

House of Commons Service Diversity and Inclusion Scheme 2012 – 2015

Summary

Aims and priority areas

Equality, diversity and inclusion help make the House of Commons Service respected, effective, efficient, and assist in ensuring that Members, staff and the public are well informed about what we do.

Our main priorities for the next four years are aligned with the vision, strategy and timescale of the House's Corporate Business Plan for 2012/13 to 2014/2015.

Aims

By 2015:

- a) We will have embedded equality, diversity and inclusion into our mainstream work
- b) There will be increased and enhanced access and inclusion for a diverse range of people, both for those delivering and those using our services
- c) The diversity reflected in our workforce will be represented across a wider range of pay bands and types of job We will have a number of leading edge initiatives in equality and diversity in various parts of the House, recognised internally and externally as demonstrating excellence
- e) There will be visible commitment and involvement from the leadership of the House
- f) We will have effective governance on equality and diversity with the House ably demonstrating compliance with all equality-related legislation and regulatory requirements.

Priority areas

Our four key areas for 2012-2015 are:

1. **Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into our mainstream work:** this includes integrating equality and diversity

into core business objectives and undertaking consistent equality analyses when developing or revising policies, practices and functions.

2. **Ensuring access and inclusion:** this includes cultivating attraction and retention strategies and reaching more diverse groups. Education, communication and physical access will be considered together, prioritising the up-skilling of front-line, customer-facing staff. Greater flexibility in the way we work will be considered.
3. **Support, Talent Management and Career Progression:** workplace equality networks will be extended and their services communicated effectively. We will build on our development initiatives to harness the talent of our people and encourage greater representation, particularly of minority ethnic staff at senior levels.
4. **Recognising leading edge practice in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:** we will continue to participate in a range of benchmarking indexes to measure progress, and good practice across the organisation will be recognised and celebrated.

Supporting areas

The priority areas are all supported by:

- **Leadership:** setting the tone for equality, diversity and inclusion, and demonstrating visible commitment and involvement.
- **Monitoring and Reviewing:** identifying 'blocks' to entering the House Service and progressing within it; extension of regular equality monitoring analysis and reports.

House of Commons Service

Diversity and Inclusion Scheme 2012 – 2015

Introduction

The new Diversity and Inclusion Scheme updates the House Equality Scheme (HES) 2009 - 2011 and the work that has been done to date on equality and diversity. It supports the four strategic goals of the House Corporate Business Plan to provide a 'modern, efficient and responsive' service for Members and the public by:

- 1) Making the House of Commons more **effective**
- 2) Making the House Service more **efficient**
- 3) Ensuring that Members, staff and the public are **well-informed**
- 4) Working at every level to earn **respect** for the House of Commons.

These goals are set within the current context of the need to reduce costs while enhancing effectiveness and consistency in practice across the House. Promoting diversity sits alongside these priorities as an equal.

This Scheme has been developed in line with the Equality Act 2010 and extends to all the protected characteristics in that Act, which are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Although we are not required to comply with the public sector equality duty set out in the Equality Act 2010, we believe that it is important to go beyond the minimum approach of eliminating discrimination, and our Scheme is also designed to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.

2. Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2012 to 2015

This document sets out the strategy for diversity within the House of Commons for 2012 - 2015. The diversity strategy aligns to the Corporate Plan for the House, the Diversity and Inclusion Scheme and associated Action Plan.

2.1 Background

Equality, diversity and inclusion help to make the House Service respected, effective, efficient, and well informed about what we do.

- To be **effective** we must ensure that we recruit, train and promote the best people and that our services and facilities are accessible to all. We carry out our role to facilitate good scrutiny of government, and to provide a better quality and substance of service to Members by drawing advice from a wider range of people, from different backgrounds.
- To be **efficient** we need to know that we are directing and managing our resources appropriately by reducing unnecessary staff turnover and ensuring that staff are contributing to their full potential.
- To be **well informed** we need to ensure that we monitor our workforce and the impact of our policies on our staff, customers, visitors and suppliers. This will be communicated to Members, staff and the public, providing transparent and consistent information.
- To be **respected**, we aim to set a good example to other organisations as a high profile public sector service provider and employer, and represent the community that we serve.

2.2 Aims

By 2015:

- a) We will have embedded equality, diversity and inclusion into our mainstream work.
- b) There will be increased and enhanced access and inclusion for a diverse range of people in employment at the House and stakeholders participating in parliamentary affairs in the organisation.
- c) The diversity reflected in our workforce will be represented across a wider range of pay bands and types of job than is currently the case.
- d) We will have a number of leading edge initiatives in equality and diversity in various parts of the House, recognised internally and externally as demonstrating excellence.

- e) There will be visible leadership commitment and involvement, consistently advocating the value of diversity and inclusion to the business outcomes of the House.
- f) We will have effective governance on equality and diversity with the House ably demonstrating compliance with all equality-related legislation and regulatory requirements. Clear frameworks will be in place to measure and monitor progress.

2.3 How we will achieve our aims

Embedding

We will have integrated equality and diversity into departmental business planning, and developed specific departmental action points. Senior managers will lead on specific diversity areas.

We will have developed a more consistent and comprehensive approach to carrying out equality analyses.

Specific examples in this area include:

- Departmental business plans for 2012/13 to include specific local initiatives
- Equality analysis to be applied to all major programmes by May 2012, with key staff trained in carrying out effective equality analyses.

Access and inclusion

We will work at attracting and retaining strategies which draw talent from all backgrounds, representative of society as a whole through using a range of ways of communicating the opportunities for work within the House of Commons. Making the organisation more attractive and accessible to people who might never have thought of working here is an important aim of the Clerk of the House, the chief executive.

Inclusion of disabled people will be integral to the way we operate and we will have a major focus on the skills of our customer-facing staff, including Visitors Services; tailored tours for specific groups will be developed.

We will continue with and strengthen our mentoring of young people from a range of different backgrounds, including work experience, the Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme, through our involvement in

the National Mentoring Consortium, and planning will take place for the Clerk of the House's trainees' programme.

We will enable more flexible working options in order to respond to the changing workforce and to encourage staff loyalty and motivation.

We will continue to work on removing barriers and improving accessibility and communications, to enable as many people as possible to access our services.

Specific examples in this area include:

- Attracting talented people from all backgrounds, representative of society as a whole through the development of a Clerk of the House's trainees' programme
- Comprehensive information available on the parliamentary website regarding what facilities are in place for external visitors, for example what disabled visitors can expect.

Support, Talent Management and Career Progression

We will build on a number of development initiatives, for example the 'Leading for Parliament' and 'Milestones to Management' programmes, and equality and diversity training will be a compulsory part of induction.

Consideration will be given to piloting an approach to acknowledging transferable skills and talent management.

Continued support will be given to the workplace equality networks, encouraging and enabling others to be set up.

We will aim to achieve more diversity in the feeder routes to the more senior posts and to demonstrate and track progress at pay band A and the entry point of SCS bands.

Specific examples in this area include:

- Greater visibility and consistency of information on the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion including induction starter packs for new staff, improved references in the recruitment microsite and information to support new Members and their staff
- Work to clarify talent management and career progression and how they are addressed through development programmes and activities for all pay bands.

Recognition of leading edge practice in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We will measure our performance through participating in a variety of benchmarking exercises and recognise and celebrate good practice in the organisation.

We will build on our equality monitoring and analysis and take action where we identify under-representation.

Specific examples in this area include:

- Participating in the Stonewall Diversity Champions workplace equality index and tracking progress
- Launching awards to recognise outstanding staff contributions to improving equality, diversity and inclusion.

3. Our commitment to diversity and inclusion

The HES 2009 - 2011 and these proposals have come at a time of heightened consciousness about human rights and disadvantage. The recent emphasis in society at large on human rights, equality and diversity, as they are reflected through the prism of the make-up of Members of Parliament, sets the tone for, and raised the profile of, issues of diversity and inclusion. A number of people have commented that the large intake of new Members at the last General Election has had an impact on the behaviours on those working on the parliamentary estate.

At the most basic level, as the constitutional body that makes law, the House of Commons ought to not only comply with the law but, beyond that, should be seen as an exemplar of implementing the equality legislation that it has passed. This is part of its democratic role of representing the people that it serves by ensuring that the services that it delivers are accessible to, and meeting the needs of, its customers. Diversity needs to be embedded in the way the organisation works: the way it treats its staff, customers and suppliers, and the way it orders its priorities and makes its decisions. The greater the diversity within the Commons, the more diverse is its reach outside Parliament. This, however, is a complex task. The House is a traditional and perhaps risk-averse institution. However, we see equality, diversity and inclusion as integral to our work. We do not want to be perceived as exclusive and elitist. Whilst we continue to value age and experience, we wish to harness the best of innovation and change and to welcome diversity. The Diversity and Inclusion Scheme is part of a strategy to help people understand what a mature, responsible organisation can do to bring about the kind of equal treatment that is at the heart of the core values of the House Service.

4. The business case for equality, diversity and inclusion

Equality, diversity and inclusion help make the House of Commons Service respected, effective, efficient, and assists in ensuring that people are well informed about what we do.

Representative

There is a strong argument for the House of Commons staff to be more diverse and representative of the diversity of the nation. This contributes to us being a world-class parliament in terms of perceptions of the general public, and demonstrating leadership to the nation in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Inclusive

Having greater diversity, being more inclusive and making sure that people can progress and perform to their full potential reduces the risk of 'groupthink', and will achieve things more swiftly and to a better standard. Diversity and an inclusive approach help to break down perceptions that the House is a white male environment and encourage engagement from under-represented groups. The law, with which a diversity and inclusion scheme ultimately seeks to comply, is founded on strong moral principles of human rights and natural justice.

Effective

Drawing from a wide range of people gives us the best chance of getting access to the best people who have different backgrounds and characteristics, offering beneficially diverse perspectives and approaches.

- To be respected, we aim to:
 - Set a good example to other organisations as a high profile public sector service provider and employer, and represent the communities that we serve
 - By representing the country and taking forward the principles of democracy we need to show we represent *all* the people of this country. We need to challenge traditional ways of thinking and show we have people who understand what life in the UK is like today. Appearances matter: if what they see does not reflect the reality of their lives it is less likely that they are going to engage with or respect parliament.

- To be effective we must ensure that:
 - Our services and facilities are accessible to all. The priorities of the House can be integrated with the diversity and inclusion

- agenda, such as 'harnessing technology' which has already realised benefits in the subtitled debates for visitors with hearing impairments. 'Engaging with the public' and 'improving communications' have many implications for diversity and inclusion in that it has traditionally been marginalised groups within society who have been excluded from the activities of Parliament, had more difficulty in accessing the national legislature and engaging with their representatives, or suffered from inadequate means of communicating with it
- We recruit, train and promote the best people. If certain groups are consciously or unconsciously excluded from consideration, the organisation will lose access to its best people. By not appealing to the full range of people, organisations limit their potential to recruit the best people into the organisation
 - Our staff have confidence that there are no glass ceilings. Diversity in the workforce, and different ways of advancing in the organisation, will enrich the experience of working here and improve the quality of the decisions we make and the services we deliver.
- To be efficient and well informed we need to:
 - Know that we are directing and managing our resources appropriately by reducing unnecessary staff turnover and ensuring that staff are contributing to their full potential - unhappy staff are not productive – and eliminating discrimination that deflects concentration on the work of the House of Commons
 - Ensure that our people are well informed so that we can communicate and engage effectively with a broad range of people. It is important that we present ourselves as an organisation that represents the needs of the people, that this is recognised by those people, and that they have confidence in us as an organisation that will meet their expectations and deliver what they want
 - Recognise that greater diversity amongst decision makers makes for better decisions. Diversity can be an engine of creativity, and that in itself is challenging to a culture where ideas of precedent and consensus have long been dominant. The more minority ethnic people, or women or disabled people there are within the House of Commons, the easier it is for the structure of the House to change things and deliver more inclusive services.
 - Ensure that effective action on the Diversity and Inclusion Scheme is taken and progressed with leadership and support from the Management Board and the House of Commons Commission. This increases understanding and enhances the likelihood of successful outcomes.

5. Our priority areas for 2012-2015

Building on our achievements in the HES 2009-2011, we now have the right building blocks in place and are in a position to move to greater mainstreaming of equality and diversity into the way we work. With greater diversity will come different ways of thinking and contributing and we need to be ready for that, to be less risk-averse, and welcome and value differences. We need to encourage a lively and challenging environment, get wider understanding of the integral value of equality, diversity and inclusion, where all staff feel able to contribute ideas, and be prepared to be challenged about the way we do things. To be a first class organisation we must give adequate prominence and priority to equality, diversity and inclusion. We have therefore decided on our main priorities for the next four years, aligned with the timescale of the Strategy for the House of Commons Service 2010-2015.

Our four key areas for 2012-2015 are:

1. Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into our mainstream work
2. Ensuring access and inclusion
3. Support, Talent Management and Career Progression
4. Recognising leading edge practice in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

These are all supported by Leadership, Monitoring and Reviewing.

6.1 Key area 1: Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into our mainstream work

Consideration will be given to agreeing diversity objectives for senior managers at Board and Director levels. In addition, departments will consider ways to integrate equality and diversity into their business planning, and develop specific action points for their own area of work. This, along with more consistent and comprehensive equality analyses, will contribute to embedding equality and diversity within the mainstream operations.

We have already seen the benefits from our development of equality analyses (equality impact assessments), which have a high level of importance in managing risk and in promoting equality. There is a need to build on the EA training and embed EAs in a meaningful way in the House so that they become an automatic part of business planning, new policies and programmes and not an 'add-on'.

We will ensure that we raise with Members the equality implications of their decisions. For example, sitting late has an impact not only on the practicalities of organising the work of the House, but also has an impact in human terms. Someone working in Hansard who has young children may not see their children at all on certain days if they are required to be there all day and evening.

6.2 Key area 2: Ensuring access and inclusion

There are many career routes into the House of Commons Service and we need to cultivate effective attraction and retention strategies which draw talent from all backgrounds, representative of society as a whole. This message will be communicated to any recruitment agencies we use and we will pro-actively seek ways of reaching more diverse groups through, for example, sending information to minority ethnic student groups or professional associations as relevant. We will give consideration to the range of uniforms that can be provided for uniformed roles such as Visitors' Assistants, catering staff or Doorkeepers which would be appropriate for different religious groups. This would include, for example, Muslim women who may wish to wear the hijab but be in a uniform along with other colleagues. Outward publicity of our workplace equality networks may help in projecting the message of inclusiveness. We will continue with and strengthen our mentoring of young people from a range of different backgrounds, including the Windsor Fellowship, the Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme, and through our involvement in the National Mentoring Consortium. One of the overall aims of the Clerk of the House is to make working for the House attractive and accessible to people who might not have thought of doing so. One of the ways of realising this aim is the development of a new Clerk of the House's trainees' programme. Targeting of internships for young disabled people, particularly those using wheelchairs, will be given consideration. We need to communicate the opportunities for part-time working and/or job-sharing, flexible working at all levels in a positive and encouraging way, provide clear criteria about eligibility to apply for a career break, and also communicate effectively with staff on maternity leave, ensuring their smooth integration on return. With this in mind, an internal register for those interested in job-sharing will be considered. These points are likely to become more of a requirement as we retain staff to an older age, given the removal of the default retirement age. Greater flexibility and different ways of working mean that we will need to address the negative impacts

of a long hours culture and consider holding meetings only in agreed core hours. Consideration will be given to what IT support is available for people working from home. All of these ways of enabling flexible options provide a non-monetised benefit and lead to staff loyalty and motivation.

Information about what prayer facilities are available will be more effectively communicated to staff, Members and Members' staff through our intranet site and other communication methods. There will be further exploration of what provision can be made in each of the main buildings of the Parliamentary Estate.

Although positive attitudes to inclusion of disabled people should be integral to the way we operate, they are often separated in practice with the result that staff can be extremely helpful to disabled people, but in an inconsistent way. Education, communication and physical access should be considered together, with a major focus on the skills of our front-line customer-facing staff, including Visitor Services. Tailored tours for specific groups will be developed. Comprehensive information on what disabled visitors can expect will be made available on the internet and in other formats. This will help to inform people about how best to access our services and what adjustments we might need to consider.

With regard to physical accessibility, an underpinning principle is to inform our work with input from disabled people. Some key issues that we need to address are wheelchair access to the Commons Marquee without having to go through the smoking area of the Lords; lack of space in some of the rooms for the Public Bill Committees; continued work of the Signage project and enhancing the signage to all disabled access points including entrance doors at Portcullis House; equal treatment of disabled people on visiting the House (i.e. they should also have photos taken and supplied with photo IDs in the same way as non-disabled people); providing pagers for Members with hearing impairments to hear the division bell; relocation of the shop which is inaccessible for wheelchair users and problematic for those with mobility difficulties; routine maintenance of wheelchairs which are available on loan to visitors or staff; and timely responses to requests for reasonable adjustments.

Priority groups for disability awareness training, and for wider equality and diversity training, are the Doorkeepers and the customer-facing staff including Visitor Services, Attendants (in Facilities and on reception desks), and security staff.

6.3 Key area 3: Support, Talent Management and Career Progression

The principles of equality, diversity and inclusion need to be highlighted and integrated into the values of the organisation in an explicit and continuous message. Effective communication about the strategy and

scheme will inform staff what is available, thereby maximising the take-up of opportunities. This should begin with the induction pack and the Staff Handbook, which should contain information on the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion in the organisation, including information on all the workplace equality networks, thus integrating this into the mainstream and not treating it as an 'add-on'.

The networks have implications for 'respect' in that they 'bring together people from disparate parts of the parliamentary village' and positively affect the culture of the organisation by according the views of the network a respectful platform. As such, the networks should be extended, if senior minority ethnic individuals can be involved, to include ethnicity/race. ParliAble should build a relationship with those involved in the Strategy for the Access to Elected Office for Disabled People. In addition, there should be a move towards the coordination of all networks and their involvement in the induction of new staff and mentoring; policy consultation; equality analysis. Their work should be publicised on the intranet and consideration given to some information being made available on the internet, as this would then be accessible to potential applicants, the visiting public, and other service users.

Greater representation, particularly of minority ethnic staff at senior level, would help drive cultural change by itself – with diversity comes different ways of thinking and the working environment needs to be one where this is welcomed. We recognise that there is untapped potential in our pool of staff and aim to build on a number of development initiatives, for example the Leading for Parliament and the Milestones to Management programmes. We need to ensure that there is equality of access to development programmes, including for part-time staff. Equality and diversity training will now be a compulsory part of induction, a requirement during the first nine months in post (i.e. during their probation period), and for those who are already confirmed in their posts, but who have not attended equality and diversity training.

Further work is required across the board to be clear about what competences are required for different levels of jobs. This will help those at more junior levels identify what they should be aiming for if they wish to move into more senior positions. They are likely to have skills which are not apparent in their current role and consideration will be given to piloting an approach to acknowledging transferable skills and talent management.

The Department of Chamber and Committee Services has the highest percentage of senior level posts. As a result, we also aim to have demonstrably increasing diversity year on year at pay bands A and SCS. Although the profile of staff in the department has changed, and they are no longer all from one specific elite educational background, the

perception of an elite group of Clerks remains. Communication about its current diversity would help to break down some old stereotypes.

To achieve even greater representation of people from more diverse backgrounds at the more senior levels, there would need to be increasing diversity in the feeder routes to the more senior posts. There needs to be a welcoming of diversity and the benefits that it brings, rather than a disempowerment of minorities, who feel the pressure to 'fit in' with the predominant culture. Setting equality targets, particularly for minority ethnic staff, might assist to diversify the profile of those in the feeder levels to SCS – the leaders of tomorrow. The Leading for Parliament development programme will be an important contributor to this.

6.4 Key area 4: Recognition of leading edge practice in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We will take part in a range of benchmarking indexes in order to measure ourselves against other organisations. We will consider developing our own internal Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Awards, in recognition of leading edge practice.

6.5 Supporting areas

In support of our four key issues will be our increased focus on leadership in equality and diversity, and shaping future leadership. In addition, we will concentrate more efforts on monitoring and reviewing both our staff profile, in various ways, and our impact.

Leadership

The Speaker has set a positive tone for equality, diversity and inclusion within the House and the assumption by the Clerk of the House of the role of Diversity Champion demonstrates visible leadership, commitment and involvement. Management Board members have taken on roles as diversity champions on specific issues. The Diversity Team is a focus of excellence that enables transformational change towards our corporate goals. This leadership will continue, with more specific roles of the Diversity Champions clarified.

The 'Leading for Parliament' development programme, which has a focus on leadership rather than management, is an important development. Ensuring that it is taken up by a wide range of people, reflective of diversity, *as well as* integrating equality and diversity into the programme content, will go some way to shaping future leadership in line with the diversity and inclusion strategy.

Monitoring and reviewing

We have extended our equality monitoring of staff to cover the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. Monitoring helps to identify any 'blocks' either to entry to the organisation or progression/movement around within it. We plan to build on this and carry out regular analysis and reporting, on a quarterly or six-monthly basis. Regular analysis at departmental and at some directorate levels will help us assess how well we are doing. For example, equality monitoring reports may be produced in relation to:

- Overall staff profile, by all protected characteristics and including data on part-time staff
- Recruitment (applications, shortlisted, appointed)
- Fast streamers
- Take-up of various developmental programmes (Leading for Parliament and Milestones To Management)
- How long specific groups of staff have been at certain levels
- Career progression of returnees from maternity leave
- Leavers (including data from exit interviews)
- Grievances and disciplinaries (including outcomes of applying the Respect policy)
- Reasonable adjustments made for disabled staff
- Take-up of paternity leave
- Usage and impact of Respect policy
- Attendance on equality and diversity training programmes
- Regular gender pay audits.

It is noted that there is no monitoring of Members' staff and there is only anecdotal evidence that, for example, there are few minority ethnic people working for Members. Consideration will be given to raising this and conducting a one-off snapshot report which would provide an indication of profile at a single point in time and would be a starting point to consider more comprehensive monitoring. Additionally, we will consider how we might monitor who is accessing our services and how to use this information to improve our service delivery to all.

7. Communication of the House Diversity and Inclusion Scheme 2012-2015

The Scheme will be widely communicated across the House of Commons Service, with an emphasis on the three key issues of Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into our mainstream work; Ensuring access and inclusion; and Support, Talent Management and Career Progression.

A detailed action plan will be drawn up by the Diversity team and areas of responsibility allocated, with regular monitoring and reporting on progress.

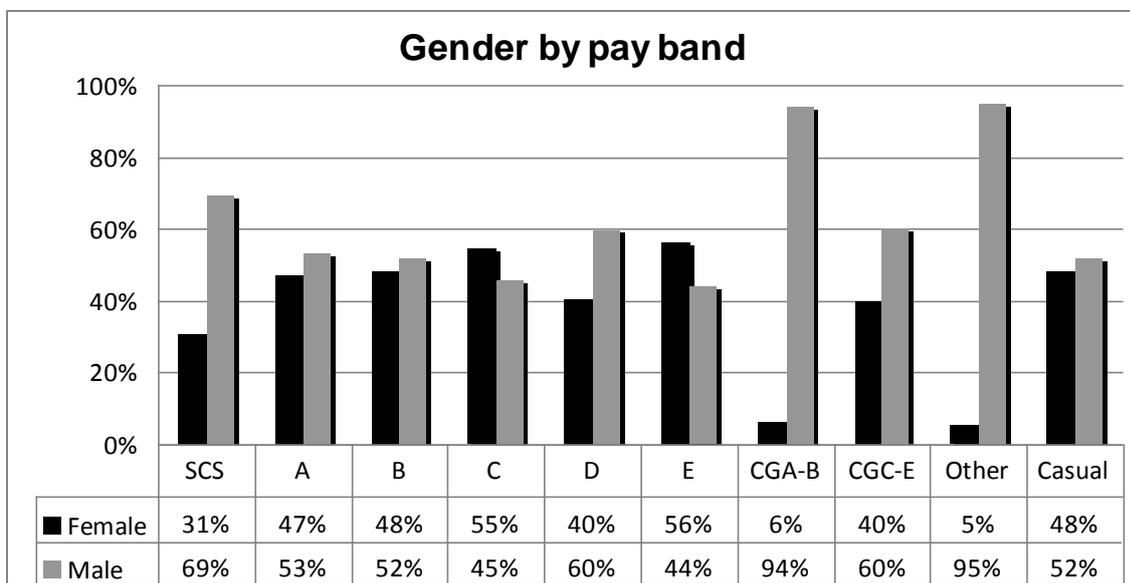
Annex 1

Selected equality monitoring data

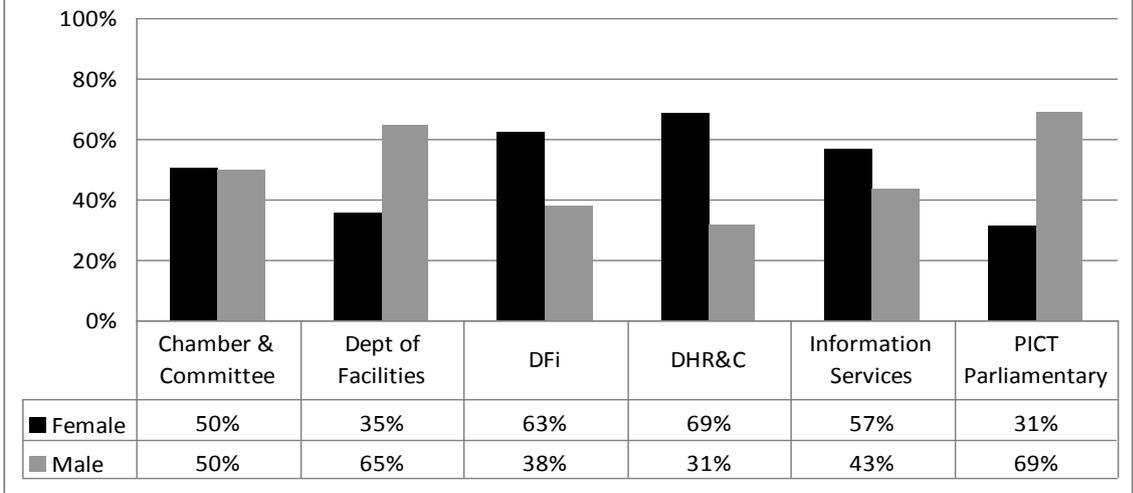
This is the staff profile data at **30 September 2011**. Figures exclude unknown data.

Gender

Overall, women are 46% of the workforce. This varies across pay bands and department.

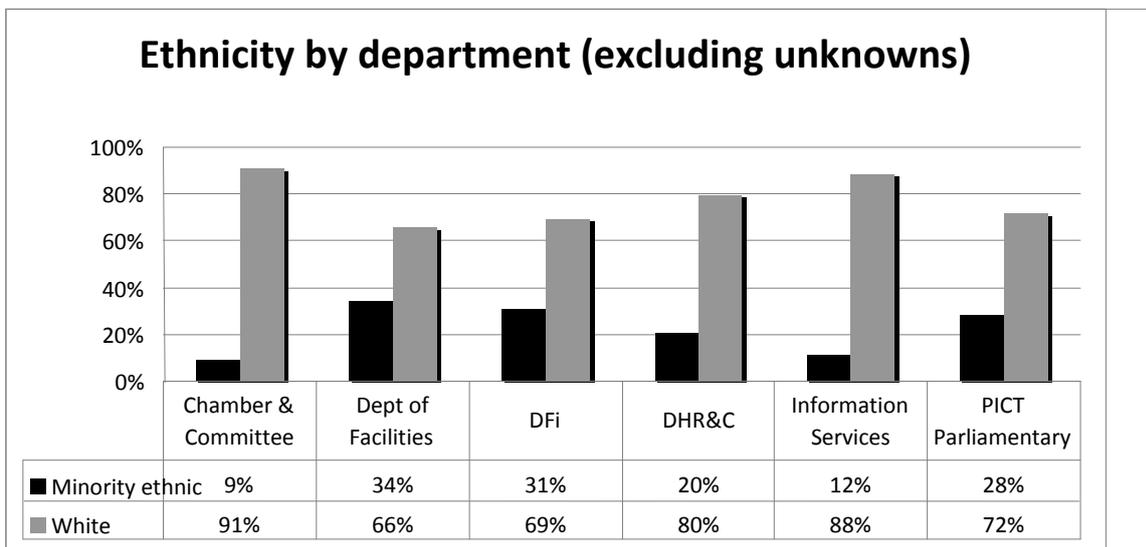
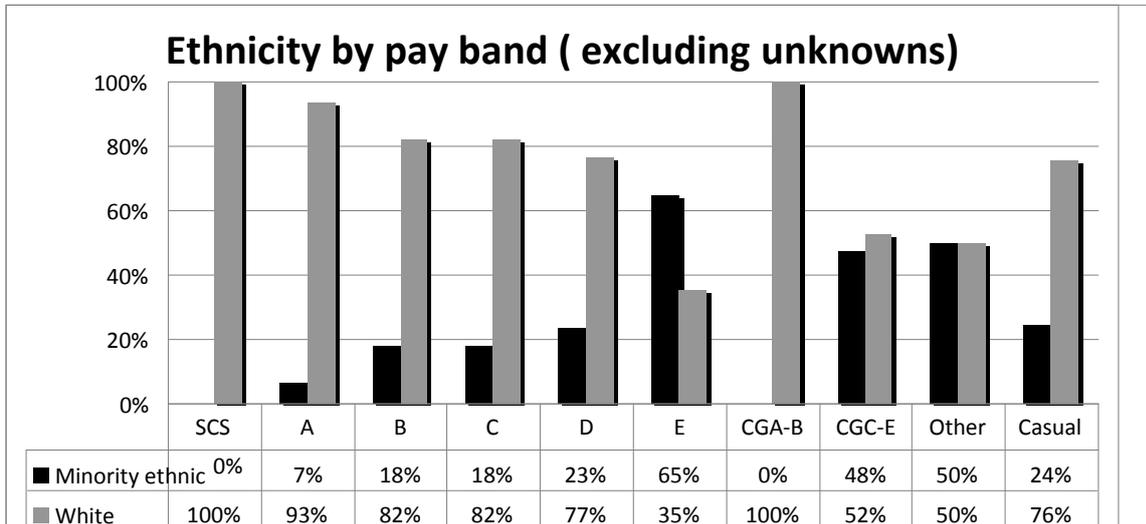


Gender by department



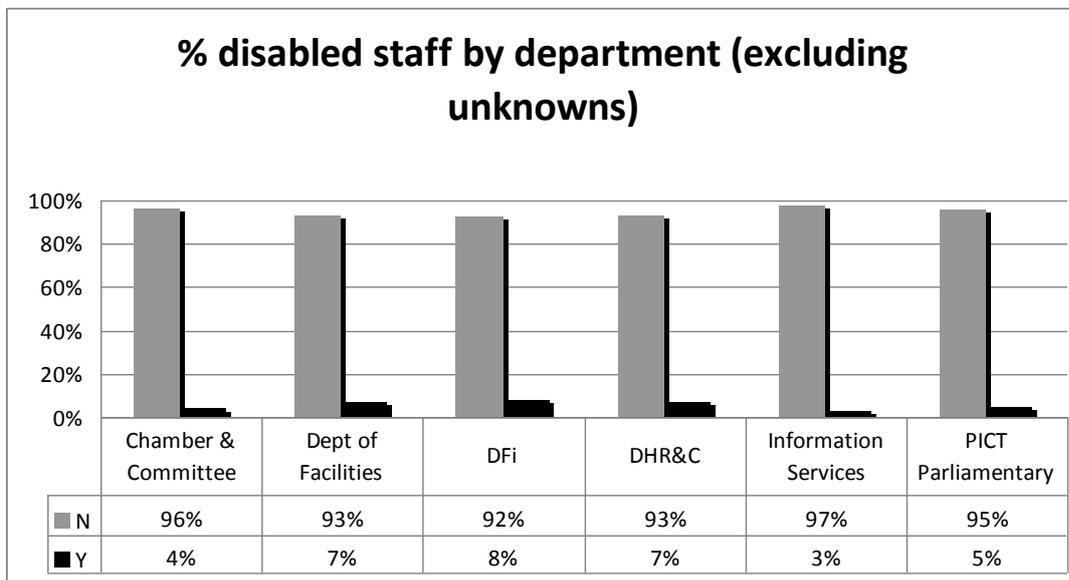
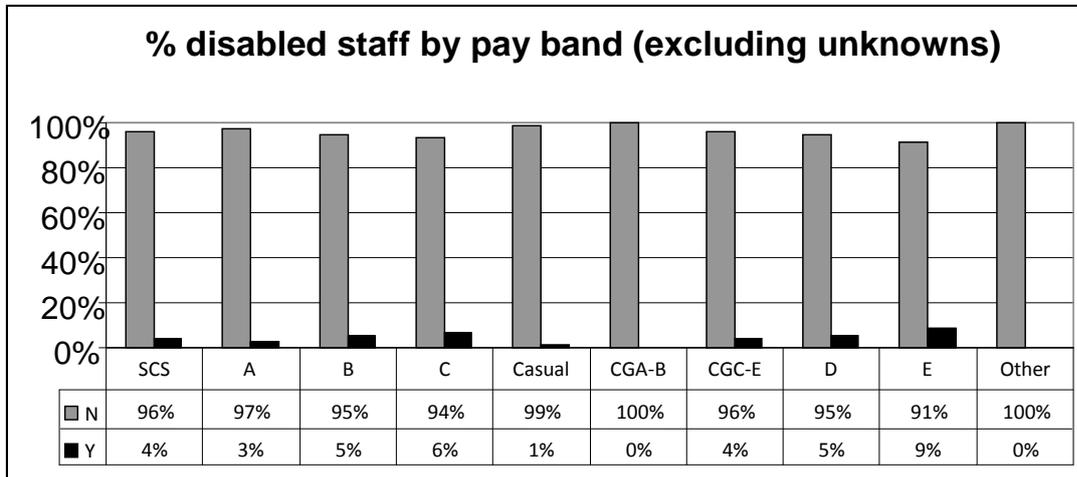
Ethnicity

Overall, minority ethnic staff are 21% of the workforce (known ethnicity). This varies across pay band and department. These figures exclude 334 employees for whom ethnicity is unknown.



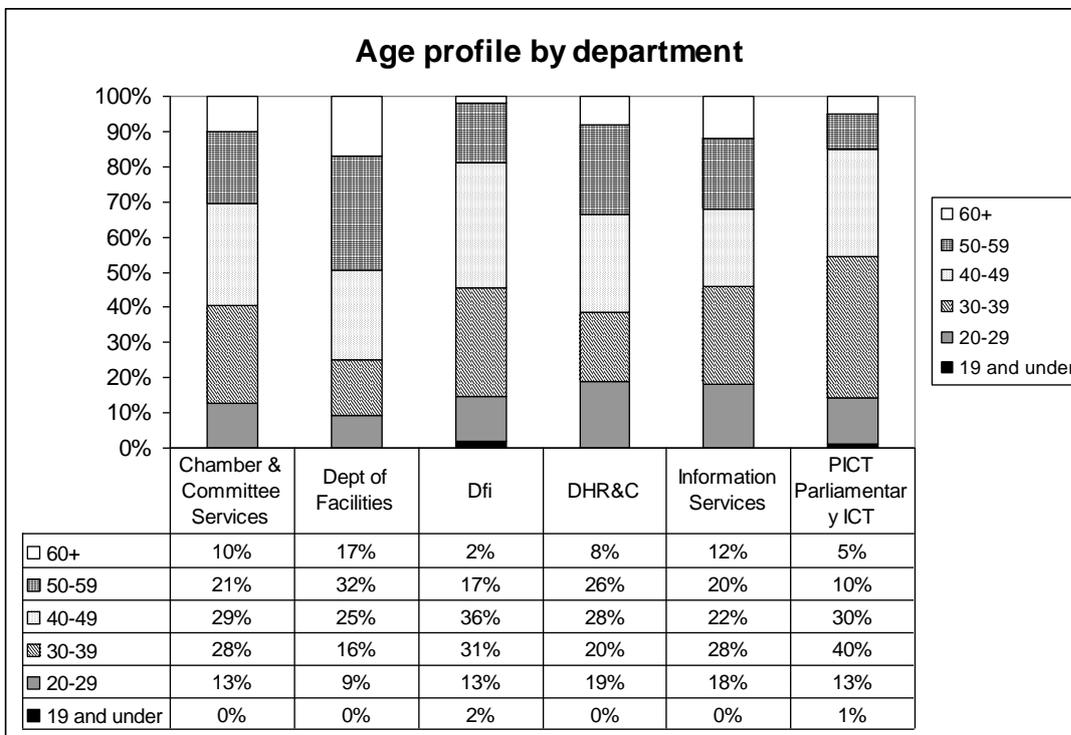
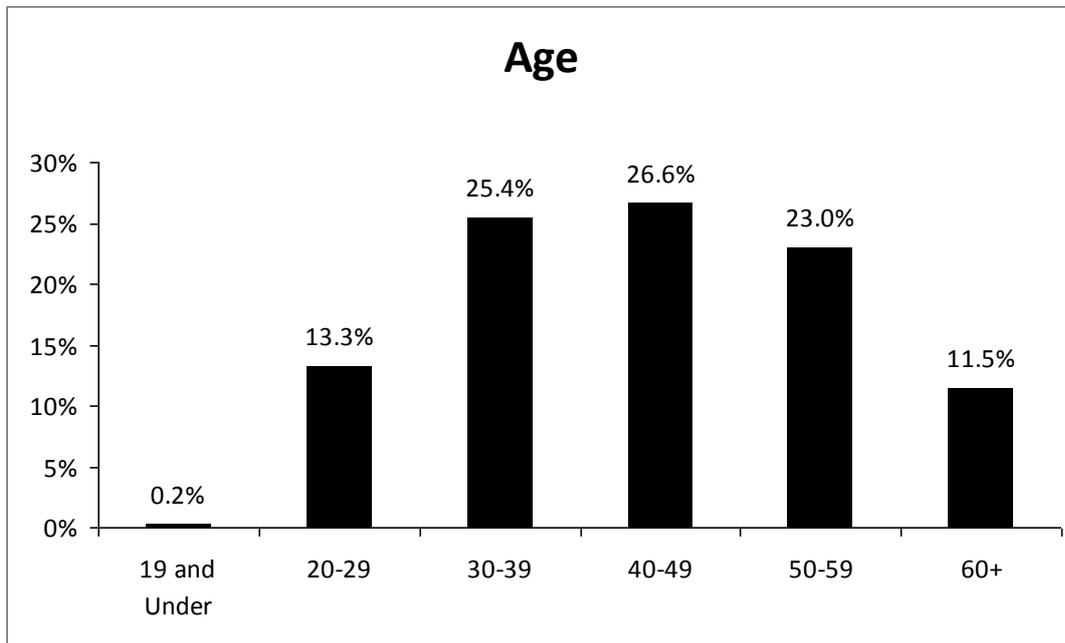
Disability

Overall, disabled staff are 5% of the workforce (known disability status). This varies across pay band and department. These figures exclude 670 employees for whom disability status is unknown.



Age

The following shows the age profile of staff across the whole organisation.



Annex 2

List of Equality Analyses carried out during 2010-2011

The House carries out equality analyses (previously called equality impact assessments) of policies and functions. A procedure is in place and, further to initial testing, is in the process of being adapted and streamlined. Over 60 staff have attended the equality impact assessment training programme which included carrying out an equality impact assessment relevant to their work.

To date, equality analyses have begun on the following:

- Commercial Services Directorate improvement plan
- Change to Doorkeepers' working patterns
- Retirement
- Savings Programme
- Valuing Others policy
- 2011 sitting of the UK Youth Parliament
- Voluntary Exit Scheme
- Higher Starting Pay
- Human Resource Policies Practices and Programmes (HRPPP)
- Portcullis House Atrium review

Annex 3

Summary of key elements of the Equality Act 2010

Purpose

The Equality Act 2010 replaced previous anti-discrimination legislation with a single act to streamline and simplify the legislation, and to harmonise protection for all of the characteristics covered.

Protected characteristics

The protected characteristics under the Act are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

Types of Discrimination

Under the Act people are not allowed to discriminate (directly or indirectly), harass or victimise another person because they have any of the protected characteristics. There is also protection against discrimination where someone is perceived to have one of the protected characteristics or where they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic.

Changes

As the Act is an amalgamation and harmonisation of existing law, there are not many major changes, but rather some removal of inconsistencies. For example, indirect discrimination is being extended to apply to disability and gender reassignment for the first time. The prohibition on direct discrimination on grounds of pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment will apply in schools for the first time. The Act also introduces some new provisions such as the prohibition on discrimination arising from disability.

Public sector equality duty

Public authorities who are listed as subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty have a statutory duty to seek to eliminate unlawful discrimination

and advance equality of opportunity and good relations between different groups in society. Although the House of Commons is not included in the list of bodies which have this statutory duty, the elements of the public sector equality duty would be helpful for any organisation aiming to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion. The duty is to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Annex 4

Review process for the House Equality Scheme 2009-2011 and development of new Scheme

Over 70 people (staff, Members, Members' staff and visitors) contributed their views about progress made on equality, diversity and inclusion during the period covered by the House Equality Scheme (HES) and made suggestions for priority areas to be covered by the new Diversity and Inclusion Scheme. In addition, documentation providing information about action taken was studied. The following steps were taken to carry out the work.

- Collection and study of a set of internal documents reporting on progress on action points within the HES 2009-2011.
- Identification of information required to provide evidence/further information about achievements to date. This was provided by the Diversity team.
- Preparation of semi-structured questionnaire for discussions with staff, Members, and Members' staff.
- Open invitation to all staff to express an interest in participating in the review was sent out by the Diversity team. Specific invitations sent to staff and Members who had participated in the development of the HES 2009–2011. This was supplemented by some requests to individuals in order to ensure that evidence was gathered relating to all the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.
- Interviews were recorded, with the permission of the interviewees, for the sole purpose of supplementing the notes.
- The findings from the interviews and from the study of the documentation relevant to the HES action points fed into the draft of the new equality scheme.
- Draft report submitted to the Diversity team who finalised the new House Diversity and Inclusion Equality Scheme.

Reviewing the impact: what we have achieved

In the two years that the HES has been in place, real progress can be reported on a range of equality initiatives affecting the House of Commons Service staff, their relationships with Members, and the general experiences of the visiting public. The Diversity team has achieved a high

level of impact on addressing equality and diversity in our work. The team is involved in 'mainstream' as well as specialist activities, providing information, advice and data upon request, and being proactive across a range of services. The launch of the HES coincided with the report of the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation which raised several issues which also affect staff, for example childcare issues, late night sitting and impact on family life, increased access for disabled people, and the holding of civil partnership ceremonies within the Palace of Westminster. The Speaker's leadership has proved to be important as a focal point and a motivating factor for staff, and the Clerk of the House and Chief Executive has taken on the role of Diversity Champion, signalling leadership and support from the top. Members of the Management Board have taken on roles as Diversity Champions for specific areas of equality, for example gender and disability.

The HES Action Plan comprised 49 action points. A large percentage of these have either been carried out or are in progress. Below are some examples of noteworthy progress.

1. Improved access: staff, Members, the public

Access for disabled people was a priority area of the HES and progress has been made in this area, whilst recognising some restrictions due to the heritage of the building. Further to access audits, including checks and feedback from disabled staff and visitors, work has continued on making aspects of the environment accessible to disabled people, including the gym, toilets, and providing handrails in some areas. There is now guidance on and for visitors with disabilities, and work has been done on access to committee rooms, for example by making more space for wheelchair users in committee rooms.

Specific tours for disabled people and adjustments to standard tours have been discussed with a view to creating targeted tours. Training on equality and diversity has addressed disability issues. A further initiative is the streaming of live subtitling for visitors in the Public Gallery, including for Prime Minister's Questions. In the Chamber lapel microphones are available particularly for Members in wheelchairs, who can find themselves too far away to be picked up on the freestanding mics. Induction loops provided in Committee rooms have had very positive feedback from visitors.

An audit on portable signage has been carried out, to ensure consistency and good state of repair, and standards of fonts, colours and background for signage will be set across the Estate. Guides in Braille have been produced, but not yet in large print.

Improved facilities for staff have been another focus of attention. Although the House of Commons and Parliamentary Information Communication and Technology (PICT) have been providing reasonable adjustments for a number of years, a new form makes it easier to assist employees and line managers. The purpose of the form is to provide an accurate record of what arrangements have been agreed between staff and line manager; to provide a basis for future discussions regarding what reasonable adjustments are needed; and, importantly, to minimise the need for re-negotiations of adjustments every time the employee changes role or there is a change of manager. This is in place in order to address any undue delay in getting adjustments made.

2. Integrating equality and diversity into our policies and functions

The first set of training sessions has been run on conducting equality impact assessments (now called equality analyses [EA], in line with the Equality Act 2010 and associated guidance), with over 60 staff attending. Several equality analyses have now taken place including, for example, a high level EA on the Savings Programme. These are beneficial in taking equality and diversity into account when developing policies or programmes with a large impact on people, and also help mitigate any risk associated with overlooking the potential for unintentional discrimination or exclusion.

Taking effect from November 2011, reports to the Board are required to include a comment about whether an equality analysis has been undertaken.

Equality principles are included in the procurement process, and we are more aware about the need to think about equality, diversity and accessibility issues when we procure services from outside the House. For example, in the bidding for 'Leading for Parliament' contracts we ensured that those tendering were not only required to submit their equality policy, but also asked them for examples of good equality practice. The Diversity team assessed that element of submissions.

A mechanism for addressing harassment between different groups on the estate has been established. This Respect Policy establishes a clear process for House staff to use if they consider that a Member or a member of his or her staff has behaved inappropriately towards them. It provides an agreed protocol for the prompt and thorough investigation of a complaint and, if found to have basis, for its resolution. It formalises the investigation process, ensures consistency of treatment and focuses on achieving a resolution that is acceptable to the complainant.

3. Employment cycle

There have been a number of achievements regarding the working environment, the Workplace Equality Networks (WENs) and the Nursery possibly being the most high profile of these.

A major achievement during the life of the HES has been the establishment of the first three WENs for all passholders on the Parliamentary Estate. Further to an invitation to all staff to consider setting up groups relating to the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act, people came forward on three issues. The first network to be launched was ParliOut (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) which was believed to reinforce the relatively positive environment and aims to 'normalise' the issue of being gay through a programme of distinguished speakers, and an advice and guidance service. It was noted that this group is predominantly gay men and there are only a few gay women members to date. Second to be launched was ParliAble (Disability), which plans amongst other things to have events with key speakers, and to be a resource to be consulted on access issues, including for Members.

The third group to date is the developing gender network. The WENs have the clear support of the Speaker, who opened up Speaker's House for the launch events, and gave keynote speeches at them. Open to staff, Members, Members' staff and Peers, these are quite high profile and have got off to a very good start.

After much effort and working to a tight deadline, the House of Commons Nursery opened on 1 September 2010 on the Parliamentary Estate. The facility is for the use of Members, Members' staff and staff of the House. This is a major step forward in supporting women returning from maternity leave.

The latest equal pay audit, undertaken in 2011 prior to pay negotiations, has shown that the risk of equal pay claims is low. An equal pay audit of SCS staff was undertaken in 2010. Our approach to conducting such audits is now well established and they can be undertaken efficiently. Concern about the under-representation of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in a broad range of the jobs at the House remains and several initiatives have to take place which either directly aim to address this, or indirectly have that impact. The UK Youth Parliament, for example, is far more representative of the composition of the UK and includes delegates with a range of protected characteristics, including minority ethnic young people. The Speaker's Apprenticeship Scheme is being reviewed and is a route for greater access for under-represented groups.

The Diversity team have built up expertise in providing support on transgender and a framework to provide appropriate support is in place. This includes information and examples of communicating to the wider

team, and drawing up and agreeing timelines whilst maintaining flexibility. Their approach has received positive feedback about how they have supported transgendered staff and their colleagues, both internally and externally.

In general, experience shows that changing the profile of staff, and having 'role models' helps break down stereotypes and perceived barriers. For example, Doorkeepers in the Serjeant at Arms Directorate have considerably diversified from the 'middle-aged, white, preferably army or forces background' to a team which now comprises women and minority ethnic staff.

4. Training

Training has been reviewed, adjustments made, and equality and diversity principles integrated into programmes. Equality, diversity and inclusion training sessions for managers and non-managers have been run with the result that managers feel more informed and confident in dealing with equality issues. Members of selection board have undertaken appropriate training on the importance of non-discriminatory practice. Several staff have been trained in British Sign Language to level two, with level three training being planned.

5. Monitoring

To reflect the extended protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010, we have expanded our equality monitoring of staff to include requesting data on religion and belief, sexual orientation and gender identity. Guidance was prepared for staff including a note of frequently asked questions which addressed key issues of concern.

6. Reporting

Regular reports on progress made have been submitted to the Management Board.