

External update report for IRS Diversity and Race Equality Frameworks

Introduction

The Independent Review Service published a Diversity Framework and a Race Equality Scheme in 2005. As part of each scheme we produced an action plan and this report sets out the progress we have made in relation to those plans.

As an organisation we have generally made good progress against the action plan we published. However we need to continue monitoring and reviewing our progress and to set new tasks for the organisation to ensure that we meet our duties under the relevant legislation.

During 2006/07 we had an unexpected and exceptionally high intake of cases. As a consequence there are some parts of the action plans where we have not achieved as much as we had hoped. Outstanding tasks will be rolled forward into our next plan and we will continue to work towards accomplishing them.

Update on action so far:

1. Establishing links with relevant external organisations

This area is relevant to both schemes.

We set ourselves the task of identifying new organisations and building on existing relationships with organisations that represent diverse groups of society. This is an ongoing process and the organisations which we have had contact with include: Citizen Advice Bureau (across the country); Welfare Rights Groups in Cardiff, Edinburgh, Newcastle, London and Leeds; The Refugee Council; Age Concern; RNIB and RNID. The contact will have been either in the form of a visit by the Social Fund Commissioner or Senior Manager, delivery of workshop or attendance of a national conference held by the organisation.

2. Delivering Awareness Sessions for staff

We have arranged the following awareness sessions for our staff:

- The Dyscovery Centre delivered sessions on ADHD and autism.
- Achieve Associates explained Local Authority obligations in relation to occupational therapy.
- The Family Fund delivered a session about the charity's work.
- We had the recent session from the Butterfly Trust on Cystic Fibrosis.
- NACRO delivered a session on issues facing discharged prisoners.

3. Ethnic Monitoring update

We have reviewed our customer ethnic monitoring survey form and ensured the categories being used match those on the national census. As part of our ongoing work we continue to review and analyse the information we collect from these forms and make any changes to working practices as necessary. There have not been any changes made since the publication of our framework.

The most recent results can be viewed in the Social Fund Commissioner's Annual Report 2006/07 on our website www.irs-review.org.uk

4. Raising awareness of social fund for pensioners

One of the biggest tasks we set was to raise awareness of the social fund amongst pensioners. The Social Fund Commissioner gained the agreement of the Chief Executives of the Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus for a pilot in Gateshead to test different methods of raising awareness amongst pensioners and the people who advise them. The IRS has worked closely with The Pension Service to design, develop and implement the pilot which went live on 6 August 2007 and will run for six months. The results and evaluation will be published next year as part of this report.

5. External Complaints Panel

As part of our normal quality checking process we have in place an External Complaints Panel. The members of the panel have been made aware of our duties in relation to the Race Equality Scheme and have been asked to consider it when reviewing cases. To date the panel have not raised any concerns.

6. Equal Opportunities training and associated policies

All our staff have received equal opportunities training since 2005. A Managing Diversity policy was published in December 2005 and a policy statement in relation to Religion and Beliefs has also been published.

7. Recruitment

We have recently undertaken two recruitment exercises to recruit AAs, AOs, EOs and HEOs. As part of this we undertook ethnic and disability monitoring of applicants. The results were as follows:

Total number of applicants from both recruitment exercises was 291

Race/Ethnic Origin

Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian,	Black (African, Caribbean)	Chinese	White	Mixed ethnicity	Any other	Prefer not to say
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Pakistani and any other)						
70	49	1	136	2	1	21

Nationality

British or British Mixed	English	Irish	Scottish	Welsh	Any other	Prefer not to say
146	107	3	0	0	4	26

Disability

A total of 24 applicants said they were disabled within the meaning of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995. All of them requested and were granted an interview under the guaranteed interview scheme.

We recruited 22 people and of these three were disabled within the meaning of DDA 1995, two were of Asian origin, and three were of Black Caribbean origin.

8. Staff Consultation

As a matter of course all staff are consulted before we change or implement any new personnel policies. This consultation take place directly and not through representative parties.

Most recently we have carried out a detailed staff survey. This raised a number of issues that are of concern to staff and these are now been taken forward as discrete pieces of work. The results of these pieces of work are not yet available.

We have also conducted an in-depth disability survey for our staff. The results of this survey can be found on our web site www.irs-review.org.uk alongside our Disability Equality Scheme.

9. For the future

The outstanding tasks from the action plans of both schemes will be rolled forward in to future action plans.

We are currently in the process of developing a unified equality policy to integrate our approach to race, disability and gender.