

Forestry Commission
Disability Equality Scheme
2009-2012

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FOREWORD

The Forestry Commissioners welcome and endorse this new Disability Equality Scheme, which in their view will support the Forestry Commission's continuing work to engage and support those individuals with a disability, both employees and customers.

The Forestry Commission's mission is to protect and expand Britain's forests and woodlands and increase their value to society and the environment.

As an employer, the Forestry Commission (FC) can only hope to achieve this mission if we ensure our staff are encouraged to realise their full potential. Therefore, we must recruit, retain and develop a workforce comprised of the best and most talented people for the job. We believe this requires a workforce that is representative of the diverse nature of society today.

In addition, use of the public forest estate is paramount to communities across Great Britain (GB). Therefore, the FC has made a commitment to include all of those who make up communities in the way the forests are managed irrespective of any individuals' race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion/belief. GB society today is very diverse. As a Government department managing the public forest estate, the FC respects the needs and aspirations of the many different peoples and customs present within GB society.

This mission and approach to our workforce and the forest estate is fully consistent with the obligations placed on the FC by the equality legislation, including the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. This Act obliges public bodies to promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons and promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.

This Disability Equality Scheme sets out how the FC will meet its obligations under the Act. It is an important and integral part of the FC's wider equality and diversity agenda. The Scheme is formally reviewed every three years, but it is a living document that will be regularly reviewed and improved. This Scheme and its Action Plan will help us turn our disability equality objectives into reality.

As the Commissioners of the FC, we are fully committed to playing our part and leading the FC forward in its drive to become an exemplar service provider and employer across GB. This includes eradicating unlawful discrimination and ensuring fairness of opportunity to all our customers and staff irrespective of their race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion/belief.

The Forestry Commissioners

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Disability Equality Scheme (DES)

This document sets out how the FC will continue to meet its duties under the Disability Equality legislation. The Scheme also outlines how the FC will fulfil its important role in influencing the opportunities and participation of employees regardless of any disabilities. Therefore, this document describes the systems and processes needed to mainstream disability equality into all of the work that the FC does and the action plan required to address disability equality priorities.

Development of the DES

This DES has been compiled by the Diversity Team with input and participation from the Diversity Technical Group, wider FC colleagues (including the internal Staff Equality Forum) and Pearn Kandola, an independent consultancy.

The scope of the document and the potential priorities for action with regard to external services was drafted following involvement and engagement with a range of organisations representing the interests of people with a variety of disabilities. This is described in more detail on pages 13 to 19.

The FC's previous DES covering 2005-2008 has been reviewed and outstanding relevant actions incorporated in this revised DES. This revised DES underlines and develops FC commitment to equality in the way we work and services we provide during the next three year period. It is a clear statement of FC policy on disability equality and provides a strategic framework for the FC's work in this area.

Consultation

In addition to the initial engagement exercise with people with disabilities to form the content of this Scheme and associated Action Plan, the Scheme will also be subject to a twelve-week external consultation with the FC's main stakeholders. This will include various forestry organisations, FC staff, Government departments and agencies and relevant organisations from the public, private and third sectors.

Context

This scheme, as part of the FC's wider agenda on diversity, will be crucial in bringing about meaningful change. In order to do this, the FC will examine relevant policies, functions, service planning and service delivery processes to ensure that no-one is in any way discriminated against or subject to unfair opportunity/adverse treatment. Further, as an employer the FC will ensure that appropriate training is provided to all staff to raise awareness of the equality and diversity agenda.

In addition, as a service provider the FC will ensure that working with community groups, other public bodies, voluntary organisations and private organisations/individuals is done in an inclusive manner, offering fairness of opportunity to all. To this end, the FC will also ensure that it does everything possible to procure and receive goods from organisation and individual/(s) that have or subscribe to equality and diversity values and objectives as set down in legislation.

Leadership Commitment

The senior staff group within the FC are committed to ensuring the organisation is free from discrimination as an employer and a service provider. The following specific responsibilities apply:

- The Executive Board Chair is the Director General of the FC and has taken on the role of Board level Diversity Champion.
- The Director, HR ensures that diversity issues are discussed at and actioned between meetings of the GB Executive Board, the HR Service Board and the HR Management Board.
- Both the Director General and the Director, HR have personal objectives to mainstream equality and diversity throughout the FC. In addition, other members of the Senior Staff Group now also have personal targets aimed at mainstreaming equality and diversity throughout the FC.
- Country Directors have taken responsibility to drive forward the equality and diversity agenda on a country basis, with the aim of promoting equality and diversity throughout the forestry sector.
- HR Business Partners and/or policy leads for each of the six business areas ensure that the equality and diversity agenda is promulgated and publicised at business management boards.
- All senior managers in the FC have had mandatory training on equality and diversity to ensure that strong and consistent leadership is provided around this issue. Senior managers are expected to role model inclusive behaviours to ensure appropriate standards of behaviour are understood and applied by all employees.
- The Diversity Technical Group will facilitate the exchange of good practice; and develop, monitor and advise on the implementation of the DES and subsequent broader equality work. The group reports to the FC's Executive Board as well as Management/Service Boards. The Director of Human Resources chairs this group. Each constituent part of the FC is represented and has been asked to contribute to the prioritisation and implementation of equality and diversity throughout the FC.

Equality and diversity are key drivers in the FC's mission, values and people strategy (see below for details). In addition, social justice and inclusion feature highly in each of the country forestry strategies and delivery plans. The FC has also developed an Equality and Diversity Strategy that is available through the website.

The FC's Mission

The FC's mission is to protect and expand Britain's forest and woodlands and increase their value to society and the environment. Therefore, the FC is committed to ensuring the forest and woodlands they manage are accessible and enjoyed by all groups in society regardless of their race, age, gender, religion, faith, sexual orientation or disability.

The FC's Values

In essence the FC's commitment to diversity and specifically disability equality is embedded in the organisation's core values which influence the behaviour of all staff and their approach to service provision.

Specifically the FC aims to be an organisation that values:

- Teamwork - recognising and identifying everyone's unique contribution
- Professionalism - tapping the potential of a diverse group of people in pursuit of organisational goals
- Respect - respecting peoples' ideas, differing views and perspectives
- Communication - communicating in different ways to ensure a common understanding
- Learning - how to do things differently looking to learn from others
- Creativity - considering different ways of doing things and not always assuming that the usual way is the only way or that one size fits all.

The FC's People Strategy

The corporate plans for each country and Forest Research have common themes defining how the FC wishes to work; these determine the key strategic drivers for how the organisation manages its people.

The People Strategy demonstrates the FC's commitment to people and how it will attract, manage and develop a diverse workforce over the next three to five years.

The People Strategy outlines:

- A fair and consistent approach in dealing with people; and

- A framework for ensuring that the FC meet its goals of effective HR practices, demonstrating diversity through increasing representation of disabled employees, developing the leaders of the FC's future and refreshing the organisation through mobility.

The People Strategy has the following high-level goals:

- To demonstrate excellence in the leadership and management of a diverse workforce
- To support people in their professional and personal development and improve organisational performance, identifying and overcoming any barriers to progression
- To maintain a safe and healthy environment and develop a diverse workforce
- To adopt people practices for the future, which support efficient and effective processes of delivery, through HR support and advice.

The FC's Equality and Diversity Strategy

The FC's Equality and Diversity Strategy (launched in Autumn 2008) has the following five high-level aims:

- Aim 1: To recruit and employ more people from a diversity of backgrounds in order to make the Forestry Commission representative of the population of the areas where we operate
- Aim 2: To support our departmental policies, organisational objectives and operational practice by ensuring our equality and diversity policies allow all people irrespective of race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation and religion and belief to have access to all our services
- Aim 3: To improve our engagement with people from diverse backgrounds especially people in minority and under-represented groups
- Aim 4: To articulate to our staff the business, moral and ethical case for equality and diversity in an easily accessible manner and to monitor and evaluate our progress by improving data quality, collection and analysis
- Aim 5: To go beyond fulfilling the Commission's general and specific duties and our responsibilities as a public body to become known as an exemplar employer and service provider in respect of equality and diversity.

Aims 1, 4 and 5 are designed to deliver the People Strategy objective of developing a diverse workforce.

All of the aims of the Diversity Strategy will contribute to the business objectives of delivering customer services that are accessible to all sectors of the communities that we serve regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. In other words, meeting the FC's GB mission of "increasing the value of Britain's forests and woodlands to society...".

Structure of the DES

The document is structured in the following way:

- Foreword and Introduction
- The Forestry Commission's Structure
- Legal Obligations
- Key Elements of the FC's Disability Equality Scheme
- Systems for Mainstreaming Disability Equality
- The Forestry Commission as a Service Provider
- The Forestry Commission as an Employer
- Disability Equality Action Plan
- High Priority Actions

If anyone has any comments on, or complaints about, this Scheme, please contact us at the address below.

You can also get this publication on tape, in large print and various other formats by contacting the FC's Diversity Team at the address below. In addition, contact the address below for information on language translations, additional copies or to arrange for an officer to discuss with you to explain any area/(s) of the publication that you would like clarified.

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THE FORESTRY COMMISSION'S STRUCTURE

The Forestry Commission (FC) is the Government department responsible for the protection and expansion of Britain's forests and woodlands.

Forestry is a devolved subject and the FC answers separately to Ministers in England, Scotland and Wales. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has responsibility for forestry in England as well as certain activities such as international forestry affairs that remain reserved at Westminster. Scottish Ministers have responsibility for forestry in Scotland and the Welsh Assembly Government has responsibility for forestry in Wales. Therefore, the FC is responsible for advising Forestry Ministers within the Westminster Parliament, Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales on forestry policy and for implementing the three separate forestry policy strategies across England, Scotland and Wales.

This devolved structure allows the FC to focus more clearly on delivering the policies of the individual Governments while still having the ability to take a GB-wide approach to 'cross-border' issues.

The FC has a Board of Commissioners with duties and powers prescribed by statute, consisting of a Chairman and up to ten other Forestry Commissioners, including its Director General, who are appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of Ministers. The Commissioners' programmes to deliver each country's forestry strategy are set out in Corporate Plans for England, Scotland and Wales. These programmes are directed and financed by the three administrations to which the FC is directly accountable.

The FC also has three executive agencies that work to targets set by Commissioners and Ministers:

- Public forests, woodlands and other lands in England and Scotland are managed by Forest Enterprise agencies on behalf of the FC in that country.
- Forest Research is a GB-wide agency that delivers high-quality scientific research and surveys, to inform the development of forestry policies and practices, and promote high standards of sustainable forest management.

Ministers have agreed that, whilst most of the FC's work is now done at country level, a number of the FC's functions would be funded directly by Westminster and operated on a cross-GB basis by Corporate and Forestry Support Division. In this GB role, the FC provides advice and support to the UK Government and to the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales on the standards for sustainable forest management and encourages good forestry practice. In addition, as the FC operates across GB, central support services such as HR are provided to the entire organisation on a GB basis.

The FC works with a wide range of partners from private sector landowners to sports clubs, local communities to national businesses, on a whole host of recreation, regeneration and educational schemes.

FC responsibilities span research, commercial timber production, sustainability programmes and policy, as well as learning and leisure.

The FC's goal is always to ensure that, at a practical level, Britain can use its forests to contribute positively to as many of the nation's needs as we can while sustaining this great resource for the future.

Impact of Structure on DES

Although forestry is devolved the FC approaches equality and diversity issues on a GB basis rather than a devolved basis. Responsibility for the implementation of the DES is shared but guidance and support is provided from the central diversity team based at Silvan House.

In order to appropriately monitor action and progress, the FC focus on six discrete business areas as follows:

- FC England
- FC Scotland
- FC Wales
- Forest Research
- Silvan House (HR, IT, Finance - support functions to the wider FC)
- Business Units (civil and mechanical engineering, renewable energy, plant and seed supply i.e. supporting business functions to the wider FC).

These six areas impact on the reporting and analysis of employment data and service provision.

What does the FC do?

- The Forestry Commission is the biggest provider of outdoor recreation in the UK
- Cares for more than 1 million hectares of sustainable managed woods and forests – that's more than 1.4 billion trees
- Plants more than 17 million trees every year
- Welcomes more than 50 million visitors every year
- Provides 2,600 km of cycle trails
- Has 55 visitor centres, almost 500 car parks and 155 easy access trails
- Provides 109 forest classrooms or educational facilities

- Maintains 24,000 km of forest roads – seven times the amount of motorway in Britain
- Welcomes more than 100,000 people per year to our concerts in the forest
- Maintains more than 2,300 bridges
- Conducts research into forestry, trees and tree health
- Helped expand Britain's woodland by an area more than 3 times the size of greater London in the last 20 years.

As you can see the Forestry Commission provides a great deal in terms of leisure for the UK population. This year we have continued and expanded a campaign in the disabled lifestyle press to promote the FC's current facilities for those with a disability.

FC Education Activities

The FC has an extensive programme of education activities, delivered by staff across the three countries.

In recent years, the team has worked to deliver educational activities to adults with learning difficulties and children with additional support needs including involvement in the *Learning for Life* and *Forest School* programmes. The FC has been involved in, and/or provided financial support for projects with children with severe physical and learning difficulties, adults and children with learning difficulties and children with visual impairments.

Visits and initiatives are increasing e.g. FC Wales delivered 20 Special Schools visits during 2007-08 benefiting nearly 400 pupils. This is a 43% increase on the number of pupils who benefited from visits during 2006-07.

In order to encourage long-term sustainability of these projects, there has been training and support provided to representatives from the organisations to deliver the Forest School programmes themselves. In recent years this has been carried out with a number of organisations including schools and colleges, Enable Scotland, Royal Blind School and the Thistle Foundation among others.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Legislation and its Implications - Legislative Context

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 provides the legislative basis for disability equality policies in Great Britain. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005 amended the 1995 Act.

The General Duty

The DDA 2005 places a statutory general duty on public authorities (this includes the FC) to promote disability equality. This means that the FC is required to 'have due regard to the need' to:

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

The aim of the general duty – making the promotion of disability equality central to the way public authorities work – ties in with the FC's commitment to mainstream equality and diversity. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process will assist the FC in meeting this general duty through the regular monitoring, review of policy and process as well as targeted action to ensure representation.

The FC will continue to review policies and functions for their relevance under the Act. The FC's existing policies and functions most relevant to promoting all six equality themes have been prioritised for the next three years and scheduled for equality impact assessment by the relevant department area (FC England, FC Scotland, FC Wales, Forest Research, Silvan House, Business Units).

An equality impact assessment tool has been developed and will be used to assess policies for their impact for employees and service users.

The use of impact assessments will also help to ensure that service areas engage with local people from disabled communities to ensure their needs and priorities help shape local policy and service delivery.

Summary reports of all EqIAs are published on the FC's web-site on the Equality and Diversity pages.

The Specific Duties

The FC also has specific duties to help them meet the General Duty. These state that public authorities should:

- publish a Disability Equality Scheme demonstrating how it intends to fulfil its general and specific duties;
- involve disabled people in the development of the Scheme;
- carry-out impact assessments;
- make arrangements for gathering relevant information;
- develop an action plan;
- take the steps set out in its action plan, within three years;
- publish a report summarising the progress made with the action plan, the results of information gathering and how that information has been used.

The following sections of this document will outline how the FC has planned to meet the general and specific duties.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE FC's DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has set out five key principles for Disability Equality Schemes: Involvement, Action Plan, Monitoring, Assessment and Review.

Involving disabled people in developing the DES

In order to involve disabled stakeholders, we carried out an initial consultation and engagement exercise. This exercise involved telephone interviews and focus group meetings with both external stakeholders and internal FC employees. Prior to this engagement, an initial scoping document was issued which outlined what the FC considered should be included within its DES, based on feedback from the Equality Impact Assessment process and the annual monitoring exercises of disabled staff and applicants. This initial document was reviewed by those participating in the initial engagement exercise, and their feedback incorporated into the development of this Scheme. The results of this exercise are outlined on the following pages, including both external stakeholder and FC employee responses.

Initial Engagement Exercise with FC Staff

In addition to engaging with external disability organisations, we also sought the views of staff via those members of our Equality and Diversity Staff Forum who had expressed a specific interest in disability equality. Although they reviewed the Consultation Document we sent to external organisations, we also asked them to focus directly on employee disability issues, as follows:

Potential Actions:

- Consultation with staff to explore self-declaration rates.
- Introduction of the Two Ticks scheme.
- Advertising campaign through relevant lifestyle magazines.
- Potential to use network of disability charities to advertise jobs?
- Examine whether job adverts provide adequate details of the duties so applicants with a disability can have a realistic idea of whether they could perform the tasks.
- Continue to provide reasonable adjustments and publicise those that have already been provided i.e. promote best practice.
- New staff forum can assist in consultation process.

Of those members of staff who replied, the following potential actions were felt to be the key priorities:

1. Consultation with staff to explore self-declaration rates.
2. Examine whether job adverts provide adequate details of the duties so applicants with a disability can have a realistic idea of whether they could perform the tasks.
3. Potential to use network of disability charities to advertise jobs
4. Introduction of the Two Ticks scheme.
5. Continue to provide reasonable adjustments and publicise those that have already been provided i.e. promote best practice.

Subsequent actions for the FC as an employer

Based on the information outlined above there are several potential aims for the Forestry Commission as an employer. The most important of which is to understand why there are such low disability declaration rates within the Forestry Commission. Finding an answer to this question will act as an enabler to increasing the recruitment and retention of staff with disabilities.

Therefore, the objectives will be:

- Improve disability self declaration rates

- Increase understanding of how staff with disabilities feel they are treated through the staff survey
- Increase % of disabled applicants
- Increase % of successful disabled applicants
- Provide advice and guidance on reasonable adjustments and share best practice.

The level of self-declaration of disability is poor within the FC. Based on the experiences of HR Case Managers and the People Support Team who are involved in supporting managers and staff in making reasonable adjustments, there is good reason to believe that a higher proportion of staff are disabled than those who are declaring. Therefore, the FC has developed a new process, practices and procedures for self-declaration. Once the agreed action plan for this has been implemented, it is hoped to make an impact on this objective, which will be reviewed annually to check on progress. If no progress has been made, further work will be done to understand why people are not self-disclosing.

Therefore, the actions to facilitate the objectives in order of priority will be:

- Consultation with staff to explore self-declaration rates. The new staff equality forum can assist in consultation process.
- Introduction of two ticks scheme
- Continue to provide reasonable adjustments and publicise those that have already been provided i.e. promote best practice
- Advertising campaign through relevant lifestyle magazines
- Examine the potential to use network of disability charities to advertise jobs
- Ensure that job adverts continue to provide adequate details of the duties so applicants with a disability can have a realistic idea of whether they could perform the tasks.

Initial Engagement Exercise With People With Disabilities

In order to develop the new DES and associated action plan, the FC engaged with the following organisations through interviews and focus groups to canvas views on the potential contents of the new Scheme:

Organisation	Description of Organisation
Rough Riderz	Club for wheelchair users, along with able-bodied Mountain Bike riders, enabling opportunities for off-road downhill 4 wheel mountain bike riding.
The Fieldfare Trust	Promoting countryside access for disabled people.
Cardiff and Vale Coalition of Disabled People	Supporting the full rights for, and inclusion of, all disabled people in the community. Working to empower disabled people to be in control of their own lives.
Disability Wales	The national association of disabled people's organisations, striving to achieve the rights, equality and independence of disabled people in Wales.
Celf o Gwmpas	Provides high quality arts experiences primarily for adults with learning disabilities.

Wales Council for Deaf People	The major voluntary body in Wales concerned with deafness. An umbrella organisation of associations, both voluntary and statutory, working in the field of hearing loss and representing people who are deaf, deafened, hard of hearing or deaf/blind.
Guide Dogs for the Blind Association	Provides guide dogs and other mobility services that increase the independence and dignity of blind and partially-sighted people. Campaigns for improved rehabilitation services and unhindered access for all blind and partially-sighted people.
Royal National Institute for the Blind	Challenging blindness by empowering people who are blind or partially sighted, removing the barriers they face and helping to prevent blindness.
Mencap	The voice of learning disability. Everything they do is about valuing and supporting people with a learning disability and their families and carers.
Individual	An individual with a mobility impairment.
Royal London Society for the Blind	RLSB offers independently acclaimed "best in class" education, training and employment services to people who are blind or partially sighted
Disabilities Trust	National charity providing personal care and specialist housing for people with special needs
Speaking Up	Speaking Up supports and empowers people with learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health problems to speak up for themselves
Camsight	Cam Sight is a charity, working with blind and partially sighted people within Cambridgeshire.

The organisations were sent an initial consultation document, giving an overview of the Forestry Commission, suggesting some potential priorities for our DES and asking some specific questions. Respondee were also invited to make their own comments or suggest their own priorities. Our aim was to focus on understanding of disabled groups' needs in relation to the services provided by the FC with the objectives of understanding the needs of disabled people and consulting on specific services designed for disabled users.

The proposed potential actions to deliver these objectives were:

- Consultation with disability groups with regard to new and existing services and facilities.
- Increase the sharing and publication of best practice in making services accessible. Ensure the organisation learns.
- Increase the advertising of accessible services, e.g. accessible trails. (diversity database, Local Newsletters).
- Examine data on proportion of FC budget spent on educational work with special schools compared to mainstream schools, in order to benchmark and monitor the budget across the FC.
- Engage with local teams to carry out an assessment of expenditure on diversity initiatives to inform future policy-making and direction.

- Continue development and expansion of forests closer to centres of population to more readily provide leisure, health and education opportunities.
- Use Staff Survey insights to help us evaluate that the FC public services are being engaged with and valued by diverse groups.

Views were sought via a mixture of interviews and focus groups. We asked those who participated to identify the three actions they felt most important to achieve progress and also if they had any ideas that we might have missed. We asked the following questions:

- Why do you feel this is a priority for the Forestry Commission?
- How do you think it will help the Forestry Commission/Disabled users?
- Have you seen this approach work well in other organisations/places?
- Do you have any specific ideas how this approach could be used most effectively?
- What other actions do you think the Forestry Commission needs to take to ensure people with disabilities can engage with services?
- Do you have any other comments that would help us?
- Do you have any questions?

The results of the interviews, and the subsequent action taken is summarised below:

Priorities for the proposed actions								
Group	Disability represented	FC Proposal						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Cardiff and Vale Coalition of Disabled People	All	1st	=2nd	=2nd				
The Fieldfare Trust	All	2nd		1st			3rd	
Disability Wales	All	1st	2nd	3rd				
Celf o Gwmpas	Learning	1st	2nd			4th	3rd	
Guide Dogs for the Blind Association	Sight	1st						
Wales Council for Deaf People	Hearing	=1st	=1st	=1st	=1st	=1st	=1st	=1st
Mencap	Learning		1st		2nd			
Royal London Society for the Blind – Individual 1	Sight	1st		2nd				3rd
Royal London Society for the Blind – Individual 2	Sight	3rd		2nd			1st	
Royal London Society for the Blind – Individual 3	Sight	1st		2nd		3rd		
Royal London Society for the Blind – Individual 4	Sight	1st		2nd		3rd		
Disabilities Trust	Physical & Sight	1st		2nd			3rd	

Speaking Up – Focus Group	Learning							
Camsight – Focus Group	All							

Comment

Focus groups were conducted at Speaking Up and Camsight. The groups strongly endorsed the idea of carrying out more consultation and also advertising FC services more effectively. The tables show a consistency of choice between the groups, regardless of which disability they represent. The order of preferred priority is easy to identify and is as follows:

1. Consultation with disability groups with regard to new and existing services and facilities.
2. Increase the advertising of accessible services, e.g. accessible trails. (diversity database, Local Newsletters).
3. Increase the sharing and publication of best practice in making services accessible. Ensure the organisation learns.

Summary

Although there are many different sorts of disability, the main messages are clear:

- Involve and consult with disabled groups, local or national as appropriate and do this at an early stage of any initiative.
- Involvement should occur where services are being offered e.g. in the forest
- Use the opinions that are given and tell the groups what you have done.
- Create and maintain good relationships with disabled groups.
- Disabled groups will help us get it right.
- Share best practice internally and externally.
- Advertise what we offer through local disability groups in national and local newsletters, magazines and websites – tailor the information to the targeted group.
- Ensure the information about our services are detailed enough and correct so people with disabilities can make informed choices.
- Tailor our advertising to help different groups understand what is available for them.
- Involve as many different types of disability groups as possible – one answer does not suit all.

We are very grateful to those individuals and organisations that took the time to participate in this initial engagement exercise.

The subsequent DES and Action Plan will be subject to further involvement and engagement through a twelve-week consultation exercise. Consultees include a range of peer organisations and those organisations representing the interests of people with disabilities.

Action Plan

The Action Plan has actions to ensure that the FC continues to mainstream disability equality through the EqIA process and actions relating to the organisation's role as an employer and service provider.

The Action Plan is based on the outcomes on the initial engagement exercise and focuses on several key priorities to be achieved over the next three years. The Plan is owned by the Diversity Team who will be responsible for its implementation.

Monitoring

Information and evidence gathered through the FC's social research programme, customer surveys, Equality Impact Assessment engagement with disabled people and annual employee and recruitment applicant monitoring exercises will be utilised to inform the DES review process and identify barriers and gaps which may impact negatively on disabled people.

Assessment

Now that the EqIA Guidance exists in FC operational guidance format, there is a systematic assessment process on-going of appropriate 'people' policies, services and functions across the whole FC. This includes the development of new policies and the revision of existing policies and a programme of priorities has been developed with the larger recreation policies, etc identified as a first priority for action. Consultation and engagement takes place as appropriate through this process.

Review

All of this information gathering and analysis will be used as part on an on-going review process. The DES will be reviewed annually, with a major review after three years.

SYSTEMS FOR MAINSTREAMING DISABILITY EQUALITY

For the purposes of monitoring and completion of Equality Impact Assessments, the FC has been broken down in to six areas: FC Scotland, FC England, FC Wales, Forest Research Agency, Business Units providing central services (civil, mechanical engineering, seed supply, radio and electronics) and Silvan House (HR, IT, Finance i.e. supporting central services).

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs)

The use of EqIAs is fundamental to the FC's understanding its priorities in relation to disability equality.

The FC has created an EqIA template and guidance literature to enable thorough reviews of relevant functions and policies to be completed and this has been produced in the format of other FC Operational Guidance for ease of use by the business. The possibility of producing an online process will be explored in due course, after sufficient time has lapsed with the use of the current Operational Guidance to allow for useful feedback from business users in order to inform the structure of the online process.

Full details of the EqIA guidance and template, which is available on-line for all FC staff as part of the suite of Operational Guidance, can be found [here](#).

Assessing Functions and Policies

To initiate the process, the FC completed an initial assessment of policies and documentation. This assessment has been taken further in each part of the business to identify which of the existing policies will require full or partial EqIA and set criteria for prioritising a wider roll-out for new policy development.

The Diversity Team assesses the quality of the EqIAs produced. The Diversity Team will undertake an ongoing check of the quality of the EqIAs by sampling 10% of those completed and will engage with the Internal Audit team about introducing a formal audit process

Results of EqIAs are published as outlined in the EqIA guidance. If any adverse impact is identified through the EqIA process, appropriate action will be taken as outlined in the EqIA guidance.

The consultation and engagement processes the FC will use to assess the impact of functions and policies will comply with the central government guidelines and follow good practice in engaging target groups. A database detailing community groups to involve in the EqIA process has been developed.

Summaries of the EqIAs are published on the FC's Internet on the Equality and Diversity web pages, to share best practice across the organisation.

Monitoring

Monitoring is a key priority for the FC and will form the basis, along with EqlAs, of future action. Comprehensive and meaningful data, information and research will be collected and used to build an evidence base to help the FC assess its progress in meeting its targets and goals for equality. The FC will ensure that its monitoring information in relation to employment and service provision offers:

- Comprehensive benchmarks against which the FC can monitor progress
- A quantitative basis for EqlAs with which the FC can highlight areas of required action.

The FC will continue to monitor the required areas under the employment duty and will report and benchmark progress on an annual basis. This information will be used to identify gaps in representation. Where gaps are identified, action will be taken to investigate reasons and to address discrepancies appropriately (see FC as an Employer section for details of completed monitoring for 2007-2008).

Employment Data Systems

In terms of monitoring employment practices by disability the HR data system is updated with demographic details of employees at all stages of the employment cycle.

Data is stored on the system in compliance with the 1984 Data Protection Act. The HR team is responsible for the management, collation and production of analysis on request.

Examples of the monitoring that has already been completed can be found in the following section 'The FC as an Employer'.

Customer Experiences

As part of our on-going commitment to our service users we undertake a range of customer surveys. Some of these are conducted on a regular basis to compare and test customer satisfaction and explore needs. These range from public opinion surveys, site questionnaires, focus groups, feedback forms, etc. The surveys are analysed by the Economics and Statistics team who are responsible for compiling reports based on their analysis. This team reports to the Management Boards within FC England, Scotland and Wales. The Diversity Team liase with this team to use the data, explore where gaps exist within the data and agree how they can be filled.

Some site managers are also using local demographic data to more strategically assess the local demand for services and facilities and compare this with actual site usage. This type of analysis will become more prevalent as the EqlA process is further embedded across the FC.

We also carry out research into better understanding attitudes, beliefs and barriers to people using and not using our services and facilities. This can be undertaken at both a site level but also at the Regional and National level. Research and evidence we collate will be analysed and made available for all staff through our Intranet.

Consultations

As part of Government we comply with the current guidance on consultation and engagement. Therefore, regulatory consultations are conducted with key stakeholders when regulations change.

Local community consultations can also occur whenever there is a new development relating to a forest area near a local community. Local office teams are responsible for the completion of the consultation process and during consultations with the public, the facilitators proactively ask whether there is anything the FC could be doing to better promote access to information and services as a matter of routine.

Publishing the Results of Assessments, Consultations and Monitoring

Details of EqlA and other forms of monitoring and consultation will be published by the Diversity Team on the equality and diversity pages of the FC website. Publications will be made available in different print fonts and languages as requested.

THE FC AS A SERVICE PROVIDER

Ensuring Access to Information and Services - Working with Communities

The FC recognises that forests and woods can contribute so much to the nation in terms of opportunities for people to enjoy woodlands. The FC delivers a range of practical programmes to make sure that communities and individuals can get the most from them. For example:

- Education and learning initiatives
- Healthy living
- Play, recreation and sporting opportunities
- Volunteering
- Community forestry and woodland creation in places close to where people live.

The above list constitutes a number of ways in which the FC can directly impact on people and will be developing and following best practice to ensure equality of opportunity.

All FC services and facilities are open to anyone who wishes to use them. However, we recognise that there may be barriers and reasons why a number of people may not be able to

fully benefit from them. We are actively seeking to address this by adapting infrastructure, providing a wider range of activities and events, reaching out to communities by working with target groups and in some cases providing specialist equipment. To achieve this the FC is working closely with a range of partner organisations at the local, regional and national level.

Information and Communications

The FC publishes a series of publications in a variety of languages (external publications are produced in Welsh) and formats, on demand, to inform customers of news and potential activities to enjoy. The FC is currently seeking advice regarding the best way to advertise the availability of publications in different languages and formats as currently this notification is in English (and Welsh).

All hard copy information is also available on the FC website. Free publications can be picked up at visitor centres and district offices. Any priced publications are available to order via the FC website.

Procurement

The FC ask for details of larger organisations' Diversity or Equality policies to ensure that they are in line with the Duty's requirements.

For smaller organisations, they are asked whether they are prepared to comply with the FC's approach to disability equality as outlined by the DES.

The process of formalising the pre-qualification questionnaire on a national level is in the process of being completed and being made mandatory. The preparation of a Procurement Manual is underway. The Diversity Team is engaged with the Procurement Team on this to ensure that equality and diversity is appropriately considered throughout the Manual. The Manual will be subject to an EqIA.

THE FC AS AN EMPLOYER

Employment Monitoring

The Act requires that the FC make clear its disability monitoring arrangements in relation to all aspects of employment and to publish annually the results of any such monitoring.

The HR team recognises that it has a key role to play in meeting the duties contained in the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 particularly in relation to employment practice. HR will continue to meet the statutory requirements of the Act in relation to monitoring disabilities of current employees, applicants for employment and those who:

- Apply for formal training
- Participate in formal training

- Apply for promoted posts
- Raise a formal grievance
- Are the subject of disciplinary action
- Benefit or suffer a detriment as a result of performance assessments
- Leave the employment of the FC.

The FC will continue to use information obtained through monitoring employment practices. Monitoring data will be used to plan actions aimed to build a workforce that reflects the diversity of local communities and to ensure that employees receive equality of treatment. Employment procedures and practices will continue to be reviewed and amended, where adverse impact is shown.

The EqlA and monitoring outputs will be reviewed by the policy owners in partnership with the Diversity Team. If any adverse impact is identified, it will be dealt with using the process as outlined in the EqlA guidance document.

Completed Monitoring

The FC has completed a detailed monitoring process for employment data collected between 2007 and 2008, the outcomes of which are outlined below:

Disability by Department / Location

On the 31 March 2008 the Forestry Commission (FC) had in total 3325 staff, with 71 of these declaring a disability. In comparison with the GB population where it is estimated that 17% of the population are disabled, the FC's figure of 2.1% shows that the FC workforce is not representative of the national statistics.

However, the FC's HR team is aware of a number of staff for whom reasonable adjustments have been made, but have not declared themselves as disabled and are not therefore recorded as such on the FC's systems.

In order to address this issue, the HR Management Board have endorsed a programme of work to increase staff confidence in the self-declaration system and the FC support available and it is hoped that this will lead to a more accurate recording of staff with a disability in our recording system.

Disability by Department / Location and Contract Type

Of those staff who have declared a disability, 96% are employed on permanent contracts compared to 86% of those staff who have not declared a disability.

The full-time/part-time split between declared disabled staff is almost equivalent to the split of those staff who have not declared a disability.

Disability by Pay-band

Again analysis shows that the pay band distribution of staff who have declared a disability is roughly comparable to the distribution of those staff who have not declared a disability.

Internal Recruitment Cycle by applicants with a disability

Analysis shows that four FC staff who have declared a disability applied for an internal vacancy. All of those applicants were interviewed and one applicant was successful.

External Recruitment Cycle by applicants with a disability

Only 22, or 1% of total applications were from people who declared themselves disabled. The FC guarantees to interview all applicants who declare themselves disabled whom the selection board judges meets the job specification. Nine of the 22 applicants were interviewed, 41% compared to 30% of those applicants who did not declare a disability. One declared disabled person was employed.

In order to increase the number of applicants with a disability, the FC is actively promoting itself as an employer, and service provider, in disabled lifestyle magazines. Consideration has also been given to joining the JobCentre Plus 'Two Ticks' Scheme and the preliminary preparation for this is currently underway.

In addition, a Guidance Note for managers and interviewers entitled 'Disabled Candidates and the Recruitment Process' has been produced. This has been edited and approved by the Employers' Forum on Disability and will be published by December 2009.

Training by participants with a disability

Analysis indicates that those that those staff who have declared a disability receive less formal training provided by our internal Learning and Development (L&D) team than those not declared disabled. However, there is anecdotal evidence that many of those declared disabled staff often receive informal one- to-one training at their workplace rather than attend training courses. Thought is being given to how courses are promoted and adjustments that can be made to increase the confidence of disabled staff about attending.

Analysis of external training opportunities has not indicated anything discriminatory, with no known refusals for disabled staff to attend.

Performance Assessment by disability

Again analysis indicates that there is little difference between assessments for those staff who have declared a disability and those who have not.

Grievance and Discipline by disability

Analysis indicated that there was nothing discriminatory in either grievance or disciplinary procedures.

Leavers by disability

There is a lower turn over of staff who have declared a disability. Analysis of the reasons for leaving did not indicate anything discriminatory.

In summary, the statistical analysis indicates that staff who have declared a disability are treated equally with those who haven't and no discrimination is indicated.

However, the FC is concerned about the low level of applications from people with a disability. This is the experience of many of our peer organisations in the environmental sector, as many of the jobs are physically demanding. Regardless, we are trying to change our image as an employer and focus on those members of our staff with disabilities in lifestyle publications to demonstrate that we are an open and fair employer in practice.

FC Employee Experiences

The next staff survey will be conducted towards the end of 2009. At the start of the survey demographic data will be requested. In the body of the questionnaire, staff will be asked to detail their employee experiences e.g. whether they have been refused training / development opportunities or if they applied for an internal move / promotion whether it had been supported by managers and what the outcome was.

Analysis will be conducted on the grounds of disability (amongst all demographic information) to further explore whether there is adverse impact at any stage of the employment cycle.

The Learning and Development Team are responsible for the development of the staff survey and have consulted with the diversity team regarding diversity questions to be included and what type of analysis is required.

The FC will carry out the staff survey in September 2009. The results are due in December 2009. Therefore, this DES and action plan will be reviewed and updated with the insights from the survey if necessary.

Training

The FC has devised a four level approach to training to ensure the differing needs of employees are met.

Each individual will produce a training and development plan produced in combination with their line manager. Timing for completion of training will be negotiated with the line manager and training coordinator.

- Level 1 - All Employees

A mandatory programme of training on equality legislation and the FC's responsibility to deliver on its commitments laid out in the Disability, Race and Gender Equality Schemes.

Level 1 training is underway and will be completed in 2010. This training will be embedded into other appropriate training courses such as New Entrants' Events and Interview Skills.

- Level 2 – Managers and Specialists

This training was designed for specialist groups such as Communications staff or Recreation, Education and Community staff. This programme is also underway.

- Level 3 - Senior Managers

This training has been developed to enable managers to: understand why equality and diversity are important in the workplace, appreciate different attitudes towards equality and diversity, understand what their role is in terms of promoting and valuing equality and diversity and identify / explore discrimination and how to deal with it effectively.

- Level 4 - Policy Developers

This training has been developed to enable managers to: understand why equality and diversity are important in the workplace, appreciate different attitudes towards equality and diversity. These sections are consistent with Level 3 training. In addition, those responsible for policy development will also be made aware of the FC's legal obligations and what EqlAs are and their role in helping to improve services and workforce representation.

In addition, we have also produced a DVD for staff that highlights best practice initiatives on-going across the FC. This DVD includes a section on engaging with people with a physical disability and subsequent adjustments to the facilities provided. The DVD is utilised on training courses as appropriate.

PROGRESS AGAINST PREVIOUS DES ACTION PLAN 2006-2009

The previous DES included a detailed action plan. The following table identifies the progress made against the key actions:

Task	Progress
Conduct Impact Assessments for areas of work with a high degree of relevance to DES	EqlA training developed and delivered to all policy makers. EqlA Operational Guidance booklet published. EqlAs published on Intranet and summary versions on the Internet. EqlAs completed on key strategies and strategic documents, including <i>Delivery Plan for the Government's Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests</i> and <i>Wales Woodland Strategy</i> .

Development and expansion of woodland parks, community forests and increase access to woodlands	Development and enhancement is an integral part of the England, Scotland and Wales forestry strategies which have been subject to public consultation. EqIAs completed on the control of woodland removal in Scotland and access behaviour code for the national forest estate in Scotland.
Build on Walkers Welcome package to improve information on access	This package has been dis-continued but new Operational Guidance on Managing Recreation is in draft form and an EqIA is underway.
Develop FC's woodland park/community network close to towns and cities	FC Scotland have completed an EqIA on their Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) Policy.
Improve recreational and other facilities through private sector partnerships	EqIAs completed by FC Scotland on Design of Recreational Facilities, Forestry Challenge Funds and Forest Habitat Network Partnership.
Engage with the public to promote the benefits of trees, woods and forests	EqIAs completed by FC Scotland on Woods for Health and Woodlands and the Historic Environment.
Increase the contribution of forestry to local tourism by working with local businesses	EqIA completed by FC Scotland on Supporting Business Development.
Improve the delivery of visitors' needs through research and training	A programme of social research has been undertaken, including exploring use of the forests by those with disability and used to inform the country strategies.
Support urban and rural development by improving links with community groups and local people	EqIA completed by FC Scotland on Community Engagement Policy.
Enhance Opportunities for health and enjoyment through access and recreation via partnership working and liaison with primary health sectors	EqIAs completed by FC Scotland on Woods for Health and Treefest Partnership.
Support Forest Education Initiatives to promote woodlands as an educational resource by developing and improving networks of local groups with the education sector	EqIAs completed by FC Scotland on Education Development Programme, Education Officer (WIAT) and Forest Kindergarten.
HR policies such as Recruitment and selection procedures, absence and performance management, provision of	New HR Policy Team appointed Summer 2009. Policies under review and EqIAs in progress.

training and development, management development programme.	
Building and office management	Programme to ensure all buildings are DDA compliant is well-advanced and accessibility improved as necessary.
Internal and external communications, including Internet and Intranet	On-going projects to improve the accessibility of the Internet and internal and external publications are underway. The Scottish and Welsh Communications Strategies have been subject to EqlAs.
Review local monitoring, assessment and reporting arrangements for involvement of/consultation with disabled people	This is completed through the EqlA process and through the annual monitoring process via compilation and sharing of best practice examples.
Ensure that managers are carrying out evaluation and reporting requirements	This is completed through the EqlA process and through the annual monitoring process via compilation and sharing of best practice examples.
Review progress on action taken in areas identified as relevant to the Scheme	Ongoing. Diversity on every Executive Board and Management Board Agenda. Diversity Technical Group (Director HR and all FC Business Partners) meet and review progress quarterly.
Publish results of information gathering on progress and use to which information has been put	Monitoring Reports completed and published on Internet and Intranet annually. Best practice examples published on Intranet annually.
Establish ways in which DES actions can be fulfilled in the development of new, relevant policies.	Equality Impact Assessment (EqlA) training has been delivered to all policy makers and service providers at senior level. Full guidance on reasons for and methods of completing Equality Impact Assessments (EqlAs) published on Intranet and advertised. Equality and Diversity Responsible Officers appointed in each business part of the FC, who monitor all new policy development and ensure EqlA have been completed.
Consider and establish ways in which DES actions can be 'captured' in the preparation of and reporting on Business Plans	EqlAs completed for the following business plans and strategies: FC England – Delivery Plan for the Government's Strategy for England's, Trees, Woods and Forests. FC Wales – Wales Woodlands Strategy FC Wales – Corporate Plan for Wales 2009 – 2012 FC Scotland – Forest Enterprise (Scotland) Strategic Plan for the National Forest Estate (2009 – 2012) Forest Research – Corporate and Business Plan (2009 – 2012)
Research current communication tools and capability to recognise needs of disability groups to	EqlA s completed as follows: FC Wales - Corporate Communications Strategy FC Scotland – Communications Strategy – in process

<p>identify whether there is a need to present information in other formats for the public and employees. Produce guidance where needed.</p>	<p>FC is following Government guidelines for Internet and Intranet design. People with sight, learning and motor difficulties have independently tested FC Internet. All literature for general public printed with offer of alternative format. New Brand Management Guidance for use across the FC has several sections on diversity and accessibility of publications based on national guidelines</p>
<p>Publish summary results of research/monitoring on review of communications at local and GB level.</p>	<p>Reviews not completed.</p>
<p>Identify relevant stakeholders and devise methods of involvement and consultation. Share best practices across Countries.</p>	<p>Database of disabled groups available on Intranet. Cabinet Office Consultation Guidance referenced in EqIA Instruction. Internal Guidance (Consultation Toolkit) available on Intranet and EqIA in process. Best practice published on Intranet.</p>
<p>Assess local plans for new developments and set in place ways for involvement of disabled people in relevant schemes.</p>	<p>EqIA process guides. Equality and Diversity Internal Staff Forum reviews all FC wide policies.</p>
<p>Implement and monitor involvement of local people in decision making for local woodlands or new projects.</p>	<p>EqIA process.</p>
<p>Publish results of monitoring of local involvement</p>	<p>EqIA process.</p>
<p>Manage the following three research projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'Assessing the Contribution of Forestry Grants to Equal Access for Disabled People to Recreation Goods, Facilities and Services in Scottish Woodlands' 2. 'Enhancing the Forest Sector's Contribution to Equal Access for Disabled People to Recreation Goods, Facilities, and Services in Scottish Woodlands' 3. 'Exploring Disabled Peoples' Perceptions and the Role of Forest Recreation, Goods, Facilities and Services in 	<p>Conducted by OPENspace, Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot-Watt University published December 2007.</p> <p>Conducted by OPENspace, Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot-Watt University published December 2007.</p> <p>Conducted by Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research, University of Glasgow and published August 2008.</p>

Scotland, England and Wales'.	
Identify from research the key best practices, actions from research and make recommendations for managers to improve performance on DES.	Evidence Review completed by Forest Research 2008. Research projects under consideration but limited by budget cuts. Small-scale social marketing study underway focused on increasing race diversity in job candidates but there may be lessons to be learned with regard to increasing candidate diversity across other protected characteristics.
Recommend methodologies for measuring levels of participation, satisfaction, relevance and appropriateness of FC functions relating to disability.	No action.
Improve and develop new equality monitoring tools/data gathering.	New EqIA guidance produced.
Development of Guidance on how to produce accessible information.	Brand Management, Publications and Internet Guidance all have accessibility considerations built in.
Maintain Public Opinion surveys of Forestry statistics.	These surveys are continuing.
Identify arrangements for publishing results of assessments, consultations and monitoring.	New EqIA guidance produced.
Incorporate new equality legal requirements into relevant management and operational training, to ensure employees have the skills to carry out specific duties.	Review of existing and new training programmes ongoing.
Ensure managers have relevant information about their duties the Scheme.	Diversity training delivered to all senior and other managers, specific duties explained. Duties described in EqIA Guidance available on Intranet.
Explore new avenues for delivering equality training at national or local level, including improved disability accessibility training events for forest managers.	Four levels of Diversity training designed, to meet different needs of employees. Training delivery to all employees throughout FC is ongoing. Further course specifically aimed at FC Recreation staff on diversity also delivered. Diversity incorporated into all New Entrant (induction) courses.
Review recruitment and internal selection processes/policies for potential impact.	Part of move to Electronic Recruitment – EqIA in process.
Consider new ways to collect level of disability information amongst employees.	Policy paper and action agreed by HR Management Board and Equality and Disability Internal Staff Forum. Implementation from Autumn 2009.
Improve HR data collection on	Completed 2007. Interpretation of data indicates no

recruitment, retention, performance pay, internal promotion and training/development of disabled people (to better assess impact of policies on disability equality).	discrimination.
Develop better links with Disability Groups both internally and externally	The separate business parts of the Forestry Commission are creating their own links to appropriate groups. No action required by Diversity Manager.
Maintain disability monitoring information and publish.	Monitoring Reports published on Internet and Intranet in 2007 and 2008 and will continue to be published annually.
Review current contract/ procurement processes/documentation to ensure that they reflect relevant equality provisions.	Review of FC Procurement manual underway, with Diversity embedded. Will be subject to EqIA.
Ensure procurement guidance for managers is updated where needed.	Review of FC Procurement manual underway, with Diversity embedded. Will be subject to EqIA.

DISABILITY EQUALITY ACTION PLAN

This action plan outlines the FC's current priorities to meet the general and specific disability equality duties based on our consultation process and building on the actions taken to date. It outlines future, planned action for the duration of this Scheme, which will be reviewed on an annual basis. The actions outlined below are intended to develop an awareness of disability equality, eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of disability, promote equality of opportunity and encourage participation of disabled persons in public life.

This action plan was developed following involvement with a range of stakeholders from a variety of disability organisations. Four external priorities were identified:

- Involvement of people with disabilities
- Effective Advertising
- Sharing Best Practice
- Bring Forests Closer to People

An overview from the involvement exercise for each priority is provided below:

Involvement of People with Disabilities

Involvement of disabled people is a requirement of the Disability Equality Scheme and a requirement which is fully endorsed by the Forestry Commission. However, as an organisation the Forestry Commission is highly devolved requiring involvement at a local level. The Forestry Commission wanted to learn how it could consult more effectively with people with disabilities. This theme was thought most important by those who took part in the exercise.

Involvement has to be a meaningful experience for those taking part. For the Forestry Commission this should not be about gathering people into offices but instead getting people out to the forests, so they can share their ideas and experiences meaningfully.

As well as a meaningful experience, involvement needs to be easy to participate in, should not be a financial cost to those taking part and should translate into action for the Forestry Commission. To do this people need to receive feedback on the results of their involvement.

A wide range of disabilities needs to be explored in any involvement exercise. It is crucially important that local Forestry Commission teams build relationships with a variety of local disability groups in their vicinity to take part in involvement activities. Involvement at a local level is also important so that those involved can experience the services that will be offered.

People with disabilities also felt it was vitally important that involvement took place at the outset of any new project or initiative, so that they had a chance to influence. Any retrospective involvement would not be appropriate.

Effective Advertising

The second highest rated theme in the involvement was that of effective advertising. This was particularly the case for those who had no prior experience of the Forestry Commission. Those who took part in the exercise were surprised about the range of services for users with disabilities that were provided by the organisation, which reinforces the point that the Forestry Commission should more effectively publicise the services designed for users with disabilities.

The involvement exercise revealed that people with disabilities receive information through a variety of different sources, including the radio (national & local), the internet, word of mouth, newspapers and specialist publications. The type of medium used was often related to their disability type or generation. It was recognised that it would be infeasible to use all these approaches to advertise. The strong message was that the Forestry Commission should make better use of local disability organisations to help advertise their services.

Local advertising was also endorsed by those who commented that the Forestry Commission was a massive organisation but which provided very different services across the country. People wanted to know what was locally available to them, rather than hear about services across the country that they could not access.

It was recognised that not all services provided by the Forestry Commission could be made accessible for all disability types. What people wanted was accurate information so they could effectively plan their trips to the Forest. People did not want to be told a service is accessible to then find out that it is not. People wanted accurate information so that they could make informed choices.

People wanted the Forestry Commission to produce a comprehensive guide to each location, describing services and grading activities by ability type. This type of information could reduce anxiety before a visit to a Forest and make people feel comfortable before they arrive.

Finally people thought the Forestry Commission could better partner with some National organisations to advertise their services. For example, Center Parcs was seen as a very disability friendly facility. It also happens to be located in forest locations throughout the country.

Sharing Best Practice

People thought that the Forestry Commission would benefit from sharing and learning with other similar organisations. This has several benefits, from being able to learn from others' success, to not over consulting those with disabilities for issues that have already been solved in similar contexts.

There could also be more sharing of knowledge internally. It was recognised that there are a many great services for those with disabilities and the organisation could do more to encourage the sharing of these successes.

Finally people also felt that more feedback from people with disabilities should be collected when services are introduced so that they can be continuously improved.

Bring Forests Closer to People

Forests tend to be located in rural areas away from large centres of population. Research shows that people with disabilities tend to live in urban areas, as cities are better equipped to meet their needs in terms of services and facilities. The Forestry Commission was interested to see how Forests could be brought closer to people with disabilities, either physically or by removing some of the perceived barriers to accessibility.

Transport is a very big issue for people with disabilities wanting to access the Forests. Due to their remote locations, they are often not well served by public transport, resulting in some people being cut-off from them. People felt that the Forestry Commission could do more to bridge this gap. One of the ideas endorsed by several people was for organised trips to forests, including transport. Whilst people recognised that the Forestry Commission should not fund transport to the forests, people felt they could co-ordinate local groups to achieve this.

Getting to the forests was not the only issue mentioned. Not everyone felt comfortable exploring the forests independently and for some people this would be dangerous. Many of those involved would like to see guided tours of forests led by people who were aware of different disability needs.

Other creative ideas included making better use of CCTV technology to bring people closer to nature virtually. CCTV cameras could be placed in nest boxes so that people can observe wildlife without having to access hard to reach parts of the forest. These could be streamed online or at visitor centres.

Those taking part in the involvement also thought that events organised in forests could be more accessible to those with disabilities. Travelling to forests is expensive enough and people thought that disabled people and their carers should be offered discounted entrance to events such as concerts in the forest.

Other Ideas

The involvement exercise produced many interesting ideas. It is not feasible to include all of these into the scheme. Themes have been included based on how frequently they were endorsed by the individuals involved. Additional ideas will be stored and reviewed when the scheme is next monitored.

ACTION PLAN

External Activities i.e. Forestry Commission as a Service Provider			
Objective: Consultation and Engagement through EqlAs			
Actions	Measurement	By Who	By when
Continue to improve approach to EqlAs by continuing to seek feedback from users	Comments received by the Diversity Team through the advice and support provided to those completing EqlAs	Diversity Team	On-going
Continue to monitor EqlA use	QA of completed EqlAs	Diversity Team Responsible Officers	On-going
Continue to refine EqlA guidance, tools and training	Feedback from users	Diversity Team	On-going, as necessary
Ensure staff are allocated time within their Forward Job Plans to undertake EqlAs	Feedback from users	FC managers	On-going
Objective: Involvement of People with Disabilities			
Actions	Measurement	By Who	By When
Ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for all those attending involvement and engagement sessions	Feedback from participants	Policy/service developers	On-going, as necessary
Seek feedback from people with disabilities about their involvement experience and give feedback to show how they have made a difference.	Feedback from participants	Policy/service developers	On-going, as necessary
Ensure all involvement activity is accessible for people and a worthwhile experience. Involvement activity perhaps to include a forest visit. Ensure all subsistence and travel expenses are paid.	Feedback from participants	Policy/service developers	On-going, as necessary

Local teams to build network of local disability organisations for consultation, marketing FC services and advertising jobs	Network achieved and utilised for consultation and promotion of local services and jobs	Local office teams	This will be an on-going task but initial network developed by end of 2010
Diversity Team to co-ordinate with a National Charity to secure local disability contacts for each forest area	Approach DIAL UK and seek feedback on contacts made	Diversity Team	Summer 2010
Ensure EQIA process is completed before project implementation	Check EqIAs completed prior to implementation	Responsible Officers	On-going, as necessary
Objective: Effective Advertising			
Raise awareness of easy access trails through effective advertising	Evidence of increased use through customer surveys	Communications Teams	By Summer 2010 and on-going
Provide detailed information about each easy access trail, e.g. level of accessibility, inclines involved. Need to think about accessibility from different disability perspectives.	Evidence of increased awareness through customer surveys Customer feedback	Communications Teams in liaison with Local Office Teams	By Summer 2010 and on-going
Advertise FC services through local disability networks	Evidence of increased use through customer surveys Customer feedback	Local Office Teams	By December 2010 and on-going
Produce a detailed Guide for each facility. These will detail accessibility information for all services provided at the facility.	Publish on-line – analyse website traffic	Communications Teams in liaison with Local Office Teams	By Summer 2011 and on-going

Explore opportunities to support marketing with partners, e.g. Centre Parcs	Evidence of increased use through customer surveys Customer feedback	Country Communications Teams	By 2012
Explore opportunities to feature in RADAR accessibility holiday guide.	Evidence of increased use through customer surveys Customer feedback	Diversity Team in liaison with Local Teams	By December 2011
Objective: Sharing Best Practice			
Investigate opportunities to share and learn with other country side organisations.	Number of contacts made, good working relationships formed, joint initiatives	Diversity Team	On-going
Create list of disability organisations each local team has worked with to develop a profile and sharing best practice.	More local initiatives launched	Diversity Team	On-going
Actively collect feedback from users of services designed for people with disabilities.	Develop a feedback form and analyse responses	Diversity Team with local teams	On-going
Objective: Bring Forests Closer to People			
Liase with local public transport providers to explore the possibility to increase transport links to recreational forests	More routes provided	Local delivery teams	On-going
Explore with local councils and local charities the possibility of organised trips to the forest	Ensure that this best practice is shared to increase this type of initiative	Local delivery teams	On-going

Develop a database of volunteers/staff who can conduct guided tours of forests, suitable for different disability groups.	Ensure that this best practice is shared to increase this type of initiative	Local delivery teams	On-going
Carry out an audit of toilet and parking facilities to ensure these meet the requirements of disabled users.	Ensure that this best practice is shared to increase this type of initiative	Local delivery teams	Summer 2011
Investigate possibility of providing car parking for free to disabled users across all sites.	Ensure that this best practice is shared to increase this type of initiative	Local delivery teams	Summer 2011
Promote and expand the use of CCTV to bring wildlife encounters closer to people, e.g. nest boxes or red squirrels	Increased number of examples and analysis of the web-traffic	Communications Teams	On-going
Work with partners who provide entertainment in forests, e.g. concerts, GO Ape!, to explore the possibility of providing reduced rates for people with disabilities and their carers.	Ensure that this best practice is shared to increase this type of initiative	Local delivery teams	Summer 2011

Objective: Educational Work			
Continue to provide educational initiatives and support to children with additional needs and/or disabilities, in partnership with other organisations when appropriate	Analysis of the number of children who have engaged in these initiatives in the annual monitoring	Country Education Teams	On-going
Objective: Support of mountain bikers with a disability			
Continue to work with disabled mountain bike riders to develop accessible trails when and where appropriate	Feedback from the riders themselves	Forest District Teams	On-going
INTERNAL ACTIVITIES			
Objective: Improve staff self-declaration rates			
Actions	Measurement	By Who	By when
Implement to action plan agreed by the HR Management Board to increase staff knowledge and confidence in the FC system for self-declaration	Increased rate of self-declaration	Diversity Team	September 2010
Objective: Reasonable Adjustments			
Publicise the types of reasonable adjustment made within the FC and how people can access these	Increased implementation of reasonable adjustments	Diversity Team HR Team FC managers	September 2010 and then on-going
Share best practice, both internal and external	Improved management and staff confidence around this subject – measured via staff survey	Diversity Team	On-going

Objective: Recruitment Advertising			
Introduce the Two Ticks Scheme	Increased number of applicants with a disability for FC jobs	Diversity Team	Late 2010/early 2011
Make use of local disability networks to effectively advertise new jobs in the disabled community	Increased number of applicants with a disability for FC jobs	Local managers HR Team	On-going
Continue to ensure that job adverts have realistic job profiles and specifications so that disabled applicants can make informed choices	Increased number of applicants with a disability for FC jobs, increased number of those applicants successfully employed	FC Managers HR Team	On-going

KEY HIGH PRIORITY ACTIONS

The following key priority actions have been identified by the Head of Diversity and will form the basis of the action for the rest of the year. Following this time, DES actions will be reviewed and priorities assessed for the following twelve months.

December 2009

- Review existing EqIA guidance in context of user feedback and feedback from Level 4 Diversity Training (EqIA) and make necessary amendments.
- Publish DES annual monitoring report and develop action plan with actions identified via statistical analysis.

January – March 2010

- Approach DIAL UK initially with a view to assisting local FC managers in the first steps of widening their network of local disability organisations. This will assist in the promotion of existing services, the development of new services and with recruitment exercises.
- Develop a rolling programme of reviews of existing facilities, including car parking and toilet facilities for customers with a disability and consider the production of specialist and detailed guides.

March 2010 – July 2010

- Discuss with the web team the potential to widen the use of the Internet e.g. using webcams and audioclips to bring wildlife encounters closer to people.
- Develop proformas to allow for effective feedback from those customers with a disability who have used our services or been involved in consultations and engagement.

March 2010 – December 2010

- Forest District teams continue to build their networks of local disability organisations and engage to promote existing services provided and development of new services and recruitment exercises.

Throughout 2010

- Improve the FC's self declaration system and processes, prior to the implementation of the Two Ticks Scheme once this work is complete and no later than 2011.

FUNCTIONS RELEVANT TO THE GENERAL DUTY

As forestry is a devolved issue, FC England, FC Scotland and FC Wales each have their own forestry strategy. However, there are common themes with the strategies. The following table represents a composite assessment of the themes and their degree of relevance to the Disability Equality Scheme.

After an initial assessment, it is clear that the key function relevant to the General Duty and therefore the area where the FC's DES can make most impact is around the development of Woodlands for People, as outlined below:

Theme	Relevance to DES (0 – none, 1 – a little, 2 – some, 3 – high)	Level of Priority within DES (High, Medium, Low)
Maintaining and improving woodlands and trees as a sustainable resource	1	Low
Responding to Climate Change	0	Low
Competitive and integrated forest sector – timber and business development	1	Low
Maintaining and improving the environmental quality of woodlands and trees – biodiversity and conservation	1	Low
Woodlands for People – improving the quality of life through access to woodlands, health, recreation and education initiatives, community development.	3	High

The key theme of Woodlands for People can be further broken down as follows:

Strategic Actions	Relevance to DES (0 – none, 1 – a little, 2 – some, 3 – high)	Level of Priority within DES (High, Medium, Low)
1. More communities benefit from woodlands <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance forestry's engagement with communities. • Promote and support tree planting 	2	Medium

<p>and the creation of accessible woodland in identified priority areas with appropriate ongoing maintenance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and evaluate the quality of experience provided by new or improved woodlands and their impact on local quality of life. • Pilot new ways of getting more people, particularly from under-represented groups, involved in the creation, management and enjoyment of their local trees, woods and forests. • Encourage effective dialogue between woodland managers and community groups about community involvement in planning and managing woodlands. 	<p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>High</p> <p>High</p>
<p>2. More people enjoy the life-long learning benefits of woodlands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop forestry's role in education and lifelong learning. • Work with other education providers to offer a broad range of enjoyable and accessible woodland-based education and learning opportunities, particularly for children and young people. • Provide safe, well-managed woodlands as a setting for learning for all age groups. • Encourage public involvement in woodland-related learning of all kinds through schemes like the Forest Education Initiative and support for community groups. 	<p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>High</p> <p>High</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the links between existing learning and training initiatives in the public, private and voluntary sector to encourage life-long learning. 	2	Medium
<p>3. More people enjoy healthier lives as a result of use and enjoyment of woodlands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make access to woodlands easier for all sectors of society. Use woodland access to help improve physical and mental health. Provide a greater range of ways for people to enjoy woodlands. Further develop the Forestry Commission's role as a provider of high-quality recreation, natural play and leisure experiences to a wide audience for the benefit of their health, wellbeing and personal development. Support innovative partnership projects and joint ventures that extend the range of opportunities for both informal and more active sport and recreation in both public and private woodland. Support communities to identify local access and recreation needs. Encourage joint working with providers of health, education and social care services to promote the use of woodlands by people of all ages, appropriate to their physical and mental health needs. 	<p>3</p> <p>3</p> <p>3</p> <p>3</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p>	<p>High</p> <p>High</p> <p>High</p> <p>High</p> <p>High</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>High</p>

