

# Independent Review Service

## Diversity Framework

### Delivering Services to a Diverse Society

#### 1. Background

In December 2004 the National Audit Office published a report entitled ***“Delivering Public Services to a Diverse Society”***. The report made a number of recommendations for government bodies. These recommendations are set out below:

- **Gather adequate information on the needs and make-up of the customer base**
- **Establish regular channels of communication with a wide range of stakeholders to engage them in the design, implementation and subsequent evaluation of services to meet the needs of diverse customers**
- **Set clear diversity related objectives and targets throughout the organisation that link to Public Service Agreements for all diversity strands**
- **Lead from the front at all levels of management**
- **Set up appropriate organisational structures that reflect the existing depth and breadth of organisations’ experiences with, and need for serving diverse customers**
- **Nurture a workforce with appropriate skills, training and support to deliver services to diverse customers**
- **Target resources to initiatives that have well focussed objectives**
- **Evaluate progress on an ongoing basis using multiple methods that include customer feedback**
- **Develop ways to share good practice and lessons learnt among government bodies**

Using these recommendations as our baseline we have developed a framework setting out how we as an organisation will aim to deliver services to a diverse society. In developing the framework we have taken into account the size of the organisation, the resources we have available and in particular the transient nature of our customer base.

#### 2. What is diversity?

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect.

It means recognising that each individual is unique and each has different needs. Here are some key facts on the diversity of the UK population:

1. One in five adults and one in 20 children are disabled in some way.
2. The proportion of women in the workforce has increased; in 1984, 58% of women were in employment compared with 77% for men, whereas in 2003 the employment rate was 70% for women and 79% for men.
3. Around one in twelve people is from a minority ethnic background.
4. From the 77% of the population of GB who report having a religion, more than one in 20 belong to a religion other than Christianity.
5. With the current trends in population aging set to continue, it is projected that by 2014, one in four people will be aged 65 or over.
6. It is estimated that around one in fifteen people is homosexual or bisexual.

What is the difference between Equal Opportunities and Diversity?

Equal Opportunities is about making sure that everyone is treated fairly and has the same access to opportunities. Under the banner of equal opportunities particular groups of people within the general population are protected by legislation. Diversity focuses more on respecting and valuing the differences between everyone regardless of our individual make-up. However diversity does fall within the same range of legislation as Equal Opportunities.

**3. Legal Requirements**

Currently the government recognises six key strands of diversity in the population:

- Disability
- Gender
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sexual Orientation
- Age

Each of these areas of potential discrimination is protected by legislation:

| <b>Strand</b>       | <b>Legislation</b>   |
|---------------------|--|
| Disability          | Disability Discrimination Act 1995                         |
| Gender              | Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and Equal Pay Act 1970         |
| Race                | Race Relations Act 1976                                    |
| Religion and belief | Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003 |
| Sexual Orientation  | Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003  |
| Age                 | To come into force in December 2006                        |

#### **4. About the IRS and our customers**

##### Our aim

As an organisation we aim to ensure that we acknowledge, accept and value the differences in individuals in both the way we manage the organisation and in the delivery of services to our customers.

##### Our organisation

The IRS is an Independent Statutory Body that is funded by the DWP through a parliamentary vote.

The IRS has one office based in Birmingham from where we deal with review requests from across Great Britain. We receive around 20 000 applications for reviews each year.

##### What we do

The IRS provides an independent grievance process, by means of a review, for applicants who are dissatisfied with the decision made at the Department for Work and Pensions on their applications to the discretionary part of the social fund. This part of the fund helps people with one-off payments at times of particular difficulty in their lives.

##### Our Customer Base

Because of the nature of our business our customer base is constantly changing and as a result we serve a wide range of diverse groups of people including:

- Male and female applicants
- Applicants who are single, married or divorced
- Applicants who have children and who don't
- Applicants in same sex relationships
- Applicants from age 16 upwards
- Applicants who have a range of disabilities or illnesses
- Applicants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds
- Applicants who are homeless
- Applicants who are newly released from prison
- Applicants who are setting up home following a period of care

This list is not exhaustive but aims to illustrate our wide-ranging customer base.

##### The Review

We aim to treat everyone equally regardless of their personal circumstances.

Social Fund Inspectors carry out the review. Their role is to make decisions taking into account the individual circumstances of the applicant and applying the rules of the social fund scheme as set out in Section 140 (1) of the Social Security (contributions and benefits) Act 1992. As amended by the Social Security Act 1998.

In order to ensure that the right decision is reached all our Inspectors receive intensive training on all technical areas of the scheme. They are also trained how to apply the rules of natural justice and to perform an inquisitorial role as part of the review process. The role performed by the Inspector in carrying out the review

requires procedural fairness regardless of the circumstances of the case. We have a legal requirement to ensure that our customers have a full understanding of the review process. This means tailoring what we do for each individual customer, taking account of their particular needs.

## **5. What do we already have in place?**

### Race Equality Scheme

We published our Race Equality Scheme in June 2005 – this can be found on our website at [www.irs-review.org.uk](http://www.irs-review.org.uk)

### Other Services

In order to give all our customers the best opportunity to engage in the review process we provide the following services:

- Language Line – a facility for customers to discuss their case with someone in their own language
- Translation service – the facility for documents to be translated into specific languages
- Braille Service – the facility for documents to be translated into braille
- Our information leaflet IRS1 can be printed in 16 different languages
- Text Phone – a facility for customers who are deaf or who have a hearing impairment
- Plain English – all our leaflets are written in plain English
- All correspondence with customers is written in the font size recommended by RNIB
- A freephone telephone service for customers who wish to call us and discuss their case
- An external complaints panel that meets three times per year to examine our complaints process and make sure we are acting fairly – they produce an annual report on their findings for the Social Fund Commissioner
- We undertake an ethnic background survey and also a regular customer survey and feed the results of the surveys into our processes and decisions.

More details about these services can be found on our website at [www.irs-review.org.co.uk](http://www.irs-review.org.co.uk) or by contacting us on 0800 096 1926

### Other information

We currently retain the following information about our customers:

- Gender (all applicants)
- Age (all applicants)
- Ethnic background (where the ethnicity survey has been returned)

Each year we summarise our findings in the Social Fund Commissioner's Annual Report.

We undertake the following as part of our communication with other organisations:

- The Social Fund Commissioner meets regularly with other interested organisations e.g. Age Concern, Refugee Council. RNIB, RNID
- Following these meeting the IRS has developed close links with many of these organisations and we maintain a two-way communication strategy
- The Secretary of State publishes an annual report – this is launched each year for invited guests who have a particular interest in the social fund scheme
- We deliver workshops across the country , both technical and general awareness
- We attend conferences held by specific organisations e.g. NACAB, MIND etc.
- We regularly publish articles in other organisations' publications.

Since the IRS was set up in 1988 we have developed many links with external organisations. But given the transient nature of our customer base, the size of the organisation and available resources it is not proportionate or practical to have links with organisations representing every possible group within society.

## **6. For our staff**

For our staff we already have in place an Equal Opportunities Policy:

### Equal opportunities Policy

Our current Equal Opportunities Policy that was issued in 2003 states:

The IRS wants to get the best from everyone to enable us to deliver the highest standards in our business. Our policy is to develop and use a diverse range of skills and abilities to improve our work for the benefit of our customers.

We will not unlawfully or unjustifiably discriminate against anyone, including staff and customers on any grounds including race, colour, ethnic or national origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, Trade Union activity, political beliefs, disability age or social class.

To achieve this we will ensure that:

- Our recruitment, selection and promotion policies are fair and open and people are selected on the basis of aptitude, competence and potential.
- We will make staff aware of how appreciating diversity could enhance their work
- Managers will lead by example and foster an environment where fairness and equality are the norm.
- We create a working environment, which promotes dignity and respect to all and is free from bullying and harassment.
- Individuals discharge their personal responsibility in relation to the business values and diversity policy.
- IRS policies and working practices will reflect our commitment to equal treatment for everyone.

- IRS customer service policies will reflect our commitment to an equal and accessible service for everyone.

This policy will be implemented within the framework of relevant legislation, which includes; Equal Pay Act 1970 (Equal Value Amendment 1984); Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974; Sex Discrimination Act 1975(Gender Reassignment Regulations 1999); Race Relations Act 1976; Disability Discrimination Act 1995; The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

We also do the following:

- Deliver awareness sessions dealing with all issues including mental health, physical disability, homelessness etc.
- Provide regular feedback on their performance
- Carry out a bi- annual ethnic survey
- Carry out an annual disability survey (followed up with face-to face meetings where issues are identified)
- Hold an annual staff conference to discuss key issues
- Have regular communication briefings delivered by the Office Manager
- Provide training for staff including refresher training to help them understand diversity issues and to consider these in their work.

Whilst we already undertake a number of initiatives (as described above) we recognise the need to continually review and develop what we do in order to promote the delivery of our services to meet the diversity of our customers.

## 7. Our Action Plan

| Action   | Responsibility                                  | By when                   |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| Complete self assessment questionnaire to measure our current position and determine future action                         | Toni Bourne<br>Ann Greenshields<br>Karen Manuel | 30 November 2005          |
| Publish our framework on the IRS Website   | Toni Bourne<br>Ann Greenshields<br>Karen Manuel | 31 March 2006             |
| Identify new organisations and build on existing relationships with organisations that represent diverse groups of society | Office Manager<br>SFCST                         | Ongoing – Review annually |
| Develop links with individuals and organisations, particularly relation to a consultation process.                         | Office Manager<br>SFCST                         | Ongoing                   |
| Develop an initial pool of consultees as set out in our Race Equality Scheme Action plan                                   | SFCST   | 31 December 2005          |
| Arrange further awareness sessions for staff to  | Training Manager                                | 31 March 2007             |

|   |                                 |                  |
|---|---------------------------------|------------------|
| broaden their knowledge of diverse groups, in particular to focus on groups where we have limited information   |                                 |                  |
| Carry out an ethnic and disability survey for IRS staff   | HR Manager                      | 30 June 2006     |
| Review customer ethnic monitoring survey form to ensure it captures the right information   | Karen Manuel                    | 31 March 2006    |
| Review the information collected as part of the ethnic monitoring survey and case examination to identify any necessary changes   | Karen Manuel                    | 31 March 2006    |
| Continue to raise awareness of the Social Fund for pensioners   | Office Manager<br>SFCST         | Ongoing          |
| Ensure that all processes and communications take account of feedback received from all sources   | SMT                             | Ongoing          |
| Evaluate recruitment processes as appropriate to ensure we have in place a diverse workforce that matches our customer base   | HR Manager<br>SMT               | Ongoing          |
| Undertake and evaluation of the following services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Translation</li> <li>▪ Braille</li> <li>▪ Language line</li> <li>▪ Text Phone</li> </ul> | Donna Bateman<br>Debbie Russell | 31 December 2005 |