

DRAFT**House of Commons Equality Scheme****2009 - 2011**

This Equality Scheme explains how we plan to implement and manage equality, diversity and inclusion in the House of Commons Service. It sets out an equality action plan to address race, gender and disability equality and, although not included in the equality duties issues of age, religion and sexual orientation are also covered.

This version is a draft scheme: we are working towards a Scheme that is realistic and will have a meaningful impact on all users of the House of Commons Service and thus further consultation will inform the contents of the Scheme itself and the detailed Action Plan. We actively seek involvement of interested parties. If you would like to comment on the Scheme, a questionnaire is attached as an Appendix which you can return to the Diversity team:

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Foreword

Include Photos

Foreword by Dr Malcolm Jack, Clerk of the House and Chief Executive of the Commons Service.

Foreword from Andrew Walker, Diversity Champion and Director General, Resources

Foreword from [s.40], Head of Corporate Learning and Diversity and [s.40], Diversity Manager

Introduction to the Equality Scheme

Through this Equality Scheme, we plan to strengthen and advance equality, diversity and inclusion within the House. It will help us take and monitor action to enable us to address our inequalities in a positive and pro-active way.

Although the House is not legally required to develop an equality scheme, we strongly believe that it is in line with good practice and will help translate our commitment to equality into practice, as relevant for the work of the House.

1.1 Our commitment to equality and diversity

The House of Commons exists for all people of the United Kingdom and therefore it should have no less equality of access, opportunity and employment than any of the leading institutions and employers in the country; indeed, we seek to be an organisation that others look to for a lead.

‘We recognise and value the diversity of our staff and are committed to developing working practices which will allow every member of staff to contribute his or her best, regardless of race, sex, marital status, religion or belief, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or any other irrelevant factor.’¹

1.2 Public Duties on equality

Public authorities are required by law to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality. An equality scheme is a strategy for setting out in a timetabled action plan how an organisation will build equality into its activities and how it will monitor and evaluate its performance.

The general and specific duties follow. These are different for each of the areas – race, disability and gender - partly because of different needs for each of those groups, but also because they have developed over time, with the disability duty building on the earlier race duty and the gender duty building on the disability duty.

1.2.1 1.2.1 Race

General duty in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination

¹ Equality and Diversity Statement, House of Commons Staff Handbook, Feb 2008

- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between persons of different racial groups.

Good practice² includes the monitoring of ethnicity and the publishing of the findings as follows:

- numbers in post
- applicants for employment, training and promotion
- recipients of training
- those who benefit from or suffer detriment as a result of performance assessment procedures
- those involved in grievance procedures
- those who are the subject of disciplinary procedures
- leavers.

A Race Equality Scheme should set out arrangements for:

- assessing and consulting on the likely impact of proposed policies on the promotion of equality
- monitoring policies for any adverse impact on the promotion of race equality
- publishing the results of such assessments, consultation, and monitoring
- ensuring public access to information and services
- training staff in connection with the equalities' duties imposed
- a review of the assessment of functions for relevance to the duty.

1.2.2 1.2.2 Disability

The general duty in the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 is as follows.

General duty:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act
- eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- encourage participation by disabled persons in public life
- take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other persons.

A Disability Equality Scheme needs to include a statement of:

- the way in which disabled people have been involved in the development of the Scheme
- methods for impact assessment

² The stages we have listed are those set out in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 for equality monitoring staff

- steps which will be taken towards fulfilling our general duty
- arrangements for gathering information in relation to employment and, where appropriate, delivery of education and functions
- arrangements for putting the information gathered to use, in particular in reviewing the effectiveness of the action plan and in preparing subsequent Schemes.

Through legislation, authorities must, within three years of their Scheme being published, take the steps set out in its action plan and put into effect the arrangements for gathering and making use of information. An annual report containing a summary of the steps taken under the action plan, the results of its information gathering and the use to which it has put the information must be published.

1.2.3 1.2.3 Gender

The general duties of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, as amended by the Equality Act 2006, are as follows:

General duty:

- eliminate unlawful [gender-based] discrimination and harassment
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

A Gender Equality Scheme needs to:

- identify gender equality goals and show the action that will be taken to implement them
- consult employees and stakeholders as appropriate in drawing up the Scheme
- publish the Scheme, setting out goals and planned outcomes
- monitor progress and publish annual reports on progress
- review the Scheme every three years
- develop and publish a policy which must be reviewed at regular intervals on developing equal pay arrangements between women and men – including measures to promote equal pay, to ensure fair promotion and development opportunities, and to tackle occupational segregation
- conduct and publish gender impact assessments
- develop and publish arrangements for identifying the conditions that justify conducting a formal gender impact assessment.

Since 2007, compliance with these general and specific duties has been overseen by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) which works to promote equality and tackle discrimination in relation to age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, human rights, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. The Commission champions equality, diversity and human rights as defining values of UK society, encouraging

all our institutions to operate for the benefit of every individual and all communities.

Background/Context

The House of Commons in its legislative work and scrutinising role is facilitated by a wide range of support, administrative and executive staff employed in distinct departments: the Department of Chamber and Committee Services, the Department of Facilities, the Department of Information Services and the Department of Resources. In addition, the joint Parliamentary Information and Communications Technology (PICT) department provides ICT service for Members and staff of both Houses. As Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of the House of Commons, the Clerk of the House has senior management responsibilities over the Management Board, which discusses corporate issues, authorises contracts and spending, and accounts for the use of service resources for the Commons.

The House of Commons has an equality and diversity policy in line with UK legislation on equality of opportunity and equal pay. Equality duties are relevant to the House in that they help it meet its aims of *Valuing Others* (see below), a policy which sets out the rights and responsibilities of managers and staff in ensuring that everyone is able to work in a positive environment free from unacceptable behaviours such as discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation. These responsibilities are:

- to ensure the dignity at work of all our employees
- to respect others and value their contribution to the organisation
- to demonstrate our commitment to equality and inclusion through our actions
- to be open and constructive in our communications
- to be fair and just in our dealings with each other
- to handle conflict promptly, effectively and creatively
- to raise awareness of the effects of unacceptable behaviour.³

This Equality Scheme is an opportunity to build on our existing achievements in equality, inclusion and access, and fulfil the ambition of this strategy and plan to provide leadership and to model good practice.

1.3 Organisational Values of the House of Commons

The core values for House staff are:⁴

³ Valuing Others, House of Commons Staff Handbook, Ch. 4, section 4.8

Integrity

We serve the House of Commons, its Committees and Members, and the public, with honesty, probity and political impartiality.

Professionalism

We strive for excellence, effectiveness, efficiency and accuracy, remaining always open-minded on the prospects for better ways of delivering our services. We seek to be responsive to changing requirements, and to be outward looking.

Teamwork

We value a co-operative approach, based on mutual support, trust and respect.

Recognition

We are committed to maximising personal development, to valuing diversity and the contribution of all individuals, and to equality of opportunity.

Commitment

We seek to ensure that the House of Commons is a good place to work, that recognises the importance of maintenance of work-life balance, and enables us to get the most out of the jobs we do.

3. Our approach to equality and diversity

The House has a dedicated diversity team which consists of the Head of Corporate Learning and Diversity, the Corporate Diversity Manager, and the Corporate Learning and Diversity Facilitator. The approach for diversity actions within the House has always been to mainstream activities and work towards embedding a diversity culture in everything we do. It is our aim that by producing this scheme and action plan, clarity is achieved around the day to day responsibilities of all staff moving the House towards being an 'equality and diversity' organisation.

The Director General of Resources is Diversity Champion for the House.

1.4 3.1 Diversity strategy 2006 and ongoing work

Building on work by the Diversity Forum⁵, a *Diversity Strategy for 2006-2011* was developed. This focused on five key themes, largely taken forward through working groups:

⁴ Core Values, House of Commons Staff Handbook, Ch.1, section 1.1

⁵ The Diversity Forum, a House-wide volunteer group which comprised of over 20 staff, drawn from each department, met to discuss diversity issues from 2003 to 2007.

- Disability (action on: communication etiquette; management guide on recruitment, performance, adjustments; workshops)
- Flexible working (action on: addressing management of flexible working in management development programmes)
- Education and learning
- Recruitment
- Monitoring and evaluating.

Further communications on diversity within the House demonstrated that a considerable number of staff thought that more could be done to bring consistency and to challenge the ingrained culture of the House with particular reference to influencing the most senior staff. An action following this feedback was for the diversity managers to take back full responsibility for developing diversity policy and create a wider diversity network open to all staff of the House, with a series of informative events planned around various diversity themes, e.g. disability.

1.5 3.2 Valuing Others policy

The Management Board is committed to providing a work environment that is fair to all and where everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Each of us is responsible for sustaining this environment through how we behave towards each other and what we do every day.

In such an environment where people's contribution is recognised and acknowledged, staff, whatever their background and level, will feel encouraged to realise their full potential and support the House in achieving its objectives.

All staff deserve, and should expect, to be treated with respect for who they are and what they do. This treatment should be consistent and inclusive.

1.6 3.3 Selection procedures

To ensure equality in the selection of employees, the House published 'Guidance Notes for Members of Selection Boards' in September 2005, which contained the following statement on Equal Opportunities:

'At all stages of consideration candidates must be assessed solely on their merits. In particular there must be no discrimination on grounds of colour, race, ethnic, age or national origins, sex or marital status and no unfair discrimination on the grounds of disability. The interview board should avoid asking questions which could give rise to suspicion of potential discrimination'.

It reminds selectors that:

‘It is good practice for boards to bear in mind that some candidates may have fewer educational qualifications or less work experience than others, because fewer opportunities were open to them in the past; and that they may be as suitable for the job as other candidates. Cultural bias must also be avoided when making recruitment and selection decisions. ’

In addition, it includes reference to applicants with disabilities, in that candidates should be assessed on merit and should not be ruled out on the grounds of their disability, unless it is absolutely clear that the disability is such that it would prevent the candidate from doing the job. Questioning should not stray into capability issues and advice is available from Human Resources Management Directorate and the Disability Contact Officer^S. If special interview arrangements are needed every effort should be made to provide these.

The guidance notes provide additional ‘Notes to members of Selection Boards for Recruitment, Promotion and Transfer’, which contain advice on the avoidance of discrimination.

1.7 3.4 Learning and development

The House is committed to providing learning and training opportunities to support the business objectives so that everyone has the skills and knowledge to perform their job role competently. It also supports development opportunities so that individuals can work towards roles with different responsibilities. While all learning and development activities uphold the principles of equality and diversity and make particular reference where appropriate, activities specifically focusing on equal opportunities and diversity initiatives include:

- disability equality awareness training for all staff
- disability equality workshops for managers and front-line staff
- accredited training for internal workplace mediators, in support of our *Valuing Others* policy
- diversity awareness training (Valuing each other)

1.8 3.5 Investors in People

The House was first accredited as an Investor in People employer in 2003, and reaccredited in July 2006. We are currently in the process of working towards further re-accreditation in 2009 and part of this maintenance of the standard is to ensure that:

- staff at all levels are involved in business planning

- everyone is valued for his/her contribution to the organisation
- appropriate investment is committed to learning and development opportunities for everyone who wishes to participate.

1.9 3.6 Procurement

The equality and diversity principles of the House of Commons Service apply to procurement procedures. By actively promoting equality and diversity within these processes, we seek to liaise with suppliers who promote fair employment practices.

4. Involvement and consultation in the development of the Equality Scheme

4.1 In order to assist with the development of our Equality Scheme, we consulted with staff of the House, Members and Members' staff. A total of 110 (September 2008) people participated, providing insights into equality and diversity in practice in the organisation as well as contributing their views on what would be useful to include in an Equality Scheme. Participants reflected diversity in terms of pay band, department, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, religion and sexual orientation as well as representing a wide range of different types of work and across the hierarchy. All members of the Management Board participated.

Around 70% of the sample were women, 7% were disabled and 25% were of ethnic minority origin. There was a good age spread, and there were staff who had joined relatively recently (including in the last few months) through to those with more than 30 years' experience in the organisation. The sample also included people from a number of different religions. A small number of gay/lesbian people participated.

4.2 Meetings were held during the period of the consultation with the House Equality Scheme Working Group who were invited to comment in particular on the key issues arising and the emerging recommendations, and who gave a useful steer throughout. Three meetings were held with the Trade Union Side.

Public consultation took place with selected organisations by placing the scheme on the organisational website, and contacting specific groups of disabled people.

4.3 The themes which emerged from the consultation are summarised below under the six equality areas. Broadly, they relate to issues of involvement of and access to the public; leadership and effective management of diversity; organisational policies and practices and

consistency; recruitment, development and progression; flexible working arrangements.

We have also taken into account information from previous relevant consultation exercises including the annual staff surveys and a recent disability questionnaire. Past staff surveys have shown that those who identified themselves as 'black' were slightly more negative about their immediate manager's effectiveness in promoting a culture of diversity than the average. Just under 30% of those who considered themselves to have a disability believed that the House was fairly poor or very poor at providing support for staff with disabilities. The disability questionnaire provided an opportunity for staff to give their views on how the House manages disability-related issues.

Results from the most recent survey will be analysed and taken into consideration when the results are published.

The points relating specifically in relation to the six equality issues are set out below.

4.4 Race and ethnicity

According to recruitment statistics, numbers of applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds are generally very low and there has been little success to date in both the appointment and internal promotion of ethnic minority people to the more senior posts. There have also been very few ethnic minority entrants into the fast-stream

Thus, although around 18% of the current staff are non-white, they are over-represented at the more junior professional levels as well as the manual jobs which strengthens the stereotyped image of the ethnic minority House of Commons employee 'people assume that because she is black, she's in catering'.

On a more positive note, there has been a small number of ethnic minority staff breaking through into the more senior levels and in previously 'all white' areas. It was noted that this can put such individuals into the spotlight – being held up as role models, invited onto a disproportionately large number of recruitment boards, etc. Although there was no particular negative reaction to these requests, it needs to be borne in mind that such activities should not detract from their main professional roles, standing and personal opportunities for development.

4.5 Disability

Despite some improvements, there are still many things which often go unnoticed that operate to make things difficult for disabled people and underscore the difficulty with which they have to navigate the House. These issues are not always disclosed. This is relevant not just for visitors and the public but also for staff, line managers, Members and their staff

There appeared to be some doubt about how information about the needs of a disabled member of staff needing reasonable adjustments was communicated to the relevant parties in the organisation. Several references were made to the need to keep such data confidential. However, the impact of this meant that there were occasions when the relevant data did not reach the line manager, The result was that the staff member had to raise this with their manager themselves which, if they were newly recruited into the organisation, could be intimidating.

The key question is how the House balances its own needs with those of the disabled individual. An issue commented on several times was the difficult physical access in some areas of the Estate. This is complicated and hindered by issues of security, listed building status, the requirements of English Heritage, and the inadequacy of signage. There can also be a conflict between the desire to design and construct features for the national legislature which are aesthetically pleasing and symbolically meaningful, but which are impractical for disabled people, and several issues regarding disability access have emerged after, rather than before, the opening of Portcullis House and the Cromwell Green Entrance.

For those with sight-related disabilities, the standards of presentation on the Web – for example use of font and links, documents and signage can cause particular problems.

A number of participants raised the issue of disability and recruitment. The concern was expressed that the current criteria for many jobs may well mean that someone who was, for example, autistic would be unlikely to get through the recruitment process because they would not, for example, meet the requirements based on the traditional interpretation of effective communication or team-working.

In addition to the physical barriers, attitudinal issues and ignorance (for example of dyslexia) have produced experiences of exclusion.

4.6 Gender

Although women form almost 50% of the workforce, the percentage of female senior staff is only 28% which was a cause for concern for a significant number of women interviewed. Also mentioned, was that through the changes following the Tebbit report, all but one women member of the Board of Management lost their positions and currently the Management Board consists of white males with the remaining female being an external executive member.

Women in senior positions commented that they often experience being belittled or sidelined, especially in meetings.

Being able to qualify for certain jobs such as carpentry and plumbing is perceived in traditionalist terms and women do not tend to apply. Consequently, there are no female staff in these areas and the benefits of mixed gender teams are not fully appreciated.

Both women and men raised the issue of greater consistency in access to flexible working arrangements. Women raised this more in the context of family responsibilities, particularly when they have young children.

4.7 Age

There is diversity within the staff age profile, although there can be a bias towards a younger age group for positions that require training.

Although it is generally agreed that experience accumulates with age, the degree to which the ability to perform physical tasks with the same levels of energy, skill and exactitude at all ages is a key issue which will depend on the nature of the specific job.

Participants described discrimination against older people as including a lack of opportunity for training and up-skilling while discrimination for younger staff was felt around trying to gain promotion. There is a general belief that the House through its reputation and culture does not attract young people in any significant numbers.

4.8 Religion

There are staff from a range of religions/beliefs, but it is a subject that is rarely raised in the workplace. Recently, requests for prayer space, specifically for Muslim staff, have made their faith more public knowledge. Staff have access to a quiet room which may be used for prayer and is used by people from different religions, although it appears that this is not widely known

Because of the existence of a Christian chapel on the premises Christian worship is seen to be privileged and facilitated, and in particular the Anglican Church.

The social expectations, which often centred around the pub 'that actually oils the wheels of how this place works', was, as indicated above, something that could be excluding of some groups. In particular relating to religion, this could, for example, be exclusionary or uncomfortable for some Muslims.

Provision is made for a range of dietary needs in the various refreshment outlets.

4.9 Sexual orientation

There is some indication that there is a very wide range of views about the degree to which the House is a comfortable place for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people to work. There were diverse views, reflecting different experiences and it has also been suggested that acceptance of diversity regarding sexual orientation 'has been tacitly recognised, strangely enough, without anything formally being done about it', and that the atmosphere is 'reasonably open', particularly since the civil partnership legislation has made people more comfortable about acknowledging their sexual orientation and celebrating the atmosphere of positive change. Others are more categorical about the advances in acceptance: 'we have the full range of sexual orientation here and it doesn't enter into anybody's thinking or discussion'.

However, there is some evidence of the diffidence of managers in broaching (or 'prying into') such issues with their staff.

1.105. Gathering evidence: diversity monitoring in the House

The House of Commons collects and analyses equality monitoring data relating to its staff. This data is held by the Diversity team and can be cross-tabulated in a number of ways to show representation of specific groups (men/women, different ethnic groups, age, disability) by, for example, pay band, department, and employment status. Pay bands are grouped into House of Commons administration, catering and craft groups.

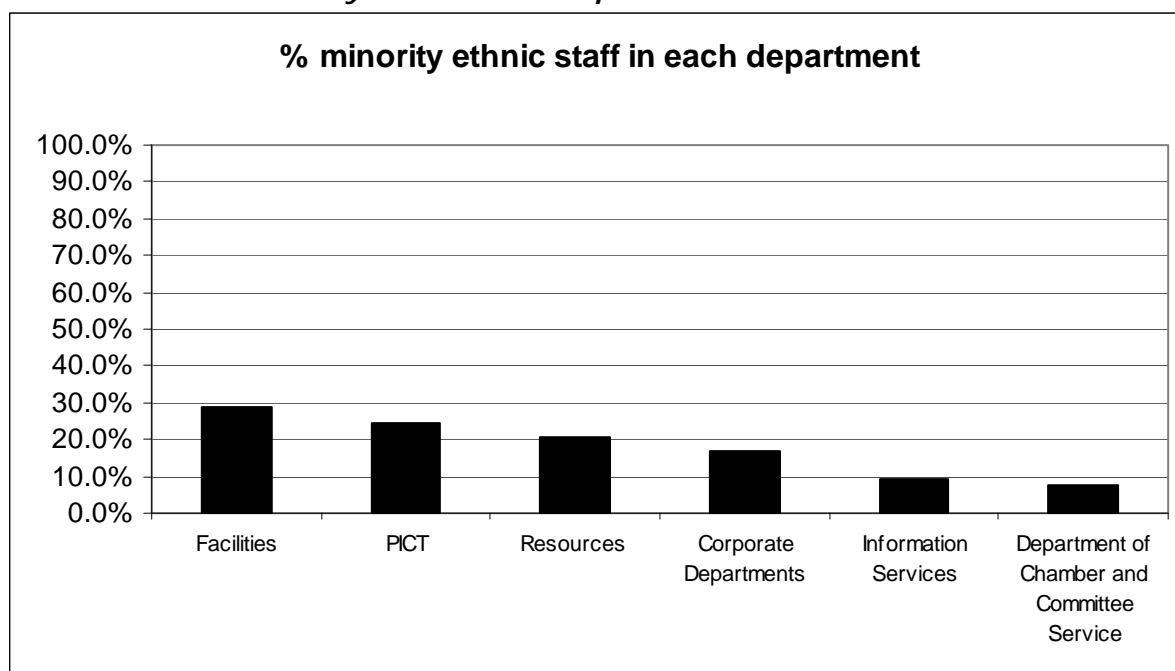
At the time this exercise was done, the number of individual staff was 1951. Based on this, the composition of the House of Commons staff is as follows:

5.1 Ethnicity

Of the total House of Commons staff, 18.3% (357) are of ethnic minority origin.⁶ This includes staff of Asian, black, Chinese, mixed and other ethnic origin. Representation of ethnic minority staff varies across departments, with the Facilities Department having the highest percentage (29%) and the DCCS the lowest (7.8%).

⁶ Ethnic origin is unknown (including some who have not responded to the request for information) for 11.5% of staff). Of the staff whose ethnicity is known (1,727), 20.7% are of minority ethnic origin.

Table: % ethnic minority staff in each department



Overall, ethnic minority staff are relatively highly represented in the lower pay bands. Over 50% of staff at band E are of minority ethnic origin. There are 22% at pay band D, dropping to 14% and 15% at pay bands C and B. There is then a further drop to 4% at band A and 1% in the Senior Commons Staff pay structure.

In the catering bands, there is a similar pattern, with relatively high representation of ethnic minority staff in the lower pay bands, C – E (41%), and much lower representation in the more senior A – B pay bands (5.8%).

Overall in the craft pay bands, 14% are of ethnic minority origin.

5.2 Disability

Disability status information is available for 410 staff, which is 20% of the total staff group.⁷ Further work is being undertaken by the Diversity team on an ongoing basis to increase the records in this area.

Of the responses, there are 28 staff who have identified themselves as having a disability, which is 1.4% of all staff (and which is 6.8% of those

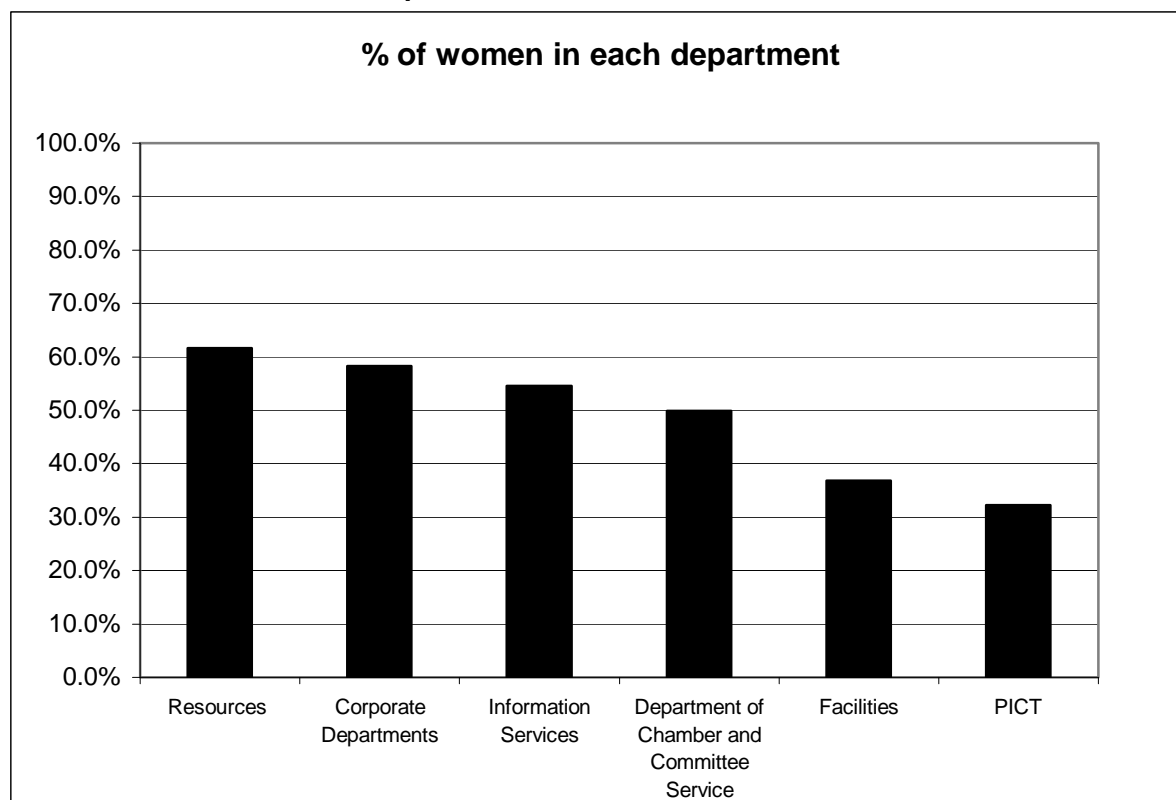
⁷ This figures is as at 7 August 2008, updated by the Diversity team

for whom disability status is available). Although Facilities Department had the lowest response rate (13.5%) in terms of representation of disabled staff, they and DCCS had the highest representation. The highest numbers are in pay bands C and D although it should be noted that disabled staff are represented in all pay bands – from E to SCS, in the catering and in craft pay bands.

5.3 Gender

There is a higher percentage (54.6%) of men than women in the organisation. This varies across departments, with the lowest percentage of women in PICT and the highest in Resources.

Table: % women in each department

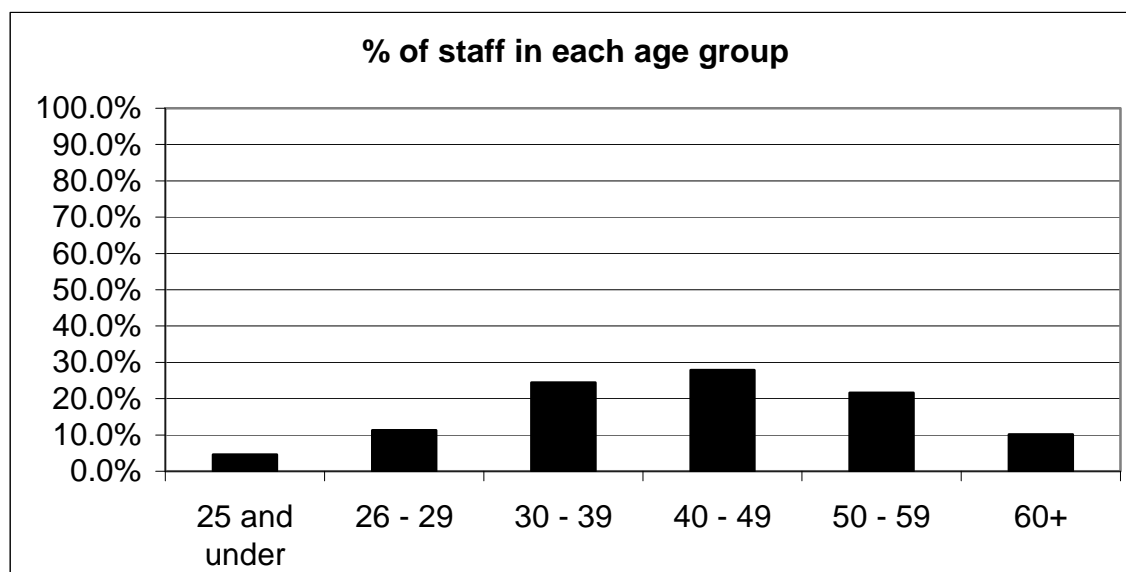


Overall, women are relatively highly represented in the lower pay bands. From a high representation (70%) at band E, there are 50% in bands B – D. They drop slightly, to 45%, at band A, and to 27% in the Senior Commons structure...

In the catering bands, there is a similar pattern, with relatively high representation of women in the lower pay bands, C – E (41%), dropping to a lower representation (12%) at the more senior A – B bands.

It is of note that there are no women in craft jobs.

Age



Staff are from all age groups, with the peak in the 30 – 59 range and the highest percentage in the 40 – 49 group.

All age groups are present in all departments. The lowest representation apparent from the figures is the number of staff of 60 and above in the Department of Resources where they form 1.9% of the staff and PICT where they form 2.4% of the staff.

At present, there are no staff under 30 in the Senior Commons structure. This is not unexpected, given the experience required to reach that level. The youngest age group on the whole tends to be in the C and D pay bands, although there are a few in B and A. In the senior catering bands A and B, there are no staff under 25 or 60 and above.

5.4 Flexible work patterns

11% of permanent staff were working on a half-time or part-time basis.⁸ Of these, 81% were women. Other working patterns are in place, but this information is held locally at present and does not feature in the regular diversity statistics.

6. Key findings from the consultation exercise

The key findings can be broken down into three main groups:

leadership under-representation

⁸ This figure is as at January 2008.

improving work practices

Leadership

There was a strong message that Parliament ought to lead by example on equality as on other issues; that the House of Commons exists for all people of the UK and therefore should have no less equality of employment, access and opportunity than any leading organisation; indeed it should be an organisation that others look to.

Leadership from the top was considered to be important in identifying our principles and objectives. Staff wished to hear stronger messages of commitment to equality from the top. It is up to top managers to lead and promote a culture where everyone feels valued and feels included. Only when this happens will everyone be able to give of their best.

Equality may be seen as challenging some traditions of the House that are valued and staff look to the Board and senior managers to manage that tension by working towards a more inclusive culture.

Under-representation

The most visible issue of under-representation is race at senior levels. This was commented upon by a wide range of staff, Members and visitors. Some concern was expressed that it appears to be difficult to attract applications from people from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, it is clear that there are ethnic minority staff in the House, but they are actually over-represented in the lower pay bands and jobs with limited responsibility. Lack of role models, lack of development opportunities and 'unhelpful

attitudes' were all given as reasons for these groups finding it difficult to move up the organisation. It has also been noted that although many senior vacancies have been filled recently, there seems to be no change to the profile of the workforce at higher pay bands. There is strong feeling that ignorance and attitudinal issues are what really produce feelings of exclusion amongst staff with disabilities, rather than access/facility problems. Feeling ignored and reacted to negatively have been experienced by staff as well as visitors. Currently, the number of staff who have declared themselves to have a disability is very small and a key reason for this is that many feel their chances of progression and promotion would be adversely affected if that information was known. Consequently, people will struggle at work rather than ask for reasonable adjustments which results in performance issues. Only when they believe that their disabilities will not make a difference to their career in the House will they be open and receive the support they should have.

6.3 Improving working practices through impact assessments

Best equality and diversity practices must be within the context of our business practices and not stand outside what we do on a day to day basis. This can cause tension with traditions that are valued which has implications for acceptance of an equality scheme and the House must find a way where the two can sit comfortably together. A better understanding of what is meant by

equality, diversity and inclusion must be pursued through leadership, communications and training and opportunities to 'break down barriers' which cause demotivation and division should be continually sought.

Empowerment, trusting staff to do a good job, take on more responsibility and not constantly be monitored came through as a way of working which would be welcomed.

A programme of equality impact assessments to our policies and working practices would help identify when changes would be most beneficial
Equality impact assessment of policies and functions

An important part of any effective equality scheme is to set out plans for carrying out equality screening and impact assessment of policies and functions. An outline process has been developed, with the following stages:

- i. List all policies and functions, prioritising them to decide in what order to carry out the assessments.
- ii. Policy owner to complete the assessment, gathering evidence of relevance to equality and diversity - such as staff equality monitoring data, research into diversity of user group - and information about particular needs of specific groups who may be affected by the policy.
- iii. Policy owner to identify a panel of staff and customers where relevant (for example on disability), to work through the questions in order to assess the impact of the policy or function on equality. The questions relate to:
 - Negative impact of the policy
 - Different needs, experiences, issues and priorities
 - Differing levels of participation
 - Identification of opportunities to promote equality
 - Justification (if there is any adverse impact that cannot be avoided)
 - Summary of points for action and allocation of responsibility.
- iv) Progress on action points to be monitored by the Diversity team.

Arrangements for ensuring public access to information and services

Information for the public is a priority area for the House of Commons. The House will promote and continue to develop internally and externally, a culture of openness, transparency, and customer focus. To demonstrate the House's commitment and to ensure that this is carried out, a member of the Management Board champions accessibility issues.

In taking forward the above, the House will consider the needs of the different audiences. Different approaches will be considered (e.g. full detail for specialists, summaries for the general reader). The House will communicate in plain language and avoid the use of jargon.

Work on our re-designed website continues, and we are testing it with a range of users with disabilities in order to ensure its accessibility.

Equality of access is an integral part of developing our facilities for visitors.

Outreach work in building relationships with schools, communities and organisations around the country is an important part of the House's work in widening public access to information and services. Over the past few years, this has increased significantly with a number of schemes being well established such as the Toucan Scheme for assisting adults with learning difficulties get into the workplace, Mr Speaker's Apprenticeship Scheme which gives young adults unlikely to go on to further education an opportunity for extended work placement and a work experience scheme with Westminster to give local students an experience of working in Parliament.

9. Feedback on the implementation of the Equality Scheme

Any feedback on the Scheme should be referred to:

Corporate Learning and Diversity
House of Commons
7 Millbank
London SW1P 3JA
E-mail: corporatelearning&diversity@parliament.uk
Telephone: 020 7219 1412

10. Plans for publication of the Equality Scheme

The House of Commons will publish the Equality Scheme both electronically and as hard copy. The Scheme will be available, on request, in different formats, for example in large print or audio. However the primary source of information will be the website.

11. Monitoring and review of the House Equality Scheme

Progress against the House Equality Scheme will be monitored on an annual basis by the Diversity team, with an annual report produced and published. A three-year review will be carried out, aiming to further develop the Scheme and Action Plan. A six-monthly update will be sent to the House of Commons Commission as requested by Mr Speaker.

12. House Equality Scheme Action Plan

Introduction

This first draft Equality Scheme Action plan draws together the action points from the Diversity Strategy Delivery Update. The aim is to outline specific timetabled actions with clear lines of responsibility which will ensure that the organisation moves in a positive direction within the framework of the House Equality Scheme.

There are nine key target areas:

1. Involvement in the development of the Equality Scheme
2. Implementation, monitoring and review of the Equality Scheme
3. Accessibility and communications
4. Public access to and information about services
5. Policies and functions
6. Staff responsibilities and training
7. Employment cycle
8. Equality monitoring
9. Plans for the publication of the Equality Scheme

There are generic action points for each of the above nine areas. These are then followed, as relevant, by specific action points for the individual six equality areas of race, disability, gender, age, religion and sexual orientation.

Equality Scheme Action Plan

Involvement in the development of the Equality Scheme

This section includes the action planned to involve people in the development of the Equality Scheme. The action points cover involvement of:

- Staff – ethnic minority staff; disabled staff; women
- Staff – as well as the above targeted groups, a wide range of males, full age range, gay and lesbian staff and those of a range of religions
- Members of Parliament and their staff
- Public consultation, including groups with disabilities

Section 1 – Involvement in the development of the Equality Scheme			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Consult with wide range of staff and sample of MPs and MPs' staff.	Feb – July 08	Diversity team	✓
Consult with people with disabilities (focus groups and 1-1 interviews).	Feb – July 08	Diversity team	✓
Consult with minority ethnic staff (focus groups and 1-1 interviews).	Feb – July 08	Diversity team	✓
Consult with women staff (focus groups and 1-1 interviews).	Feb – July 08	Diversity team	✓
Public consultation, including specific consultation with people with disabilities.	Sept – Oct 08	Diversity team	

Implementation, monitoring and review of the Equality Scheme

This section sets out the action planned to monitor and review the implementation of the Equality Scheme. The action points cover:

- Mechanisms to monitor on an ongoing basis
- Interim and annual reporting on progress
- 3-year review

Section 2 – Implementation, monitoring and review of the Equality Scheme			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Consider selection of diversity leads on issues, beginning with race, disability and gender. These will be a resource for the Diversity team and also support the work of the Diversity Champion.		Diversity team Diversity Champion	
Re-configure a Diversity Action Group with sub-groups on issues (when required) to include disability, gender, race, age, religion and sexual orientation. The group should have the role of supporting the Diversity team monitoring progress on implementing the Scheme.		Diversity team	
Prepare an interim and an annual report on progress of the action plan.		Diversity team	
Produce a 3-year review of the plan at the end of 2012.		Diversity team	
Take responsibility for the corporate administration and monitoring of the scheme		Diversity team working with the Office of the Chief Executive	

Accessibility and communications

This section includes the action planned to enhance accessibility to information and effective communications, particularly to the public. Action covers:

- Provision of accessible information, including in different languages as appropriate
- Disability access issues – nature of communication methods; information about disability access provided
- Physical access to the organisation

Section 3 - Accessibility and communications			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Generic			
Communicate the Equality Scheme through a variety of mechanisms including a specific note/article to Members and their staff.		Communications team	
Enhance visibility of the equality and diversity policy throughout the organisation		Communications team Department of Information Services (DIS)	
Provide clear and consistent equality & diversity messages internally and externally. ensuring format is accessible to different audiences eg those with English as a second language		Office of the Chief Executive Facilities Dept	
Disability			
Ensure website meets disability access standards.		DIS and PICT	
Improve physical access to people with a physical disability.		DDA Project Group	

Section 3 - Accessibility and communications

Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
		Works & Estates	
Ensure that visitors to functions are aware that appropriate facilities, including accessible toilets, will be available. This should be made clear in the Visitors' Guide on the website.		Events team Members' Centre Central Tours SAA Help Desk	
Increase use of assistive technology and British Sign Language.		DDA Project Group Facilities Dept	
Enable wheelchairs to be passed through security, so that wheelchair users are responded to appropriately and receive the same quality of service as others		SAA Directorate Police & Security	
Religion or belief			
Communicate widely the availability of quiet/contemplation room.		Diversity team	

Public access to and information about services

This section covers the action planned to ensure wide public access to services, and information about the services. The actions cover:

- Engaging the wider community
- Improvement of signage in the premises
- Provision of information to MPs, regarding facilities they can use to widen access for their visitors

Section 4 – Public access to and information about services			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Engage the community through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outreach work • web forums • presenting the House of Commons as a potential employer to the wider diverse population. To be done through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - diversity in materials used - range of universities, schools and location and recruitment agencies used 		Outreach team Education Services Diversity team Recruitment team	
Improve signage around the Palace of Westminster and other House of Commons buildings, with particular emphasis on those with sight impairment.		DDA Project Group SIG	
Provide more explicit advice to Members about the services available to them for use with their visitors, such as a signing service and translation services, with expert advice from the Diversity team.		Members' Centre Diversity team	

Policies and functions

This section sets out the action planned to ensure that equality and diversity are embedded in policies and functions of the organisation. The action points cover:

- Assessing the equality impact of policies and functions
- Enhancing visibility of the equality policy
- Agreeing areas for positive action
- Establishing mechanism for dealing with any equality issues between MPs and staff
- Carrying out work to meet Disability Standard

Section 5 – Policies and functions			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Finalise the process for equality screening and impact assessment (See Appendix for draft Equality Screening and Impact Assessment Form).		Diversity team Human Resources (HRM&D)	
List all policies and functions and prioritise in terms of high, medium and low relevance for equality.		Departmental Director Generals, Business Managers and Senior HR Managers	
Set up centralised system and allocate resources to collate results of equality screening and impact assessments to facilitate monitoring of exercise and action taken and publication of findings and decisions taken.		Diversity team HRM&D PICT	

Section 5 – Policies and functions			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Re-visit the work produced by the Officer of the House Working Group and equality impact the assessments made. Communicate the work of this group to staff.		Chair of the Officer of the House Working Group.	
Establish a mechanism for dealing with any harassment between Members and House of Commons' staff.		Resources Operations	
Consider trialling a service to Members for central HR recruitment advice		PAS/HRM&D	
Carry out an updated childcare provision feasibility study for Members		Diversity team through the Admin Committee	
Establish a comprehensive way of ensuring that, as appropriate, diversity is taken into account in deciding who is to be invited as witnesses to Committees.		DCCS – Committee Office	
Develop different ways of involving the public in consultations and submissions of evidence to Committees, building on the good practice already established by some, e.g. web forums.		DCCS – Committee Office	
Ensure that there is evidence that the set of equality and diversity principles within the procurement process is leading to the selection of suppliers who		Central Procurement Office	

Section 5 – Policies and functions

Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
promote fair employment practices.			
Disability			
Carry out the work required to participate in Disability Standard, run by the Employers' Forum on Disability,		Diversity team Dept Resource Managers DDA Project Group	

Staff responsibilities and training

This section sets out the action planned to ensure that equality and diversity are covered in the area of staff responsibilities and training. The action points cover:

- Career development plans
- Training grades and development opportunities
- Inclusion of equality and diversity in training
- Equality objectives in job descriptions
- Positive action training
- Performance appraisal

Section 6 – Staff responsibilities and training			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Establish and communicate a clear internal career development plan which includes facilitating short term/permanent internal/external moves, secondments, temporary promotions, mentoring.		CLD Career Adviser	
Ensure that there is diversity in the take-up of talent management programmes and mentoring schemes.		HRM&D Diversity team	
Ensure when opportunities for temporary promotion arise that equality and diversity are taken into account, as temporary positions can lead to greater access to permanent posts.		Recruiting Manager HRM&D	
Provide staff in Catering & Retail Services with opportunities for access to work experience in other		Diversity team HRM&D	

Section 6 – Staff responsibilities and training			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
activities, for example in the visitors' assistant work or in administrative/clerical jobs.		Facilities Dept Senior HR Managers	
Establish training grades for existing staff who may wish to progress. Draw on existing scheme in DIS (ensuring that this existing scheme is effectively communicated).		HRM&D Dept Resource Managers	
Review all training, to ensure appropriate equality and diversity messages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adequately and consistently included in induction integrated into all management training consistent in messages in the training provided on an ongoing basis for all staff tailored as closely as possible to staff's day-to-day working environment transgender issues included as relevant, including in management training 		Corporate Learning and Development (CLD) Diversity team	
Develop series of 'Toolbox' talks on diversity issues		CLD Diversity team	
Introduce new equality & diversity training 'Valuing each other' for all staff and as part of induction training. Ensure all staff participate		Line managers CLD Diversity team	

Section 6 – Staff responsibilities and training			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Ensure all involved in recruitment and selection have undertaken training to be on selection board.		Recruitment manager	
Provide refresher training courses (to include giving feedback) for people who are given responsibility for promotions and recruitment		CLD Recruitment Manager	
Leadership and management development to have components of equality and diversity integrated into the programme...		Senior Management Development Group/CLD	
Disability awareness training to be mandatory for managers and front line staff		CLD Line managers	
Consider inclusion of equality objectives in job descriptions and assess staff and managers annually		Diversity team Dept Resource Managers	
Support and guidance for staff (including police and security staff) to be provided for managing and working with staff with disabilities.		Diversity team	
Encourage under-represented groups to take advantage of development opportunities; positive action in training. In their ongoing identification of talent, managers should be alert to the potential for minorities to be excluded, and make efforts to ensure that they are encouraged to participate. Consider training aimed at specific job categories where there is relatively high representation of		Director Generals Line Mangers Career Adviser CLD	

Section 6 – Staff responsibilities and training

Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
minority ethnic staff and limited movement or progression.			
Compile and communicate positive examples of people who have been successful in progressing in the organisation. Include those from 'non-traditional' backgrounds.		Communications team	
Review staff appraisal system to ensure that it is a purposeful dialogue. New system should include objective measurements upon which performance reports are discussed/written		HRM&D	
Address the issue of police attitudes towards members of staff by provision of equality and diversity training.		SAA Directorate Diversity team	
Ensure that opportunities for Members' staff to participate in equality training, and other training, are communicated effectively.		DIS Quality Assurance Team Office of the Chief Executive	
Equality and diversity issues to be introduced to the programmes that are run for constituency staff of MPs and are open to MPs' staff.		Quality Assurance Team	

Employment cycle

This section sets out the action planned to ensure that equality and diversity is addressed at all relevant points of the employment cycle. The action points cover:

- Continuation of equality pay reviews
- Inclusion of equality and diversity at all recruitment stages – from application through to appointment
- Inclusion of equality and diversity in competence frameworks
- Low levels of applications from specific groups
- Communicate positively about opportunities to work part-time and flexibly
- Reasonable adjustments
- Targets

Section 7 – Employment cycle			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Continue to carry out the regular equal pay reviews of pay and banding system to encompass pay structure, job evaluation schemes, reward strategy. Principal requirement is to cover gender. Ensure that findings and recommendations are acted upon.		HRM&D	
Corporate competence framework to reflect diversity values at all levels.		CLD	
Recruitment and selection processes to be diversity aware.		Recruitment Manager	
Investigate reasons for low response rates from ethnic minority communities and disabled people to various recruitment campaigns		Recruitment team Diversity	

Section 7 – Employment cycle			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
		team Recruitment agency	
Consider make-up of recruitment panels; mixed panels in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, age range.		Recruitment team Diversity team	
Inclusion of images in recruitment literature to ensure recognition that there is diversity amongst the Members and (ethnicity age, gender, disability and religions)	HR recruitment team		
Consider range of ways of communicating successful role models, for example staff who have succeeded in moving around the organisation into different roles, or role modes such as the Serjeant at Arms.		Diversity team Internal Comms team	
Recruitment process to be reviewed to eliminate all but necessary written elements; inadvertent barriers to be identified and eliminated from the job adverts; review of language used and qualifications required for potential unnecessary exclusion. Consider possible ways of being flexible in order to take into account applicants who are eg autistic.		Recruitment Manager	
Race and disability			
Positively engage in recruiting from non-traditional areas. Extend outreach work in colleges, schools and diverse communities, e.g.		Diversity team Outreach	

Section 7 – Employment cycle			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contact BME student groups on suitable courses, and invite them to an Open Day purely for Black and Asian students with an interest in working in Parliament • Links with special schools • Continued participation in Civil Service fast stream positive action programmes 		team Director Generals	
Disability			
Systematically and comprehensively follow up all newly recruited staff who have a disability (or staff who have acquired a disability in-service), a few weeks after they have seen Occupational Health, to ensure that any access or related issues have been addressed.		Occupational Health	
Check the current mechanism for providing information about the requirements of any new disabled staff to the relevant managers, to ensure that the appropriate information is reaching the right people in order to take action, for example any reasonable adjustments.		Occupational Health Diversity team	
Consideration should be given to extending the use of the Toucan Employment Scheme or similar, with more ongoing support from line management for supervisors of Toucan Scheme participants.		Diversity team	
Gender			
Ensure that there are positive messages including business benefits about a) part-time working and b) flexible working arrangements more consistently across		HRM&D Senior HR managers	

Section 7 – Employment cycle			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
the House – to staff and managers			
Targets			
Consider setting a reporting target for staff with disabilities to be monitored and reviewed over time.		Diversity team	
Consider setting goals for achieving ethnic minority staff in senior pay bands to be monitored and reviewed over time.		Management Board	
Consider setting goals for increasing the number of women in senior pay bands to be monitored and reviewed over time.		Management Board	

Equality monitoring

This section sets out the action planned to ensure that equality monitoring is comprehensive. The action points cover:

- Continuation and extension of equality monitoring
- Analysis of data
- Increase of reporting of disability status

Section 8 – Equality monitoring			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Generic			
Extend equality monitoring data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to staff and visitors • collected at all stages (from response to advertisements/ opportunity through all the stages of recruitment and selection); • performance evaluation outcomes; • access to training and development; • temporary and permanent promotions; • secondments; internal moves; • grievances, harassment and disciplinaries. • cross-tabulated by department • analysed more regularly • used to monitor progress and review actions. • reported on a 6-monthly basis to senior management. • benchmark with other relevant organisations or sectors, 		Diversity team HRM&D Office of the Chief Executive Visitor Centre Manager Education Services PICT	

Section 8 – Equality monitoring			
Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Monitor perceived inconsistencies between departments in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numbers of grievances • charges of harassment, • applications and approvals for training and development 		Diversity team Dept HR teams	
Provide more detailed and regular equality statistics for management and staff, with accompanying analysis on a six monthly basis		Diversity team	
Disability			
Continue to increase the response rate on the disability monitoring question.		Diversity team.	

Plans for the publication of the Equality Scheme

This section sets out the action planned to publish the Equality Scheme.

Section 9 – Plans for the publication of the Equality Scheme

Equality Area	Timetable	Responsible	Progress
Publish the Equality Scheme on the House of Commons website, with an Executive Summary and an Easy Read version. Offer should be made to make this available in different formats, on request.		Diversity team Office of the Chief executive	