



Ofwat's compliance with the Equality Duty

1. Background

The public sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) came into force on 5 April 2011. The Equality Duty applies to public bodies and others carrying out public functions. It supports good decision-making by ensuring public bodies consider how different people will be affected by their activities, helping them to deliver policies and services which are efficient, effective, accessible to all and meet different people's needs.

The Equality Duty is supported by specific duties, set out in regulations which came into force on 10 September 2011. The specific duties require public bodies, such as Ofwat, to publish relevant, proportionate information demonstrating compliance with the Equality Duty; and to set specific, measurable equality objectives.

2. How does Ofwat comply with the Equality Duty?

Ofwat has had an equalities scheme in place since 2006. A revised updated scheme was published in 2010 for the period until 2013. While the Equality Duty replaces the need for a separate equalities scheme, we are continuing to take forward the actions originally published in that scheme.

3. Actions we have taken in the past year to further equality

External

In early 2011, we published an updated policy on impact assessments on our website. This was supported by guidance and template forms which were available to internal staff. The updates included specific changes to meet the new equality duties in the Equality Act.

We have published impact assessments alongside our major consultations in accordance with our policy during the year.

In June 2010, we published our revised guidance to the water companies on services for disabled, chronically sick or elderly consumers. This sets out the minimum policy and procedures we expect the companies to adopt when delivering services to people who may need specific help in the way water and sewerage services are delivered to them because of age, disability (which includes those who are blind or partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing) or illness (which includes those with learning difficulties or mental health problems). The guidelines will help the companies to fulfil their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended).

http://www.ofwat.gov.uk/consumerissues/problemspayingbill/gud_pro_specialassistjun10.pdf

In 2010-11, we examined in detail who is most likely to be at risk of being unable to afford their water and sewerage bills. We published our findings and views on who is vulnerable and on the performance of the companies in providing assistance in order to inform and encourage the strengthening of the companies' policies. We have also used this work to inform the UK and Welsh Governments' policies on the provision of financial and other assistance to low income, pensioner, disabled and otherwise vulnerable customers, to help with bill payments

Internal

Our staff survey in autumn 2011 asked specifically about fair treatment of employees. As in previous years, more than 80% of staff agreed that staff were treated fairly. This is more than 10% greater than the equivalent question in the Civil Service People Survey 2011.

Ofwat has a comprehensive 'dignity at work' policy, which sets out the organisation's expectations of all employees. This extends beyond the boundaries of employment legislation to ensure all our employees understand what is acceptable employment practice and behaviour towards others in the workplace, and our stance on equality and diversity. Our Internet usage policy also refers specifically to avoiding discriminatory language via our email and other electronic media.

Ofwat's recruitment practices are audited each year by an independent auditor (DLA Piper), which accredits Ofwat as a best practice recruiter in line with Civil Service standards that measure fairness and transparency.

Ofwat has an Investors in People accreditation that has included evaluation of diversity practice within the organisation.

Ofwat has an active Diversity group, comprising volunteering employees from across the organisation, which discusses and agrees ways to raise awareness of diversity issues. In conjunction with Trade Union colleagues, it actively supports events, such as Black History Week, that raise awareness of our diverse population.

As part of our monitoring of our reorganisation in 2011, we carried out a multi-stage equality impact assessment to ensure that the changes were not having a differential impact on any specific group. We published the results of this assessment on our internal intranet.

4. Equality objectives for 2012-14

We will report our progress on these objectives every year in our annual report and accounts (starting from the report for 2012-13).

External

As an economic regulator, Ofwat rarely works directly with individuals but carries out its duties through the way it regulates water companies. Our work to further equalities is largely through our general regulatory approach. We seek to ensure these approaches do not have unintended or disproportionate impacts. There are few one-off projects such as the work described earlier in 2010 and 2011.

| Objective | Measured by | Due date |
|---|---|----------|
| Continue to ensure that equality and diversity issues are reflected in our policies | Review impact assessment policy for consistency with the latest guidance from BIS | 2014 |
| Respond to any new Social and Environmental Guidance from Government | Monitor relevant developments to ensure our policy/guidance remains consistent | 2012 |

Internal

| Objective | Measured by | Due date |
|--|--|------------------|
| To continue to be recognised for equality and diversity good practice | Staff survey results. We will maintain more than 80% agreement with our equality question in staff surveys | 2012 and 2013 |
| | Accreditation as a best practice recruiter | 2012 and ongoing |
| To ensure employees remain familiar with equality and diversity expectations | Delivery of training and enabling access to e-learning packages | 2012 |

**Ofwat
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