EUROPEAN COMMUNITY
European Social Fund

Involvement of Stakeholders
In Diversity Management

A Case Study of
A Government Department

October 2005

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1   Background to the ESF research project

Traditionally equal opportunities policies (EOPs) have been the main organisational tool used to tackle gender and race discrimination. However, over the last ten years or so a diversity discourse, originating in the USA, has become more prominent in the UK. This recognises broader dimensions of diversity including less visible bases of difference. Employers are exhorted to develop policy to harness workforce diversity towards business goals. From the diversity perspective, EOPs, with their emphasis on the social justice case for equality, are viewed as being less able to meet the social and economic challenges of the new millennium (Kandola and Fullerton 1998). Many advocates within the Human Resource Management (HRM) field suggest that diversity management is a more effective means of achieving equality for all. Although there are now a number of good practice guides (Johnstone 2002; Kandola and Fullerton 1998) and theoretical explorations (e.g. Lorbiecki and Jack 2000), little is known about diversity management in *practice* in Britain. Indeed, there is controversy about whether diversity management is anything new, and if it does offer a way forward for equality policy and practice, particularly in the areas of gender and race, and whether it makes a real contribution to business success (Cornelius et al 2001). However, the concept of diversity has filtered through to the policies of UK organisations (Johnstone 2002).

Lack of knowledge about the processes and outcomes of diversity management means that there are significant areas of potential difficulty when implementing diversity policies, and more importantly in achieving real diversity gains that contribute to business outcomes. A particular area of concern is that while senior commitment to diversity is often present, difficulties are found in implementing policies at local team and line management level. Here, stakeholder involvement is seen as crucial for employee and line management buy-in to equality and diversity initiatives and consequently for successful outcomes (Kirton and Greene, forthcoming).

There is now a need for research, which investigates diversity management at the level of organisational policy and practice, exploring the initiatives and measures, the processes involved and outcomes delivered. In particular it is necessary to understand

the role of stakeholder involvement in diversity management in order to formulate conceptions of good practice, which better fit pluralist organisational realities and which are more likely to generate positive equality outcomes.

The ESF funded research project – *Involvement of Stakeholders in Diversity Management* – aims to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of diversity management in Britain. The research explores equality and diversity policy and practice in a range of British public and private sector organisations. Examples of organisational equality and diversity policies and initiatives have been collected. In addition, through in-depth interviews and focus groups, the perceptions and experiences of a variety of organisational stakeholders have been gathered, including human resource management practitioners, equality and diversity specialists, senior managers, line-managers, trade union officials and representatives, non-management employees.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Introduction*

This report concentrates on policy and practice, rather than on the theoretical and conceptual debates surrounding the development of the concept of diversity. It is worth saying a few words about the shift from an 'equal opportunities' concept towards a diversity one. At first sight this might appear a purely theoretical debate and therefore of little concern to policy-makers and managers of organisations. However, the question at the heart of this seemingly academic debate is one that very much concerns 'real' organisations – whether the diversity concept symbolises a shift away from a policy focus on discrimination and disadvantage (within legal constraints) towards a focus on efficient utilisation of (human) resources. Critics of diversity are concerned about the former, while proponents have turned their attention to the latter.

The central tenets of diversity management have been summarised as:

  (i)   internally driven, not externally imposed – that is the concern is with business or organisational need, rather than with minimal legal compliance;

  (ii)   focused on individuals, not groups – diversity claims to benefit everyone and not simply disadvantaged groups;

  (iii)   concerned with diversity not equality – recognising difference rather than trying to achieve sameness;

  (iv)   addressing the total culture, not just the systems – moving the policy focus away from rules and procedures towards culture change initiatives;

  (v)   the responsibility of all, not just personnel – the role of line-managers is played up (Ross and Schneider 1994).

These ideas are reflected in the diversity statements of many British organizations (see Johnstone 2002).

If organisational statements on diversity are anything to go by, it appears widely accepted by British organisations that workforce diversity is good for business performance (Johnstone 2002; Cornelius et al 2001). It then follows that organisations need to develop policies to 'manage diversity' in order to fully exploit all that a diverse workforce has to offer. Diversity management refers to 'the systematic and planned commitment on the part of organizations to recruit and retain employees with diverse backgrounds and abilities' (Bassett-Jones 2005).

2.2 Approaches to equality and diversity management

Jewson and Mason (1986) argued that various participants involved in the development of 'equal opportunities' policies in the 1980s used terms and concepts in a confused, arbitrary and contradictory manner. Therefore the aims of the policy were often unclear and it was impossible to evaluate the success or otherwise of initiatives. In addition, the long term effect was to generate disappointment with and distrust of 'equal opportunities' policies (Jewson and Mason 1986). Jewson and Mason distinguished between two different conceptions of 'equal opportunities' – the *liberal* and *radical* views. The *liberal* conception is based on the principle of fair procedures, implemented via bureaucratization of decision-making. A key element of effectiveness is positive action and the aim is to generate the perception that justice has been done. Therefore the perceptions of various stakeholders are integral to any evaluation of policy effectiveness. The *radical* conception is based on the principle of fair distribution of rewards, implemented by politicization of decision-making. A key element of effectiveness is positive discrimination, which gives preferential treatment to under-represented groups. In addition, the aim is to raise consciousness so that organizational members take opportunities to advance the position of disadvantaged groups. For example, from two equally qualified candidates, selectors would choose an individual from an under-represented group, if possible. In practice most 'equal opportunities' policies in Britain, underpinned by legislation, were/are *liberal* in nature.

Diversity management seems to suffer from the same problems of conceptual confusion. While the central tenets, described above, appear to be agreed upon, at

present there is very little literature detailing and discussing precisely what measures and initiatives comprise 'systematic and planned commitment' (Bassett-Jones 2005) to diversity management within British organisations. Therefore it is useful to outline conceptions of broad approaches.

Liff's (1997) typology of four diversity management approaches is useful as it differentiates between the underlying principles and aims of policy and therefore reflects the multi-dimensional nature of many organizational policies. The first approach Liff (1997) identifies is *dissolving differences*. Differences between people are not seen as based on social group membership (such as gender or race), but are individually based. It follows that initiatives would seek to respond to individual needs. Essentially, this approach ignores the wider social causes of inequality, including unequal access to training and education.

The second approach is *valuing differences*. Here Liff (1997) refers to social group-based differences and the recognition of the way in which these contribute to inequality. Initiatives would include provision of training for employees from under-represented groups to help overcome past disadvantage. According to Liff's conception, this approach also has strong echoes of the *liberal* approach in so far as there is a concern to dismantle *collective* barriers. However, the intention of the *liberal* approach is to minimise rather than value differences. In practice it appears that some organizations understand *valuing differences* as to do with individual, rather than group-based differences, so whether or not a *valuing differences* approach can address inequalities is not clear.

The third approach is *accommodating differences*, which is broadly similar to traditional *liberal* 'equal opportunities' where there is a commitment to creating policies that open up opportunities (rather than providing special measures) to under-represented groups. This approach might be found where the most compelling business case for diversity relates to the changing demographic composition of the labour market.

The final approach is *utilizing differences* where social group-based are recognised and provide the basis for different treatment rather than the focus of equality policies.

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Therefore this approach is not concerned with social justice, rather these differences will be put to use for the benefit of the organization. Whether or not equality goals will inadvertently be met depends very much on the organisation's motives for utilizing difference.

It is clear that there are some parallels between diversity management and 'equal opportunities' approaches and this is to be expected given the impossibility of a complete break from past approaches, especially in view of the legislation. However, one feature of diversity management that stands out when compared with traditional 'equal opportunities' is its strong strand of individualism (Liff 1997).

2.3 Benefits of diversity management

Traditional 'equal opportunities' has been largely concerned with social justice, although business case arguments have always formed part of the basis for policy (Colling and Dickens 2001). Within diversity management there is a much stronger emphasis on organizational benefits. Four main advantages to organisations are usually emphasised: (i) taking advantage of diversity in the labour market; (ii) maximising employee potential; (iii) managing across borders and cultures; (iv) creating business opportunities and enhancing creativity (Cornelius et al 2001).

The first point – taking advantage of diversity in the labour market - highlights the changing demographic composition of the workforce such as the increased employment participation of women, the ageing workforce and larger numbers of minority ethnic workers, for example. This argument is founded on the belief that only organisations that attract and retain a diversity of employees will be successful, particularly in tight labour markets.

The second point – maximising employee potential - argues that the harnessing of human capital possessed by diverse groups will improve organizational performance. Conversely, unfair and discriminatory treatment creates low morale and disaffection

leading to poor performance. Therefore organisations need to actively manage diversity in order to extract the highest levels of performance from employees.

The third point – managing across borders and cultures - mainly concerns the globalization of world markets and the international labour market that many organizations draw on. Here the argument is that a diverse workforce can enhance an organization's ability to reach and satisfy a broader customer base. While this might seem to apply more to commercial business organizations operating at a multi-national level, it is also possible to situate this argument within the public sector, for example the National Health Service and its active recruitment of overseas nurses might spring to mind. It might be argued that this strategy enables hospitals to meet the needs of a diversity of patients.

The fourth point – creating business opportunities and enhancing opportunities - is about tapping the supposedly culturally specific experiences and insights that a diverse workforce possesses in order to move the organisation forward. Locating this argument in the public sector, within the Small Business Service of PSO for example, might black and minority ethnic (BME) employees have a greater understanding of the needs of BME small business owners, therefore enhancing the reach of the SBS?

In practice, there is conflicting evidence on whether or not and which kind of organisations might benefit from workforce diversity and from adopting a 'valuing diversity' policy approach (discussed above). A similar discussion has taken place on whether equality is good for business. It has been argued that the business case for *equality* is 'partial and contingent' and does not have universal purchase (Dickens 1994). For example, some organisations compete on the basis of low cost; therefore equality measures, such as work-life balance policies, might not be cost-effective. In addition, some organisations might benefit from an absence of equality in so far as discriminatory practices can contribute to the bottom line – organisations can benefit from, for example, the utilization, but under-valuing of women's labour (Dickens 1994). After all, the gender pay gap means that women are cheaper to employ. Translating Dickens' arguments into the language of diversity, it is possible for organisations to benefit from having and utilising a diverse workforce, but whether or

not there will be benefits from *valuing* diversity depends very much on the type of organisation and its business and employee relations strategies. An organization with a cost-minimisation strategy might regard its low-paid employees as entirely dispensable and replaceable and be unwilling to invest in potentially costly diversity initiatives.

Advocates of diversity (e.g. Ross and Schneider 1994; Kandola and Fullerton 1998; Schneider 2001) have tended to gloss over these issues, making broad-brush statements about the benefits of diversity that lack a contextualised analysis. There is no solid evidence that diversity management policies are any less partial and contingent than traditional 'equal opportunities'. There are, however, suggestions that diversity management can deliver organisational benefits if initiatives are formulated in ways that are sensitive to the existing culture and practices and if some of the potential dilemmas and challenges are dealt with (Cornelius et al 2000; Maxwell et al 2001; Sinclair 2000).

2.4 Dilemmas and challenges of diversity management

2.4.1 Union involvement

Employers have not always voluntarily improved their policies and practices and 'bottom-up' pressure for equality exerted through trade unions has proved just as important as the 'top-down' commitment of senior management (Dickens, 1999; Colling and Dickens 1998). Dickens et al (1988:65) highlighted this in their research into 'equality bargaining' in the 1980s, arguing that a 'review of discriminatory terms and practice is more likely to occur where there is some form of joint regulation than where issues are unilaterally determined by employers'. More recently, there is evidence that workplaces with recognised trade unions are more likely to have developed formal equality policies than non-unionised firms (Noon and Hoque, 2001) and that unionised workforces generally experience less pronounced inequalities than non-unionised ones (Colling and Dickens, 2001). In Dickens' (1997) ideal model of 'equal opportunities' practice, the role of trade unions is seen as a vital piece of the 'jigsaw' making up the campaign for equality in the workplace. Here a 'three pronged

approach' (Dickens, 1999) to equality action is required, encompassing the business case, legislative regulation, but also joint regulation involving employee representative groups such as trade unions.

With British organizations now typically shifting away from traditional 'equal opportunities' towards diversity management, there is some concern that unions will have less influence on the policy agenda. Will the ultimate consequence be that unionised workplaces lose their status as more equal ones? In their role as defenders and promoters of employee rights, there are three key features of diversity management that are likely to cause concern for unions, at least in theory:

(i)   the underpinning economic rationale for diversity;

(ii)   the focus on the individual;

(iii)   the positioning of diversity as a top-down managerial activity (Kirton and Greene, forthcoming).

These key features potentially:

- divert policy efforts away from the trade union aim of social justice,

- remove the union focus on group-based forms of discrimination and disadvantage, and

- marginalise the role of trade unions in bargaining for equality.

2.4.2 Benefits for employees

It is particularly noticeable that within both the theoretical and policy debates about the benefits of diversity, employee perspectives are often absent and it is taken for granted that if organisations have much to gain from workforce diversity, then by extension employees have much to gain from diversity policies. Therefore, one of the issues that stands out concerns how employees (at various levels of the hierarchy) benefit from diversity management, as opposed to from more traditional 'equal opportunities' approaches. From a trade union perspective, Kirton and Greene

(forthcoming) identify three potential problems with diversity management that question the extent to which diversity policy benefits employees.

First, the business economic rationale for diversity might in practice mean that while some equality and diversity issues are vigorously tackled, others might be neglected if no strong business reason for action can be identified. For example, whether or not a business case for employing disabled people can be made has been questioned (Woodhams and Danieli 2003). In fact in much of the diversity literature and in organisational policies there is an implicit, if not explicit focus on gender and race, rather than on broader diversity issues. Further, if organisations utilise employee difference simply to improve business performance, some employees might feel exploited and unfairly treated (Thomas and Ely 1996).

Second, diversity policies usually place the emphasis on the individual employee. This can mean that 'special measures' or positive action initiatives aimed at disadvantaged groups of employees, such as black and minority ethnic or women, fall out of favour. While this need not be a problem in itself, in many organisations it is measures such as targeted management training programmes or mentoring that have increased the proportion of previously under-represented groups in the management layers of the hierarchy or within certain occupations. A focus on the individual might prove insufficient to reverse under-representation.

Third, diversity policies emphasise senior level commitment over 'grassroots' involvement. Although it is widely accepted that the most senior people in the organisation need to publicly support the policy, the more challenging project is ensuring that all organisational members 'buy into' diversity and operationalise that commitment into everyday behaviour and practices. It is also necessary for employees to be involved in order to identify their experiences and needs (Cameron 1993). One way to do this, as many organisations recognise, is to find ways of involving different groups of employees, via for example, trade unions and employee networks.

2.4.3 Line-management buy-in

One important criticism of the traditional 'equal opportunities' approach is that it was largely seen as a specialist, peripheral activity that had little to do with line-managers. In contrast, within diversity management there is a very clear role for line-managers (Kandola and Fullerton 1994). It is argued that diversity management is likely to be most effective when there is pro-active line management involvement (Cornelius et al 2000). Therefore, another dilemma is how to obtain line-management buy-in and embed diversity into everyday managerial practice.

Given that many organisations now devolve authority for a range of staffing decisions to line-managers, they are critical to the success of a diversity management policy, particularly to the culture change at the heart of diversity management. Many organizations are grappling with how to make it a 'core competency' so that managers have to demonstrate how they build diversity into their own performance (Schneider 2001). While in theory diversity management represents an opportunity for interested and committed managers to get involved in equality and diversity (Cunningham 2000), in practice there is evidence of line-managers' reluctance to give priority to diversity issues (Cornelius et al 2000; Maxwell et al 2001). The freedom to manage and to exercise discretion that comes with devolvement can also provide an opportunity for line-managers to ignore the equality and diversity agenda (Cunningham 2000).

It is also clear that line-managers face many conflicting priorities, including heavy workloads, tight deadlines etc and that these difficulties might lead them to opt out of actively 'managing diversity'. The public sector has undergone such extensive changes over the last twenty years or so, that the pressures that line-managers are under are magnified to the extent that they might even feel 'besieged' (Cunningham 2000). For some line-managers it might not be a question of lack of time or commitment, rather they might genuinely be at a loss to understand exactly what it is they are supposed to do to demonstrate that they value diversity (Iles 1995). In addition, some line-managers might believe that the diversity management policy is

simply rhetoric, a passing fad, and therefore might not take it seriously (Maxwell et al 2001).

Another question impacting on the role of line-managers is whether diverse teams are easier or more difficult to manage than relatively homogeneous ones. Again, there is conflicting evidence in both the US and UK literature (e.g. Iles 1995; Kossek et al 2003). Even proponents of diversity recognise that the likelihood that diversity will promote team creativity and innovation and improve problem-solving and decision-making is debatable (Kandola and Fullerton 1994). Some research has highlighted the way that diversity in work teams can (or be widely held to) lead to divisions, conflicts and poor interpersonal relations (Carter 2000; Miller and Rowney 1999; Schneider and Northcraft 1999), potentially contributing to poor performance. This might result in line-mangers having a preference for homogenous work groups in order to avoid the extra time and effort they might believe is necessary to manage diverse ones.

2.4.4 Conflicts and paradoxes

The criticism of diversity management in the more critical academic literature has centred on the 'upbeat naivety' (Prasad et al 1997) contained in most definitions and statements. The idea that the conflicts and paradoxes of 'equal opportunities' can be swept away by the more positive language of diversity management is widely thought to be nothing more than wishful thinking (e.g. Lorbiecki and Jack 2000). Even the very idea that diversity is 'do-able' (i.e. that it can be managed and harnessed for organisational ends) is false according to some commentators (e.g. Prasad et al 1997).

Most models of diversity management prescribe culture change as necessary for the success of initiatives. This stands in contrast with traditional 'equal opportunities' which depended more on bureaucratic methods – formal rules and procedures – an approach that has been criticised for failing to guarantee fair and equal outcomes or even treatment (e.g. EOR 1995). In some areas such as the public sector, culture change has been part of a wider package of initiatives under the umbrella of 'New Public Management' designed to rid bureaucracy of its inefficiencies (Cunningham 2000). In the public sector context, challenging discriminatory cultures has also

become a statutory duty in terms of promoting race equality and conducting impact assessments following the findings of the McPherson Report. However, there is rarely any in-depth analysis of exactly how culture change can be achieved (Dick 2003). There is often an assumption that organizational culture is something that can be easily manipulated by senior management to achieve business goals and the complexities of managing something as intangible as culture, are downplayed. Evidence in support of this assumption, particularly in relation to diversity initiatives, is lacking.

One of the supposed benefits of diversity management is that it is inclusive and does not exclude anyone, 'even white, middle-class males' (Kandola and Fullerton 1994:9). This is meant to avoid the problems of backlash associated with the 'equal opportunities' emphasis on particular groups and on special measures to assist them. In theory this should then create a more positive climate for diversity. However, if diversity management successfully achieves its aim of attracting and retaining a diverse workforce (at all levels) then this will inevitably involve loss of privilege for some groups, who will find the competition for rewards such as bonuses and promotions intensified (Cockburn 1991; Sinclair 2000). This is bound to attract anger and resistance and confronting these reactions is arguably part of the process of diversity management (Dick 2003; Miller and Rowney 1999).

3 The organisation

The organisation is a government department which we give the pseudonym PSO. In order not to reveal the identity of the organisation we only give minimal details about its activities in this report. PSO has approximately 9,500 staff. The Civil Service recognises three unions – PCS, Prospect and FDA.

4   Specification of the research project at PSO

PSO is one of two case study organisations in which the authors have carried out in-depth qualitative research work as part of an ESF funded research project. The research at PSO was carried out in the second half of 2004 and involved the following methods:

(i)   Semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus groups, involving diversity and equality personnel, HR personnel, line managers, trade union representatives and non-management employees.

- 7 in-depth interviews with trade union representatives plus one interview with national trade union official

- 10 in-depth interviews with supervisory staff/line-managers

- 4 focus group meetings with 24 non-management employees

- Interview with equality and diversity manager

- Interviews with chairs of women's, race equality and lesbian and gay employee networks.

(ii)   Observation at diversity training courses and diversity events.

- Valuing Diversity Course

- Conference on Diversity and Flexibility

- Women's employee network meeting

(iii)   Examination of documentary evidence, including relevant policies, reports and monitoring data.

(iv)   Short email survey of employee network members.

- 31 responses were received overall from 14 disability group members, 4 lesbian and gay group members, 5 race equality group members and 8 women's group members.

5 Equality and diversity at PSO

5.1 Strategy and policy

Diversity is an integral part of the Civil Service reform agenda outlined in the *Modernising Government* White Paper of 1999:

> 'A truly effective diverse organisation is one in which the differences individuals bring are valued and used. Currently we tend to minimize differences and to expect everyone to fit into the established ways of working. We should not expect them to. We should be flexible to allow everyone to make the best contribution they can. This has to be reflected in our ways of working, our personnel practices, the way managers manage.'

The Civil Service Diversity Agenda was subsequently drawn up, requiring Departments to produce their own action plans.

PSO (2002) defines diversity as:

- About individuals and including everyone.

- Not treating people less favourably because of obvious differences, e.g. age, race, gender, disability, accent, religion, belief or non-visible differences such as responsibilities and/or skills.

- Valuing differences. It aims to harness those differences to the benefit of both the organisation and the individual.

- About **all** differences; not just those based on gender, race, disability or sexual orientation.

- Aiming to create equality of opportunity for **everyone** whilst recognising that some people face barriers that others do not.

- Better understanding of the diverse needs of the customer.

From this we can see that PSO includes in its conception of diversity traditional equality issues (such as gender and race, discrimination and disadvantage) and issues drawn from the diversity concept (such as individual difference, valuing and utilising difference and the business case). Based on relevant documentation the external drivers of diversity strategy are seen as the 'Modernising Government White Paper' and the 'Civil Service Reform Programme', while the internal drivers are a review of business direction and the diversity and equality strategy itself. There is an expressed commitment to a 'listening style' of management and trade union representatives and advisory group members are invited to various seminars and events in order to give their views on policy matters.

At the centre of its equality and diversity strategy, PSO has programmes of action on disability, race and women's equality. Key elements of all three programmes include raising awareness, valuing all employees, training, career development, promotion and progression, internal and external recruitment. In addition, the disability programme includes the working environment, information technology and people with disabilities in the wider community. The women's programme includes cultural barriers, alternative working patterns, caring responsibilities and double disadvantage (on basis of gender and ethnicity). The action programmes identify roles for Groups/Head of Management Units, Staff Directorates, Line Managers, Advisory Groups and Individuals. Roles for line managers, advisory groups and individuals within the women's programme are outlined in Appendix 1. Within the policy, PSO has also identified benchmarks for measuring progress on women's and race equality (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Benchmarks for women by band within PSO

Year	1999	2002	2004	2005
Band B	40.0%	43.0%	47.0%	50.0%*
Band C	26.0%	32.0%	37.5%	40.0%
SCS	21.0%	28.0%	32.5%	35.0%

Monitoring data for 2001 (see Table 3 below) shows that the 2002 benchmarks for women were close to being met.

Table 2: Benchmarks for Ethnic Minority Staff by Band/Range

	1998	2001	2003	2005	2010
Band B	11.0%	14.0%	16.0%	18.0%	19.0%
Band C	3.6%	5.5%	6.3%	8.5%	10.0%
of which					
Range 9	7.0%	9.0%	10.0%	12.0%	15.0%
Range 10	2.0%	4.0%	5.0%	7.0%	8.0%
Range 11	3.4%	4.0%	5.0%	7.0%	8.0%
SCS	0.5%	2.0%	3.5%	4.0%	5.0%

Monitoring data for 2001 shows that the 2001 benchmarks for ethnic minority staff were almost reached for Band B and Band C, but that the target for the SCS was not being met (see Table 4 below).

5.2 Good practice policy initiatives

The PSO Diversity and Equality Strategy contains most of the elements that would be expected of a good employer in the 2000s, including equality/diversity proofing of HRM practices, policies on bullying and harassment, etc. However, there are no special career development schemes aimed at under-represented groups. Some initiatives are worthy of more detailed attention.

5.2.1 Diversity season

This is an annual two week period of equality and diversity events that all members of staff are invited to attend. The aim is to increase awareness of and to sustain interest in the equality and diversity strategy. The Employee networks host events in order to promote and publicise their role.

5.2.2 Personal achievement plan (PAP) diversity objective

All individuals have to complete an annual Personal Development Plan (PAP) that must contain a diversity objective to be agreed with the individual's line manager. Examples of possible diversity objectives are provided by HR on the intranet and might include attending a diversity training course or participating in a Employee network. The aim of this initiative is to embed diversity into all employees' roles to signal that diversity is everyone's responsibility.

5.2.3 Employee networks

PSO has established four employee networks on women, race equality, disability and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transsexual issues. They can make recommendations on the equality and diversity policy and give advice on the content of relevant training. It is also intended that the groups will facilitate self-development and networking among members. Groups are encouraged to liaise with each other. The disability group is the largest of the employee networks with approximately 90 members; the lesbian and gay group has about 35 members; the women's and race equality groups each have about 25 members.

5.2.4 Work-life balance/flexibility

Within work-life balance PSO offers a range of policies and flexible working arrangements, including special leave for time off for dependants or domestic problems (up to 5 days paid and longer periods unpaid), a career break scheme (of between six months and five years unpaid), part-time working (with all advertised posts available for part-time or job share and the possibility of temporary part-time working during a difficult period), flexi-time, home working and term time working. It is emphasised that all flexible working patterns are available to those with or without family or caring responsibilities. Line managers must agree any arrangements.

5.3 Workforce composition and monitoring data

PSO monitors its workforce by gender, ethnicity, disability, age and part-time status. The latest available workforce monitoring data is for the year up to 1.4.2001. All monitoring data is made available to the recognised trade unions and much is publicly available on PSO web site, indicating a commitment to transparency. The composition of the PSO workforce is 43% female meaning that women are slightly under-represented relative to their share of the national workforce. Minority ethnic workers are over-represented (relative to the national workforce) at just under 15%, while disabled people are about 5% of the total PSO workforce (in keeping with the national average). However, when the workforce is broken down into the various Civil Service grades, there are a number of observations to make.

First, Tables 3-7 show the demographic composition of PSO HQ staff by grade (Band A being the lowest and SCS – Senior Civil Service – the highest). As can be seen women, minority ethnic and disabled people are over-represented (relative to their total share of PSO workforce) in the lowest grade and under-represented in the two highest. All three groups are also under-represented in the 'faststream', graduate-level entry category, with minority ethnic and disabled people being particularly under-represented.

Table 3: *Staff breakdown by gender 1/4/2001*

BAND	Female	Male
BAND A	64.8%	35.5%
BAND B	40.8%	59.1%
BAND C	29.7%	70.3%
SCS	27.1%	72.9
FASTSTREAM	43.3%	56.7%
Total	**43.4%**	**56.5%**

Table 4: *Staff breakdown by ethnic origin 1 April 2001*

BAND	White	Black	Asian	Other	Ethnic minority total	Unknown
	%	%	%	%	%	%
BAND A	55.4	18.5	11.0	1.3	30.7	13.9
BAND B	72.7	6.2	6.7	0.8	13.6	13.7
BAND C	84.5	1.2	2.4	0.9	4.5	11.1
SCS	91.7	-	0.4	0.8	1.3	7.1
Fast stream	74.2	1.0	5.2	1.0	7.2	18.7
Total	**72.4**	**7.6%**	**6.3%**	**1%**	**14.8%**	**12.8**

Table 5: *Staff with disabilities 1/4/2001*

BAND	% of total staff at level
BAND A	7.6 %
BAND B	4.5 %
BAND C	3.5 %
SCS	2.9%
FAST STREAM	2.1%
Total	4.88%

Second, as can be seen from Table 6, PSO has an overwhelmingly full-time workforce, while part-time employees are fairly evenly distributed across the grades. There is a small over-representation in the lowest grade (relative to their total share of the workforce) and in the SCS, suggesting a concentration of part-time work at the lower skill levels, but possibly that there are also opportunities to work part-time once seniority has been achieved.

Table 6: *Staff breakdown by part time working 1/4/2001*

BAND	Full time	Part time
BAND A	89%	11%
BAND B	94%	6%
BAND C	92%	8%
SCS	91%	9%
FASTSTREAM	99%	1%
Total	**92%**	**8%**

Third, as would be expected, younger employees are concentrated in the two lower grades, but also comprise the overwhelming majority of 'faststream' employees (Table 7). Older workers (55 plus) are over-represented in the lowest and highest grades, suggesting a polarization between lower skilled, lower paid older workers (who possibly need to continue working until at least statutory retirement age) and higher status older workers who possibly have foregone the option of early retirement (people aged 45-54 are massively over-represented in the SCS).

Table 7: *Age profile of PSO HQ staff at 1/4/2001*

BAND	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
BAND A	5%	30%	33%	20%	11%
BAND B	1%	25%	43%	25%	6%
BAND C	0%	13%	36%	43%	8%
SCS	0%	1%	18%	63%	18%
Faststream	12%	80%	6%	1%	0%
Total	2%	23%	36%	30%	8%

PSO also monitors the outcomes of the special bonus scheme, promotions/progressions and the accelerated development plan. Tables 8-12 show promotion outcomes by the various monitored groups. As can be seen female

promotions were more numerous than male and white more than minority ethnic, indicating the success of the various initiatives to improve the position of women in PSO, but that the organization has some way to go before race equality of outcome is achieved. In addition, the overwhelming majority of promotions were among full-time workers and among the 25—44 age group, with older workers under-represented, the latter suggesting that PSO careers have a tendency to plateau after age 44.

Table 8: *Promotions by gender 2000/01*

Into Band	Female	Male
Band B	52%	48%
Band C	50%	50%
SCS	60%	40%
Total	**52%**	**48%**

Table 9: *Promotions by ethnic origin 2000/01*

Into Band	White	Ethnic minority	Unknown
Band B	60%	31%	9%
Band C	87%	*below 5	*below 5
SCS	80%	*below 5	*below 5
Total	72%	20%	8%

Table 10: *Promotions by disability 2000/01*

Into Band	%
Band B	3.7
Band C	5.8
SCS	0
Total	**5.4**

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Table 11: *Promotions by part time status 2000/01*

Into Band	Full time	Part time
Band B	94%	6%
Band C	94%	6%
SCS	73%	27%
Total	**92%**	**8%**

Table 12: *Promotions by age group 2000/01*

To Band	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Band B	5%	37%	41%	15%	2%
Band C	0%	11%	54%	31%	4%
SCS	0%	0%	53%	47%	0%
Total	**3%**	**24%**	**47%**	**24%**	**2%**

Looking at bonuses in Tables 13-16, only 7% of employees who received £500 or more were known to be minority ethnic, only 31% were female, only 5% worked part-time and 6% were disabled. To underline the bonus distribution, it is skewed towards white, non-disabled, full-time men.

Table 13: *Bonuses received by ethnic origin 1999/2000*

Value of bonus	% White receiving	% BME receiving	% unknown receiving
Less than £500	77%	17%	6%
£500 or more	86%	7%	7%
Total	**79%**	**15%**	**6%**

Table 14: *Bonuses received by gender 1999/2000*

Value of bonus	% Female receiving	% Male receiving
Less than £500	42%	58%
£500 or more	31%	69%
Total	**39%**	**61%**

Table 15: *Bonuses received by part time/full time staff 1999/2000*

Value of bonus	% part time receiving	% full time receiving
Less than £500	6%	94%
£500 or more	5%	95%
Total	**5%**	**95%**

Table 16: *Bonuses received by staff with/without disabilities 1999/2000*

Value of bonus	% no disability receiving	% with disability receiving
Less than £500	92%	8%
£500 or more	94%	6%
Total	**92%**	**8%**

Finally the monitoring data for the Accelerated Development Plan show that 62% of those selected were women, 8% were minority ethnic and 8% were disabled. It seems that women and disabled employees are benefiting disproportionately (relative to their share of the PSO workforce) from this particular initiative.

5.4 Policy reviews

Two major reviews have been carried out – a general diversity and equality review in 2002 and a race equality report in 2003. In addition, PSO's Race Equality Scheme is

currently under review with a report due in November 2005. PSO reviews are reflexive and critical in nature, rather than simply self-congratulatory, identifying areas where PSO has made equality and diversity advances, but also areas where more work needs to be done.

The diversity and equality review identifies strengths and areas for improvement in PSO's diversity and equality performance. Under 'Leadership', it is claimed that 'there is a plethora of leaders demonstrating 'success profile' behaviours' by valuing all individuals. However, it is acknowledged that PSO's 'mission, vision and values' do not always filter down. The main area for improvement identified is to help leaders/managers who lack managerial skills and to support and demonstrate role-modeling behaviours. For example, staff want to see visible leadership on diversity from the SCS. Under 'Policy and Strategy', the role of the advisory groups in commenting on policy initiatives is emphasized. The inclusion in the PAP of a diversity objective is also seen as an important initiative, but it is believed that good practice in this area needs to be better communicated across PSO. Areas for improvement include greater involvement of people in the development of policy, further work on mainstreaming and diversity proofing all PSO policies and a more rigorous monitoring strategy. Under 'People', the diversity training/awareness programme, work-life balance and flexibility policies are seen as strengths. Policy communication issues, sharing of best practice and monitoring flexible working are seen as areas for improvement. For example, employees in lower grades are not taking up flexible working, possibly because some managers are not prepared to enter into negotiations with them about flexible work arrangements. Under the heading 'Processes', evaluation and diversity proofing of training, appraisal and recruitment are identified as strengths. Areas for improvement include the need to feedback up the line more regularly views and perception about processes.

The race equality report outlines PSO's work on internal and external race equality following the introduction of the amendment to the Race Relations Act imposing on public bodies a duty to promote race equality in policies, services and employment. Of particular note, it is stated that the race equality group was consulted on a number of new policy initiatives, including bullying and harassment guidance and the

development of a new PSO Race Equality website. In addition a conference on minority ethnic issues – *Lifting the Barriers* – was held, from which some recommendations have been taken forward including a commitment to design and pilot training and development for the lower grades, develop additional management courses in harassment and bullying and to introduce pre-coaching for minority ethnic staff before the Accelerated Development Plan trawl. The resulting Diversity and Equality action plan 2002-2005 highlights the activities linked to the key outcomes which are:

- Increased awareness, learning and communication

- Enhanced leadership and management capability

- Cultural change

- Improved monitoring and evaluation.

6   Research project findings

6.1 Stakeholder experiences and perceptions of equality and diversity at PSO

The experiences and perceptions of equality and diversity at PSO of three key stakeholder groups were investigated – supervisory/line-management staff, trade union officials and representatives and non-management employees. From the analysis three key themes were identified relating to perceptions and experiences of the stakeholder groups:

    (i)   equality and diversity policy;

    (ii)   equality and diversity culture;

    (iii)   union/employee involvement.

The discussion in the sections that follow is organised around these three themes.

6.1.1 Supervisory/line-management staff

This section draws on in-depth interviews with 10 members of supervisory/management staff, observation of a 'Valuing Diversity' training course, a women's group meeting, a women's group conference event and the employee network survey (some of the respondents of the latter were supervisory/management staff). The interview group consisted of four white women, three white men, one BME woman and two BME men. Interviews covered three main areas (i) context of the equality and diversity policy in relation to the individual interviewee; (ii) job-related diversity/equality issues; (iii) overall view of equality and diversity in PSO. Questions in (i) explored the respondent's general awareness and understanding of PSO policy and equality and diversity issues within PSO. Questions in (ii) looked at the individual managers' roles and incorporation of equality/diversity objectives and any equality issues facing them in their roles. Questions in (iii) covered perceptions of the equality/diversity culture and climate in PSO and views on the implementation of the policy. Essentially the interviews were attempting to understand what diversity means to and for line-management within PSO.

6.1.1.1 Equality and diversity policy

Given that PSO is using both the traditional language of equality and newer language of diversity to describe its policy initiatives, interviews explored line managers' understanding of the concepts of equality and diversity. Some respondents had more extensive answers than others, with some revealing lack of awareness about the policy and the concept. Those who were able to offer a definition generally made a clear distinction between equality and diversity concepts. Equality was associated with discrimination, the law and certain groups (e.g. women, black and minority ethnic, disabled people and lesbians and gay men were mentioned). Diversity was perceived to be about valuing and utilising difference and about the individual, rather than groups. In policy terms, equality was understood to be driven by rules and procedures and diversity about organisational culture and people's behaviour. In addition, diversity was seen by many to be about organisational change and some saw equality

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as old fashioned, while diversity was equated with progress. These views are captured by the following quote from one manager:

> *'I think it [diversity] is really recognising people's differences. I think whereas, you know, 'equal opportunities' is all about not discriminating against people and is law, I think diversity is sort of taking that to another level. It is really recognising the fact that we are all different and that different people have different strengths which we can utilise to the best, you know, to get the most out of the organisation.'*

This understanding is reinforced by the 'Valuing Diversity' training course where participants are informed that 'diversity doesn't have to be pinned in legislation, so we don't want to talk simply about the law' and that 'valuing diversity is not simply the new term for equal opportunities'. The last line of the above quote from one manager alludes to the 'business case' for diversity, a notion that many interviewees talked about. Some respondents believed that diversity could enhance organisational effectiveness, but there was some concern expressed that sometimes elements of the policy, such as flexibility, could conflict with organisational goals focused on getting the job done and providing a flexible service.

Despite this, when respondents were asked what in their opinion should be the policy priorities and which policy initiatives they saw as particularly important, it was the work-life balance and flexibility policies that were mentioned most frequently. However, there was a general perception that negative management attitudes towards the flexibility policy were widespread. Concerns were voiced by participants at a women's group event where an external speaker talked extensively about her company's experiences of implementing a flexibility policy. In particular, concerns were expressed about the possible negative effects on future career development if managers choose to work flexibly. In the 'Valuing Diversity' training course two women managers talked extensively about the flexibility policy and their experience of some senior managers' negative view of it. These women were particularly concerned about residential training courses that mothers and other carers might have difficulty attending. While within the flexibility policy individuals can be 'exempted'

from the requirement to attend such courses, the experience of these women managers was that important networking and team bonding occurs on them and that this can be important for future career development.

Some respondents also mentioned the various monitoring exercises as important policy initiatives for creating an air of transparency about the outcomes of the equality and diversity strategy. Many managers also felt that the 'Valuing Diversity' training course was very worthwhile.

6.1.1.2 Policy in practice

Overall, there was very little criticism of PSO policy and its initiatives, which were generally regarded as comprehensive in comparison to other organisations in Britain. Some made comparisons with other organisations they had worked in, including other parts of the Civil Service and PSO was felt to compare very well:

> 'I think PSO have come a long way in its policy and the policy written in black and white reflects diversity policies up and down the country and how it is to be rolled out within an organisation. The difficulty is the awareness of diversity and it's like having values and leaving the values. If we don't actually live in the ethos of diversity, then the policy, the paper it is written on is irrelevant. And it's to grapple with that concept, and it's to invest and empower others, so that you can see that it is evident in the workplace. But certainly I have looked at and read through the policies in comparison to companies, private companies, public companies and looked at the concept, researched the internet to see where it [PSO policy] fits in and the policy is the same.'

There was, however, some criticism implicit in what many interviewees said, reflected in the above quote, of methods of *implementation* of the policy initiatives. It is generally accepted that if an organisation's equality and diversity policy is to have any real impact, it is necessary for all organisational members to have not only an awareness of its existence, but also to understand what it requires of them. Indeed, as outlined above PSO policy is very specific in this regard. One strand of criticism

related to the policy of making diversity awareness training compulsory for all managers. Some interviewees agreed that this was necessary to ensure that all managers understood their role and responsibilities, while others considered this inappropriate, as the following quote illustrates:

> *'It was decided from an organisational point of view that it [diversity] was a good thing and you know, effectively we weren't given the option of ignoring it. I mean, it was sort of never "diversity is the thing that we are going to focus on this year". I say this, but it was a couple of years ago and so, it was, I hesitate to say this, but it was rammed down our throats. So as I say we had this literally compulsory diversity training and if you didn't pick a date then they assigned one to you. So, yeah, you didn't really have any choice but to attend.'*

In practice, PSO line managers varied in their own understanding and also in their perceptions of the way that other line and senior managers incorporated the policy objectives into their own everyday work. Respondents who managed 'visible minorities' typically had a greater awareness of diversity issues and the policy objectives. However, 'managing diversity' was not always a positive experience. One example is of a line-manager who spoke at length of the difficulties he had encountered in managing a group of minority ethnic employees. This reported experience resonates with the concern that diversity can create conflict within teams.

One way that managers are meant to incorporate diversity objectives into their roles formally is via the diversity objective in the Personal Action Plan (PAP). There were mixed views on this. Some respondents felt that people simply went through the motions of completing the box on the PAP form with no real consideration of what diversity meant for their job. For example, one woman manager outlined how she would approach it:

> *'I'll just put something very general, like 'keep up-to-date with diversity'. I think it's meaningless and pointless, but you have to put something and I can't think of what else to put. You don't get any help or guidance, but I think you do need something more specific to make it worthwhile'.*

A couple of managers reported that groups of people put down the same diversity objective, undermining the individualised nature of the PAP. Many were concerned about problems of measurement and evidence, claiming that it was impossible for someone not to achieve their diversity objective that was usually glossed over in the performance appraisal interview anyway. Others were more positive and felt that having to identify a diversity objective forced them to think about issues that they otherwise would not have. One woman manager remarked:

> *'Well, I think the fact that you have to have a diversity objective in your PAP, although it's one of those objectives I think a lot of people sort of like not really sure what to put there and why we have to have that, but the fact that it is there and you have to have it, is good.'*

The issue of the PAP diversity objective was also discussed at the 'Valuing Diversity' course where some participants argued that the HR department should provide more examples of how to meet the objective, while other participants felt that individuals should take responsibility for identifying their own objectives, just as is customary for other performance objectives.

With regard to publicising and promoting the equality and diversity strategy throughout the organisation, one manager's comments reflect the general approval of PSO's multiple efforts, but also the question mark surrounding the extent to which that knowledge and awareness is acted upon:

> *'They do quite a lot of work, like putting up posters and stuff. And I think it will help to just remind people, even if you don't necessarily act on it. I would be surprised if you sat down with anyone and said "Do you think the department does anything on diversity?" and they said "No". I would just be amazed if someone didn't even acknowledge that the department, because there always is stuff. You know, there's obviously a level of publicity that goes on. And whether there is anything, you know, whether stuff actually follows through from that publicity, I have no idea. But the fact that there is publicity is very good because it brings it to people's minds.'*

Overall, managers held positive perceptions of PSO equality and diversity strategy, but they were less positive about the practice of it.

6.1.1.3 Equality and diversity culture

One question that is often asked of equality and diversity policies is whether the policy reflects organisational reality, as experienced by different groups. Senior commitment to the PSO equality and diversity strategy is very explicit with the Permanent Secretary endorsing the strategy and often getting involved personally in various events. This top-down commitment and support was regarded by line-managers as extremely important for leading the cultural change felt necessary in order to achieve equality for all and there was a strong, although not universal, belief that the stated top level commitment was genuine. However, there was some criticism expressed that not enough was being done to encourage behavioural change throughout the organisation, with one respondent posing the question 'how do you influence every individual's behaviour?' Some respondents clearly felt that senior managers needed to lead more by example, rather than simply lend rhetorical support to the policy. For example, one woman who was a member of the lesbian and gay group spoke about an event that the group had held the day before the interview:

> *'And I think that there is a job to be done in reaching out to managers more. Uhm, and the Senior Civil Service. Uhm, from looking around the room yesterday, I think, I don't think that there were that many managers there. Uhm, and I think, you know, that the split on sort of, sort of homosexual and heterosexual was fairly even but I don't feel that there were enough senior people there, so managers, senior civil servants.'*

With regard to management behaviour, there was some concern expressed that line-managers could be enablers, but also obstacles to individuals accessing the policies (as discussed above in relation to the flexibility policy), meaning that the policy might not be as effective at it could be in terms of delivering the various types of equality/diversity outlined in Figure 1.

As stated above, there was general approval by line-managers of the policy initiatives and the level of effort expended by PSO in promoting and publicising the various measures. However, there was a sense of frustration from interviews and observation of events that the culture of the organisation had not kept pace with the policy. One issue for managers was the widely held perception that to get on in PSO involves working long hours and showing commitment and dedication to the work. This 'long hours culture' often meant that line managers felt under pressure and disinclined to take on anything that they saw as extra work, such as the diversity agenda. Against a background of staff cuts, one woman manager explained:

> *'And what it means is that there isn't the time to focus on the things that perhaps you should be focusing on. So you know it's hard to even get your job done, let alone think about what a lot of people consider to be peripheral issues. So I suppose that's the long way round of saying that diversity is not really mainstreamed. It's not part and parcel of everything you do. I think if you want it to become part and parcel, it needs to be something that people just do as a matter of course rather than being an extra. But people don't have time for the extras. So it's almost like a vicious circle, really.'*

The general consensus seemed to be that there was little overt discrimination or harassment, although some managers knew of individual cases of sexual and racial harassment. There was, however, some concern expressed about the concentration of minority ethnic employees in the lower grades and the role that managers might be playing in perpetuating this situation, by for example, giving lower performance ratings.

In contrast, many PSO managers believed that the situation of women at PSO had improved considerably. However, there was still a perception among some women managers that opportunities were limited for most women even though a small number reach the most senior levels of the department. Some women managers also felt that the more senior a woman became the more necessary it was to 'behave like a man' by working long hours, not taking advantage of the flexibility policy and not

mixing socially with and showing little concern for lower grades. This they felt was a problem in terms of changing the culture of PSO to make it more 'woman friendly'.

With regard to lesbian and gay equality, most of the line-managers perceived the culture to be quite open and non-discriminatory, as described in the following quotes:

> *'I think it's a really good place to be gay. That sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But people seem to be very, very open about it and it doesn't seem to provoke any sort of negative reaction in people. Uhm, and I think perhaps that might be a Civil Service thing. My brother is also a civil servant, he works at the Food Standards Agency and he, he actually is gay and he finds the same that people are completely "Yeah, no, whatever". Not being bothered. And I think that perhaps it says something about the sort of people that are civil servants but I think also here in PSO there is a good uhm, sort of coming downwards from somewhere anyway, there is a good vibe.'*

> *'But if someone asks me if I am married, I will say "No, I live with my partner". And if they say, "What does he do?", I will say, "Well, she is a civil servant", and take it from there. And I am very much from the standpoint of hey I am just the same as you. And I am not going to shout it at you, but I am not going to hide it from you. If you want to know I will tell you. If you ask me questions, I will answer them, I won't avoid them. And that is pretty much what I did. And the reception that I got from that approach was extremely good, really positive, so I'm extremely happy and I have had that all the way through my career in PSO.'*

As discussed below, the existence of the lesbian and gay group was felt to have contributed to the positive and inclusive culture.

6.1.1.4 Union/employee involvement

Most managers felt that PSO was doing a good job in terms of promoting and publicising the various equality and diversity policies. There was a strong feeling that the organisation is heading in the right direction in policy terms, but that diversity and equality are policy areas that have to be continually worked at if the desired outcomes

are to be achieved. In particular, although most managers felt that there was sufficient consultation and communication on the policy, they believed that there needed to be 'more of the same' if not more in future. However, there was diemployee networkreement on whose responsibility it was to make the policy feel like a reality for PSO employees. Some managers believed the onus to be on senior management, while others felt it was everyone's responsibility. Consequently, there were mixed views on whether employees at all levels (below the Senior Civil Service) should be consulted more on policy initiatives. There was a view expressed by some that senior managers particularly were rather detached from the issues and problems faced by lower grades making it difficult for them to formulate policies and initiatives that would have meaning for non-management employees. One respondent's comments reflect the view shared by others that the lower grades needed more 'voice':

> *'Certainly for it [the equality and diversity policy] to be given more prominence at grassroots level, rather than the centre pushing this agenda downwards all the time. Perhaps it should come from the bottom up seeing that PSO has an awful lot of staff, ethnic minority staff in the sort of lower ranges and not many at the higher ranges. So perhaps some of those lower range staff being given the opportunity to put their case in a half-day seminar on diversity which management would have to go along to.'*

The employee networks are one of the key mechanisms within PSO for involving non-SCS employees in the equality and diversity strategy. There was a somewhat mixed reaction from line-managers towards employee networks. There was no overt disapproval of their existence, but some managers knew little about and displayed little interest in their activities. Others considered that the employee networks had played and continued to play an important role in improving the situation of the various groups. Those with the latter view tended to be involved in a employee network. Some mentioned the employee networks as playing an important role as a kind of 'police force'. One manager reported that she had tried to recruit women colleagues to join the women's group, but that there was a general perception that the group would not make any difference because PSO 'is more white middle-aged, male-orientated than it likes to admit. The perception is that to succeed, you have to be a

man or very lucky'. It is relevant to note that the number of women active has declined and the group is now considering whether its job is done and discussing whether it should disband.

With regard to the lesbian and gay group, one woman manager and member saw the group as pivotal to the progressing of a lesbian and gay agenda in PSO:

> *'We work fairly well with HR in trying to advise them on HR policies and things like this and sort of taking part in staff surveys, we are quite good on that. And we do sort of advise the department on things like does the staff survey ask the right kind of questions, do we need to include other questions, do we need to include a sexuality box along with the ethnicity section of the survey. So we have consulted with the department on that. We have consulted with the department on pensions, on same sex pensions which we didn't achieve at the time but you know Y, our current Secretary, did lobby Cabinet Office on our behalf which is an extraordinary step for him to take. And that shows that we do have high-level support but we need to make the most of that. And we need to reach out to staff a lot more, let them know that we are here.'*

With regard to union involvement in the equality and diversity strategy, line-managers who were not union members knew very little about the unions' activities and tended to see the unions as irrelevant. The managers who were union representatives felt that the unions were playing an important role by disseminating information to members, organising training courses and representing individual members.

6.1.2 Trade Union Officials and Representatives

This section draws on in-depth interviews with seven trade union representatives. The interview group consisted of one white woman, one white man, three BME women and two BME men. Two of the trade union representatives were also line managers. All three of the recognised trade unions are represented (PCS, Prospect and FDA).

Interviews covered three main areas (i) context of the equality and diversity policy in relation to the individual interviewee; (ii) diversity/equality issues in relation to their trade union role; (iii) overall view of equality and diversity in PSO. Questions in (i) explored the respondent's general awareness and understanding of PSO policy and equality and diversity issues within PSO. Questions in (ii) looked at the individual's representative role for the trade union and any equality and diversity issues facing them in their roles. Questions in (iii) covered perceptions of the equality/diversity culture and climate in PSO and views on the implementation of the policy. Essentially the interviews were attempting to understand what diversity means to and for trade unions within PSO.

6.1.2.1   Equality and Diversity policy

One of the areas of interest was in knowing how involved the trade unions were in the development and implementation of policy. Therefore understanding whether and to what extent representatives were aware of the policy document was important.

All of the seven trade union representatives had seen the equality and diversity policy, although their knowledge of it clearly varied depending on different levels of involvement in trade union duties. For example, the Trade Union Secretary had in-depth knowledge of the Equality and Diversity policy document, being involved in committees where equality and diversity issues were regularly discussed. Others had only read parts of the document relevant to their own personal case work. Others had attended diversity training where the policy was discussed in conjunction with their jobs. Most respondents had needed to be proactive to see the document, but access to the electronic document was easily gained.

Interviews explored trade union representatives' understanding of the concepts of diversity and equality in order to see whether or not this seemed congruent with the 'official' organizational (PSO) understanding. All respondents saw a distinction between the concepts of equality (some used the term equal opportunities) and diversity. Primarily the term diversity was seen as being concerned with issues of difference between individuals including aspects of recognising difference, utilising difference and different treatment. In contrast, equality or equal opportunities was seen as referring to same treatment policies. Equality was particularly seen as relating to compliance with legislation and attempts to gain a demographically representative workplace, whereas diversity was seen as more about contributing to organisational goals:

> *'I think we needed something like equal opportunities law to make a difference and to get people actually responsible for their actions and you know, the fact that if they didn't abide by that, then they could be prosecuted or whatever... I think now maybe it's changing in the fact that that is embedded... into everybody's way of thinking, so the natural progression from that is "Okay, everybody is equal but actually when you look at us as individuals we are a diverse group of people. There are people from all walks of life, from all experiences, from all backgrounds, working for an organisation, so how can we best utilise the experience and the knowledge that exists here"… I suppose it is all about getting the most out of your staff… To the best of their ability.'*

In general, respondents did not see a clear break between the two concepts, and there was a view from most that diversity was a progression or evolution from equal opportunities, being more inclusive and broader in its focus. However, two respondents were not positive about the move from equality to diversity. One saw it as implying a more superficial approach that did not deal with fundamental issues of discrimination that needed to be addressed in the organisation. This respondent reported that such concerns had led to an insistence from the trade union side that the policy should be entitled 'Equality and Diversity' rather than just 'Diversity'.

The other felt that the term 'Diversity' was used because it was less offensive and less likely to cause backlash reactions but that in reality, the policy issues had not changed:

> *'Because they often use diversity to mean equality. Because they think it's less offensive. So they very much refer to diversity policies, diversity initiatives, rather than equality, even when the initiatives are about equality and not diversity... And - nobody specifically said this to me, but it's a general feel I get from conversations that I've had with people because it's less offensive. If they start talking about equality and breaking it down into race and gender and sexual orientation, it may offend white men. I think that's the thinking behind it'.*

Respondents also spoke about why they thought PSO had introduced the equality and diversity policy (notwithstanding the requirement to do so as part of the Civil Service Diversity Agenda). Some respondents did mention the business case and felt that there was a general belief at the top of the organization that attention to equality issues would lead to better performance. However more saw the role of PSO in being a 'model employer' as an important rationale for the policy as this quote illustrates:

> *'And externally, you know, PSO sort of lead on employment law, changes to employment law and have the WEU and Employment Relations Directorate within them. And should be demonstrating best practice on those issues if they are going out preaching to the rest of the country what to do.'*

When asked to comment on what they thought were or should be priority areas for the equality and diversity policy at PSO, the only area mentioned by more than one person was that of work life balance:

> *'... PSO is very keen on ensuring that people have that balance and that they are not working excessive hours, you know. They are trying to get rid of the long hours culture and that sort of thing'.*

6.1.2.2 Policy in Practice

We were interested in understanding the trade union representatives' experiences of the equality and diversity policy *in practice* within PSO. That the respondents mentioned a wide variety of mechanisms and initiatives (e.g. monitoring, training, diversity events, performance objectives, advisory groups, flexible working) was an indication that the equality and diversity policy was having some effect. Overall, there were no examples given of overt racist or sexist discrimination:

> *'I don't know of any recent cases, as in the last 5 years say, of racist abuse for example. Clearly that's... known to be unacceptable... Although, you know, sort of use of language sometimes can be difficult, I mean can be misinterpreted... But I mean it is a matter of interpretation and context rather than words actually used.'*

Furthermore, the policy emphasis was felt to have led to more opportunities for a wider range of employees and to positive culture change:

> *'I think when you really look at equal opps, I think there has been a major change in people's perception. And I think the department has done some good work in ensuring that people were given the opportunity, especially along the lines of implementing things like the independent panel members, and things like that to ensure fairness for all who are applying for jobs. And I think that has had a positive effect on the department'*

There was agreement from three respondents that opportunities for women within PSO had improved and that they had benefited from policies, such as that designed to increase the numbers of women in senior positions:

> *'The position of women is better in the sense that women tend to get better SAR markings. There does tend to be a sort of glass ceiling but, but not an absolute one... And in many grades faring better than men, in the same grade... I don't think there is any, there are any problems, any significant problems, for women in terms of their position at different levels in the organisation up to and including Director General.'*

Indeed one respondent believed that women were treated more favourably than men in terms of promotion opportunities:

> '... we used to get names of people who got promoted. And one year, I think 250 men applied for promotion and 100 women. You would expect, you know, all things being equal, that 60% of the people passed by the board would be men and 40% women. But ironically 100% almost were women, there were just 2 men out of whatever it was'.

Overall therefore, there was little criticism of the paper policy, however there were more negative views about the practice of equality and diversity.

Diversity monitoring is frequently cited as a key first step in implementing appropriate policy mechanisms. However, while all the trade union representatives had experienced the monitoring and reporting of demographic statistics by various criteria at different times, there were also comments about the incomplete nature of some of the data, particularly regarding ethnicity. While data was readily given to trade union representatives when they asked for it, the problem was often that the data was not available:

> 'And certainly we know it is one problem the Department faces that, response to ethnic minority monitoring requests is very low. And in fact lower than it was in previous years. So we don't necessarily know precisely how many minority ethnic staff the Department employs. And certainly we don't know in what grade they're [in].'

In addition, all of the respondents mentioned equality and diversity training, including both separate diversity training, and sections of diversity content in the more general induction training. However, there were some criticisms of the way this training was conducted. Four people indicated that they felt that there needed to be more emphasis on diversity and equality training, both for employees and line managers. Respondents also felt that more diversity training should be compulsory, particularly as there was little time to cover anything in much depth within the induction programme.

> *There is an introductory course when people start in PSO and there's like a snippet in there on equality, I think... So they touch on equality. Can you imagine, they have three days on everything to do with being a civil servant and the department, that equality doesn't get much of a look-in.*

While most respondents felt that there were more opportunities for flexible working it was perceived that it was more difficult for lower grades to get flexible working patterns and that even now there was still some reluctance on the part of individual managers to allow employees to work flexibly:

> *'... there is a... of the conflict between the efficiency of the unit and... the needs of the staff on the other hand. But I suppose because of the Department's [] strategy and the need to encourage flexible working, this is going to have to change anyway, because there won't be enough desks for people to be in. And certainly the pressure for everyone to accept that this is the new culture is quite intense and intensifying. So yes there will be people who will be reluctant to allow people to work flexibly and obviously there is already [hypocrisy] in the sense in which it's always been easy for people at range 10, which is the civil service principal grade and above, you know, to work flexibly. And they've always been trusted to deliver. So there has, I mean there continues to be sort of concern at some levels by some people. But I don't think there's a general hostility'.*

Finally, representatives commented on how difficult it was for employees to meet their diversity objectives within their Personal Action Plans (PAPs):

> *'... people found that really difficult, that diversity objective. That was quite interesting. They didn't think "Oh great". I mean, I have a diversity objective here but my problem was which things shall I put in there because I do fifteen things on diversity, you know. With other people it was, my goodness, what am I going to do to meet this requirement?'*

For another, the diversity objective of the PAP becomes something bland, rather than addressing adverse behaviour that leads to inequality and unfair treatment.

> *So mine [PAP Objective]... is almost sort of being nice to your colleagues and treating them all as individuals and respecting their individual personalities and that sort of thing... I am not sure it's a concept that... one can easily describe as a positive objective... as opposed to sort of being able to recognise a negative, negative behaviours and dealing with those as they arise.*

6.1.2.3   Equality and Diversity Culture

While respondents agreed that there had been improvements in terms of women progressing to more senior positions, the higher echelons of the organisation were still seen as white and male dominated. Two respondents talked about the continued existence of an 'Old Boys Network' within the organisation:

> *I think there is also very much a sort of Oxbridge culture in PSO and if you don't fit into that, then you are sort of looked down on. There is some class discrimination in PSO, I believe. And I think it is quite gradeist, as well.*

> *I think there is a lot of networking, I think it's the old boys system but they haven't got rid of quite a few of the old school types actually.*

The under-representation of BME women in senior positions was perceived as a significant equality issue in PSO. While respondents agreed that there were very few cases of overt race discrimination, (which was seen as a positive feature of PSO culture as opposed to their experiences in other organisations), it was clear that the trade union respondents believed that BME employees were still facing difficulties within PSO.

First trade union respondents commented on the extremely low numbers of BME employees in senior positions and their concentration in the lowest grades in the organisation.

> *... Patricia Hewitt... she wants changes in the department because most of the government departments seem to be stuck in the old school, you know, the bowler hat and the umbrella, you know, the pinstripe suit sort of thing. And she wants to come away from that. She said, she did say at one of the seminars*

> *that, you know, it's nice to come to a meeting, a high profile meeting with*
> *Directors, to see that, you know, that there's female faces in there. Because*
> *when she started, she was literally on her own, you know, maybe one or two*
> *dotted around. But from that she said it would be nice to see some ethnic*
> *minorities at the DG level, you know, which you don't get. You don't get it in*
> *the civil service. It's very, very hard to get there. It's been hard to reach*
> *Director General level.*

Second, relating to recent Government measures to cut staff numbers, BME employees were also believed to be concentrated in the Holding Pool, the register of employees waiting to be relocated to other parts of the organisation following a restructuring exercise, which was seen to be a particularly detrimental situation:

> *… most of the people on the Project Working Team … they tend to be sort of*
> *from ethnic minorities… At the lower grade bands… they try and make us*
> *believe that it is not dumping ground for the people that they don't*
> *particularly want in the department anymore. But it really is… the project*
> *team is literally there as a holding station so that you can start looking and*
> *applying for jobs within the department or outside.*

> *there's quite a lot of work to do on the position of minority ethnic staff. The*
> *trouble is of course is that a lot of the Gershon/Lyons initiatives, in terms of*
> *cutting staff, in the Department generally and relocating staff from London,*
> *will impact more on minority ethnic staff than it does other… the percentage*
> *of minority ethnic staff in London is higher than outside London so, and since*
> *the cuts and the relocations are aimed at posts in London, minority ethnic staff*
> *will suffer more than white staff..*

Third, the trade union respondents claimed that there was evidence of BME employees being given lower performance rankings compared to white employees:

> *'we do have a sense of minority ethnic staff being disproportionately subject to*
> *inefficiency procedures for example. And we're attempting to get statistics on*
> *that…'*

Representatives also talked about personal cases they were dealing with relating to treatment of BME employees and they stated that the greatest number of cases involved BME women employees. These personal cases concern a number of different areas, such as disciplinary matters, dismissal, and bullying and harassment, some of which had connections to race issues.

> *'I think particularly with race issues, harassment and bullying. I think there is also multiple discrimination, particularly black and Asian women. So that obviously is twice as bad, because it is a mix of gender and race… I did a study last year on appraisal and I looked at all the cases I had and they were all from Black and Asian members. I think one or two were men, nearly all of them were women.'*

6.1.2.4   Barriers to Equality and Diversity Policy

Respondents indicated that the gap between the positive perceptions of the policy document, and the more negative perceptions of the practice of the policy was due to a number of key barriers.

The most commonly cited barrier was that of managers, which was mentioned by six respondents. Five respondents commented that line management were particularly problematic in terms of not understanding or buying-in to the policy.

> *'I think, we've got, the HR team has this person who looks at it and takes it forward. So I think they are quite au fait with what it is about and what they want to achieve. However, I would need a bit more convincing as to whether or not line managers really understand it themselves. You know, I think, and I don't think it's all, actually, unless you are that way inclined anyway and unless you are interested in that as a subject, you are not going to really pass it on to your staff, to be honest.'*

When asked to discuss why they thought managers did not 'buy-in' to the policy, a number of issues were raised. First, that there are problems with communication of the policy to line managers:

'It's not been explained to them well enough. If they don't really understand it then they are not going to buy into it. So I think it's sort of like a, it has a knock-on effect, if they don't understand it, then how can you expect them to be really that committed to implementing it.'

'... you break it down and explain it to them, then they tend to back off or understand it at least, even if they don't really accept the idea. So I don't think PSO does enough of that. You know, there is more that they could do to make people understand why it is important.'

Second, there were wider discussions about line-managers' lack of understanding of what equality and diversity meant in practice. Two respondents summed up the problems of operationalising the diversity concept at an individual level:

'Because it's one of those... sort of slightly amorphous concepts that... From a business point of view one can sort of see it's slightly easier to set up an objective in terms of you know the way that business is supposed to treat its employees and individuals... [how do you translate] the concept into something that is meaningful on an operational level.'

Three respondents were of the view that the policy was difficult to understand because of its devolved nature that gave no clear directional steer from the centre:

'But it's not joint up or consistent a lot of the time... So you can have one group championing one element of equality, for example, doing some sort of awareness events and seminar. And another group doing absolutely nothing... You know, even though there is sort of an overarching HR unit and within that there is an Equality and Diversity Unit... not every idea or policy that they come up with is enforceable in every group and it does not necessarily get filtered down the line of the management chain in the same way within different groups.'

'… the importance of the centre and the need for kind of, well knowledge of the centre, about the facts, the data about what's going on. And the power and ability, will, to intervene where necessary... The centre should be doing

> *things and the process of delegation and fragmention has meant that to a*
> *certain extent the centre does not regard it as their [responsibility] to*
> *intervene.'*

The decentralised nature of the organisational structure also meant that there was a lack of communication about key policy levers. For example, two respondents spoke of the Departmental Diversity Champions as being 'invisible', claiming that most people would not even know the name of the Champion in their area.

Related to the comments above on management buy-in, the lack of central direction and enforcement meant that how the policy was implemented depended very much on the individual manager. Therefore whether or not flexible working was offered, or training needs met with regard to equality issues was very much left to managerial discretion, meaning that there was wide disparity between practices in different departments/groups.

> *'... some managers are really good in ensuring that they do keep track of staff.*
> *Make sure that their staff know what their rights are, you know, with the*
> *changes in the department and the changes within the department and what*
> *help is out there if they need it. But other areas, you know, you are basically*
> *an individual, isolated, people chucking their own rules in, you know, and that*
> *happens quite a lot.'*

In regard to discussions about not understanding the need for the equality and diversity policy and related initiatives, one respondent reported two incidents indicating a certain amount of opposition from white male employees:

> *'There have been some complaints and some literature come out from white*
> *men... a very short newsletter came out, called Backlash which... it was*
> *criticising the support given to women. It claimed that women went off on*
> *maternity leave and left men to do all the hard work in the office and things*
> *like that. And were in privileged positions... A notice went out... about a PCS*
> *union regional black members network and I am actually the coordinator of*
> *that network... and a white member of staff, a white male member of staff*

wrote to him [The person in PSO who sent it out] and complained that he has been excluded and why isn't there a general group for everybody and why do they have to have things for black people. And that is what I mean about awareness and understanding'

6.1.2.5   Union Involvement

Respondents were asked to detail the level of involvement of their unions or themselves as union representatives in issues relating to equality and diversity. Overall industrial relations were seen as good within PSO and all seven respondents were generally positive about the level of involvement that they had in PSO. Most felt that the unions were consulted adequately on equality and diversity issues and that they or union colleagues had an opportunity to shape policy documents and were asked to comment upon drafts.

Two respondents indicated that there had traditionally been hostility from the unions to employee networks and other bodies which were felt to threaten the role of the union. However over time this hostility had waned and now the advisory groups were seen as useful to unions in gauging opinion and discussing issues:

> *'... I think in the very early days... all levels of our organization were hostile to what was seen as an attempt to kind of undermine the position of the unions and undermine the Whitley committee system. Which of course is meant to be the system for consultation between the management and the representatives of the staff... we've long lost that hostility. And now in fact... we have... membership of all the advisory groups. On the basis that it's extremely useful to get feedback from people on their concern direct'*

While there had been some early problems with policy documents going to the advisory groups before the unions for comment, these had been resolved and both bodies were seen as being equally consulted. No respondent reported problems with getting time off for attendance at union meetings or committees.

6.1.3 Non Management employees

Interviews with non management employees in the case study organisations were conducted differently to those involving managers and trade union officers. The project aimed to explore the role of different stakeholders in the development and implementation of diversity policy across the organisation and necessitated interviews with key senior and line managers and trade union officers who had remits covering groups of employees. Interviews with a large enough sample of employees to be representative across the organisation were not possible due to resource and time constraints. However we were keen to get some insight into how the policy was being received and the benefit that was felt to be gained from having the policy in place. Therefore we decided to hold interviews with small groups of employees. In total, four focus group interviews were carried out involving 24 employees. These involved nine minority ethnic men and ten minority ethnic women, three white men and two white women. Attempts were made to get coverage across different sections of the organisation; however, the intention was not necessarily to make these groups representative of employees in the organisation.

The focus groups interviews were held over lunch, and were designed to be informal to facilitate open discussion amongst the participants. Participants were assured that their comments would remain anonymous. One member of the research team facilitated discussion by asking a small number of broad open-ended questions and another member of the research team took detailed notes of the discussion. Question areas were i) Do you think diversity is valued at PSO? ii) What are your experiences of equality and diversity issues at PSO? iii) What are the major barriers to equality and diversity at PSO and how might they be overcome?

In addition, the findings below draw on two other sources; observation at a 'Valuing Diversity' training course held in November 2004, and responses from a short questionnaire survey sent to a sample of employee network members.

6.1.3.1 Is diversity valued at PSO?

Participants were asked an opening question about whether they felt diversity was valued at PSO. Generally people's perceptions were that the situation at PSO was not too bad, compared to their experiences of other organisations, particularly in the private sector. People could think of very few examples of overt unfair discrimination.

There were also some positive comments. For example, some participants felt that emphasis on diversity issues had increased recently and was reaping some benefits:

> *'In recent years there has been an awareness of cultural diversity in PSO. How long it will take to achieve it I don't know...I can see quite a few young ethnic minorities have been promoted, so you could say it's going in the right direction.'*

> *'Diversity is increasing. Where I work I was the only ethnic minority out of seventy for a number of years but now more Asians and Blacks [sic] are coming in.'*

However, looking across the three focus groups, more people held negative views about equality and diversity at PSO. Four participants stated specifically that while the policy document existed, it was much more difficult to put into practice. For example:

> *'There is a cynicism, you read it and it's just management speak, lip service, they don't really mean it. So many things don't happen.'*

> *'Maybe the intention is good, but it's a question of implementation.'*

> *'I've noticed there's a lot of 'talk the talk' but not a lot is actually being done'.*

A particular area of concern was the perception that promotion was extremely difficult for those in the lower ranks:

> *'Are junior staff valued? It's difficult to say, I think we're still overlooked and taken for granted... We are just the little man. We are the servant part of Civil Servant'.*

Therefore while most participants did not feel that there were cases of open discrimination in terms of sex and race, what two participants in different focus groups referred to as *'gradeism'* was a common feature for participants in all three focus groups. In addition, participants at the diversity training course also brought up the issue of gradeism. Participants commonly cited their own experiences of long service without promotion prospects:

> *'I have been in the civil service for thirteen years. No promotion, nothing ever. I am a qualified lawyer; I have my LLB but still no progress'.*

> *'I've been here twenty odd years in an outpost without promotion.'*

> *'I haven't been promoted for a long time… I feel like I'm always fighting for recognition.'*

> *'I joined the civil service seven years ago. I have had a nightmare getting promoted even though I have done all I can to impress. It's not easy for a junior grade'*

Furthermore, the difficulties of gaining promotion from lower grades were seen as particularly problematic because minority ethnic employees were disproportionately found in lower level jobs at PSO:

> *'On paper it's well worded but in practice for ethnic minorities… you still do not see them rising up the ranks.'*

> *'… if you look at the structure and who is at what level, you see ethnic minorities in the lower ranks.'*

> *'… As for ethnic minorities, I don't really see them influencing decisions, they're not in those kind of roles'.*

A couple of people felt that even though things had improved for women in terms of promotion and the visibility of women in senior level jobs, this was not the case for minority ethnic employees:

> *'With women I can see progress but with minority workers there is no change.'*

Another issue that was brought up in two focus groups was the problem of long working hours and lack of flexibility to work around caring needs:

> *'There's no work-life balance here. Some people think it's your job to stay late.'*

> *'[Flexibility] hasn't been introduced into my section or else I've been ignorant of it. I have a family so [would] see it as a good thing.'*

Two participants spoke specifically about discrimination they believed they had faced or were facing within the organisation. Both were minority ethnic women. One was currently having her lack of promotion investigated with the help of her trade union. The other participant also described herself as disabled and felt that this had led to bullying treatment within her previous section.

In summary, while there were few examples of overt discrimination mentioned, particular problem areas were the lack of promotion for junior employees, the concentration of ethnic minority employees in junior grades, and the lack of work life balance.

6.1.3.2 Perceptions and Experiences of the Equality and Diversity policy

Generally we were interested in finding out participants' knowledge and experiences of the policy document and its associated initiatives.

The dissemination of the policy document came up in two focus groups, where most seemed aware that the document could be viewed and downloaded on the intranet, but most had not read the document.

A few participants knew about the different diversity groups (e.g. employee networks) and indeed two were actively involved themselves. One BME man was a member of the race equality group, whilst another commented:

> *'[My section] has a diversity group which I'm part of. We've done a lot of lunch time plays etcetera to highlight diversity issues that aren't being picked up by other groups.'*

However awareness was very variable and most participants did not know about the employee networks, and it was clear that communication about the existence of the groups and their activities was not reaching all employees. As one participant commented on finding out that four out of six people in his focus group did not know about the groups:

> *'You see, they should know about it, they do some very high profile events. Sometimes they can't see the relevance because it's nothing to do with their job. They think 'why should we come here?''*

One participant commented that there was too much information coming around and that it was likely he had missed notices of events and meetings. Another indicated that managers did not let people have the time off to attend employee network events. It was clear that knowledge of and participation in the employee networks required people to be very proactive and have a personal commitment to or interest in the group. Indeed, the most common reason for being a member of a employee network in our survey was 'personal interest/information'. The next most common reasons were 'to influence policy decisions', 'to work towards change' and 'for help and support'.

Only a small number of initiatives were mentioned specifically by participants including, the provision of prayer rooms and the 'Valuing People', 'Be Courageous' and 'Unlocking Potential' initiatives, and one participant was aware that there had been a Black History Month event held in 2003. Some participants felt that other equality and diversity issues they considered important, had been forgotten as part of the process of moving onto new areas such as the 'Unlocking Potential' initiative which was designed to raise awareness of issues affecting gay and lesbian employees:

> *It makes you think, excuse me, what's wrong with me? I'm and ethnic*
> *minority, I'm a woman, don't I have potential too?... Are they forgetting about*
> *ethnic minorities?.*

Diversity training events were also commented upon by participants in two focus
groups, but only insofar as a general impression was that such courses had not run
recently. There were no comments about the utility/effectiveness of the courses or
comments about whether they should be compulsory.

Most participants seemed aware of the diversity objective in the PAP. There was
discussion about what people usually include as evidence that this objective is met.
Overall, there did seem to be a lack of clarity about what people could or would
include. Some indicated that participation in our focus group interviews would be
something they would include. One participant reported that he found it very difficult
to meet this objective because of the nature of his work:

> *'As someone at the very bottom of the ladder, I don't see where there is any*
> *application of diversity.'*

Participants felt that they did not get enough help in understanding how they might
meet the diversity objective. On the Valuing Diversity training course, participants
were asked to think about what they might include as their diversity objective and we
observed that most found this very difficult. When they asked if example objectives
could be posted on the intranet as a guide, the course trainer was opposed to the idea
because it would mean that people would cut and paste, rather than develop their own.
However clearly people find developing their own objectives difficult and seemed
very concerned about the possible negative consequences of not meeting this
objective.

Other participants were fairly negative about the importance attached to the PAP in
general and therefore about the prominence that diversity could have in everyday
work practices. One participant did not think the PAP was looked at seriously by
managers:

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> *'Diversity is a prominent issue like you say but I only fill it out once a year and then it doesn't get reviewed until the next year when I do it again. Management just aren't concerned about anything to do with the PAP.'*

Others felt that the PAPs were too subjective and revealed little about real contribution, coupled with a perception that there was a quota system in place meaning that only a certain number of employees could get a high performance ranking:

> *'It is a difficult area for managers to know the contribution of ethnic minorities... The reports that are written about you don't tell me contribution, it's on the surface.'*

6.1.3.3 Barriers to Equality and Diversity

Participants were asked to comment on what they saw as the primary barriers to implementing the equality and diversity policy at PSO.

6.1.3.3.1 Promotion procedures

The difficulty of being promoted from the lower grades was seen as a significant problem at PSO and participants spoke negatively about promotion practices within the organisation.

First, participants felt that the promotion procedure was very subjective and that being judged suitable for promotion depended more on the people that one knew rather than job performance:

> *'Experiences* [in the section] *or relationships, not job content. Content counts for a very small part... You do more work but you're not recognised. They keep saying 'promotion next year'. That demotivates you but no way will I crawl up to the boss. But then you realise at some point that you need to get on with your boss.'*

> *'Who you know not what you know...Management base their teams on favourites.'*

Greene, A. M., Kirton, G., and Dean, D.   59

Second, some participants felt that whether or not an employee was seen as suitable for promotion depended on whether '*your face fitted*'. For some this meant that attractive women were perceived to have an advantage:

> '*Attractive women do get jobs. I'm being sexist here but that's what men on the panel think. We're going to support the women over the men because they make the office an attractive place.*'

Third, opportunities for training apparently differed from section to section. Some participants said that while there was some training related to their specific job, they were not given adequate training opportunities to allow them to progress beyond this and as Band A employees they had limited choices about courses:

> '*You can't as a Band A apply for any management course, I have applied for many courses and they said it's not related to my job.*'

It should be noted that contrary to the majority view, two participants did feel that people were given adequate opportunities to progress but that there needed to be effort on the part of the individual to take up these opportunities.

6.1.3.3.2 Variability in practice

A common viewpoint was that whether or not elements of the equality and diversity policy were implemented varied from section to section. Managers were felt to differ highly in the way they approached equality and diversity issues. Some participants commented positively on their managers' attention to diversity issues while others reported more negative experiences. For example, flexible working hours were seen as possible for some employees but not others:

> '*It works for certain people but not for all, e.g. some lawyers are allowed to work from home others aren't. Sometimes the people in charge don't allow it*'.

> '*The lawyers have one set of policies for them, but for everyone else, they get dumped on. Lawyers automatically get promoted after so many years, while everyone else has to fight for it*'.

One participant related how her current manager had a very progressive attitude towards flexible working around caring responsibilities, while only two years ago, a different manager had told her that in order to care for her sick father, she would have to use her lunch hour.

Some felt that there was a real problem with managers not seeing equality and diversity issues as important:

> *'It's just on the surface, it's just words. It's easy to write things down but the people who are going to put it into practice are indifferent to it.'*

> *'Line managers can read something but do what they want. If they are not that way inclined they are difficult to change...it needs to come from the top.'*

In one group, there were specific concerns raised that the Personnel Department no longer had authority and that a major barrier was that implementation of the equality and diversity policy was left to the individual manager:

> *'It's not like years ago when we had a central personnel department and they had goals to be implemented... I'm a member of the race action group and it does some good work, but when I go back to my work, it's different, efforts dissipate and they're wasted.'*

6.1.3.3.3 *Spending review*

The recent Government Spending Review and the consequent requirement to reduce the workforce within PSO was clearly in the minds of participants and was raised on many occasions as a context to their discussion. Participants were concerned about whether they would be losing their jobs and this in some circumstances was clearly more important than attention to diversity issues. However it was also apparent that it was felt that the Spending Review would impact more detrimentally on employees at the lowest level of the organisation in Band A. One group talked about the requirement to up-skill and re-apply for jobs in the restructuring process:

> *'If you think Band As will benefit you can forget that. If you are in Band A you have no hope...*[of up-skilling] *Having to apply for your own job is a very negative way of applying it.'*

At the same time as people felt that their jobs were under threat, participants also commented that the Civil Service was still recruiting, including temporary agency workers which was viewed as unfair and hypocritical.

One participant felt that the restructuring would have a particularly detrimental effect for minority ethnic employees:

> *'A lot of the jobs that are being relocated out of London are Band A ethnic minority jobs.'*

Overall morale was very low, and participants felt that diversity issues would fall by the wayside in the restructuring.

6.1.3.3.4 Poor communication/employee involvement

One of the main problems with regard to the Spending Review was the uncertainty about what kind of threat it actually paid to their jobs. It was clear that there was a general feeling that communication channels had improved over the years, away from the traditional hierarchical structure of PSO. However, while there were some individual positive examples, participants generally felt that communication was poor between managers and employees, particularly those at lower grades within the organisation.

> *'Junior staff have been told there will be job losses but they still feel management are not letting on what they really know... I would like to have more clarity about what is going on, they're gambling with people's livelihoods and it's very worrying.'*

> *'It was announced to the public before us as staff'.*

> *'You can't plan your next move because you just don't know.'*

In addition, mechanisms through which employees could become involved were also seen as discouraging two-way communication flows. For example, participants indicated that active involvement in the diversity related advisory groups and their activities was very low amongst most employees:

> '*Yes there are various groups dotted around... The question though is 'are people going to them?' They are only as effective as the number of people who go to them'.*

One participant commented that it was difficult to find time to go to events organised by the groups because of work pressures.

In addition, participants in one group mentioned 'dialogue meetings' where managers and non-managerial employees would come together to share views. However these were not seen as leading to effective communication:

> '*Some of the ideas they come with are vague and people don't know what they mean.*'

One clear channel of possible employee-management communication is the trade union. Three participants were positive about their trade union and had found them useful both as a support and in voicing their concerns to management:

> '*They understand what the employer/employee relationship should be, so they can help you voice your problems. They know about the laws'.*

However for most participants, the trade union was not viewed as significantly improving the situation. For example, one participant recalled a union meeting where people were raising concerns but would not take action because they were fearful of being labelled as a trouble-maker within the organisation. Another felt that management did not engage positively with the trade unions:

> '*I have my reservations about the unions. They might help you but only up to a point. You have to find other avenues for helping yourself. Senior management sometimes treats the unions contemptuously'.*

> *'I don't feel the union is particularly relevant. There was a one-day strike on*
> *Friday and it hasn't figured largely in any publicity. Perhaps this is the*
> *management, they* [the unions] *seem to get sidelined anyway.'*

6.1.3.4   Areas for improvement

Participants were asked to state what they thought would improve the situation in
PSO in the future regarding equality and diversity. Clearly the threat of job losses was
something that overshadowed concerns about equality and diversity and stopping the
job losses was stated as an action that would improve equality and diversity in PSO.
Beyond this, the only area that was discussed was the need to improve communication
between managers and employees:

> *'I would like there to be more communication. There's a real problem of non-*
> *belief in senior management.'*

6.2 Discussion and Evaluation

6.2.1 Key Themes from the Literature

Within UK organisations there has been a movement from equal opportunities to diversity management. The literature review focused on three main areas, 1) a definition of terms and concepts, 2) an analysis of benefits for business and the benefits for employees, and 3) a discussion of the factors affecting implementation of policies. In particular, various dilemmas and challenges of diversity management were highlighted as impacting on stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of policy initiatives.

With regard to terminology, distinct features of the concept of diversity management can be identified, including a stronger focus on the business rather than the social justice case, on individual rather than group differences, on culture change rather than bureaucratic, formal procedures, and on the important role of the line manager rather than simply the HR manager in implementing change. However in practice, policies reflect more of a mixture of equal opportunities and diversity management initiatives, with attention being paid to both business and social justice/moral cases, and the existence of initiatives designed to recognise individual differences as well as combat the disadvantages attached to social groups. In other words, organizations have not done away entirely with established policies and initiatives.

Benefits to business of adequately addressing diversity issues were outlined, including taking advantage of demographic changes, maximising employee potential, addressing the negative effects of unfair discrimination, meeting the challenges of a globalised market, and creating new business opportunities. However, the literature review also highlighted the variable impact of such polices depending on such issues as the type of organisation and the employee relations structures and systems in place. With regard to the latter, the importance of adequately involving organisational stakeholders was emphasised, including the involvement of employees, collective representative groups such as trade unions, and achieving the 'buy-in' of line managers.

Against the evolving policy context, this research sought to explore stakeholder perceptions of equality and diversity policy and practice in order to determine whether various stakeholders regard diversity management as the way forward for equality and whether it seems to overcome some of the perceived weaknesses and problems of traditional 'equal opportunities'.

6.2.2 Equality and diversity policy and practice within PSO

The monitoring data from 2001 presented in Section 5 of this report indicate a number of issues that an equality and diversity policy might address. Firstly, it is apparent that women, minority ethnic and disabled people are over-represented in the lowest grade and under-represented in the two highest. All three groups are also under-represented in the 'faststream', graduate-level entry category. Secondly, despite the laudable efforts to implement policy on flexible working and work-life-balance, part-time working is concentrated in the lowest grade and there are few promotions of or bonuses awarded to part-time staff, indicating that 'career jobs' are full-time. Thirdly, when it comes to promotions women seem to be doing relatively well – female promotions were more numerous than male in 2001, as were acceptances to the Accelerated Development Plan. However, minority ethnic employees were under-represented. The bonus distribution is also skewed towards white, non-disabled, full-time men.

As would be expected from a Government Department, PSO has an impressive range of initiatives included within its equality and diversity strategy. Figure 1 below provides a summary evaluation of PSO strategy. This is based on the policy itself and conceptual understandings of equality and diversity discussed in the literature review, in particular the work of Jewson and Mason (1986) on equal opportunities policies and Liff (1996) on diversity policies.

As can be seen from Figure 1 PSO equality and diversity policy can be characterized as multi-dimensional and informed by five main principles with a range of strategies and methods of implementation. Of particular note is the fact that the policy claims to be inclusive and about individual differences as well as group-based. In practice, many of the specific initiatives within it are aimed at 'minority' groups including

women, black and minority ethnic employees, disabled and lesbian and gay employees.

Because of its multi-dimensional nature, the type of equality/diversity that the policy can be expected to achieve is also varied. The relative absence of initiatives based on strong positive action means that the policy arguably has only a limited ability to deliver equality of outcome, particularly in the short term. However, in the longer term, if culture change is successfully engineered, then equality of outcome might follow (although the difficulties of achieving culture change have been discussed in the literature review).

Essentially PSO policy is 'relational' rather than 'structural' in nature (Kersten 2000). That is, there is an emphasis on leadership, communication and working together. While these aims are perfectly laudable, critics would argue that for substantive change in the fortunes of under-represented, undervalued groups to occur, there needs to be stronger accountability and stronger initiatives to push structural change forward (e.g. positive action).

It is within this policy and practice context that the research explored the perspectives of different stakeholder groups within the organization.

Figure 1 – Summary evaluation of PSO equality and diversity policy

Principle	Strategy	Method of implementation	Type of equality/diversity
Fairness and justice	Level playing field	PSO Policy statement- What is Diversity? Equality and diversity proofing of recruitment and selection, appraisal and career progression procedures and processes	*Liberal* - equal treatment, equality of opportunity, equality of access *Accommodating differences*
	Eliminate harassment and bullying	Guidelines; diversity training	
Positive action	Special equality measures for disadvantaged groups	Work-life balance, childcare and flexible working policies; disability policy; monitoring of workforce and employment outcomes by gender, race, age, disability, sexuality, part-time status	*Radical* - equality of outcome *Valuing differences*
Strong positive action	Positive preference to certain groups	Programmes of action on gender, race and disability Employee networks	*Radical* - equality of outcome *Valuing differences* *Utilizing differences*
Maximize individual potential	Use diversity to add value	Personal Achievement Plan; Accelerated Development Plan; Mentoring scheme; diversity training	*Radical* - equality of outcome *Dissolving differences*
Improve organizational performance	Use diversity to achieve better understanding of the diverse needs of the customer	Mainstreaming equality and diversity; Personal Achievement Plan; diversity training	*Utilizing differences*

6.2.3 Line-manager perspectives

It is clear from the literature review and the orientation of PSO policy that line-managers are the ones who will make the policy happen. Without their active engagement, the aim for all employees to feel valued will not be achieved. It is therefore worrying that some of the line-management interviewees knew so little about the PSO equality and diversity policy and had little knowledge of diversity issues more generally. However, rather than simply blaming line-managers and seeing them as the barrier to successful equality and diversity management, there is undoubtedly a need to understand their perspectives – the pressures they are under and the views they hold, all of which could prevent line-management 'buy-in' and the policy from achieving its aims. In the context of the Spending Review and earlier staff cut-backs, it was clear that many line-managers felt under considerable pressure and saw equality and diversity as something else they had to do, but something of lower priority than their 'real' work.

However, line-managers are not a unitary category with unified views. On the contrary, the research revealed a variety of line-management perspectives on equality and diversity. Some seemed to have quite jaded and cynical views, with little enthusiasm either for the policy or for the aims and ideas within it. Some seemed quite disengaged, believing that the policy had little to do with them. Others appeared quite excited by it and its potential to achieve culture change within PSO. The latter managers were the ones who were most actively involved in diversity management either via the employee networks or via the trade unions.

6.2.4 Trade union perspectives

Trade union representatives generally had a good knowledge of the equality and diversity policy which is a positive indication of both the dissemination of the policy document to trade union representatives, and their involvement in the process. Many of them had also been involved in the development of policy in joint consultation forums and through the employee networks, indicating that PSO takes much more of a joint regulation approach to its equality and diversity policy.

In comparison to the managers, there was more of a unified perspective about what equality and diversity means and the different emphases of the two approaches. Indeed, trade union officers were the only stakeholder group who had any overt criticisms about using a diversity as opposed to an equality approach. The views that diversity is more superficial and leads to less focus on fundamental issues of discrimination are not unexpected from trade unionists. Indeed these views at PSO are similar to those views we have encountered in talking to trade unionists more generally from a wide variety of organisational contexts, and reflect the typical concerns outlined in the literature review.

Like the managers, the trade union representatives generally felt positive about PSO's equality and diversity policy in principle, and its aims. In essence, with some of them having a level of involvement in the development of policy, trade union officers were advocates of the policy and are likely to provide valuable support to managers implementing the equality and diversity policy.

However like the managers, they also had more critical views about the way the policy was implemented. Their perceptions were that lack of understanding of and buy–in to the policy was a significant problem, leading to very variable practice across the organisation. The trade union officers cited examples of management acting as obstacles to such initiatives as flexible working requests. In similarity to the managers, debates about whether diversity training should be compulsory or not were also voiced by trade unionists, however there appeared to be much more overall support for the training to be compulsory.

One of the most pressing equality and diversity issues for the trade union representatives was that of the situation of BME employees within the organisation. Both managers and trade union representatives talked about the negative impact of the Spending Review and associated labour cuts. However, as a point of differentiation, the trade union representatives specifically highlighted the disproportionately negative impact of the job cuts on BME employees in PSO, something we did not hear from managers. In other words, the Spending Review was viewed as having specific equality impacts.

6.2.5 Employee perspectives

In similarity with both the managers and the trade union officers, non-management employees were generally positive about PSO's *intention* to deal with equality and diversity issues. However most had negative comments about the *practice* of the policy, indicating that the policy document did not necessarily reflect the reality of working within the organisation. In this regard, employees shared the view of trade union representatives that the practice of equality and diversity was highly dependent on the knowledge, interest and commitment of the individual line manager, and as a result, practice varied considerably across the organisation.

The most common area of concern related to experiences and perceptions of 'gradeism'. A few spoke about the fact that BME employees were disproportionately concentrated in lower grades and therefore seemingly had less chance of promotion and were considered more likely to be adversely affected by the Spending Review. However for most participants, the problem was viewed as one of 'gradeism' rather than of race discrimination. Gradeism was also seen to have negative effects on other areas such as access to training and flexible working. Most of the non-management employees we talked to were from the lowest grades of PSO, and an overall impression was that they felt undervalued and believed they had limited promotion and development opportunities. They also felt that they were not communicated with, consulted or involved.

Many said that they did not know why some of the equality and diversity initiatives had been introduced, indicating lack of information, but also some disillusionment. Clearly the provision of information and making efforts to involve employees is key to increasing their understanding, yet most employees had not seen the equality and diversity policy document. In addition, most claimed that they had not received diversity training, which might be another vehicle for raising awareness. Another mechanism by which employees might get involved in equality and diversity issues is through participation in the employee networks, yet it was clear that only a very small number of employees knew about or attended employee network events. While reasons for non attendance varied, of particular concern was the view that managers

did not always readily give time off to attend. Finally the diversity objective within the PAP could also potentially be a way of obtaining buy-in of employees and increasing their understanding of how diversity issues affect their everyday work. However the general consensus was that non-management employees found meeting the diversity objective extremely difficult, and there appeared to be little assistance and support from managers in this process, thus reducing the impact it could have.

Overall, employees complained about the level of communication they had from management, which was viewed as another aspect of 'gradeism'. The trade union may potentially be an important conduit for information and consultation to employees, however while the trade union representatives were positive about their level of involvement in the equality and diversity policy arena, this did not seem to be cascaded down to their members. Indeed most focus group participants were not union members, and did not view the trade unions as improving the equality and diversity culture, notwithstanding some positive experiences of a minority who had specific experience of being supported by their trade union.

6.2.6 Summary

In this final section of the discussion and evaluation of the PSO equality and diversity policy, we summarise the main findings and offer concluding reflections on whether, from the point of view of stakeholders, the policy seems to be working.

With regard to the policy itself, there are a number of initiatives worthy of specific attention. Firstly, the open approach of the various diversity events and groups is a significant feature of the PSO policy. Management and non-management employees are given diversity awareness training alongside one another; they can attend various diversity events together and can participate in the employee networks on equal terms. These are in theory important opportunities for the different grades to share and hear each other's experiences. However, it is clear from the research that trade union representatives and non-management employees in particular, feel that their participation, opinions and voices are less valued by the organization than those of more senior grades. There seems to be a widespread perception that the equality and diversity policy does not serve the needs of non-management, lower grade employees.

If the policy is to be viewed as successful by lower level employees, greater effort needs to be made to gather their opinions and respond to their needs and aspirations.

Secondly, the inclusion of the diversity objective in the PAP is an important feature of PSO policy. This has the potential to help embed diversity in the mindset and everyday practice of all staff, including line-managers and non-management employees. However, the way it is currently formulated and interpreted seems to have the opposite effect. Maybe it should be possible for an individual not to achieve the diversity objective, or maybe there should be different levels at which the objective could be met. For example, mentoring a more junior colleague (particularly a member of an under-represented group) could attract a higher rating than a platitude such as 'used the intranet to keep up-to-date with diversity news'. Other possibilities are higher reward/recognition for attending a diversity training course, or perhaps for writing a short reflective account about what was learnt. Taking a more qualitative approach to the diversity objective would also draw more line-managers (as appraisers) into the discussion about the variety of possible ways that the objective might be met.

Thirdly, the ongoing provision of diversity training is important. However, the question of whether or not to attempt to make diversity training compulsory is a much vexed one – the study indicated that either way, resentment and hostility could be the result. The middle ground of including training as part of induction for new employees, as is current policy might seem a sensible way forward. However there needs to be enough time devoted to equality and diversity issues within this induction training so it does not become tokenistic or superficial. An extension to this, which from the research would meet the approval of at least some career oriented employees and non-management employees in PSO, could be to make diversity training a condition of promotion, particularly so that those new to managing are exposed to the ideas.

Finally, although the PSO equality and diversity policy contains many laudable statements and aims and some innovative and significant initiatives, overall it is dependent for its success on culture change. Such an approach is always bound to

provoke mixed reactions. For some (members of under-represented, 'minority' groups) change will not occur fast enough and there will always be a question mark surrounding whether a long term vision for change will be sustained for long enough to actually make any difference. The research suggests that non-management employees were not very optimistic that there would be long term benefits for them, particularly within the context of insecurity as a consequence of the Spending Review. Others (members of dominant groups and possibly line-managers) will be asking themselves why change is necessary when the existing culture seems to have served them well enough. It is difficult to achieve consensus and a shared vision throughout the layers of the organization and those in more powerful positions will always find opportunities to ignore or subvert the agenda if a strong system of accountability is absent. However, a 'blame culture' where individuals (e.g. senior managers) or groups of people (e.g. line-managers) are held to blame, will not help either.

Overall, the findings suggest that the various stakeholder groups – line-managers, trade unions, non-management employees – use different criteria by which to judge the equality and diversity policy. Non-management employees and trade union representatives are more concerned with the outcomes of the policy; that is whether the policy delivers tangible (promotion and training opportunities, bonuses etc) and intangible benefits (a sense of feeling valued) to employees. Meanwhile line-managers are more concerned with (i) how different policy initiatives impact on their ability to manage in the way that they want to; (ii) whether policy initiatives are likely to increase their workload; (ii) or negatively or positively affect work performance.

Different perceptions are not unexpected, but the challenge lies in meeting the expectations of all the stakeholder groups. To do this involves conceptualising equality and diversity as a *process* needing continuous attention in order to sustain the momentum. Part of this process must involve mechanisms that allow employees at the lowest levels of the organisation to understand, and become involved in policies and initiatives.

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