



Valuation Office
Agency

EQUALITIES UPDATE REPORT



The VOA has a duty to publish equality objectives, at least once every four years. These support the agency in meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty.

We published our equality objectives in 2017, which reflect our aim to provide an accessible service for all our customers and make the VOA an inclusive place to work:

1. Diversity Data: We'll improve our breadth and depth of workforce diversity data to enable us to better understand our people, so that we can build a more inclusive workplace.
2. Inclusive and diverse workforce: We'll nurture and sustain a workforce which reflects the communities we serve and creates a work environment which fosters good relations, values difference and advances equality of opportunity for everyone.
3. Customer understanding: We'll continue to develop our understanding about the impact of our services on customers to identify more clearly those who may need additional support.
4. Customer services: We'll provide services that are accessible and usable by the widest possible range of customers.

We set a target for each of these objectives to help us meet our ambitions in every area. This report considers the Agency's progress, ahead of publishing our new equality objectives for the years ahead.



Diversity Data

Our target to improve our diversity data, was to achieve a diversity declaration rate of 85% for race, sexual orientation, religion and belief, and disability.

We met our disability declaration target in 2018 – an important milestone.

There has been a slight decrease in declaration rates, partly due to more new staff joining the Agency.

We remain committed to improving diversity declaration data by explaining its importance at induction events and making it easier to update information online.

Our focus on declaration rates means that senior leaders have access to the information they need to understand the impact their decisions have, ensuring the Agency remains a great place to work.





In December 2020, we launched a Race Equality Action Plan to address under-representation of ethnic minority colleagues in senior positions within the Agency.

Inclusive and Diverse Workforce

In early 2017 our 'Inclusion and Fair Treatment' score was 73%, as captured by the Civil Service People Survey – we set a target to raise this score 5% by 2020.

Our score for 2020 was 83%, representing a great achievement for the Agency – but we recognise there is still more we can do.

We established diversity & inclusion groups to help create an even more inclusive Agency. Each group is represented by a colleague, known as a Partner, who is a point of contact for colleagues. The group is championed by a Senior Civil Servant to promote it across the Agency. We also reviewed the groups last year to ensure they remain effective and produce a tangible difference to our colleagues.

Race Equality

In December 2020, we launched a Race Equality Action Plan to address under-representation of ethnic minority colleagues in senior positions within the Agency. We will provide more learning & development opportunities for colleagues in order to support them to progress. We will reinforce these opportunities with training for managers as we continue to build an inclusive workplace.



Social Mobility

As an Agency we remain committed to supporting colleagues from lower socio-economic backgrounds. To improve social mobility we joined with HMRC's 'Stride' mentoring scheme, which provides at least six months of mentoring for those from a lower socio-economic background.

Since 2019, we have collected social mobility data as part of the Civil Service People Survey. From 2021, we will collect information on the social mobility of our staff as part of our own internal diversity and inclusion data. We will conduct research with our people to better understand the perceived barriers to progression, in turn helping us to monitor and improve our performance on social mobility.



Customer Understanding

We have improved our policies and guidance for supporting customers, most notably on providing additional support, including reasonable adjustments to our customers, and supporting distressed customers. Our reporting processes now give us better customer insight so we can ensure we continue to provide the best support possible.

“ / ” This year, we will implement further training for all customer service colleagues so they can provide the right level of additional support to customers who need it.

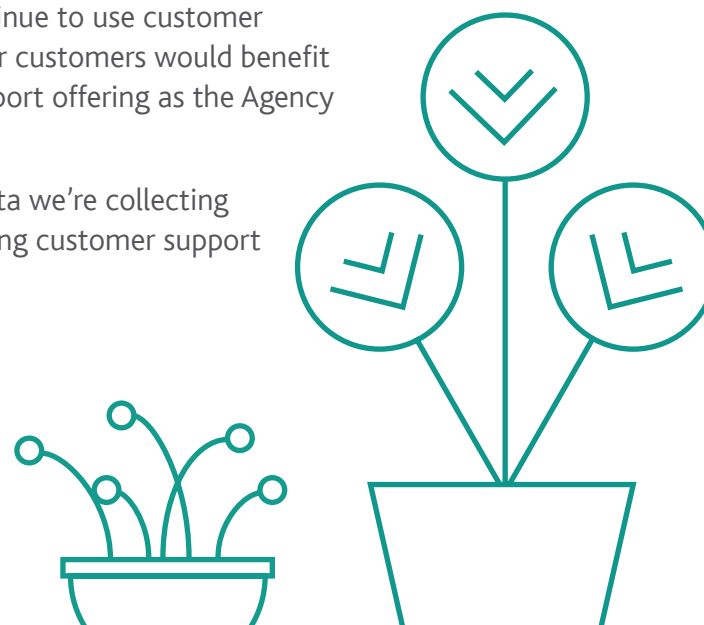
We continue to develop the support that we offer to all our customers. This year, we will implement further training for all customer service colleagues so they can provide the right level

of additional support to customers who need it.

We're also making it easier for these customers to access the information they need, for example, we have provided alternative formats of the Council Tax proposal form.

In addition to this, we will continue to use customer insight to understand where our customers would benefit from improvements to our support offering as the Agency continues to digitalise.

We will continue to use the data we're collecting to ensure that we keep improving customer support processes.



Customer Services

We reviewed a number of internal and external web services to make sure they meet the relevant compliance standards. We now know our online forms are accessible and our customers can use our online services supported by their assistive technology.

We have updated, and continue to improve, our guidance so that staff are empowered to support customers if they are in distress or need additional support.

We continue to review our processes, training and guidance, to ensure it meets the needs of our customers and that our staff continue to have the skills and confidence they need to support everyone. We continue to promote the additional support available to customers and offer reassurance that extra help is available.

Looking Forward to New Objectives

We are continuing to work hard across the Agency to deliver for our colleagues and our customers. We are also working hard to improve our approach and to drive forward diversity and inclusion as an employer, as a customer-focused Agency and in support of wider Government efforts.

