

DIVERSITY - FORESTRY COMMISSION'S WORKFORCE

Purpose

1. To provide an update to Commissioners of the current diversity of the Forestry Commission's workforce.

Background

2. As part of our legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 the Forestry Commission (FC) has a legal requirement to produce a report annually by 31 January which monitors workforce and customer diversity across the nine protected characteristics and provide progress on achieving the FC's diversity objectives.
3. Although the current and previous Monitoring Reports have not highlighted anything discriminatory in the FC's HR processes and procedures, there are recurring issues and continued low rates of progression through the recruitment process; at application, interview and selection stages for both employees and applicants from across all protected characteristics.
4. As a result, the FC's workforce diversity remains very poor, and does not reflect the diverse society that we serve.
5. Achieving our legal obligations requires senior management involvement; ensuring they are committed to, informed about and involved in the equality and diversity agenda. Senior managers need to demonstrate ownership and accountability for the E&D agenda, including an ability to demonstrate progress. The breadth of the FC's current approach to equality and diversity, including senior managers' involvement, is summarised at Appendix 1.

Workforce Diversity

6. The FC's workforce as at 31 March 2015 numbered 2,600 individuals and was predominantly male (66%), white British (95%), not disabled (97%) and aged 40 or over (68%). These percentages are almost identical to last year.
7. The staff survey carried out at the end of 2015 indicated that, of those staff that responded to the survey (1,605 individuals), only 2% identified themselves as

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Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (UK population estimated to be between 5-10%). However, 16% of those that responded chose not to disclose their sexual orientation. A total of 3% of staff who responded identified themselves as transgender. This is high (and increasing steadily) for an organisation of this size compared to the national average (0.01% of the UK population estimated to be transgender).

8. In terms of religion and belief, the largest groups of those who responded to the staff survey identified themselves as having no religion or Atheist (46%), Christians (42%) and then those who preferred not to disclose their religion (12%). A total of 2% of staff who responded practice other religions (Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and Jewish).
9. A total of 98 staff (6% of those who responded to the survey) advised that they had caring responsibilities for elderly or disabled children/relatives.
10. Of our total staff, 35% of women and 11% of men utilise a flexible working pattern.
11. The percentage of women who return to work after maternity leave is 95%, which is higher than the BIS/DWP report from 2009/10 which indicated a GB average of 77% of women return to work.
12. Equal Pay Analysis has shown that the gender pay gap has continued to fall to a current average for all staff of just above 8%. The UK average equal pay gap for all (full-time and part-time) employees is 19.2%.

Issues Arising from the Annual Monitoring Report

13. The Monitoring Report details the continuing low level of staff diversity. Although the level of external recruitment had dropped over recent years, it has started to increase again. The FC advertised 282 posts externally (including the wider Civil Service) during 2014/15, 68 more than 2013/14.
14. This means that the FC has not yet met its key diversity objective of having a workforce that reflects the society we serve. Comparison of the FC and data collected via the 2011 Census shows the demographic of the country is shown in the table below:

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Characteristic	GB demographic	FC demographic
Gender	49% male, 51% female	66% male, 34% female
Ethnicity	85% White, 2% Mixed race, 8% Asian, 4% Black, and 1% Other	99% White, 1% BAME
Disability	18% consider themselves disabled	3% consider themselves disabled
Age	49% aged 40 or over	68% aged 40 or over
Religion	59% are Christian (all denominations), 9% are non-Christian, and 32% have no religion	42% are Christian (all denominations), 2% are non-Christian and 46% have no religion
Transgendered	0.01% of the population identify as transgendered	3% of staff who answered the staff survey identify as transgendered
Sexual Orientation	5-10% of the population identify as LGB	2% of staff who answered the staff survey identify as LGB

15. Once again, the Monitoring Report indicates that there is nothing inherently discriminatory in the FC's policies and practice with regard to staff. However, close monitoring should continue on several trends and objectives/outcomes should be developed to tackle these trends going forward as appropriate.
16. Applicants for FC jobs tend to be white men without a disability.
17. The reasons for this are well understood, as the current Diversity Team and FR have previously carried out research using focus groups of BAME and disabled people to establish attitudes to employment and applying for jobs within the FC.

Actions

18. Potential actions based on the results of the Staff Survey and the annual monitoring exercise will be proposed and discussed with the HR Management Board at their next meeting in March. The HR Business Partners will then decide which, if any, actions to take forward will inform the country Management Boards, etc. accordingly.

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Equality Act Impact on FC Business

19. The Monitoring Report reviews our achievement and progress with regard to our objectives. Good progress has been made with many and the FC continues to offer a range of services to those with protected characteristics.
20. The EHRC and Government Equalities Office have made clear that best practice is to ensure equality and diversity objectives are built into the FC strategic planning process and Business Plans and not a separate HR process.

Resource Implications

21. None at present.

Risk Assessment

22. The risk to the FC of failing to diversify our workforce and therefore failing to recognise, understand and engage communities of those with protected characteristics about the services we offer remains high.

Communications Issues

23. None at present.

Implementation and Evaluation Proposals

24. Annual monitoring will continue, although the component parts of the FC business will produce their own reports from now on.

Conclusion

25. Commissioners are asked to:
 - note the diversity of the FC's current workforce, and;
 - remain aware that equality objectives/priorities should be built into the strategic and business planning processes.

Stephen Bennett
Head of Corporate Services and Diversity
February 2016

FC Approach to the Diversity Agenda as at February 2016

- There is an FC Diversity Strategy directly linked to the People Strategy – both are approved by senior managers, including the Executive Board
- Dedicated Diversity Team of 1.9 FTE (3 individuals) with an annual budget set at circa £150K in FY 2015-16
- Team situated in HR function to ensure close engagement with other HR teams, particularly Recruitment, Policy, L&D, Occupational Health and Case Managers
- Five Diversity Champions across the FC business (four of whom are SSG)
- Staff Diversity Forum meets regularly with membership from across the FC, pay bands and protected characteristics
- FC Values include direct reference to diversity through respect – “We value each other and our stakeholders, recognising diverse perspectives and treating everyone with consideration.” Diversity Team was consulted and involved during Values refresh exercise
- Existing People Strategy has E&D as one of the four key themes – associated action plan regularly reviewed by the HR Management and Service Boards. The new draft People Strategy for 2016-19 also has E&D as a key theme
- There are FC Diversity Objectives (three sets for FC England, FC Scotland and Diversity Team), published on the Internet and approved by country management boards and the Executive Board
- Annual discussions on FC diversity with the Executive Board, regular updates provided to Commissioners
- Suite of both online and face to face equality and diversity training available for staff. Also diversity is built into other courses as appropriate e.g. New Entrants (diversity specific presentation and discussion), Interview Skills, etc.
- Equality Analysis process developed and supported with guidance and ‘exemplar’ process map developed for use in Forest Districts
- Annual exercise carried out to monitor staff diversity, performance against objectives and services to diverse customers – results shared and discussed with senior managers, including the Executive Board
- Biennial Staff Survey carried out, which monitors staff diversity and levels of discrimination, etc. Diversity Team involved in developing content and complete

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an analysis of the results for discussion with HR Management Board and Executive Board

- Internet and Intranet presence – extensive library of advice and guidance (much of it externally assessed and validated) including Operational Guidance Booklets
- Involvement in FC customer surveys, including Public Opinion of Forestry, etc. Diversity Team involved in developing content and carry out analysis
- Best Practice in customer initiatives is published and shared
- Suite of internal and external communications materials, including posters, leaflets and information booklets
- Network of contacts established with organisations representing the interests of people with protected characteristics (e.g. Business Disability Forum, Capability Scotland, Stonewall) and other public sector organisations
- Calendar published every six months with diversity events and links to guidance and ideas for forest themed events
- Process developed to provide reasonable adjustments for staff and customers
- Research programme developed by the Diversity Team and carried out by colleagues in Forest Research (Social Research Group)
- Monitoring of news, social media etc. to keep up to date with current developments.