

Council meeting 14 & 15 February 2006

PUBLIC BUSINESS

FOR NOTING

Diversity in the Society

Purpose

To inform the Council about the Society's current activities, including a review to determine the necessity for a formal action plan

Strategic objective domain

An organisation that consistently performs as a regulator, professional representative leader and publisher

Recommendation

To note the diversity audit of activity across the Society as a precursor to the development of an action plan, with a target date for reporting to Council in June 2006

1. Background

Diversity is a high profile issue, particularly for public bodies or those organisations whose role encompasses providing some service for the public benefit. As a subject it is many-faceted, with many implications for the Society around both our public interfaces and employment practices.

For the purpose of this paper, diversity is assumed to cover disability, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation and age (discrimination on grounds of age is due from 1 October this year). In the past five years Parliament has implemented an increasing raft of legislation, much of it originating from Brussels (a list is attached at Appendix 1). Legislation is relevant to all Society buildings, communication processes internal and external, all employees wherever based and to direct and indirect interactions with the public.

2. Diversity at the Society

In recent years, the Society has adopted a largely piecemeal approach to diversity issues. In some areas, including Human Resources, diversity issues are firmly and positively addressed in our processes. This year, for example, the HR team will be examining how proposals to enact age discrimination legislation will impact on our employment processes, and our rewards and benefits systems. In others, specific pieces of work have been managed when prompted by the introduction of a specific piece of legislation, or in the course of a regular process review. One example of this would be the work undertaken by the Examinations Board in the run-up to the inclusion in October 2004 of the Society as a "Qualifications Body" under Part II of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. This required the Society not to discriminate against members and applicants by virtue of their disability and to make appropriate "adjustments" on their behalf. The library and the museum both have in place access and learning policies designed to meet the needs of the DDA, while the review of the Society's internet site defined and implemented action to provide improved access to people with disabilities, in line with accepted good practice for public websites as one of its earliest changes. We are currently considering the impact of the December 5, 2005 changes to the Disability Discrimination Act, which extended legal rights to people suffering from cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis but not yet showing signs of

their illness, and the introduction of a new legal relationship through the Civil Partnership Act 2004 which came into force on the same day.

The awareness of diversity is addressed on a regular basis through training. CD-based training is issued to employees on induction, and the Society runs a number of face to face courses for employees (and Council members) each year – attendance is considered essential. Our statutory committee Appointments Group received training before commencing their work, and the panels they appoint will undergo mandatory training.

3. Addressing diversity effectively

While the Society has taken effective steps in many areas to raise awareness of the potential for direct or indirect discrimination in processes and activities. A report compiled in late 2004 suggested the Society activities were in line with those of other regulators, for example, while recognising that local government and health and non-health regulators could provide a number of examples of best practice against which the Society's work could be benchmarked. The complexity of the legislation and the scope of impact across the Society's means that we should not be complacent, and the time is right for a more structured and comprehensive approach to be adopted to ensure that diversity issues are addressed as a matter of course proactively within the Society's processes and procedures.

As a necessary first step, therefore, a formal diversity audit has been scheduled to examine all areas of the Society and benchmark us against other bodies, and make recommendations for what might be needed to ensure the Society has processes and procedures that represent "best practice". The audit is likely to take three months, giving us a target date for sharing the output with the Council, and any necessary action plan in June.

4. Risk implications

Positive action to ensure diversity issues are addressed within the body of the Society's processes and procedures, as well as policymaking, is crucial to protect the Society against any form of litigation, whether employment or public related, resulting in both financial costs but potential reputation loss through damage the Society's image to its members, the public and government bodies.

The appropriate implementation of fair and consistent standards at all the Society's interfaces is likely to increase public confidence in pharmacy and enhance both the Society's and the profession's public image.

5. Resource implications

The cost of the audit is being met by the Corporate & Strategic Development Directorate. Depending on the results of the audit, further monies may need to be identified for any specific tasks or oversight mechanisms recommended by the audit, and agreed for implementation either as an operational exercise in risk management, or as a result of a policy decision by the Council.

6. Recommendation

To note the diversity audit of activity across the Society as a precursor to the development of an action plan, with a target date for reporting to Council in June 2006

Robert Darracott
Director Corporate & Strategic Development

Appendix 1

Legislation relevant to diversity

Legislation	Year
Universal Declaration of Human Rights - rights to no distinction or race, colour, sex, language, religion and right to equal pay for equal work	1948
Treaty of Rome – established EC and equality of opportunity including men and women should receive equal pay for equal work	1957
Sex Discrimination Act – unlawful to discriminate on sex, marital status	1975
Rehabilitation of Offenders Act	1974
Equal Opportunities Commission	1975
Race Relations Act (CRE) – unlawful to discriminate on colour, race, nationality or national or ethnic origin	1976
Welsh Language Act	1993
Disability Discrimination Act – unlawful to discriminate without justifiable reason that is relevant and substantial	1995
Human Rights Act - right to respect for private life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion	1998
Race Relations (Amendment) Act	2000
Further amendments to RRA (broader definition of indirect discrimination)	2003
Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations	2003
Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations	2003
Disability Discrimination Act (extension)	2004
Sex Discrimination (Amendment Act)	2005
Age Discrimination	10/2006