



The Public Sector Equality Duties

Making An Impact

November 2007

SCHNEIDER~ROSS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY November 2007

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Executive Summary

This research was carried out by Schneider~Ross Limited with sponsorship from the Government Equalities Office and Transport for London and support from IDS Diversity at Work.

The key drivers for the research included:

- It is over six years since the Public Sector Equality Duty was introduced as part of the Race Relations Amendment Act; and there are now three sets of duties – race, disability and gender. Based on our earlier research on the race equality duty, we thought the timing was appropriate to see how public authorities were working with the equality duties and applying the lessons they had learnt from the race equality duty.
- The recent legislation on age, religion or belief and sexual orientation also provides opportunities for public authorities to consider equality and diversity more coherently and to address cross cutting issues. We wanted to gauge how public bodies were responding to cross cutting issues; were they adopting strand specific approaches or developing single equality schemes/an integrated approach to equalities.
- A number of public authorities have shown real commitment to the Public Sector Equality Duties and have achieved outcomes both in terms of employment and service delivery. We wanted to identify these 'showcase' organisations and find out why and how their practices have led to success.

The research began in February 2007 and was completed in September 2007. The methodology included a combination of paper survey, workshops with stakeholders and in depth case studies with 8 public sector organisations.

The findings show that:

- The Public Sector Equality Duties have influenced the equalities agenda within public sector organisations. This influence is more impactful when there is lasting commitment from the leadership of the organisation and the actions are integrated as part of mainstream business.
- Many organisations have applied the lessons they have learnt from the race equality duty to support the implementation of the disability and the gender equality duties. Particularly in the context of community engagement and involvement and also when addressing employee monitoring, recruitment and development.
- Developing clarity in goals and setting realistic targets is a challenge. Organisations which have dedicated resources to support implementation and periodically assess progress and review policies, have demonstrated that the results are beneficial to achieving improvements in service delivery and people management.
- Public authorities are choosing to respond to the specific duties on developing equality schemes in a variety of ways. Some have developed strand specific equality schemes – race, disability and gender; and some have chosen to write single equality schemes. In either instance, the challenge has been to ensure that schemes reflect the business priorities of the organisation, based on an accurate assessment of requirements. Where organisations chose to develop individual schemes, there is a risk of duplication particularly in the areas of employee and community consultation. There are clear advantages when organisations do consider cross cutting strands – some of the case studies have shown that this has led to the effective use of resources, as well as the achievement of outcomes.
- The role of an equality lead is important and there needs to be clarity on what they will and will not do. Both in the case studies and the stakeholder workshops, it was discussed that this role has to be more strategic and influential, rather than merely focused on operational issues. "I am expected to write schemes, see that they are implemented, consult, do impact assessments, respond to concerns and also offer

advice. I am spread too thinly and at times it is difficult to show where I am making impact.”

We hope that the Government Equalities Office will consider the findings from this research as they take forward the proposals for the Equality Bill, and would encourage the Equality and Human Rights Commission to take into account these findings as they take forward work on the existing public sector duties. Key issues for consideration by both the Government Equalities Office and the Equality and Human Rights Commission are:

- To retain the involvement and outcome focused aspects of the equality duties.
- To emphasise the considerable role of senior leaders and their accountability in taking forward the public sector equality duties.
- To ensure that guidance is clear on procurement and how public authorities work with contractors and partners to deliver services.
- To strengthen the role of the regulatory and inspection bodies on how they assess commitment and performance on equalities, and
- To influence the implementation of impact assessments in important policy areas.