



DISABILITY EQUALITY INVOLVEMENT

**Report on Outcomes from the
17th September 2008 event held in
conjunction with Capability Scotland**

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Discussion Areas and Recommendations
 - 2.1 Audit Scotland's Corporate Plan
 - 2.2 Audit Scotland's Forward Studies Programme
 - 2.3 Audit Scotland's Recruitment & Selection policy
 - 2.4 General Learning from the event
- 3.0 Next Steps

1.0 Introduction

Audit Scotland is committed to valuing diversity and promoting equality of opportunity for all staff, all client groups and the general public. In order to ensure that our work takes account of the particular needs and requirements of diverse groups we are keen to consult and involve a diverse range of stakeholders. Their views and opinions will help shape the way that we do business and help ensure that our practices are inclusive. As part of achieving these aims and to comply with our particular duties to consult and involve disabled persons is particular, Audit Scotland invited the equality unit of Capability Scotland to support us in running involvement events for a number of people with disabilities.

Our first consultation and involvement event was held at the Stirling University Innovation Park on Wednesday 17th September 2008, and was attended by eight disabled people who work with Capability Scotland predominantly in providing training, user access surveys and mystery shopping services. Most of the attendees also hold a number of other committee and public appointments representing disabled people and inputting their views to shape public practice. Across the group a wide range of conditions were represented including mobility issues, wheelchair users, sight, hearing and speech conditions.

For our first event we decided to focus on three key and current areas of focus. These included:

- The Corporate Plan – the overall focus of Audit Scotland’s work and the priorities the organisation sets itself each year
- The Forward Studies Programme – the identification of areas or study and research that Audit Scotland will focus on
- A Review of Recruitment and Selection – as the organisation looks to ensure best practice recruitment methods are employed in a fair and objective manner.

Overall the event was both informative and enjoyable with everyone fully participating in a lively debate on relevant issues. Audit Scotland is grateful for the contributions made by all attendees and for the facilitation provided by Elspeth Maloney of Capability Scotland.

In the months following the consultation event, various stakeholders across Audit Scotland have been considering how they can take on board the points made by attendees. This document is both a report of the event and a response to the recommendations put forward. For ease of reference, within each topic area we have separated out ‘Discussion Themes’; ‘Recommendations (made by Capability Scotland)’ and ‘Response including Actions to be Taken (by Audit Scotland)’ and shown these in tabular format.

2.0 Discussion Areas and Recommendations

In the following sections we cover the three main topic areas of the Corporate Plan, Forward Studies Programme and Recruitment & Selection. We have also included a section on General Learning from the event itself.

2.1 Audit Scotland's Corporate Plan

David Blattman, Human Resources and Organisation Development Manager for Audit Scotland gave a presentation explaining the Audit Scotland Corporate Plan and the priorities for the organisation going forward. The differences between annual financial audits, performance audits and best value audits were explained and the group heard that performance audits include equality and diversity elements.

David also highlighted that best value audits involve ensuring that local authorities are meeting the needs of the public and that effective public services are delivered efficiently; and that audits do involve some consideration of the views of service users.

It was also explained that Audit Scotland is not just about highlighting what a public authority is doing wrong but also about making recommendations on improvements and sharing good practice.

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<p><u>Accessibility of Publications</u></p> <p>It was explained that Audit Scotland plan to produce more executive summaries of audit reports in the future to ensure the findings are more widely accessible. These summaries will be written in a way that lay people understand. This led to a discussion about the accessibility of publications in general.</p>	<p>Executive Summaries along with all Audit Scotland publications should be available to download from the Audit Scotland website as well as being available in hard copy by post on request.</p> <p>All Audit Scotland publications should be available in a range of alternative accessible formats such as large print, Braille and audio tape.</p> <p>All publications should include a statement indicating that alternative formats are available and include details of how to access these.</p> <p>Audit Scotland does not have to keep a stock of all publications in alternative formats, but it is important that all staff know that Audit Scotland has a legal duty to provide accessible information and that staff know what to do if a request for an alternative format is received.</p>	<p>All Audit Scotland publications are already available on the website in pdf and rtf format, and are also available in hard copy. Podcasts (mp3 files) are available for most national reports.</p> <p>We also already offer a range of alternative accessible formats on request.</p> <p>All our publications carry a statement indicating that alternative formats are available along with contact details to organise this.</p> <p>Staff are aware to contact our publications team if they receive requests for accessible formats.</p>

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<p><u>Audit Scotland Website</u> It was reported that the Audit Scotland website has been approved for accessibility by the Shaw Trust and that Browsealoud can be downloaded from the website and used to access all content as the spoken word. It was also commented that Audit Scotland are keen to improve the website even further.</p>	<p>Disabled people should be involved in plans for improving the site, particularly people who use accessibility software and adapted IT equipment.</p>	<p>Audit Scotland involved disabled people who use accessibility software and adapted IT equipment extensively in the building of the new Audit Scotland website. We are pleased that the Shaw Trust has recognised the work we have done in making our website more accessible and we will continue to monitor and consult on further improvements.</p>
<p><u>Public Complaints</u> The group discussed the scope Audit Scotland may have for dealing with public complaints about local authorities.</p>	<p>Audit Scotland should consider how to make the public more aware of Audit Scotland and their potential for highlighting to the complaints department issues they have with their local authority.</p>	<p>We consider concerns about public bodies as part of our risk based approach to the audit process. Provided the issues raised fall within our remit we refer any correspondence we receive to the auditor of the public body concerned. On the basis of the auditor's response we decide whether the matter will be investigated further to form the basis of a report, whether it should be included in our normal audit activity or whether no further action is required. Information on this is available on our website and with FAQs on this topic.</p>

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<p><u>Corporate Priorities – General Consultation</u></p> <p>The group had been issued copies of the corporate priorities consultation paper and noted that of the ten key issues listed, “greater focus on equality and diversity” and “greater focus on environmental sustainability” are the only two key themes that are not elaborated upon.</p> <p>The group felt that this suggested that equality and diversity – the last theme on the list – was either not deemed to be as important as the other themes or was not understood well enough to elaborate upon.</p> <p>Barbara explained that Audit Scotland sees equality and diversity as running through all themes rather than being an add-on.</p>	<p>Audit Scotland should take into account the fact that a tacit implication may be made that equality and diversity was not deemed to be important when analysing the responses to question three on page five of the Corporate Priorities consultation document.</p> <p>Audit Scotland should be explicit about the mainstreaming of equality and diversity in all documents in order to keep the issues to the fore.</p>	<p>Future consultation documents will be worded to ensure that can be no misinterpretation of the importance of equality and diversity.</p> <p>Action will be taken in future to ensure that general consultation documents include explicit explanation of Diversity & Equality as a cross-cutting theme in Audit Scotland’s work.</p>

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<p><u>Auditing for Compliance with Equality Legislation</u> Discussion focussed around Audit Scotland’s relationship with other bodies including the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC); and how clarity was needed on the role of Audit Scotland in auditing for compliance with equality legislation (particularly the DDA and Disability Equality Duty) in public authorities.</p>	<p>The group recommended that Audit Scotland ensure that the EHRC understand how well placed the organisation is to audit public bodies on the Disability Equality Duty.</p>	<p>Audit Scotland is already engaging with the EHRC to establish how our work can complement and support the remits of each of our organisations. We are also looking at how we can most effectively participate in discussion across Audit & Inspection bodies as another opportunity to promote Equality & Diversity across different sectors.</p>

2.2 Audit Scotland’s Forward Studies Programme

Barbara Hurst, Director of Public Reporting, gave a presentation detailing the Audit Scotland Forward Studies Programme. In particular, Barbara explained about the range of studies undertaken by Audit Scotland and the methods used for deciding topics for study.

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<p><u>Identifying Equality & Diversity issues in study topics</u></p> <p>It was explained that the Project Lead is responsible for identifying if there are any equality and diversity issues relevant to the study and Barbara explained that all staff have been provided with guidance on equality and diversity through an informative booklet and online diversity training to assist with this.</p>	<p>All staff should receive tailor made Disability Equality Training based on the social model of disability and delivered by disabled people (in addition to general diversity training/guidance) so that they are well placed to identify disability equality issues and potential disabling barriers.</p> <p>The group recommended that the assumption should be that equality and diversity is always relevant to studies and audit work.</p>	<p>It would not be appropriate to put <i>all</i> staff through training but in circumstances where assessing disability equality forms part of an audit or a study we will ensure that appropriate specialist training is provided for those involved. We agree that this should be based on the social model of disability to promote positive attitudes and the removal of barriers for disabled people to participate in public life.</p> <p>We ensure that emphasis on E&D is actively promoted through every study including at the scoping stage. Fieldwork also involves gaining a range of views from diverse groups. The Project Management Framework provides the process for achieving this and we will review the effectiveness of this in 2009.</p>

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<p><u>Advisory Groups</u> It was explained that Audit Scotland have advisory groups to help them ensure that they are looking at the right themes in study topics. The group discussed how these groups are put together.</p>	<p>Efforts should be made to ensure that disabled people are included on the advisory groups where appropriate. Audit Scotland should ensure that representation on advisory groups is not tokenistic with regard to disabled people but that people are chosen for the contribution they can make.</p> <p>Audit Scotland should spend time preparing people who join advisory groups so that they can join in effectively.</p>	<p>Normal practice is to include service users in advisory groups as well as experts and service providers. We already try to ensure a diversity of service users and will monitor the progress of this over time. In addition we will review our process for engaging with other appropriate contacts including disabled people out with the actual advisory group.</p> <p>We commit to seek feedback from past members of advisory groups to help us explore options for ensuring people can contribute to the best of their ability. We will also ensure that we ask advisory group members about any specific support they may need.</p>

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<p><u>Disability Equality Duty</u> The group discussed Audit Scotland’s dual role with the Disability Equality Duty – as a public body bound by the duty and as an audit body scrutinising other public bodies. The group agreed that Audit Scotland has a vital role to play in ensuring that public bodies meet the Disability Equality Duty and that public bodies involve disabled people in their work.</p>	<p>In addition to disability equality training, all staff should receive specific tailored Disability Equality Duty training. This would explain in depth the requirements of the Disability Equality Duty and detail what auditors should be seeking by way of evidence that public bodies are meeting the Disability Equality Duty.</p>	<p>As above, it would not be appropriate to put <i>all</i> staff through training but in circumstances where assessing disability equality forms part of an audit or a study we will ensure that appropriate specialist training is provided for those involved.</p> <p>As mentioned previously, we are building our relationship with the EHRC to ensure that we appropriately use our position as an audit body in promoting and monitoring compliance with the disability equality duty (and other equality duties).</p>
<p><u>Sharing Good Practice</u> The group discussed the potential for sharing good practice in mainstreaming disability equality that may be identified as part of audits and studies.</p>	<p>Audit Scotland should do more to facilitate the sharing of good practice within the public sector.</p> <p>Audit Scotland could have forums for sharing good practice on their website.</p> <p>Audit Scotland could produce “How to” guides, providing case studies of good practice, for example “How to involve disabled people in policy and practice development”.</p>	<p>Through our Best Value work and the development of Best Value 2 we are reviewing how public bodies are exercising their various duties. We will also continue to review how we can maximise the opportunities we have during studies to identify and share good practice. We will need to further consider the feedback on producing ‘how to’ guides in relation to Audit Scotland’s overall remit and establish the appropriateness of undertaking specific work. We do currently produce good practice checklists which are generated from specific audit work.</p>

2.3 Audit Scotland’s Recruitment & Selection Policy

David Blattman gave a presentation detailing the current Audit Scotland recruitment process and explaining the current review which is looking at Best Value in Recruitment and Selection. Information and copies had been provided regarding the corporate application form, monitoring forms, and typical recruitment adverts.

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<p><u>Attracting Candidates with Disabilities</u> The group discussed the challenges in attracting candidates with declared disabilities. Despite Audit Scotland making the website accessible and encouraging partner recruitment agencies to consider disabled candidates there is still a low response from candidates with declared disabilities. This led to a discussion about the challenges of monitoring disability data and the need to encourage applicants to disclose information at the early stages of recruitment.</p>	<p>The group recommended that positive language should be used at all times in line with the social model of disability definitions. Therefore words like impairment and special needs should be avoided and replaced with words like ‘disability related conditions’.</p>	<p>All recruitment documentation is to be reviewed to ensure positive language is used at all times. Recruitment agencies and recruitment partners will have this requirement written into service level agreements as part of the review going forward.</p>

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<p><u>Application Form Content</u> Although the application form is available in a range of alternative formats (as is required by the Disability Discrimination Act) no requests for an alternative format have been made to date.</p> <p>The group discussed the fact that all information that could indicate a person's gender, ethnicity, age or any disability, is blanked out by the recruitment company before the form is given to the Audit Scotland selection panel. There is also a separate equal opportunities monitoring form which is not given to the recruiting manager/panel.</p>	<p>A statement should be added to the application form to the effect that the form is available in arrange of accessible formats with a telephone number to contact to discuss requirements.</p> <p>Best practice is not to ask disability-related or health related questions on the application form but to separate this out. Where this type of information remains on the form this may make the applicant feel that the information will affect the recruitment decision. However, Information should still be collected in relation to equality aspects for the purposes of equal opportunities monitoring and a separate form should be used for this.</p>	<p>This practice will be adopted when the new recruitment documentation is designed.</p> <p>It is agreed that questions related to disability and health will be completely separated from the application form from now on and will be incorporated into the separate Equal Opportunities Monitoring form. The policy of blanking out other information which may indicate other equality aspects is to be reviewed after research into best practice in other organisations. This is currently being undertaken as part of the Recruitment Review.</p>

<p>The application form currently asks “If you have any illness or medical condition which might impair your ability to perform the duties of this post please give details”. The group commented that the medical model phrasing of this question puts the emphasis completely on the individual and does not recognise that the organisational policies and practices may also affect the person’s ability to perform in the role.</p> <p>Although information is blanked out it was noted that this would flag up to a Recruiting Manager that there was something to be declared but that they would just not know the details. This could lead to wrong assumptions being made.</p>	<p>Audit Scotland should only ask such questions if they are, or may be, relevant to the person’s ability to do the job – after a reasonable adjustment if necessary.</p> <p>Information that is irrelevant to the recruitment decision should be separated from the application form where possible.</p>	<p>Recruitment documentation will be reviewed to ensure the sensitivities of asking for health information are considered and this approach will be reinforced through interview skills training.</p> <p>As detailed above we will now completely separate Equal Opportunities related questions from the application form.</p>
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<p>The group also discussed the fact that the application form asks candidates to “Give details of sickness absence over the last two years”, and this could also have links to disability conditions. Some members of the group admitted that they if they would leave off information about their disabilities from an application form in order to get past the first hurdle of short-listing.</p> <p>The group still agreed that it would still be important to talk about any reasonable adjustments that might be required at the interview, but that this should take place after the candidate has been invited to interview.</p>	<p>It is important that Audit Scotland does not discriminate against a disabled applicant on grounds of disability-related absence (as opposed to sickness absence). Therefore a separate form should be used for any necessary health-related questions with explanation given as to why the question is being asked and what the information will be used for.</p> <p>The invite for interview letter should include asking the candidate if they require any adjustments in the selection process.</p>	<p>Questions related to sickness absence will also be separated from the application form and covered in a separate form. Consideration will be given to the wording including how to ask if the absence was related to a disability condition.</p> <p>The invite to interview letter is currently arranged by the third party agency and the requirement to ask about adjustments will be reinforced with them as part of the service level agreement.</p>
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<p><u>Pre-Employment Health Questionnaire</u> The group commented that the pre-employment health questionnaire asks a large number of very personal questions and that many of the questions asked seem to have little or no bearing on a person's ability to perform in an Audit Scotland role, e.g., skin problem, allergies, height and weight, regular dental check, regular exercise.</p>	<p>Questions should only be asked if they can be shown to be pertinent to the person's ability to carry out the job.</p> <p>Applicants should only be asked to complete this form once they have been conditionally offered a job.</p>	<p>We commit to reviewing our process for collecting information about health including the content of the pre-employment health questionnaire. We will do this by benchmarking our practice against other comparator organisations and reviewing published guidance.</p>

<p><u>Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form</u></p> <p>The group discussed the EO monitoring form, the confidentiality aspects and the importance of collecting data for monitoring but handling this sensitively to encourage accurate disclosure by the applicants.</p>	<p>Rather than using the Disability Discrimination Act medical model definition of a disabled person to gather statistics, a social model definition should be used. This may encourage greater disclosure. Suggested wording is:</p> <p><i>“Audit Scotland understands disability under the social model of disability. We recognise that it is often the barriers in society (attitudinal, institutional, environmental and barriers in communication and information) that exclude disabled people rather than people’s individual impairments and conditions. Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?”</i></p>	<p>As part of the recruitment review different social model statements on disability will be considered and a newly designed EO monitoring form is to be introduced.</p>
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<p><u>Job Advertisements as an attraction method</u></p> <p>The group discussed three sample job adverts from recent Audit Scotland campaigns and explained that jobs are advertised in the national press and on the Audit Scotland website (where Browsealoud can be used so that people can access the information as the spoken word).</p> <p>The group noticed from the job adverts that Audit Scotland is not a “Two Ticks – Positive about disabled people” symbol user. This is an accreditation given to employers by Job Centre Plus as a result of the organisation making commitments to support disabled people. To receive the accreditation, employers must make five commitments There were mixed feelings about the merits of the 'two ticks' symbol as some of the group feel it can be a token</p>	<p>It should also be stated in job adverts that the application form and info pack is available in a range on alternative formats. A limited stock of the form can be kept in different formats but other materials (Job Descriptions etc) can be organised as required. A speedy process should be in place so that candidates requesting them do not have to wait too long.</p> <p>The merits of the 'two ticks' symbol should be considered carefully. The key parts are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy. 2. To ensure there is a mechanism in place to discuss, at any time, but at least once a year, with disabled employees what they can do to make sure they can develop and use their abilities. 3. To make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure they stay in employment. 	<p>A statement will be drafted for inclusion in Job Adverts and also on the Recruitment pages of the website.</p> <p>The HR team will find out more information from the Disability Adviser at Job Centre plus and consult the Diversity & Equality Steering Group and recruitment partners to give due consideration to adopting the two ticks symbol.</p>
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<p>gesture and the commitments not followed through. The group discussed the issue of the guaranteed interview scheme in particular and many commented that disabled people still often feel it is better to delay declaring to be disabled until one has to in order to lessen the opportunity for disability discrimination at the selection stage.</p>	<p>4. To take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness to make your commitments work.</p> <p>5. Each year, to review the five commitments and what has been achieved, to plan ways to improve on them and let employees and Jobcentre Plus know about progress.</p>	
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<p><u>Interviews/Assessment Centre</u> The group discussed the different selection methods used and the importance of Audit Scotland making reasonable adjustments to the interview/assessment centre process where necessary.</p> <p>Currently Audit Scotland relies on the recruitment firm Hudson to make a judgement on whether a candidate might need reasonable adjustments from what they have said on the application form.</p>	<p>When Audit Scotland invites people for interview it should be made clear that people know they are keen to make the interview process inclusive and make any necessary reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>Audit Scotland should not just rely on Hudson to pick up any potential requirement for a reasonable adjustment. The candidates themselves should be asked, using a statement such as:</p> <p><i>“We will make any changes needed to make sure that you can attend your interview and take part fully in it. Please let us know what changes we can make to enable you to attend your interview such as providing a sign language interpreter or an accessible parking space near the interview venue. “</i></p>	<p>A clear statement will be included in invite to interview letters.</p> <p>As above</p>

	<p>Audit Scotland should communicate with the disabled candidate to ensure that the most appropriate reasonable adjustment is made for them. This might involve discussing with the candidate what is involved in the assessment so that the disabled person knows what will be required for them to fully participate.</p> <p>During interviews you should only ask a disabled candidate questions about their impairment or condition if they are relevant to the job. These questions should be phrased in a sensitive way and should be asked for a valid reason. For example, you could ask “What, if any, type of aids, adaptations or equipment could be provided to help you do this job?”</p> <p>All staff involved in the selection process, and staff at Hudson, should receive tailor made Disability Equality Training based on the social model of disability and delivered by disabled people.</p> <p>Consider inviting disabled lay people to join your interview panel as an observer.</p>	<p>HR will work with Hudson to ensure that their processes can pick up the responsibility to ask about required adjustments.</p> <p>We plan to go one step further than this recommendation and will cover relevant questions outside of the formal interview in a separate conversation so that it does not detract away from the competency based interview approach.</p> <p>The general training requirements of interviewers are currently being reviewed including how to ensure equality and avoid discrimination across all equality strands. In addition we will organise disability equality training for a selection of HR, Line managers and members of our Equality & Diversity Steering Group specifically so that they can advise panel members where a disabled candidate is being considered.</p> <p>We do not consider this recommendation to be practical for interviews where an</p>
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3.0 Next Steps

The outcomes and identified actions from this consultation event will be incorporated in the relevant project plans and equality impact assessments where applicable.

Audit Scotland commits to running regular involvement events with disabled stakeholders and will look to extend this practice to other equality strands in 2009.

Contact Details for Further Information:

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