

Fit for Our Future

Equality and Diversity Strategy 2012-2017

Foreword

In a time of unprecedented change for the Forestry Commission, one thing has remained constant over the last few years – our mission. Our mission is to protect and expand Britain's forests and woodlands and increase their value to society and the environment.

It is vital that we use every possible opportunity to ensure that we remain valued by, and relevant to, society. Two key components of achieving this are continuing to increase the diversity of our workforce in order to better understand and relate to the changing GB society; and to continue to provide our customer services in new and innovative ways to diverse communities.

We have a legal responsibility to achieve this, but beyond that, as a Government Department we also have a moral responsibility. The Forestry Commissioners and senior team do not underestimate how challenging this can be. However, we also know how inventive and determined Forestry Commission staff can be in achieving goals.

Indeed, the Forestry Commission has already come a long way in terms of the Equality and Diversity agenda. We have provided training for all staff so that everyone can understand their responsibilities and why equality and diversity is of such importance to our future. This has already resulted in innovative new customer services that have been recognised and rewarded.

So while we still have a long way to go to achieve the objectives set out in this, our second Equality and Diversity Strategy, I can also say that I am confident that the Forestry Commission can achieve them. I know this, because our staff do not fail to deliver and enjoy a challenge. Together, from all our diverse backgrounds, we will continue to achieve our goals and deliver what is expected of us.

Tim Rollinson
Director General

Introduction

Improving the FC's performance with regard to the Equality and Diversity agenda was one of my main goals when I took on the role of Director HR, four years ago. That is why Equality and Diversity remains a key theme in the new People Strategy launched last year.

I am often asked why this agenda is so important to the Forestry Commission, beyond the obvious legal requirements. Equality is about creating a fairer society where everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential and Diversity is about valuing people for their differences – why wouldn't this be important to us?

The changing demographics in the workforce, that were heralded a decade ago, are now upon us. Today's labour pool is dramatically different than in the past. The available talent is now overwhelmingly represented by people from a vast array of backgrounds and life experiences. Therefore, workforce diversity is an essential business concern – the greatest asset we have is our people and we cannot afford to restrict our ability to attract the very best people, by not embracing the wider employment market.

The legislation has changed to reflect this. We have new legal responsibilities, or Duties, under the Equality Act 2010 which has now been widened to include nine protected characteristics – age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

So I see Equality and Diversity as an integral part of our future strategy ensuring we are 'Fit for Our Future'. This Diversity Strategy sets out our targets and goals and I commend it to you. With your help and support I know we will achieve success.

Jean Lindsay
Director, HR

Our Vision

Our ambition is to have a diverse workforce that reflects the society that we serve and to continue to offer exemplar customer services to diverse communities.

Our Goals

In order to achieve our vision and meet our legal obligations we want to ensure that:

- We build on our successes and continue to work towards making our services and facilities available to all.
- We continue to ensure our departmental policies, organisational objectives and operational practice enable everyone to access our services and facilities.
- We continue to engage with communities to ensure our services and facilities are fit for purpose and tailored to meet their requirements.
- We continue to respect, support and value all our staff, treating them in accordance with our values.
- We recruit and employ people in order to make our workforce more representative of the GB population.

In order to meet our vision and goals as well as our corporate obligations and objectives we need to be efficient and effective. That means we need the best workforce possible ensuring they remain engaged, motivated, flexible and professional. This only happens when staff feel valued and respected and there is a culture of inclusion. This will support the FC remaining an organisation known for its adaptability, innovation and delivery. A diverse workforce helps us relate to, and engage with, diverse communities.

To continue to be valued by our customers and stakeholders we must offer equality of access and services that meet the needs of the people we serve. We must understand the needs of communities and plan and deliver our policies and services to meet those needs. It is our responsibility to do so as a Government Department, but it also makes good business sense to do so. It meets our legal obligations, it contributes to minimising costs and increasing revenue and it enhances our reputation.

Our Focus and Commitment – the high level objectives

Equality and Diversity remains a key theme of our People Strategy, not only because of our legal responsibilities as a public sector organisation, but also because we see it as the right thing to do.

To that end we will focus on:

- Legal Compliance – we will continue to meet our general and specific duties under the Equality Act.
- Engagement – we will continue to engage with, and promote to, communities of those with protected characteristics about the types of services and opportunities the FC provides.
- Analysis – we will continue to support our employees to engage with communities of those with protected characteristics through an Equality Analysis process.
- Communication – we will develop a new Diversity Communications Strategy, which will include improving the information available to customers through the FC's Internet, and staff through our Intranet.
- Workforce – we will work towards further improving the diversity of our workforce, focusing on encouraging applications from people from ethnic and disabled communities and from more women.
- Training – we will review and re-launch our suite of diversity training for staff at all levels within the organisation.

Our Values

The focus of our diversity work will reflect and incorporate our values:

- Respect – respecting people's ideas, differing views and perspectives
- Teamwork – ensuring that everyone in the team has equality of opportunities and identifying and valuing their unique contribution
- Communication - communicating in different ways to ensure a common understanding

- Professionalism – utilising the potential of a diverse group of people in pursuit of organisational goals
- Learning – 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'.

Our Legal Responsibilities

General Duty

Under the Equality Act 2010 we will meet the public sector General Duty. The General Duty has three aims:

- To eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- To advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- To foster good relations between people from different groups.

The General Duty applies to both FC staff and customers. The 'groups' referred to are those with protected characteristics. There are nine in total – age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. With regard to marriage and civil partnership, only the first aim of the general duty applies.

Specific Duties

Under the Equality Act 2010, we will also fulfil the two Specific Duties to help us achieve our general duty as set out above.

1. To publish equality objectives by 6 April 2012 and to review these every four years. The objectives must be specific and measurable. The objectives will also enable the Forestry Commission to deliver the two high-level strategic objectives as outlined in the People Strategy and this Diversity Strategy. In order to ensure that these are delivered, an associated action plan will be prepared and published.
2. To publish an annual report by 31 January that demonstrates the Forestry Commission's compliance with the general equality duty. This Monitoring Report will include statistical analysis of FC staff and job applicants, in order to measure and

evaluate our progress. The Report will also include details of our customer services provided to diverse communities.

Our Approach to Equality and Diversity

Like all public sector organisations, the Forestry Commission was established to deliver very specific functions and responsibilities. Not all of those are relevant to the diversity agenda or can contribute to achieving the General Duty e.g. timber production or species biodiversity. In addition, again like all public sector organisations, the Forestry Commission has limited resources and must apply those to maximise the value of public funds.

Therefore, in order to achieve our equality objectives, and the aims of the General Duty, we will focus on those areas of our business where we can really make a difference. With that in mind we have analysed our corporate objectives as described in the Corporate Plans and have highlighted those business functions where we will consider the equality and diversity agenda and take appropriate action. This analysis is outlined at Appendix 1.

It is also important to identify and prioritise those communities of people with protected characteristics where we can and need to make the biggest impact. For example, it is clear from analysis of our public opinion surveys that the number of men and women who visit the public forest estate is equal and that the level of satisfaction with our services from both sexes is high. Therefore, we will focus our attention on engaging other communities to improve their use and enjoyment of the public forest estate e.g. people with disabilities.

In order to do so, and as required under the Equality Act, we will develop detailed specific and measureable objectives based on research and analysis of both our staff and customers. There will be an associated action plan to help us achieve this.

Our Delivery

As set out in the People Strategy, the Forestry Commission has identified two high level objectives in order to achieve the general duty:

- To continue to improve the diversity of the FC's workforce; and
- To continue to engage with diverse communities in relation to the provision of FC services to the public.

In line with our legal responsibilities, we will develop more specific and measurable objectives/actions to ensure that we achieve these high-level objectives, and publish them by April 2012.

Responsibility for delivery of these objectives will rest with the Executive Board at national level, supported by the HR Management Board and the HR Diversity Team. Policy leads will be responsible for ensuring relevant FC policies have undergone the Equality Analysis process. At local level Forest District Managers will be responsible for engagement and delivery of local services. All staff are responsible within their own role and key work areas for delivery and ensuring their actions adhere to the principles of this Strategy.

As required legally, delivery of the objectives will be monitored and a report produced and published annually to assess progress. The key outcomes of this report will be reviewed and discussed by the Executive Board who will direct the HR Management Board and Diversity Team to take action when and where necessary to ensure delivery.

Meeting Our Customers' Needs

If you require this publication in another format or have any comments on this publication, please contact us.

Address:	Diversity Manager Forestry Commission Silvan House 231 Corstorphine Road Edinburgh EH12 7AT
Telephone Number:	0131 314 6531
E-mail:	diversity@forestry.gsi.gov.uk