

Equality & Diversity Objectives 2016–2020





Forestry Commission's legal obligations

As a public sector organisation, the Forestry Commission (FC) is subject to the legal obligations placed upon it by the Equality Act 2010.

Under the Equality Act 2010 the Forestry Commission has two **Specific Duties** to fulfil to achieve the General Duty.



The first Specific Duty is to publish an annual report by 31 January that demonstrates compliance with the General Duty. This annual report includes statistical analysis of staff and job applicants, in order to measure and evaluate our progress. This Monitoring Report also includes details of customer services provided to diverse communities. It is available on our website.

The second of the Specific Duties is to publish and review Equality Objectives every four years from April 2012. The objectives must be specific and measurable. These objectives will enable the Forestry Commission to deliver the high-level strategic aims and objectives as outlined in its People Strategy and Diversity Strategy. This document outlines our second set of objectives in detail, including why they were determined and how progress will be measured.

The objectives have been selected to ensure that the Forestry Commission meets the three aims of the General Duty as outlined in the Equality Act.

The three aims of the General Duty are:

- To eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- To advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups;
- To foster good relations between people from different groups.

The General Duty applies to both FC staff and customers. The 'groups' referred to are those with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. There are nine in total – age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. With regard to marriage and civil partnership, only the first aim of the General Duty applies.

Our mission and key functions

The Forestry Commission's mission is to protect and expand Britain's forests and woodlands and increase their value to society and the environment.

Compliance with the General Duty will contribute to meeting the FC's high-level objective of increasing the value of England and Scotland's forests and woodlands to society, and specifically for those people with one or more of the nine protected characteristics.

The Forestry Commission was established to deliver very specific functions and responsibilities. Not all of those are relevant to the diversity agenda or can contribute to achieving the General Duty, e.g. timber production or woodland species biodiversity and conservation. In addition, like all public sector organisations, the Forestry Commission has limited resources and must apply those to maximise the value of public funds.

Each part of the Forestry Commission has a corporate plan which outlines key work programmes and business objectives. We have assessed these functions with regard to their relevance to the General Duty. The detailed assessment can be found at Appendix 1. A copy of this is available on request.

Therefore, in order to achieve our Equality Objectives, and the aims of the General Duty, we will focus on those areas of our business where we can really make a difference.

In summary, we have developed specific and measurable objectives with regard to our staff and our services directly for customers relating to their recreation, health and education. There is little about our work with regard to timber harvesting and marketing, species biodiversity and conservation, tree health research and protection, renewable energy development, climate change, forestry standards, ecosystems etc., that can contribute to achieving the General Duty because although people benefit from this work, the benefit is not derived directly in the way that our customer services are.





FC approach to the diversity agenda

It is worth highlighting that, by their very nature, the opportunities for recreation within Forestry Commission woodlands are already open and available to all communities. It is estimated that there are over 50 million visitors every year to our woodlands. As access is generally free and open to everyone, our visitors do not always come into contact with FC staff through formally organised activities and/or our visitor centres, but are the regular visitors who visit the woodland to walk their dogs, exercise or enjoy the countryside/nature experience entirely independently.

As part of our ongoing commitment to customer service we undertake a range of surveys. Some of these are conducted on a regular basis to compare and test customer satisfaction and explore needs. These range from Public Opinion Surveys, site questionnaires, focus groups, feedback forms, etc. Where appropriate the surveys are analysed by the Forestry Commission Statistics Team who are responsible for compiling reports based on their analysis. This team provides reports to the Management Boards within England and Scotland. The Diversity Team liaise with this team to use the data, explore where gaps exist within the data and advise how the gaps can be filled.

During 2015 we conducted Public Opinion Surveys in Scotland and England. The Surveys indicate that people have a great interest in visiting forests and that around two thirds or more of all respondents said they had visited forests or woodlands in the last few years.

The Public Opinion Survey records positive responses from respondents in different categories. Those that responded "Yes" to the question 'In the last few years, have you visited forests or woodlands for walks, picnics or other recreation?' also declared the following information in relation to their protected characteristics: 17% disabled; 51% female, 49% male; 6% BAME, 94% white; and, 46% aged 44 or less with 54% aged 45 or over.

We are increasingly creating woodlands close to towns, to give more people and communities the opportunity to experience these rich green spaces. Those that responded "Yes" to the question 'Types of woodlands visited – Woodlands in and around towns.' also declared the following information in relation to their protected characteristics: 20% disabled; 48% female, 52% male; 9% BAME, 91% white; and, 54% aged 44 or less with 46% aged 45 or over.





Those that responded “Yes” to the question ‘Types of woodlands visited – Woodlands in the countryside’ also declared the following information in relation to their protected characteristics: 18% disabled; 48% female, 52% male; 2% BAME, 98% white; and, 45% aged 44 or less with 55% aged 45 or over.

The responses given by participants of the Public Opinion Survey highlighted that there are various reasons why people do not visit forests. These reasons include personal mobility problems (difficulty in walking, etc.), not having a car or that woods were too far away.

Our initiative of creating and facilitating the creation of woods close to towns should, over time, mean that more people have access to woodlands that are closer to where they work and/or live. We also continually review our existing facilities to ensure they are available and accessed by as wide a range of people as possible. To ensure that these facilities meet the needs, where possible, of all our diverse customer groups we continue to work to understand the main barriers for people visiting our forests and are working with different groups and associations to identify and put in place solutions to barriers, and promote the services we offer.

The Public Opinion Survey is undertaken every two years.

Strategic Diversity Objectives

As a Public Sector organisation, the Forestry Commission has been developing an evolving diversity agenda for some years now. We have adapted and widened our approach to meet the changing legal obligations. However, we have also been making continuous adjustments in response to feedback from our customers, annual monitoring of our staff and engagement with diverse communities.

As set out in the People Strategy, the Forestry Commission has identified **two main objectives** in order to achieve the General Duty:

- **To continue to improve the diversity of the FC workforce; and**
- **To continue to engage with diverse communities in relation to the provision of FC services to the public.**

The Diversity Strategy outlines **five key goals** to support the delivery of these Strategic Objectives:

- **We build on our successes and continue to work towards making our services and facilities available to all.**
- **We continue to ensure our departmental policies, organisational objectives and operational practice enable everyone to access our services and facilities.**
- **We continue to engage with communities to ensure our services and facilities are fit for purpose and tailored to meet their requirements.**
- **We continue to respect, support and value all our staff, treating them in accordance with our Values.**
- **We recruit and employ people in order to make our workforce more representative of the GB population.**



We have classified the objectives by each of the nine protected characteristics, and then by staff and customer-focussed objectives.

The FC recognises that diversity of its staff group is intrinsically linked to the provision of valued services to diverse communities and vice versa. Diverse staff can provide insight into ways of working with diverse communities, suggesting appropriate customer services and as role models can encourage a wider pool of potential applicants to apply to work for the FC if they can see that the organisation is positive about equality and diversity.



Age

Staff Objectives

The results of the 2015 Staff Survey indicated very few differences with regard to working for the FC between the different age groups except that younger people were generally more positive about the organisation. However, the Staff Survey did indicate that staff over the age of 45 are more likely to be negative about their pay and workload. Also staff aged between 16–34 were more likely to have experienced discrimination at work within the last 12 months. We have asked our HR Business Partners to explore solutions to these issues including training for managers and a review of forward job plans for staff, particularly those over 45.

We also have set objectives in England and Scotland to recruit a more diverse workforce. For an employer like the Forestry Commission to have an older workforce adds tremendous knowledge and enthusiasm for our sites and customers. However, we must ensure that young people are attracted to careers in forestry and that we are seen as an attractive place for young people to work. This is why we will continue to offer apprenticeship and graduate placements as funding allows.

Customer Objectives

The Forestry Commission provides a wide range of customer experiences which are open and available to people of all ages (for instance, visiting our woodlands is a popular family leisure activity). Many of our woodland trails are already accessible, therefore suitable for those with disabilities, older people, children, families with prams/pushchairs etc.

From our surveys, we know that a wide range of people of all ages visit our forests and woodlands. While we haven't had any customer feedback to suggest that we need to do anything differently for specific age groups, our public opinion of forestry survey helps us identify that children aged between 11–15 are less likely to visit our sites than younger children, or young people aged 16–24. We know that we must do more to engage these harder to reach groups as we have a duty to be inclusive of all ages, by providing a range of activities to suit customers of all ages. With this in mind, the FC has set objectives to engage more 11–15-year-olds to participate in recreation in woodlands.

We have also set a target in England to get more 16–24-year-olds onto our Forestry and Woodlands Advisory Committees.

Our new Play Policy for England is being launched in 2016, and this will provide an inclusive focus on providing better and more inclusive all ability play, for all young people.

FC England has included an objective to increase the provision of recreation facilities for older customers. This also links to the new play policy, which while aimed at younger visitors, recognises that they are often accompanied by older family members such as grandparents.

Disability

Staff Objectives

As a result of our annual monitoring of staff and results of the Staff Survey, we know that both the levels of job applications we receive from people with disabilities and of self-declaration of disability are low within the FC.

Following on from the trend identified in the last staff survey, we have more staff telling us that they are disabled than those who have advised us through the official systems. However, we remain lower than the estimated percentage of the working age population which is estimated to be disabled. We need to do more to encourage our staff to be open and share with us their disability. In the staff survey we had 5% of staff declaring a disability, up from 4% in 2013.

Our new objectives commit the Forestry Commission implementing the Guaranteed Interview Scheme which will ensure that disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria are offered an interview. We hope this will increase the confidence in which disabled people hold the Forestry Commission.

Both Scotland and England have strong commitments in their objectives to attract more disabled applicants to work for the Forestry Commission.

Customer Objectives

We have developed the following customer-focused objectives as a result of direct customer feedback, the results of our Public Opinion Surveys and the views expressed through our network of disabled stakeholders and customers.

The Forestry Commission has embedded accessibility for disabled customers as a priority during the next four years.

- We will create local office databases of local disability organisations to develop an identifiable FC profile, offer services and share information about our facilities and services.
- We will continue to provide educational support to children with additional needs and/or disabilities where resources allow.
- We will raise awareness of local accessible trails, etc. through advertising and promotion through local networks and our Internet site.
- We will audit and then continually monitor all built facilities including visitor centres; toilets and parking facilities to ensure these are accessible and meet the needs of all users.
- We will improve information available about accessible facilities.



- We will explore opportunities to support marketing with partners, e.g. RADAR accessibility holiday guide.
- We will develop a database of volunteers/staff who can conduct guided tours of forests suitable for different groups. This is in response to requests raised at the feedback forums that some of those with disabilities would find this useful and would relieve any anxieties about visiting forests.
- We offer specialist mountain biking sessions at some of our sites, working with partners such as Rough Riderz and Blazing Saddles to ensure everyone can enjoy the exciting recreation opportunity.
- We will continue to work with disabled mountain bike users to develop accessible trails where appropriate. This work will be ongoing, as and when new trails are proposed over the next four years. The local recreation teams will take this forward building on the working relationships already built up with relevant groups.
- We have been successful in thinking inclusively to attract more disabled customers, such as providing over 600 free tickets to carers to enable disabled people to enjoy the range of Forest Live events.
- The FC England Recreation team has developed a strong, positive and supportive relationship with our stakeholders from the Disabled Ramblers group by getting to know their needs and to fully understand how we can best support them. This organization which enables physically disabled people to enjoy rambles through our forests and other sites, through providing the safety, planning, infrastructure, equipment and support needed to help make ramble inclusive for disabled people.

In **Scotland** we have run several innovative and ground breaking schemes; including:

- Funded a programme to deliver walking events for Ethnic Minority groups in Edinburgh to promote good mental health and well-being through activity.
- Hosted a twelve week programme in the West of Scotland to support improving mental health which has attracted around 250 attendees with positive feedback.
- Helped academics identify the positive impact on outdoor activity on those with dementia.

Gender reassignment

Staff Objectives

None proposed at this time, other than continued monitoring of staff.

We do not monitor the gender identity of our job applicants as we have received advice and guidance from central Government and a:gender not to do so at application stage.

During the last three surveys the FC has noticed a continued increase in the number of employees who report as having transitioned gender. Based on investigation and analysis, it seems highly unlikely to be accurate that the 3% of staff who answered the survey have transitioned gender. This would equate to 49 individual staff that have changed gender. Given an estimate of the UK's Trans population is 1%, with approximately 20% of this group seeking to undertake treatment to transition gender; this would mean that we have almost twelve times the typical population of transgendered staff. Whilst we would welcome the diversity, we recognise that anecdotally, no HR staff are aware of cases of staff that have transitioned gender and the FC must recognise that it is likely that the high incidence of reporting might actually reflect attempts by staff to increase their anonymity through the reporting of the staff survey. In future surveys the new country bodies will be asked to increase staff confidence in anonymity of reporting and consider removing the use of individual personal access codes to allow staff to access the survey.

No staff grievances have ever been raised about transgender issues.

Therefore, no specific and measurable objectives have been necessary at this time.

Customer Objectives

The services that we offer are not gender specific and do not raise gender specific or gender identity issues in the same way that larger public service organisations do (e.g. Health or Education).

With regard to our customer services, we have not been contacted through our centralised systems, or received any complaints, from members of the public who identified themselves as transgender or those who raised transgender issues generally.

In addition, we continue to engage with a:gender, GIRES and Stonewall on our work, most recently on the new objectives for 2016–2020.

While we have no specific objectives at this time other than continued monitoring, the FC is continuing to embed inclusively into our policies and practice. Our new play policy for England, which is due for publication in 2016, will promote play between sexes of young people in a way which doesn't require children to be tied to traditional play or PE kit, removing the expectation of what young boys and girls are expected to wear.



Marriage and Civil Partnership

Staff Objectives

No staff objectives proposed at this time as all of our HR policies that apply to members of staff getting married do so regardless of gender or sexual orientation and also apply equally to staff entering into a civil partnership.

No staff grievances have been raised about this subject or issues raised via the 2013 or 2015 Staff Surveys.



Customer Objectives

None proposed at this time, other than to continue to ensure that our local offices with suitable facilities which are licensed to provide civil weddings also offer services, including wedding fairs and promotions, equally to those who are entering into a civil partnership. We have advised those customers organizing wedding fairs to ensure that their events are inclusive and welcoming to lesbian, gay and bisexual guests.





Pregnancy and maternity

Staff Objectives

None proposed at this time as all of our HR policies comply with and enhance statutory provisions. The FC offers contractual maternity and adoption pay of 26 weeks full pay and 13 weeks statutory pay (plus 13 weeks unpaid) rather than 39 weeks statutory pay (plus 13 weeks unpaid). The FC also offers mothers/primary adopters/partners contractual shared parental pay of up to 26 weeks full pay and up to 13 weeks statutory pay (plus 13 weeks unpaid), less any weeks of maternity/adoption pay received. As of April 2015, partners can now share their maternity leave and pay, between employers, though as at April 2016, no cases had been reported to FC HR.

The FC also offers a wide range of flexible working options that support parents. Our annual monitoring exercise demonstrates that in 2014/15 95% of women return to the FC to work after maternity leave, which compares favourably to the UK average of 77% as reported by DWP/BSI report. The return rate has progressively increased from 85% in 2012.

No staff grievances have been raised about this subject or issues were raised via Staff Surveys etc.

We will continue to ensure that our HR policies remain up-to-date with changing employment law and Government guidance.

Customer Objectives

None specifically proposed at this time. However, many of our local initiatives to provide accessible facilities can benefit pregnant women and those with young children in prams and pushchairs etc. In addition, some of our local offices offer specific services such as 'Buggy Fit' across the country which we will continue to circulate through the best practice section of our website so that more local teams with suitable facilities can consider offering similar initiatives.

These activities support our objectives, such as in England where we have committed to developing activity trails for families with pre-school children.

Race

Staff Objectives

We know from our annual monitoring exercises that we have a very low number of ethnic minority staff and a low number of applications for externally advertised posts from the Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. The Forestry Commission accepts that it has not succeeded in meeting the targets we set ourselves in this area in 2012, due to a range of reasons stemming from the impacts of spending reviews on staffing levels.

Whilst external recruitment has started to increase again, this has not resulted in an increase in BAME applications. Whilst we can recognise that a large proportion of our sites are in rural locations, where traditionally the BAME community populations are lower, we also recruit nationally and are funded by taxpayers from across all races.

Going forward the, HR Business Partners will have responsibility for increasing the diversity of applicants for roles within the FC. Progress will be measured by annual analysis of job applicants which will be published in the annual monitoring reports and by analysing customer feedback to check if the number of BAME respondents to the Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys increases.

Our employees can access the Civil Service Learning module on Unconscious Bias, which helps identity and challenge the innate personal preferences people have developed through their working lives. Additionally, the Learning & Development team have built Unconscious Bias theory into their courses on Recruitment and Selection and the Line Manager Development Programme; to equip our leaders with the skills and awareness to build inclusive teams which embrace the widest diversity of talent.

To create a more welcoming culture and use inclusive language in the workplace, the Diversity team recently published a language guide which helped staff learn what language is and isn't acceptable and moreover, how to create a welcome for visitors by using more inclusive language.

Customer Objectives

We know from analysis of our customers that BAME communities are less likely to visit our woodlands and use our services. We also know that BAME visitors are significantly less likely to visit woodlands in the countryside, where only 2% of visitors were BAME, compared to 9% of visitors to woods in and around towns.

We will continue to monitor visitor numbers through analysing the results from Public Opinion Surveys.

Going forward both Scotland and England have objectives on facilitating increased accessibility of recreation opportunities for BAME customers, to build on the good practice we have already seen across the FC.

Using our knowledge of communities and having staff who are committed to working on engaging under-represented communities means we better understand their needs and can develop specific programmes to increase their participation in the forest.

In Glasgow we developed a programme using an expert forager, who had previously delivered courses in English. This time he used an interpreter to run a course for the Chinese community, for many of whom, English was not their first language. We provided courses which received great feedback and positive outcomes for people who weren't initially comfortable in the outdoors and learned to cope with different surroundings and change of culture.

Forestry Commission Scotland has funded an application from Health All Round to deliver walks in local woodlands in partnership with the Minority Ethnic Health Inclusion Service. This is a community health project based in South West Edinburgh with the aim of improving physical, social, and mental wellbeing, and contributing to the reduction of health inequalities in Edinburgh.

Religion and belief

Staff Objectives

No specific objectives have been developed at this time as we have not had any staff grievances related to religion or belief to date and the staff survey results carried out in recent years have not indicated any significant issues, problems or differences in attitude or responses between different religions.

We have published guidance for managers and staff on religion and belief issues and will continue to update this as necessary.

Customer Objectives

Due to the type of recreation activities that the FC offers, we have very few requests for adapted services and facilities that relate to religion and belief. There have been no customer complaints recorded centrally related to religion and belief.

However, while we have not developed specific objectives at this time, our teams regularly embrace diversity through running events which encourage minority communities into the woodlands. For example, at Vogrie Country Park we hosted a group from the Scottish Council for Jewish Communities to celebrate the Lag B'Omer, the Jewish Bow and Arrow Festival. A total of 170 people travelled from across Scotland to enjoy archery, storytelling, craft working, outdoor cooking and educational activities such as tree identification.



Sex

Staff Objectives

The Forestry Commission is aware that our workforce is predominantly male and that this is historically down to occupational segregation, with men traditionally working in operation forestry roles and women working in support, administration and recreational roles. However, we are working actively to break down these barriers and build a more inclusive workforce.

FC Scotland set an objective to work with the industry to ensure more women are trained to enter the industry, as well as BAME trainees and young people with mental health issues. This sort of target will ultimately impact on the wider sector through partnership working, with the aim of making forestry a more diverse and inclusive industry to work in.

Our Graduate Development Programme was developed to help us recruit future leaders of the FC. In the last three years where we recruited graduates, seven out of ten graduates appointed were women.

In 2015 two of our former forestry trainees were recognised by an external agency as Learners of the Year, at Lantra Awards, in the Trees and Timber Category. Lesley Stalker from Scottish Lowlands was named winner while Heather Forbes from Inverness was named runner up. Winning the awards is tremendous recognition for the FC Scotland's training programmes and also a positive sign that women are not only applying for roles in forestry but succeeding and looking to develop their careers.

"Winning the Trees and Timber Learner of the Year award is a real honour and being one of the few female trainees to do so makes it extra special. Becoming a work supervisor is my next goal. This will allow me to get involved with practical work as well as gain more responsibility within the team."

Lesley Stalker



"I don't know any other women who are Forest Crafts People, so it's important to me to grow in my role and do well. I am happy to break a barrier and set an example for other young women who want to enter forestry."

Heather Forbes



Customer Objectives

Analysis of our customers through Public Opinion Surveys has indicated that the numbers of male and female visitors to FC forests and woodlands is almost equal and the majority visit for recreation, although the type of recreation may vary e.g. mountain biking has been perceived as a male dominated pursuit. Therefore, FC England has committed to facilitating an inclusive cycling policy which will help encourage more women to participate in the sport, and will provide running groups for women to encourage female participation at Active Forest Pilot sites.



Sexual orientation

Staff Objectives

We have not developed any specific objectives as the Staff Survey completed in 2015 did not indicate any significant issues with regard to LGB staff, around their experience of working at the Commission, including bullying.

We have published guidance for staff and managers on sexual orientation issues, which was endorsed by Stonewall.

Customer Objectives

We have not received any customer complaints with regard to sexual orientation issues. Discussions with Stonewall have also indicated that there do not seem to be any particular issues with regard to customer access and participation linked to sexual orientation. As such, we have not developed any objectives specifically targeted at increasing customer services for the LGB communities at this time.

However, as it can be difficult to know and understand the needs of the LGB community with regard to the services offered by the FC, we commissioned research during 2012. This was in the form of a short attitude questionnaire, via Stonewall and their contacts, to canvas the views of the LGB community and explore if there is anything that we could be doing differently with regard to our customer services. Although the response rate was low, the overarching theme of the results was that the FC did not need to adapt its services to meet the needs of LGB customers.

Meanwhile, we continue to remain open to approaches from groups to organise or attend specific events (e.g. gay pride events) where resources allow, to promote customer services and career opportunities.

We will also continue to liaise closely with Stonewall and participate in the Stonewall Good Practice Programme.

Summary of objectives

A summary of our specific objectives can be found at Appendix 2. A copy of this is available on request. These have been split into three tables of responsibility as follows: the HR teams, FC England and FC Scotland. Although the FC is a cross border organisation, responsibility for forestry is devolved and the FC exercises its powers and duties separately, and receives separate funding in England and Scotland. This has led to different FC business models in each country. As a result, each country has different objectives, and the pace of progress will depend on the resources available in each country.



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