcomes that promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Ultimately most public bodies have successfully sought to address the awareness stage of the continuum, but further work is required in terms of engagement and change.