

Agenda Item 6

Executive Board Meeting
5 March 2014

Memo No 3/14

DIVERSITY - FORESTRY COMMISSION'S WORKFORCE

Purpose

1. To advise Executive Board members of the current diversity of the Forestry Commission's workforce.

Background

2. 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 reports on 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, the FC's workforce diversity remains very poor, and does not reflect the diverse society that we serve.
4. The Government recruitment freeze and FC down-sizing have limited our ability to further diversify our workforce.
5. The Equality Act requires senior management involvement, ensuring they are committed to, informed about and involved in the equality agenda.

Workforce Diversity

6. The FC's workforce as at 31 March 2013 numbered 3,012 individuals and was predominantly male (67%), white British (96%), not disabled (98%) and aged 40 or over (67%).
7. These percentages are almost identical to last year. The FC has not significantly improved the diversity of its staff since we started diversity monitoring our workforce seven years ago.
8. The internal and external recruitment applications remain dominated by white men who do not have a disability.

9. The staff survey carried out at the end of 2013 indicated that, of those staff that responded to the survey, only 1% identified themselves as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual. However, 14% of those that responded chose not to disclose their sexual orientation. A total of 1.6% 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.
10. In terms of religion and belief, the largest group of those who responded to the staff survey identified themselves as Christians (42%), followed by those with no religion (37%) and then those who preferred not to disclose their religion (12%). The next largest group was those that are atheist (6%) followed by 3% who practice other religions (Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and Jewish).
11. A total of 217 staff (15% of those who responded to the survey) advised that they had caring responsibilities for elderly or disabled children/relatives.
12. The FC percentage of women who return to work after maternity leave is 81%, which is higher than the HSE calculated GB average of 69%.

Issues Arising from the Annual Monitoring Report

13. The Monitoring Report indicates that there is nothing inherently discriminatory in the FC's policies and practice with regard to staff. Many of the differences between protected characteristics are to be expected. There are several differences that we will continue to monitor closely in case trends develop.
14. However, the Monitoring Report also details the continuing low level of staff diversity. Although the level of external recruitment has dropped over recent years, the FC advertised over 200 posts externally (including the wider Civil Service) during 2012/13.
15. This means that the FC is not fulfilling its key diversity objective of having a workforce that reflects the society we serve.
16. Data collected via the 2011 Census shows the demographic of the country (Scotland and England) is:
 - Gender: 51% female, and 49% male;
 - Ethnicity: 85% White, 2% Mixed race, 8% Asian, 4% Black, and 1% Other;
 - Disability: 18% consider themselves disabled, and 82% are not disabled;
 - Age: 19% are aged 15 or below, 12% are 16 to 24, 13% are 25 to 34, 14% are 35 to 44, 14% are 45 to 54, 12% are 55 to 64, and 16% are 65 or over; and,

- Religion: 59% are Christian (all denominations), 9% are non-Christian, and 32% have no religion.
17. Both FR and FC Scotland are taking proactive steps to evaluate their current staff diversity, the impact of their respective cultures on staff and take steps to change and improve the diversity of their workforce. FR is at an early stage of evaluation but FC Scotland has already carried out focus groups with staff of both genders and is developing a programme of actions to improve the gender diversity of the workforce. The FC England HR team, supported by the Diversity Team, are currently preparing a paper for the FCE Executive Board on the status of the diversity agenda in FC England.
 18. The EB may want to consider investing in positive action measures to attract more female, non-white and disabled applicants for vacancies to influence the diversity of the workforce. For example, a programme of targeted internships? However, positive action can be expensive, particularly as they can take time to take off and make an impact. Positive action can also be controversial both internally and externally.
 19. Would the Board like to discuss these issues in more depth via a paper prepared for discussion at a future meeting?

Equality Act Impact on FC Business

20. Completion of Equality Analysis remains patchy throughout the business and is an area that the FC needs to improve on. Completion of Equality Analysis provides several business benefits, as well as contributing to meeting the FC's legal obligations under the Equality Act.
21. The Government accepts that public sector resources to devote to the equality and diversity agenda must be focused on achieving the Equality Act General Duty. Therefore, the FC has been able to prioritise available resources on equality and diversity on key areas and issues where we can make a real difference. This is based on evidence gathering and engagement with diverse communities, in order to justify our priorities.
22. Under the terms of the Equality Act, equality and diversity objectives must be built into the FC strategic planning process and Business Plans and not a separate HR process.
23. This is challenging. Working with the business, we have published specific and measurable objectives. Many of these are the responsibility of the FC business to deliver and should continue to be built into the Business Plans, etc as they are reviewed and updated.

24. The Monitoring Report also reviews our achievement and progress with regard to these objectives. Good progress has been made with many and the FC continues to offer a range of services to those with protected characteristics.

Resource Implications

25. None at present.

Risk Assessment

26. As pointed out previously, 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.
27. The lack of Equality Analysis being carried out at a local level remains a high risk. This could lead to investigation by the Government Equalities Office and/or EHRC and potentially legal action.

Communications Issues

28. None at present.

Implementation and Evaluation Proposals

29. Annual monitoring will continue.

Recommendations

30. The Board is asked to:

- note the diversity of the FC's current workforce;
- be aware that equality objectives/priorities should be built into the strategic and business planning processes;
- recognise that local teams continue to be responsible for delivering many of the diversity objectives with regard to customers;
- discuss whether they want further information about potential positive action steps;
- note the risk with regard to Equality Analysis.

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