

**DRAFT**

## **House of Commons Service**

### **Equality Scheme**

#### **A summary**

This document provides an overview of the House of Commons Service's Single Equality Scheme. The full Scheme and action plan can be requested by emailing [corporatelearning&diversity@parliament.uk](mailto:corporatelearning&diversity@parliament.uk) or telephoning 020 7219 1412.

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## 1. Introduction to the House Equality Scheme

The House Equality Scheme is a tool with which to strengthen and advance our equality and diversity work, while underpinning our purpose and providing improved services to Members and the public. This document explains:

- our focus on equality and diversity, including our core values and *Valuing Others* policy
- how we plan to implement and manage diversity in the House
- how we have consulted staff and the key findings
- what action has been taken as a result of the consultation
- how we will monitor action and assess its impact
- how we will ensure public access to information and services.

Public sector organisations are required by law to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality in terms of race, gender and disability<sup>1</sup>. 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.

Although the House of Commons Service is exempt from this requirement, the House of Commons Commission and the Management Board are committed to the principles of equality and diversity and have supported the development of the House of Commons Service Single Equality Scheme, or 'House Equality Scheme'. As well as supporting the public duties relating to race, gender and disability, the Scheme also covers issues relating to religion or belief, age and sexual orientation. It has been developed through consulting staff across the House, Members and their staff, and the public.

The House Equality Scheme is an opportunity to build on our existing achievements in equality, plan and prioritise action, and model good practice. It supports the Corporate Business Plan and Strategic Plan, and cements our standing as an Investors in People-accredited organisation.

The Scheme is a Single Equality Scheme covering the public duty to promote equality in race, gender and disability.

## 2. Our focus on 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 Director General of Resources, Andrew Walker, is Diversity Champion for the House. The Diversity team will be working with people across the House, including policy makers and action owners, to carry out the work and monitor progress. Much of this is 'business as usual'.

### *Diversity strategy*

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex for more information on the general and specific duties.

Building on work by the Diversity Forum<sup>2</sup>, a *Diversity Strategy for 2006-2011* was developed. This focused on five key themes – Disability, Flexible Working, Education and Learning, Recruitment, and Monitoring and Evaluation. A number of actions were completed covering each theme. However, internal communications demonstrated that a considerable number of staff thought that more could be done in the areas of diversity and inclusion to bring consistency and challenge the culture of the House. This resulted in the Diversity Managers proposing to the Commission and the Management Board that there should be an equality scheme in line with those published by public bodies.

### *Equality and Diversity Statement*

The House of Commons Service recognises and values the diversity of its staff and is 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.<sup>3</sup>

### *'Valuing Others' policy*

Equality duties are relevant to the House in that they help us meet our aims of our *Valuing Others* policy. It underpins our core values and 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 rights and 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Equality and Diversity Statement, House of Commons Staff Handbook, Feb 2008

<sup>4</sup> Valuing Others, House of Commons Staff Handbook, Ch. 4, section 4.8

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.

*Organisational values of the House of Commons*

As an employer, we value:<sup>5</sup>

**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. Involvement and consultation in the development of the House Equality Scheme**

Staff have been consulted throughout the development of the Scheme. Co-ordinated via the Diversity team, invitations were sent out to participate either in focus groups or by individual interview with the external consultants supporting us in the development of the Scheme.

A total of 110 people participated, including staff of the House, Members and Members' staff. They reflected diversity in terms of men and women, various ethnic backgrounds, pay bands, employment status, age, disability, religion and length of service. A small number of interviewees volunteered the information that they were gay or lesbian.

Focus groups were held on the specific core issues of disability, gender and race. A total of 11 focus groups were held (29 staff participating) and 81 individual interviews.

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<sup>5</sup> Core Values, House of Commons Staff Handbook, Ch.1, section 1.1

Public consultation took place by sending the draft Scheme to selected organisations, placing it on the parliament.uk website, and holding a specific involvement event with disabled people.

Previous relevant consultation exercises include the annual staff survey, and the findings from 2007 and 2008 have fed into the development of the Scheme.

#### 4. Key findings

The findings of the consultation fell into three main groups:

- leadership, organisational culture and structure
- cross-cutting themes relating to working environment and practices
- points relating to specific equality groups.

##### *Leadership, organisational culture and structure*

Several participants stressed that the House of Commons exists for all people of the UK and therefore it should have no less equality of access, opportunity and employment than any of the leading institutions and employers in the country; in fact it should be an organisation that others look to for a lead.

Leadership from the top was considered to be important. Staff expressed the wish to hear stronger messages of commitment to equality from the top. They commented that when these messages *are* received, they are noted, appreciated and make an impact.

The House of Commons organisation has been described as difficult to progress in – with staff working in silos, i.e. with regard to occupations and responsibilities, retained in separate departments, without the opportunity or encouragement to move easily into different parts of the organisation. This is important when examining the ethnic diversity of the organisation because there are parts of the organisation with a high percentage of minority ethnic staff (e.g. refreshments and cleaning sections) and parts with very low representation of minority ethnic staff.

There is a consciousness that the House must change, and an acknowledgement that the House has changed particularly on gender issues but that 'you can't do all the change all at once'. The move towards a unified House Service was referred to by several participants as creating a positive environment for the development of a Single Equality Scheme. This was particularly stressed by senior managers, who commented that the change was leading towards better delivery of services.

##### *Working environment and practices*

There is an overwhelming impression from participants of a heavily hierarchical environment. However, there were positive signs in the interviews and discussions that the House is prepared to assist staff to progress by moving around within the institution and by providing additional encouragement and support either in-house or through outside agencies.

Although there does feel to be good intent, there is evidence to suggest that a general advance on equalities across the board is hampered by the fact that equality work rarely extends beyond the people who are already interested and focused on this area of activity. Disability is a good example. On the whole, positive, kindly attitudes have been reported on an individual basis; however this is not the same as having systems in place and facilities readily available which are routinely taken up.

#### *Points relating to specific equality groups*

While there has been success in recruiting women to the House staff, there has not been the same positive outcome with minority ethnic people at the more senior levels and the consensus is that 'they have got a long way to go'. Nevertheless, there has been steady progress in improving forms of access such as the expansion in the number of languages into which some selected House materials are translated (for communication to the public).

The most visible issue of under-representation is race at the senior levels. Some concern was expressed that it may be difficult to attract applications from potential staff from minority ethnic backgrounds (particularly for posts at higher pay bands), and so they are not coming through recruitment channels.

There was some doubt about how information about the needs of a disabled member of staff who may need a reasonable adjustment 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 staff member's 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.

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.

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 younger children.

## **5. What next?**

### *Action planning*

To address the findings, an action plan has been drawn up. The aim is to outline specific timetabled actions with clear lines of responsibility. These actions 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. Accessibility and communications

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

### *Assessing the impact*

An important part of an 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, to ensure that policy development across the House considers:

- different needs, experiences, issues and priorities
- negative impact of a policy
- 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.

Plans are in place to prioritise the policies and functions to be screened and assess their impact on equality.

## **6. 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 actively 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 (John Borley, Director General of Facilities) champions accessibility issues.

In taking this forward, we will consider the needs of the different audiences, and use different approaches accordingly (e.g. more detail for specialists, summaries for the general reader). We 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.

Our outreach work in building relationships to engage with schools, communities and organisations around the country is an important part of our work to widen public access to information and services.

## **7. Monitoring and review of the Single Equality Scheme**



Progress against the Single 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.

### 8. House Equality Scheme Action Plan

The following represent some of the 'headline' actions in the nine target areas. For the full action plan, visit the intranet pages: [xxxxx](#), or call the Corporate Diversity Manager on ext. 1412.

#### Section 1. Accessibility and communications

Section 1 - Accessibility and communications											
Action	Date	Action by	Links to current work	Measures of success	Age	Disability	Gender	Race	Religion/ Belief	Sexual Orientation	Transgender
Continue work to improve access and facilities across the Estate for people with disabilities.	Ongoing	DDA Project Board	DDA Project Board Legislative requirements	Improvements reported and positive feedback from public and staff.		✓					
Ensure equality and diversity messages are clear and consistent and in a format accessible to different audiences.	Ongoing	OCE Dept of Facilities	IIP communication	Positive feedback from staff, Members staff and the public.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Section 2. Public access to information about services

Section 2 – Public access to information about services												
Action	Date	Action by	Links to current work	Measures of success	Age	Disability	Gender	Race	Religion/ Belief	Sexual Orientation	Transgender	
Engage the local and wider community through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>outreach work including Parliamentary Education Service initiatives, work experience schemes, voluntary activities, Mr Speaker's Apprenticeship Scheme, etc.</li> <li>presenting the House of Commons as a potential employer to the wider diverse population. To be done through:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>under-represented groups featuring in publications such as recruitment literature</li> <li>placement fairs, open days, career fairs and active management of recruitment agencies.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Dec 09	Outreach team Education Services Diversity team Recruitment team	Outreach strategy Parliamentary Education Service Corporate social responsibility (CSR)	Evidence, through monitoring, of wider take-up of the opportunities indicated  Greater diversity of images and clear statements on equality in recruitment publicity materials and materials for open days etc.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Improve website (intranet, internet and website of external recruitment agency) to meet disability access standards. Ensure that website is compatible with a range of web browsers for visually	Jun 09	DIS Hays Recruitment	DIS House-wide communication	Internationally accepted access standards met.		✓						

impaired people.											
Improve advice to Members about services available for use with their visitors, such as a signing service and translation services; provide expert advice from the Diversity team.	Oct 09	Members' Centre Diversity team	Visitor Services review	Advice in place. Positive feedback from Members including evidence of take-up.		✓					

**Section 3. Policies and functions**

Section 3 – Policies and functions											
Action	Date	Action by	Links to current work	Measures of success	Age	Disability	Gender	Race	Religion/ Belief	Sexual Orientation	Transgender
					Establish the process for equality screening and impact assessment.	Oct 09	Diversity team HRM&D	Diversity team Corporate Plan supporting task 1 Organisational development HR strategy	Process in place and piloted in a sample of departments	✓	✓
Carry out the work required to participate in Disability Standard, run by the Employers' Forum on Disability, key elements of which include diagnostic tool to assess current status in terms of disability effectiveness, assisted action plan, assessment.	Feb 10	Diversity team Dept Resource Managers DDA Project Board	Diversity team Corporate Plan supporting task 1	Performance in Disability Standard meeting own target set, with report and recommendations acted upon.		✓					
[s.36(2)(b) and s.36(2)(c)]	Oct 09	Department	[s.36(2)(b) and	Mechanism in	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Section 3 – Policies and functions											
Action	Date	Action by	Links to current work	Measures of success	Age	Disability	Gender	Race	Religion/ Belief	Sexual Orientation	Transgender
		of Resources	s.36(2)(c)]	place, communicated to different groups on the Estate							

**Section 4. Staff responsibilities and training**

Section 4 – Staff responsibilities and training											
Action	Date	Action by	Links to current work	Measures of success	Age	Disability	Gender	Race	Religion/ Belief	Sexual Orientation	Transgender
Encourage under-represented groups to take advantage of development opportunities; through educating line managers. Consider providing training aimed at specific job categories where	Dec 09	Director Generals Line Managers Career	Corporate Plan supporting task 1 Learning &	Increased take-up and successful completion of development opportunities by	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

there is relatively high representation of minority ethnic staff and limited movement or progression.		Adviser CLD	Development strategy Talent management strategy	under-represented groups.							
<p>Review all training, to ensure appropriate equality and diversity messages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>adequately and consistently included in induction</li> <li>integrated into all management training</li> <li>consistent in messages in the training provided on an ongoing basis for all staff</li> <li>tailored as closely as possible to staff's day-to-day working environment.</li> </ul>	Jun 09	Corporate Learning and Development Diversity team	Corporate Plan supporting task 1 Learning & Development strategy Talent management strategy	Review conducted and report produced identifying any action areas report of action taken.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Make available and communicate opportunities for Members' staff to participate in equality training, and other training, where possible.	Jun 09	DIS L&D DR Quality Assurance Team Office of the Chief Executive	Corporate Plan primary objective 2	Training opportunities communicated to Members' staff leading to take-up and positive feedback.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Section 5. Employment cycle

Section 5 – Employment cycle											
Action	Date	Action by	Links to current work	Measures of success	Age	Disability	Gender	Race	Religion/ Belief	Sexual Orientation	Transgender
					All parts of the recruitment and selection processes to be diversity tested.	Oct 09	Recruitment Manager	Recruitment review	Report showing that processes are non-discriminatory <i>and</i> promote equality and diversity.	✓	✓
Recruitment process to be reviewed to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- eliminate all but necessary written elements</li> <li>- remove inadvertent barriers from advertisements</li> <li>- ensure plain English used</li> <li>- only include professional qualifications where absolutely necessary</li> <li>- consider flexibility to take into account applicants' particular needs, e.g. autistic candidates.</li> </ul>	Oct 09	Recruitment Manager	Recruitment review	Evidence of changes made in the recruitment process which remove unnecessary potential for exclusion.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Systematically and comprehensively follow up all new starters who have a disability, or staff who have acquired a disability in-service, a few weeks after they have seen Occupational Health, to	Jun 09	Occupational Health	Induction policy	Policy in place. Evidence to show that all new starters who are disabled, or those who acquire a		✓					

Section 5 – Employment cycle											
Action	Date	Action by	Links to current work	Measures of success	Age	Disability	Gender	Race	Religion/ Belief	Sexual Orientation	Transgender
					ensure that any access or reasonable adjustments required have been addressed.				disability are followed up systematically		
Ensure that there are positive messages to staff and managers about the benefits of a) part-time working and b) flexible working, and that procedures are consistent across the House.	Oct 09	HRM&D Senior HR managers	Line management development Diversity team Corporate Plan supporting task 2	Evidence that messages have been sent out. Monitoring data shows take-up at different levels in the organisation.		✓	✓				



**Section 6. Equality monitoring**

Section 6 – Equality Monitoring											
Action	Date	Action by	Links to current work	Measures of success	Age	Disability	Gender	Race	Religion/ Belief	Sexual Orientation	Transgender
					<p>Extend equality monitoring data to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff and visitors</li> <li>• all stages of recruitment and selection</li> <li>• performance evaluation outcomes;</li> <li>• access to training and development;</li> <li>• temporary and permanent promotions;</li> <li>• secondments; internal moves;</li> <li>• grievances, harassment and disciplinarys.</li> </ul> <p>These should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cross-tabulated by department</li> <li>• analysed more regularly</li> <li>• used to monitor progress and review actions.</li> <li>• reported on a six-monthly basis to senior management.</li> <li>• benchmarked with other relevant organisations or sectors,</li> </ul>	Jun 09 and ongoing	Diversity team HRM&D Office of the Chief Executive Visitor Centre Manager Education Services PICT	Services to the public Visitor Services review	Monitoring in place with regular analysis and reporting, leading to action taken to address any under-representation or specific needs identified.	✓	✓

**Section 7. 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 8. 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
- Three-year review

**Section 9. Plans for the publication of the Equality Scheme**

This section sets out the action planned to publish the Equality Scheme, i.e. on the House of Commons website, with an Executive Summary and an Easy Read version, available in different formats on request.

For the full House Equality Scheme and action plan, please visit the intranet pages: [xxxxx](#), or call the Corporate Diversity Manager on ext. 1412.