

Fit for Our Future

Equality and Diversity Objectives

April 2012-March 2016

Forestry Commission's Legal Obligations

As a public sector organisation, the Forestry Commission (FC) is subject to the legal obligations placed upon it by the Equality Act 2010.

Under the Equality Act 2010 the Forestry Commission has two Specific Duties to fulfil to achieve the General Duty.

The first Specific Duty is to publish an annual report by 31 January that demonstrates compliance with the General Duty. This annual report includes statistical analysis of staff and job applicants, in order to measure and evaluate our progress. This Monitoring Report ([insert hyperlink](#)) also includes details of customer services provided to diverse communities.

The second of the specific duties is to publish Equality Objectives by 6 April 2012 and to review these every four years. The Objectives must be specific and measurable. These Objectives will enable the Forestry Commission to deliver the two high-level strategic objectives as outlined in its People Strategy ([insert hyperlink](#)) and Diversity Strategy ([insert hyperlink](#)). This document outlines the Objectives in detail, including why they were determined and how progress will be measured.

The Objectives have been selected to ensure that the Forestry Commission meets the three aims of the General Duty as outlined in the Equality Act. The three aims of the General Duty are:

- 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 as defined by the Equality Act 2010. 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.

Our Mission and Key Functions

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

Compliance with the General Duty will contribute to meeting the FC's high level objective of increasing the value of Britain's forests and woodlands to society, and specifically for those people with one or more of the nine protected characteristics.

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 woodland species biodiversity and conservation. In addition, like all public sector organisations, the Forestry Commission has limited resources and must apply those to maximise the value of public funds.

Each part of the Forestry Commission has a corporate plan which outlines key work programmes and business objectives. We have assessed these functions with regard to their relevance to the General Duty. The detailed assessment can be found at Appendix 1.

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.

In summary, we have developed specific and measureable objectives with regard to our staff and our services directly for customers relating to their recreation, health and education. There is little about our work with regard to timber harvesting and marketing, species biodiversity and conservation, tree health research and protection, renewable energy development, climate change, forestry standards, ecosystems, etc that can contribute to achieving the General Duty because although people benefit from this work, the benefit is not derived directly in the way that our customer services are.

FC Approach to the Diversity Agenda

It is worth highlighting that, by their very nature, the opportunities for recreation within Forestry Commission woodlands are already open and available to all communities. It is estimated that there are over 50 million visitors every year to our woodlands. Because access is generally free and open to everyone, our visitors do not always come into contact with FC staff through formally organised activities and/or our visitor centres, but are the regular visitors who visit the woodland to walk their dogs, exercise or enjoy the countryside/nature experience entirely independently.

As part of our on-going commitment to customer service we undertake a range of 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. Where appropriate the surveys are analysed by the Forestry Commission Economics and Statistics team who are responsible for compiling reports based on their analysis. This team provides reports to the Management Boards within England, Scotland and Wales. The Diversity Team liaise with this team to use the data, explore where gaps exist within the data and advise how the gaps can be filled.

During 2011 we conducted Public Opinion Surveys in UK, Scotland and Wales. The Surveys indicated that people have a great interest in visiting forests and that around two thirds or more of all respondents said they had visited forests or woodlands in the last few years.

Disabled respondents were least likely to have visited forests or woodlands and personal mobility reasons (difficulty in walking etc) was one of the most commonly reported reasons for not visiting. The number of BAME respondents in Scotland and Wales was also very low, reflecting national demographics.

The Public Opinion Survey records positive responses from respondents in different categories. In response to the question 'In the last few years, have you visited forests or woodlands for walks, picnics or other recreation?':

- 70% of not disabled and 57% of disabled respondents in the UK said Yes
- 67% of male and 68% of female respondents in the UK said Yes
- 71% of White and 34% of BAME respondents in the UK said Yes
- 69% of respondents age 44 or under, and 66% of respondents aged 45 or over in the UK said Yes.

From this we can determine that there is little statistical difference in the gender and age demographics of our customers. However, there are clear differences in the level of participation in our services of disabled people and BAME communities.

It is 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. 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 and BAME communities.

In order to meet the General Duty, and as required under the Equality Act, we have developed more detailed specific and measurable objectives based on research and analysis of both our staff and customers.

Meeting Diversity Objectives and Coping with Reduced Budgets

Many of the objectives dependent on recruiting staff into the Forestry Commission will not be able to be taken forward until the Government's recruitment freeze has been lifted and until we have completed the exercise to reduce headcount to meet the requirements of the 2010 Spending Review settlements. In the meantime, external recruitment has been greatly reduced.

In addition, there is also a Government freeze on expenditure to publicise and promote Government services. Until this is lifted, many of the objectives to promote the range of services that we can offer to communities of those with protected characteristics, and therefore the opportunity to increase participation, will be limited.

Strategic Diversity Objectives

As a Public Sector organisation, the Forestry Commission has been developing an evolving diversity agenda for some years now. We have adapted and widened our approach to meet the changing legal obligations. However, we have also been making continuous adjustments in response to feedback from our customers, annual monitoring of our staff and engagement with diverse communities, particularly when developing our previous equality schemes.

As set out in the People Strategy, the Forestry Commission has identified two main objectives in order to achieve the General Duty:

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

The Diversity Strategy outlines five key goals to support the delivery of these strategic objectives:

- 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.

Specific and Measureable Objectives

We have classified the Objectives outlined below by each of the nine protected characteristics, and then by staff and customer focussed objectives.

The FC recognises that diversity of its staff group is intrinsically linked to the provision of valued services to diverse communities and vice versa. Diverse staff can provide insight into ways of working with diverse communities, suggesting appropriate customer services and as role models can encourage a wider pool of potential applicants to apply to work for the FC if they can see that the organisation is positive about equality and diversity.

There are also over-arching objectives to provide focus and commitment to our diversity agenda. These were developed in response to feedback we received from both ethnic and disabled customers during focus groups organised when completing social marketing and developing our previous equality schemes. The focus groups advised that they had a lack of information about the FC as an organisation, what it does and the services it provides. This, coupled with the changing legislative requirements under the Equality Act for our staff, led to the following over-arching objectives:

- We will develop a new Diversity Communications Strategy, which will include improving the information available to customers and staff by December 2012.
- We will review and re-launch our suite of diversity training for staff at all levels within the organisation, by December 2012.

Age

Staff Objectives

The results of the 2011 Staff Survey indicated very few differences with regard to working for the FC between the different age groups except that younger people were generally more positive about the organisation. However, the Staff Survey did indicate that staff over the age of 55 are less likely to have an Individual Learning Plan. Therefore, we will engage with the Learning and Development Team to ensure that managers are trained to ensure that all staff, regardless of their age, should be developed appropriately.

Customer Objectives

The Forestry Commission provides a wide range of customer experiences which are open and available to people of all ages (for instance, visiting our woodlands is a popular family leisure activity). We also provide a range of customer services that are targeted at either older or younger visitors (e.g. the 'Bridging the Gap' initiative at Coed Y Cymoedd which brings together people aged over 50 with parties of school children). Many of our woodland trails are already accessible, therefore suitable for those with disabilities, older people, children, families with prams/pushchairs, etc.

From our surveys, we know that a wide range of people of all ages visit our forests and woodlands. We haven't had any customer feedback to suggest that we need to do anything differently for specific age groups but we are aware that we need to continue to provide a range of activities to suit customers of all ages.

Disability

Staff Objectives

As a result of our annual monitoring of staff and results of the Staff Survey, we know that both the levels of job applications we receive from people with disabilities and of self-declaration of disability are low within the FC.

Based on the experiences of HR Case Managers who are involved in supporting managers and staff, with a varied range of disabilities, in making reasonable adjustments and the results of our Staff Survey 2011, there is good reason to believe that a higher proportion of staff consider themselves disabled (between 3 and 9%) than those who are declaring. Therefore, we will develop guidance and tools during 2012 to make this process easier and will publicise these to staff.

Once this guidance is in place, we will investigate during 2014 the “two ticks” standard to explore the relevance and appropriateness of this standard for the FC. The FC already offers a guaranteed interview for those disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for the job. This means that more disabled applicants are interviewed, but only 4% of our applicants advise us they have a disability. Given the GB demographic that it is estimated by the Disability Rights Commission, that 19% of the working age population are disabled, this statistic indicates that we need to increase the number of disabled applicants and the “two ticks” standard may help us achieve that goal.

When the recruitment freeze is lifted we will continue to promote the FC as an employer to disabled communities in response to the research feedback we have had. This includes advertising in the disabled lifestyle press and profiling existing employees with disabilities in these magazines.

We will engage further with Capability Scotland during 2012 to improve our liaison with disabled communities and seek their views on our policies, etc.

Customer Objectives

We have developed the following customer focussed objectives as a result of direct customer feedback, the results of our Public Opinion Surveys and the views expressed through forums of people with varying disabilities who reviewed and commented on our previous Disability Equality Scheme:

- We will create local office databases of local disability organisations to develop an identifiable FC profile, offer services and share information about our facilities and services.
- We will explore with our partners the possibility of providing access to concerts, etc at reduced rates for people with disabilities and their carers in response to customer queries and complaints about this.
- We will continue to provide educational support to children with additional needs and/or disabilities where resources allow.
- We will raise awareness of local accessible trails, etc through advertising and promotion through local networks and our Internet site.
- We will audit by 2016, and then continually monitor all built facilities including visitor centres, toilets and parking facilities to ensure these are accessible and meet the needs of all users.

- We will improve information available about accessible facilities by 2016.
- We will investigate the possibility of providing free car parking for disabled people by 2015.
- We will explore opportunities to support marketing with partners e.g. RADAR accessibility holiday guide.
- We will develop a database of volunteers/staff who can conduct guided tours of forests suitable for different groups. This is in response to requests raised at the feedback forums that some of those with disabilities would find this useful and would relieve any anxieties about visiting forests.
- We will explore with local councils and local charities the possibility of organised trips to the forest.
- We will liaise with local public transport providers to improve transport links where possible and appropriate. We have done this at one of our sites but the costs may prove prohibitive.
- We will continue to work with disabled mountain bike users to develop accessible trails where appropriate. This work will be on-going, as and when new trails are proposed over the next four years. The local recreation teams will take this forward building on the working relationships already built up with relevant groups.

Gender Reassignment

Staff Objectives

None proposed at this time, other than continued monitoring of staff.

We do not monitor the gender identity of our job applicants as we have received advice and guidance from central Government and a:gender not to do so at application stage.

During the 2009 Staff Survey, the FC asked its employees if they considered themselves to be living and working in a gender other than the one assigned to them at birth. A total of 11 people identified themselves as transgender which is proportionally high compared to the GB average. The results of the Staff Survey demonstrated that those who identified themselves as transgender were as content with the FC and their employment within it, as all other staff. However, given the relatively high number

identified, we prepared guidance for managers on gender identity and gender re-assignment. This guidance was externally reviewed and commended by a:gender and Stonewall. It was published on our Intranet during June 2011 and FC staff were notified of this by the all-staff weekly electronic newsletter.

The 2011 Staff Survey showed that 13 staff identified themselves as transgender. Once again, there were no particular issues highlighted and those who identified themselves as transgender were as content with the FC and their employment within it as all other staff who responded to the survey.

No staff grievances have ever been raised about transgender issues.

Therefore, no specific and measurable objectives have been identified as necessary at this time.

Customer Objectives

The services that we offer are not gender specific and do not raise gender specific or gender identity issues in the same way that larger public service organisations do (e.g. Health or Education).

With regard to our customer services, we have not been contacted through our centralised systems, or received any complaints, from members of the public who identified themselves as transgender or those who raised transgender issues generally.

In addition, we have engaged with a:gender and Stonewall several times (e.g. to quality assure guidance and for views on our previous Gender Equality Scheme) and these organisations have not raised any issues with us about our customer services with regard to meeting the needs of the transgendered community.

Therefore, we propose no specific objectives at this time other than continued monitoring.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Staff Objectives

None proposed at this time as all our HR policies that apply to members of staff getting married also apply equally to staff entering into a civil partnership. Our HR policies and procedures are written to reflect this.

No staff grievances have been raised about this subject or issues raised via the 2009 or 2011 Staff Surveys.

Customer Objectives

None proposed at this time, other than to continue to ensure that our local offices with suitable facilities which are licensed to provide civil weddings also offer services, including wedding fairs and promotions, equally to those who are entering into a civil partnership. For example, the team at Westonbirt Arboretum offer a location for Civil Weddings, Renewals of Vows and Civil Partnerships. These services are also available at FC facilities at Garnwnant, Lochaber and Sherwood.

Pregnancy and Maternity

Staff Objectives

None proposed at this time as all of our HR policies comply with employment law as a minimum. The FC offers contractual adoption and maternity pay which betters the statutory provision. We offer 26 weeks full pay and 13 weeks statutory pay (plus 13 weeks unpaid) rather than 39 weeks statutory pay (plus 13 weeks unpaid).

The FC also offers a wide range of flexible working options that support parents. Our annual monitoring exercise demonstrated that 84% of women return to the FC to work after maternity leave, compared to the GB average of 69% as calculated by the HSE.

No staff grievances have been raised about this subject or issues raised via the Staff Survey, etc.

We will continue to ensure that our HR policies remain up-to-date with changing employment law and central Government guidance. Our HR Policy team constantly monitor this.

Customer Objectives

None specifically proposed at this time. However, many of our local initiatives to provide accessible facilities can benefit pregnant women and those with young children in prams and push chairs, etc. In addition, some of our local offices offer specific services such as “Buggy Fit” (Alice Holt and Sherwood), Woodlands for toddlers (FC Wales), Yoga for pregnant women and young mums (Aberfoyle), New skills learning for young parents (South West England) and many more across the country which we will continue to promulgate through the best practice section of our website so that more local teams with suitable facilities can consider offering similar initiatives.

Race

Staff Objectives

We know from our annual monitoring exercises that we have a very low number of ethnic minority staff and very few applications for externally advertised recruitments from these communities.

Therefore, when recruiting externally to normal levels again, we will identify two or three locations to specifically target BAME groups with publicity about employment (and recreation) opportunities. Our HR Business Partners will drive this work after analysis of demographics and likely FC vacancies, using appropriate communications methods as established in a previous social marketing study that we carried out. Progress will be measured by annual analysis of job applicants which will be published in the annual monitoring report and by analysing customer feedback to check if the number of BAME respondents to the Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys increases.

Customer Objectives

We know from analysis of our customers that BAME communities are less likely to visit our woodlands and use our services. When completing a social marketing exercise in the Bristol area, we were given feedback from BAME forums that this was because they did not know enough about the Forestry Commission and what it was possible to do on our land. We were advised by the forums that the best way to promote our services was through local newspapers and radio stations. To that end, the Diversity Team will engage with the Communications Team in February 2012 to develop a communications strategy in order to promote our services to these communities. We will continue to monitor visitor numbers through analysing the results from public opinion surveys.

The Gypsy and Traveller communities have long maintained cultural links to forests and woodlands. In order to support our staff in managing interactions with these

communities, we will prepare and publish guidance by December 2012. We will have this guidance externally assessed by appropriate representative groups.

Religion and Belief

Staff Objectives

No specific objectives have been developed at this time as a result of the fact that we have not had any staff grievances related to religion or belief to date and the staff survey results carried out in 2009 and at the end of 2011 demonstrate that staff are equally as content with employment within the FC whether atheist, Christian, no religion or other religion with regard to the vast majority of those areas tested. There were minor differences in answer to a few questions and we will explore this with our internal Staff Diversity Forum and continue to monitor the situation.

We published guidance for managers and staff on religion and belief issues and will continue to update this as necessary. We have also provided factsheets on specific religions on our internal website and will add to this in 2012-13.

Customer Objectives

Due to the type of recreation activities that the FC offers, we have very few requests for adapted services and facilities that relate to religion and belief. As such, we have not developed any specific objectives at this time. However, our local offices do respond positively to requests for events e.g. we have hosted Diwali festivals and events to bring different religious faiths together in woodlands such as the Mosaic project in the New Forest, Faiths Project in Sherwood and Working With A Difference in Glasgow. We will continue to share this best practice to encourage other local teams to develop initiatives.

There were no centrally received customer enquiries or complaints related to religion and belief during 2009-10 and 2010-11.

Sex

Staff Objectives

We know from our annual monitoring that our staff gender split is one third female, two thirds male. We also know that this percentage split is reflected in the number of applications we receive for externally advertised vacancies. There are a number of reasons for this including the traditional perception of forestry as a career for men. To that end, we have determined a number of objectives to achieve a more appropriate gender workforce balance. However, it must be noted that due to Government spending

reductions, the Forestry Commission is downsizing by 25% and external recruitment will be limited until we have reached our target headcount.

- We will review and consider launching another Graduate Recruitment Programme at the appropriate time. The first graduate recruits joined the FC in summer of 2007 and five of the nine graduates employed since the Programme began have been female.
- We will review and consider launching another Leadership Development Programme at the appropriate time. The Programme run in 2010 resulted in four successful candidates, three of which are female.
- We will consider introducing mentoring and coaching of women by women in higher pay bands with the aim of increasing the number of women in the middle management group by 5% by March 2016. Progress will be measured via the annual diversity monitoring of staff and published in the Monitoring Report each January.
- When recruitment restrictions are lifted, and for roles presently stereotyped as male roles, we will continue to develop the FC profile as an employer to challenge traditional gender roles/perspectives. We will continue to promote women in various roles in the organisation and continue to promote careers within the FC generally, but investigate how to specifically target women. We will do this specifically through re-commencing events to highlight and promote the range of career opportunities that the Forestry Commission can offer. We have already worked in partnership with Napier University to deliver a “Women in Forestry” event in 2010. The target audience for this event were young women entering into their careers, women returners, women looking for local work or indeed a change in career.

Customer Objectives

Analysis of our customers through public opinion surveys has indicated that the numbers of male and female visitors to FC forests and woodlands is almost equal (67% of male and 68% of female respondents said that they visited forests and woodlands for recreation). Therefore, we have not developed any specific customer objectives with regard to gender as we do not consider it a priority and would rather focus on those communities where we most need to make a difference.

Local offices can and will continue to offer gender specific initiatives but only where and when local managers decide it is appropriate to do so e.g. local visitor survey evidence showed that in certain locations a higher proportion of men than women were engaged

in mountain biking, therefore female only mountain biking events have been organised to encourage more women to participate in this male-dominated sport.

Sexual Orientation

Staff Objectives

We have not developed any specific objectives as the Staff Survey completed in October 2011 did not indicate any significant issues with regard to LGB staff.

However, we will continue to participate in the Stonewall Good Practice Programme commenced in 2011. Part of this Programme includes advertising our employment vacancies on Stonewall's website. We will continue to do so, and will monitor the impact on the number of LGB applicants for FC jobs, and subsequently the number of LGB staff within the organisation.

We also published in 2009 guidance for staff and managers on sexual orientation issues, which was endorsed by Stonewall.

Customer Objectives

We have not received any customer complaints with regard to sexual orientation issues. Discussions with Stonewall have also indicated that there do not seem to be any particular issues with regard to customer access and participation linked to sexual orientation. As such, we have not developed any objectives specifically targeted at increasing customer services for the LGB communities at this time.

However, it is difficult to know and understand the needs of the LGB community with regard to the services offered by the FC. To that end, we will commission research during 2012 in the form of a short attitude questionnaire, via Stonewall and their contacts, to canvas the views of the LGB community and explore if there is anything that we could be doing differently.

Meanwhile, we continue to remain open to approaches from groups to organise specific events e.g. a hiking event in Sherwood for a lesbian walking group. Where appropriate and where resources allow we will also attend gay pride events (e.g. central Scotland in 2011) to promote customer services and career opportunities. We will also continue to liaise closely with Stonewall and participate in the Stonewall Good Practice Programme.

A summary of our specific objectives can be found at Appendix 2.

Meeting Our Customers' Needs

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

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