

Agenda Item 7

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework Report

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Summary

The aim of this report is to update the board on the equality, diversity and inclusion framework of activities underway across the organisation, and our longer-term strategy.

As the board is aware, recent global events, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement, have thrown this into stark relief. While our work in this area has always been part of our corporate strategy, the current global context has refocussed our activity. Additionally, questions and challenges that are being levelled at many organisations, are also being asked of us. We aim to ensure, as in all areas, we are a sector leading organisation recognised for a fully inclusive approach to every aspect of our work.

Purpose

This report will set out:

- What we mean by equality, diversity and inclusion
- Why it matters to us
- Our legal and regulatory obligations
- What we have already done
- Our plan for 2020/21
- How we will monitor our progress

What we mean by equality, diversity and inclusion

When we talk about equality, diversity and inclusion, it is with an understanding that these are separate but interlinked issues and may need different approaches to ensuring they are promoted.

Equality means making sure that everyone is treated fairly and with dignity and respect. It means challenging discrimination and removing barriers so that everyone has opportunities to achieve similar outcomes.

Diversity is about recognising the benefits of people's different values, abilities and perspectives and celebrating difference. This means promoting an environment that welcomes and values diverse backgrounds, thinking, skills and experience.

Inclusion provides a space where everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources and feels valued and accepted. Everyone should be able to have a voice and make their contribution. This may mean making reasonable adjustments to facilitate participation.

Why equality, diversity and inclusion matter to us

We believe that the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are central to Social Work England being an effective regulator and employer.

As a regulator that prides itself on building positive relationships with those with whom we come into contact, we strive to ensure that anyone who engages with us finds it easy to do so and feels they are supported and treated fairly and with dignity and respect.

As an organisation that's rooted in the principles of engagement and co-production with our profession, with key stakeholders across the country and those with lived experience of social work it is critical to our success that we ensure barriers to that engagement and co-production are removed.

We recognise the diversity in the social workers and people we work for. We believe that building a diverse workforce that is best able to serve the needs of that population in accordance with our role will help to maintain and build trust and confidence in us as a regulator and employer.

People from different backgrounds and with different experiences provide us with fresh ideas and broader perspectives and insights into needs and challenges. We believe that working in a diverse team helps broaden everyone's horizons and it makes for a more innovative and stimulating place to work. The more diverse we are, the greater the talent that we have and the better organisation we can be. That is why, as an employer, we are committed to creating an inclusive culture in which people from all backgrounds and abilities can reach their full potential.

Our legal and regulatory obligations

As a public authority, we are legally obligated to comply with the general equality duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 that prohibits discrimination because of the following 'protected characteristics':

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity

- race
- religion or belief
- sex and
- sexual orientation

When carrying out our functions, the Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to have ‘due regard’ to:

- eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act
- advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not by
 - removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
 - taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
 - encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

We must publish equality information at least once a year to show how we have complied with the equality duty and prepare and publish equality objectives at least every 4 years.

The Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care standard 3 that came into effect in January 2020 similarly requires that: ‘The regulator understands the diversity of its registrants and their patients and service users and of others who interact with the regulator and ensures that its processes do not impose inappropriate barriers or otherwise disadvantage people with protected characteristics.’

What we have already done

Whilst our first equality, diversity and inclusion strategy is under development, we outlined our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion issues in our first annual report and accounts published in July 2019. We have continued to develop our thinking and approach and now have several achievements to highlight.

As a regulator we:

- have published professional and education and training standards and guidance that outline our requirements in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion issues for social workers and education and training providers
- have published equality and diversity reasonable adjustments guidance on our website that outlines Social Work England’s legal obligations with regards to equality and diversity as well as a reasonable adjustment process at fitness to practise hearings

- have a statement on our website about ‘accessibility adjustments’ to ensure that our fitness to practise processes are accessible for everyone. We can offer help for people to tell us about their concerns, provide information in alternative formats and make adjustments for disability or injury
- have issued statements outlining our commitment to operating in a way that is fully inclusive and to stand against racism and oppression in all its forms
- have published blogs from staff about their experiences of discrimination and why our approach matters to them
- worked with key sector partners e.g. Principal Social Worker networks, ADCS and ADASS to facilitate and drive change in all areas of social work to ensure it is fully representative
- ensured equality, diversity and inclusion are standing agenda items on our Education and Training Advisory Forum and National Advisory Forum
- have met with student groups from minority backgrounds and discussed their experiences of discrimination with them

As an employer we:

- have published an equality and diversity policy on our website that sets out, not only our legal requirement, but also our organisational commitment to equality and diversity
- have a people handbook available to all employees via our intranet that outlines our commitment to equality and diversity as an employer
- include competencies related to equality and diversity in our behaviours and values framework that applies to all employees. At a leadership level there is an expectation that employees
 - work to understand differences and maximise the strengths that come from diversity
 - model behaviours that value diversity and equal opportunity
 - challenge discriminatory and aggressive behaviours
 - are consistent and fair in their treatment of colleagues
- have established a People Forum that includes representation from a cross section of employees across the organisation. A stated role within the forum’s terms of reference is to ‘identify aspects of organisational delivery where gaps arise in the fairness and consistency in how people are treated’
- have established a LGBTQ+ network to bring employees together to collaborate, share experiences and support each other and provide a source of expertise to inform our work
- have established a Race Equality Network with a similar role to the LGBTQ+ network.
- had 2 dedicated sessions on equality, diversity and inclusion at our monthly all employee meetings, one of which was facilitated by an external speaker
- include mandatory e-learning courses on ‘The importance of equality, diversity and inclusion,’ ‘disability awareness’ and ‘being aware of your unconscious bias’ as part of our new employee induction processes. In addition, all employees in line management roles are required to complete ‘Managing equality and diversity for senior managers’
- Have a dedicated section on our website which is regularly updated to reflect our activity and the work of the steering group.

As an organisation we:

- published our three-year corporate strategy outlining our clear commitment to actively promoting and achieving equality, inclusion and diversity in all aspects of our work
- established a governance structure, led by an equality, diversity and inclusion steering group to oversee the development and implementation of the strategy and its associated action plan together with an executive lead for equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation.
- commenced recruitment for a specialist Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager
- commenced the development of a professional panel of subject matter experts to assist in our development in key areas, to include a subject matter expert on equality, inclusion and diversity
- established our National Advisory Forum who will assist and challenge us on the delivery of our corporate strategy, including all aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion
- are represented at the joint healthcare regulators equality, diversity and inclusion forum by a member of our executive leadership team
- are members of the Employer Network for Equality and Inclusion (ENEI) and Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme, giving all our staff access to a wide range of resources and training opportunities.
- ensure all our procurement activity is aligned to Cabinet Office guidelines. These guidelines touch on supplier diversity, such as the commitment to contracting with small and medium-sized enterprises and the voluntary and community sector. We aim to be fair, open and transparent whilst taking a proportionate approach given our size and spending power. Whilst seeking value for money, we are also mindful of opportunities to procure as locally as possible. As part of our procurement principles published on our website, we state that we:
 - adhere to a procurement process which is equitable, lawful and compliant with current legislation
 - harness the capability, diversity and innovation of our supplier to add value to our operational effectiveness and efficiency

Our Plan for 2020/21

Our equality, diversity and inclusion plan for 2020/21 focuses on establishing our systems, processes and organisational culture.

We have established a project that aims to cover equality, diversity and inclusion in its entirety as it relates to Social Work England and everyone who comes into contact with the organisation. The project has four themes:

1. Governance, policies, procedures and practices
2. Data collection and use
3. Communications and engagement
4. Employment, training and development

Our objectives for each theme are outlined below.

Governance, policies, procedures and practices

1. Establish a governance structure, including an equality, diversity and inclusion steering group to oversee the implementation of this strategy and its associated action plan.
2. Establish a process for ensuring the Public Sector Equality Duty is considered in all our decision making.
3. Audit all existing and proposed policies, procedures and practices to ensure they support equality, diversity and inclusion principles.
4. Consider how we understand whether our processes are ensuring fairness to all.
5. Audit our hearing decisions through our decision review group to ensure that our judgments are fair and proportionate.
6. Use our influence as a regulator to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion principles are upheld by social workers and education and training providers.
7. Ensure equality, inclusion and diversity is a standing agenda item on all meetings.

Data collection and use

1. Have a clear plan for the improvements that we need to make to our data collection and use in order to be viewed as a regulator that has expert knowledge on the state of the social work workforce in England.
2. Consider how we will use the data we collect through our regulatory processes to ensure that we understand how certain groups are represented in our processes.
3. The data we collect and analyse and the insights we gain will be shared with people with an interest in social work to identify any trends or differences in outcomes for people with protected characteristics.
4. Review our approach to collecting data from job applicants and employees to identify improvements that can be made to evidence that we are an inclusive employer.

Communications and engagement

1. Ensure all our communications and engagement activities are conducted in a way that promotes equality, diversity and inclusion and supports people with protected characteristics.
2. Seek the perspectives of people with protected characteristics to develop our policies, standards and shape our ways of working.
3. Work with people with lived experience of social work to ensure that our website and social media channels pay due regard to accessibility.
4. Map out external networks, agree our interactions with them, understand what we can learn from them, what information we can obtain, and what we can contribute.

Employment, training and development

1. Provide equality, fairness and respect for all in our employment, whether temporary, part-time or full-time.
2. In accordance with applicable law, set aspirational goals to improve the diversity and equality of the workforce at all levels and functions within Social Work England that is representative of the communities of which we are a part. This includes diversity in applications for our board, advisory groups, fitness to practise panels and independent inspector roles.
3. Review and renew our recruitment documentation and processes to enable us to demonstrate that, as an employer, we value and promote equality, diversity and inclusion principles in all that we do.
4. Encourage all employees to bring different ideas, innovation and creativity to help improve what we do and how we do it.
5. Create progressive policies and procedures that value equality, diversity and inclusion
6. Support and develop everyone to their potential.
7. Raise awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion and encourage people to support each other.
8. Develop our learning offer for board members, employees and partners to include face to face refresher courses on equality, diversity and inclusion issues and include content on equality, diversity and inclusion on our bespoke training for designated groups of employees, e.g. fitness to practise investigators.
9. Oppose and avoid all forms of unlawful discrimination. This includes in pay and benefits, terms and conditions of employment, dealing with grievances and discipline, dismissal, redundancy, leave for parents, requests for flexible working, and selection for employment, promotion, training or other developmental opportunities.

How we will monitor our progress

Central to delivering our ambitions is monitoring our progress and performance against our plans to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in everything we do. As well as establishing an equality, diversity and inclusion steering group, we intend to use our National Advisory Forum as a 'critical friend' to review our progress and provide a sounding board to inform improvements that might be made.

The action plan names action 'owners' who will be responsible for the delivery of individual actions. The owners are predominantly members of our senior leadership team to give sufficient priority to the achievement of our stated equality, diversity and inclusion objectives. However, there is an expectation that all our employees will support the delivery of the action plan where appropriate and will address equality, diversity and inclusion issues as they arise within their day to day roles.

As part of our work in establishing our governance for equality, diversity and inclusion we will determine our monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure our strategy and action plan is kept alive within our organisation. This will include regular review and renewal as necessary during the lifetime of this strategy.

In addition, we will consider what memberships and external standards (e.g. Joint Healthcare Regulators BME/Cultural group) Disability Confident, Stonewall Champions, Business in the Community Race at work Charter) would add value to our approach to ensure that our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion issues is obvious. We will use our existing membership with ENEI and Stonewall to self-assess and benchmark our progress using their dedicated tools and assessment process.

The Professional Standards Authority publishes annual performance reviews of regulators against its standards of good regulation. As part of our priorities for 2020/2021, we will be working towards being able to report positively on standard 3 in our 2020 submissions and beyond.

The Social Work England board holds the Chief Executive and the Executive Leadership Team to account and provides the overall strategic direction for the organisation. It will ultimately have oversight of the progress of realising the ambitions of this strategy and its associated action plan.

Our aim is to be able to clearly evidence sector leading practice as a regulator and employer in relation to our equality, diversity and inclusion commitments.

Conclusion

This report has outlined our framework and approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. Through all aspects of our work, we aim to be fully inclusive and to lead and drive change in the social work profession to ensure it is too.

We are asking the board to note and to agree our approach, and to add their support in this area.