

Annual Report on the Equality and Diversity duties of VOSA

2009 - 2010

VOSA's Annual Report on its progress with regard to the duties relating to Equality and Diversity, in particular the duties relating to Race, Gender and Disability during 2009 -2010 and beyond



Introduction

VOSA is committed to carrying out its legal obligations with regard to the duties of the Race, Disability and Gender legislation, incorporating this into the mainstream of its core business, that of providing a range of licensing, testing, and enforcement services whilst saving lives, creating safer roads, cutting crime and protecting the environment.

To be able to achieve this aim, VOSA has a Diversity Champion, a Diversity Officer, HR Business Partners, Health & Safety & Wellbeing Officer (who carries out Reasonable Adjustments on behalf of the organisation), an Investors in People Team and a Harassment Contact Officer (HCO) Team. This report is written for our customers and staff, to highlight what VOSA has achieved during 2009 and 2010 towards its duties and what it is planning for the future. These Officers and Teams have continued to make valuable contributions towards the duties by being involved in the following:

1: The Single Equality Action Plan and the Promoting Equality, Valuing Diversity Delivery Plan

VOSA has now amalgamated its Single Equality Scheme Action Plan (incorporating actions for Gender, Race and Disability duties) with its Promoting Equality; Valuing Diversity Delivery Plan. Actions arising from Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) completed on VOSA's processes will also be added to this amalgamated plan.

The action plan is available on the VOSA web site www.dft.gov.uk/vosa.

The Promoting Equality, Valuing Diversity Delivery plan 2009-2012 was produced to help VOSA mainstream diversity within the organisation as well as helping it to comply with the legislation to bring about effective diversity initiatives to enhance VOSA as a service provider and become an employer of choice. This will be achieved through the 4 key themes of the plan:

- a. Leadership and Accountability
- b. Behaviour and Culture Change
- c. Talent Management
- d. Representation



2: Equality Impact Assessments

As a public authority VOSA has to comply with duties identified under Equality Legislation, in particular promoting equality of opportunity when undertaking any new or existing function. One of these duties is to carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) on all its processes. Since 2006 VOSA has been training staff to carry out EIAs at especially designed workshops. These workshops are now being run regularly to train selected staff in carrying out EIAs. A system is now in place to record and monitor all EIAs within the organisation.

VOSA has listed its top 26 processes within the Agency to which it has assigned a policy owner and an assessor who are carrying out appropriate EIAs. This is to ensure that these processes are covered and EIAs are carried out. During 2008, 27 EIAs were carried out on various processes within VOSA whilst, as a result of the improved administration and EIA training workshops during 2009, 69 EIAs were carried out on various processes and high profile projects, in particular those processes that have a higher impact on staff such as Test Station closures.

The station closure EIA in particular has been looking at the individual needs of staff and the possible impacts that these changes may have due to staff having to relocate. VOSA's EIAs are published on the VOSA web site www.dft.gov.uk/vosa

3: Training and Education

Current training courses provided within VOSA are being scrutinised to ensure that they contain current diversity information and are compliant with the new Equality Legislation. Middle managers diversity awareness training has been carried out within VOSA during 2009, with positive feedback from managers on the content of the course. Example comments were "Was a little sceptical about the course initially, but found it very useful and hope it is taken further within the organisation", "Enjoyed it and found it very useful". The diversity awareness training continues with training for Frontline and Senior Managers through to March 2010. VOSA is also looking to develop its own e-learning platform to carry out e-learning on Diversity and Equality for the rest of its staff. This is due to start in 2010.

Feedback from the staff survey indicated that some staff felt there was an issue with bullying and harassment within the organisation. An immediate response was to purchase 10 anti bullying and harassment DVDs. These form an integral part of the briefing material which is to be delivered at team briefs during 2010 by the HR Business Partners and HCO Team. The team briefs will focus on appropriate behaviour in the workplace, as well as advice on options staff can take if confronted with bullying and harassment issues.



4: Staff Development and Investors in People

VOSA launched a 'Fast Forward Talent Scheme' to help staff progression through to senior levels. This scheme is open to all staff and is intended to close the perceived [by staff] gap that was created by Department for Transport Talent Schemes, when they are advertised as only available for certain groups. A number of the Talent Pool have already progressed into new roles since the start of the programme, using their new found skills and confidence to good effect.

VOSA has included Diversity and Equality information into its 'Induction to VOSA' and 'Staff Appraisal Courses'. VOSA has produced a Station Managers guide on achieving diversity objectives. This guide is to be used to help Station Managers understand what diversity is and where it can fit into their day to day activities. The guide also contains ideas on how Station Managers can engage more with their local community to raise VOSA's profile.

VOSA was re-accredited as an 'Investors in People' organisation in December 2007. The accreditation lasts for 3 years and VOSA will therefore be due for re-assessment in December 2010. VOSA uses a team of Internal Reviewers who are trained and 'signed off' by Investors in People UK. During October and November 2009, the Internal Review Team conducted a benchmarking assessment within VOSA, the findings of which will be ready in the New Year and any remedial action can be taken prior to the December 2010 re-accreditation.

5: Dignity at Work Policy

As part of its Dignity at Work Policy VOSA has a dedicated Harassment Contact Officer (HCO) Team who receive calls from VOSA employees who wish to discuss poor behaviour from customers or colleagues. The team members have been involved in team briefs at locations where managers may have expressed some concern in this area.

Each new entrant to VOSA receives a 'Dignity at Work' leaflet which outlines VOSA's Dignity at Work policy. This covers bullying, harassment and discrimination legislation and what staff can do if they feel that they are being affected by any of these issues. Each year VOSA takes part in the anti bullying day (7 Nov) by distributing posters highlighting the effects of bullying and advertising the availability of the HCO team.



6: Diversity Champions and raising our profile within local communities

VOSA has its own Diversity Champion, Alastair Peoples, who is our Chief Executive. Alastair attends diversity meetings set by the Department for Transport and he has agreed to champion the initiative to raise the profile of VOSA by linking up with local organisations and charities. VOSA has recently carried out some voluntary work in conjunction with the local Easton Community Centre, the Parks Department, Avon & Somerset Police and a local charity, Community at Heart. Through this work we hope to raise VOSA's profile in the community by helping people to understand what we do and send out a clear message that VOSA is accessible to everyone. This in turn will help us to remove barriers that hinder progress and inclusion, and to gain a better understanding of the communities we serve, which will help us to provide better customer service. Although the current level of recruitment is low, this community work will help VOSA to achieve a workforce which is as diverse as possible in the future. We want a wide range of people contributing to the work of VOSA because different experiences and perspectives will help us find new and better ways of achieving our objectives.

We have also been drawing up a database of local organisations and charities who help people back to work. We will be able to send communications to the organisations contained on our database about upcoming posts within VOSA, again to raise our profile, reach other groups within the local community and to help attract people from different backgrounds to apply for posts within the Agency. The VOSA Diversity Officer is extending this community outreach by personally visiting those groups on the database to find out how the Agency can help to support their initiatives. We hope to do this by providing work experience with schools and skills transfer with groups who are helping people to return to work.

VOSA has started to take on work placements from Remploy, an organisation which helps disabled people increase their skills and confidence to help them find permanent work. The first person on work placement is helping with administration work within our Audit and Human Resources departments. It is hoped that the skills learnt within VOSA will be useful for the work placement candidate to add to their CV whilst also gaining a reference from the Civil Service for the work that they have carried out, which is all aimed at improving their chances of gaining employment.



7: Diversity Awards

An initiative to increase applications from people from different backgrounds was to have 2 'Open Days', held at the Leeds Licensing Office in August 06 and June 07 to promote Administrative Case Officer posts. There was a huge turn-out of over 128 people on each 'Open Day' and it was a good opportunity to show VOSA's commitment to this type of initiative. The 'Open Day' was advertised widely in the local area. We also used the skills of Talent! a local recruitment agency that specialises in recruiting people from different backgrounds and underprivileged communities in Leeds. As a result of this initiative, VOSA was short listed for 2 Civil Service Diversity Awards in October 2009 and from that the Agency won the Civil Service Diversity and Equality award for Engagement and Involvement.

8: Ethnicity and Disability Survey

There was an ethnicity survey carried out in early 2009 with an e-mail being sent out to employees who had not informed us of their ethnicity in the past. This has resulted in known ethnicity within VOSA rising from 85% to 89%. During 2010 VOSA will be sending out an ethnicity survey to all staff. The Disability Discrimination Act survey went out in November 09. It is a voluntary survey where staff can decline to give information if they wish to. The result of the survey means that follow-up calls can be given to members of staff who declare a disability to see if they require any reasonable adjustments to their workplace. VOSA also uses this equality data to ensure that all of its employment processes are fair and there is equality of opportunity within the Agency.

9: VOSA's Reasonable Adjustments

Staff with a disability are encouraged to sign up with Access To Work (ATW) who will conduct an independent assessment of their disability in conjunction with their type of work. When the report from ATW is received, it will make recommendations and will also enable VOSA to claim back 80% of the costs for the enhancements, helping the Agency to ensure retention of valuable skilled staff. A recent case has enabled VOSA to recoup approximately £5,000 for an employee with hearing problems.

Taking advice from the Royal National Institute for the Deaf we were able to provide an employee, who wears hearing aids, with a mobile telephone that was compatible and did not feed back when used. VOSA is currently looking into issues within the organisation which face staff with dyslexia and what adjustments can be made via IT modification to improve systems for them.

VOSA continues to use and publicise the two tick guaranteed interview scheme where people who consider themselves disabled are guaranteed an interview if they match the minimum criteria of a job role.



VOSA winning the Civil Service Diversity and Equality award for Engagement and Involvement

10: Making IT within VOSA more accessible

VOSA is currently working with its IT specialists to make reasonable adjustments on its IT provisions, as well as challenging the terms of the IT partnership contracts. This will help support VOSA's disabled customers and staff in obtaining technological access to their services and information, and will work towards meeting the end of March 2011 deadline for AA web accessibility compliance. We are also working to comply with the COI Policy TG102 (Delivering Inclusive Web Sites).

Since 2008 we have converged our business-facing web presence to Business Link. One of the conditions for convergence is compliance with AA web accessibility standards. Having migrated static content to Business Link we now publish information directly through their content management system. VOSA publishes static web content, wherever possible, in Plain English so it is accessible to as many people as possible.

Our on-line web services are also made available through Business Link. These services have been the subject of an AA compliance gap analysis/health check report. The findings are currently being considered and an action plan is being developed to make technical and other adjustments to improve compliance.

VOSA works with the DfT Web Strategy Group on AA compliance and on web convergence strategy with Business Link and Direct Gov. Our corporate website was also included in the AA compliance health check report and the findings (referred to above) are being taken forward in an action plan. Our plans for accessibility and usability compliance will need to take into consideration technical developments and other work, such as real world usability testing with customer segments, to improve accessibility and improve channel shift take up of on-line services.

11: Staff profile and analysis of recruitment, training, performance and grievance procedures

VOSA has collected all its 2008-2009 staff profile and employment data which it forwarded to the Department for Transport in-house Analyst team. The team carried out an in depth analysis of this data and produced an independent report outlining their findings with regard to equality issues. Information from this report has been published on the VOSA web site and any recommendations for changes or initiatives with regard to recruitment, training, performance and the grievance processes will be taken into consideration and acted upon. Where appropriate, they will be entered into the VOSA action plan.



12: Welsh Language Act

VOSA has measures in place to revise its Welsh Language Scheme. The Agency is ensuring that it publicises the scheme through various internal communications such as staff and management magazines. Information is also included in the VOSA staff induction programme. All VOSA staff, including those involved in policy implementation and new projects, are being made aware of the scheme and VOSA's responsibilities. The Agency has included the Welsh Language Scheme in Project Initiation Documents to ensure that project managers are also aware of the requirements of the Scheme. VOSA is ensuring that new policies and initiatives will promote and facilitate the use of Welsh wherever possible and every opportunity will be taken to move the Agency closer to implementing the principle of equality. Various VOSA leaflets have been translated into the Welsh Language eg " The service we give you" " Who we are What we do" "Your car and the MoT." The Fixed Penalty Project had a major bilingual initiative launched in May 2009.

13: Measuring VOSA's compliance to legal duties

To help VOSA measure where it stands with regard to compliance with the legal duties a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) table has been set up. The table indicates VOSA's status in the different areas where Red is non compliant and green is compliant. The duties include the requirement to carry out EIAs, training of staff in equality issues, monitoring equality data, publishing equality action plans and policies. VOSA is striving to move the status in areas where red has been indicated to amber and eventually to green, using the VOSA Diversity Strategy. This table is sent to the CEO and all Directors for review.

Elaine Wing
Diversity Officer
Jan 2010

