



Strategic Investment Board Limited

Equality Impact Assessment of the
Equal Opportunities Policy

FINAL REPORT

February 2009

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Access to documents

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This document and other reports relating to the Equality Scheme can be accessed on the SIB website at www.sibni.org

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1. Introduction

1.1 Section 75

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the Strategic Investment Board Limited (SIB) is required **to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity –**

- between persons of different
 - religious belief
 - political opinion
 - racial group
 - age
 - marital status
 - sexual orientation
- between men and women generally
- between persons with a disability and persons without and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to the obligations set out above, SIB is also required **to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.**

Schedule 9 of the Act sets out the detailed procedure for the implementation of this duty including the publication of an Equality Scheme and the conduct of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) of selected policies. In response to the Act, SIB prepared an Equality Scheme which was approved by the Equality Commission in November 2005.

1.2 Screening

The Equality Scheme includes a commitment to applying a systematic process known as “screening” to all new policies to determine whether they

are likely to have significant implications for equality of opportunity. If the conclusion reached at the end of the screening process is that the policy has (or is likely to have) a significant impact on equality of opportunity, then SIB may decide to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA). This is a thorough review of a policy, including consultation with everyone affected by it, which can result in suggestions for change.

In accordance with the Equality Scheme, SIB screened the policy on Equal Opportunities and determined that an EQIA should be undertaken. The principal reason for this decision was the gender imbalance in the SIB workforce (90.9% male at the time when the screening was undertaken) which would potentially lead to a higher participation in the policy by women.

1.3 The EQIA process

When undertaking an EQIA, SIB closely follows the Guidance published by the Equality Commission in April 2001 (revised 2005). This recommends that there should be seven steps in the EQIA process –

- Step 1 : Definition of the aims of the policy
- Step 2 : Consideration of available data and research
- Step 3 : Assessment of potential and actual impacts
- Step 4 : Consideration of measures
- Step 5 : Formal consultation
- Step 6 : Decision and publication of the results of the EQIA
- Step 7 : Monitoring for adverse impact.

A report on the findings of the first 4 steps of the process was published for formal consultation in September 2008. This report includes the results of the consultation and the action plan adopted in response to the EQIA.

2. The policy

The Equal Opportunities Policy is designed to communicate the commitment of the Chief Executive, the Board of Directors and the senior management team to the promotion of equality of opportunity. It contains clear statements of SIB's opposition to all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination and the intention to select people for employment, promotion, training or any other benefits on an objective basis and without unlawful discrimination.

The policy contains a number of measures to ensure effective implementation including –

- the provision of adequate resources;
- the provision of training and guidance on equality issues;
- incorporation of appropriate duties into the job descriptions of all staff;
- training in non-discriminatory selection techniques for all those involved in assessing candidates for recruitment;
- obtaining commitments from sub-contractors and other organisations that they will comply with the policy in their dealings with SIB;
- a system for monitoring and review of the policy.

In addition the policy states that SIB will take lawful affirmative or positive action, where appropriate.

SIB's Equal Opportunities Policy is closely based on the model policy issued by the Equality Commission.

Within SIB , the Human Resources Manager takes responsibility for the implementation of the policy but all managers and supervisory staff play a role in ensuring that the policy is effective. The policy is backed up by agreed procedures for the making and handling of complaints of discrimination. All staff and job applicants are affected by the policy.

3. Consideration of available data and research

3.1 SIB employee monitoring information

The Equal Opportunities Policy applies to all SIB employees and applicants for posts. SIB is a small organisation, although there are a number of officers on secondment from Government Departments/Agencies working alongside permanent employees.

The draft EQIA report circulated for consultation contained an analysis of SIB employee monitoring information for the period 2003-2007. The employee monitoring analysis for 2008 has now been completed and so the EQIA data has been updated.

The detailed information is set out in Appendix A and the key points are as follows –

- over the period 2003 to 2008 the number of employees has risen from 12 to 29;
- the majority of posts are in SOC 1 & 2 (managers and professional occupations) – of the current 29 posts, 25 are in categories SOC 1 & 2;
- over the entire period at least two thirds of the workforce has been male – the current percentage is 72.4%;
- of the 25 senior posts, only 5 are currently held by women;
- there has been a steady increase in the number of women applicants but the majority of applicants are male – in 2008, 80.8% of applicants were male;

- in terms of community background, the current workforce is fairly well balanced (44.8% Protestant, 41.4% Roman Catholic) although there have been several years when Protestants were in the minority;
- over the whole period there has been a reasonable balance in terms of community background among applicants for posts.

3.2 Monitoring questionnaire

In 2008 SIB requested the 24 staff in post to complete a detailed monitoring questionnaire on a voluntary basis in order to obtain full monitoring information on the workforce. The table below shows the breakdown by Section 75 category of the 17 respondents in percentages to one place of decimals.

Additional Section 75 monitoring information (17 employees)

		SIB	NI
Age	<20	0	6.6
	20-29	5.9	24.7
	30-39	35.3	27.9
	40-49	41.1	22.9
	50-59	11.8	15.8
	60+	5.9	2.1
Disability	Disabled	11.8	6.4
	Not disabled	88.2	93.6
Ethnic group	White	100	99.3
	Other	0	0.7
Marital status	Single	23.5	36.7
	Married	70.6	58.0
	Separated/Divorced	5.9	5.3
Dependants	Child or children	68.8	N/A
	None	31.2	N/A

		SIB	NI
Sexual orientation	Lesbian or Gay	0	N/A
	Heterosexual	100	N/A
	Bisexual	0	N/A

It should be noted that such a small sample is unlikely to reflect the composition of the economically active population of Northern Ireland, although this figure is provided for comparative purposes. (The NI figure is taken from the 2001 Census. The source of the Census information is the Northern Ireland Statistics website: www.nisra.gov.uk and Crown copyright material is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO.)

3.3 Preliminary consultation

The Equal Opportunities Policy has a major impact on employees; a questionnaire seeking views on the policy was therefore circulated with the Section 75 monitoring form and responses were received from the same 17 employees.

The majority of the respondents indicated that they were fairly familiar with the policy and their responsibilities under it. Most had received training on equal opportunities within the last 5 years and all considered the current policy to be either very or fairly comprehensive.

When asked about the differential between males and females in the workforce, 14 of the respondents (10 males and 4 females) said that they considered that the differential had no particular effect. One female respondent commented that the differential tended to reinforce gender stereotyping in the office. One male respondent considered that an improved gender balance would change the tone of the company and help to address the unfair perception that SIB is very male and private sector oriented.

3.4 Literature review

This policy was identified for EQIA because of the gender imbalance in the workforce. It is generally accepted within the public sector that, because men and women have different ways of thinking, a gender balance will enable different thinking to be applied within an organisation resulting in higher levels of innovation and productivity. A literature review was therefore carried out to identify good practice in relation to the employment of women. (The reports accessed are listed in Appendix B.)

The literature review showed that women are under-represented in the workforce for a wide range of reasons. The ones which may apply to SIB are that women are less likely than men to –

- apply for advertised positions;
- have the requisite qualifications and/or experience to be appointed;
- apply for posts if the employer does not have family friendly/flexible working policies in place.

Details of best practice designed to overcome these challenges, as established from the literature review, are set out in Appendix C.

3.5 Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in NI

The recent Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland identified several issues in relation to employment for people in various Section 75 categories.

- There are particular barriers to employment for disabled people. The employment rate for those without disabilities (79%) is over twice that of people with disabilities (32%). Moreover, only 21% of people with mental ill health or learning disability are in employment although research has shown that up to 58% of adults with severe and enduring ill health are able to work. Key barriers impacting on

disabled people's access to employment include lower levels of educational achievement, attitudes of employers and access to transport. In one research study 45% of employers indicated that they considered it would be quite/very difficult to employ a disabled person; this was significantly higher than for employing older people, women or those from minority ethnic groups.

- Negative assumptions about capacity are an issue for both older people and younger people; the former are thought to be less capable of meeting the demands of the job and the latter are often unable to demonstrate the level of experience deemed essential for particular jobs. Both these assumptions tend to be the result of stereotyping rather than the objective assessment of evidence and members of selection panels need to be aware of the possibility of making such assumptions.

- With regard to harassment, the highest number of complaints to the Equality Commission are from women and relate to sexual harassment but there have been recent increases in cases of homophobic and racist harassment.

4. Consultation

4.1 Consultation methodology

Consultation on the draft EQIA report was carried out in accordance with SIB's Equality Scheme over a 12 week period between 15 September and 12 December 2008. The Scheme sets out SIB's commitment to the following principles :

- consultation will be carried out in accordance with the Equality Commission Guiding Principles;
- consultation with groups and individuals will begin as early as possible;
- there will be different means of consultation for different groups;
- information will be made available to ensure meaningful consultation.

A letter summarising the findings of the EQIA to date was circulated to all the organisations and individuals on SIB's consultation list; this list was set out in the Equality Scheme and has been updated on a regular basis. The letter made it clear that a copy of the full EQIA report could be found on the SIB website and that alternative formats (such as Braille, large print, disk and audiocassette and minority languages) would be made available on a timely basis on request. The letter invited consultees to comment in writing, by e mail, by telephone or at specially arranged meetings with appropriate officers.

Staff were informed about the findings of the EQIA to date (using SIB's usual communication channels) and provided with access to the EQIA report. They were invited to comment on the findings and, in particular, the proposed actions which might affect them.

4.2 Comments received

Comments were received from two organisations (FDA and Disability Action). The former stated that they were satisfied with the findings of the EQIA report and had no comments to make.

Disability Action made several substantive comments about the EQIA and offered to meet with SIB officers to discuss these issues further. A meeting was held on 2 February 2009 and the following points summarise the discussion.

(a) Access to information

Disability Action pointed out that the lack of a textphone or dedicated SMS text number significantly disadvantaged deaf people who use sign language as their main method of communication and created a negative perception of the organisation. They also commented that the SIB website could be upgraded to make it more accessible to disabled people.

(b) Impact of the policy on disabled people

Disability Action pointed out that the policy could have a significant impact on disabled people and they raised the following points regarding the recruitment and employment of disabled people –

- disabled people working at a senior level tended to function independently and not seek assistance through support schemes;
- there was evidence that disabled people working at a senior level did not disclose their disability as they considered that this might have an impact on the recruitment process;
- there was a particular problem with testing processes as the reasonable adjustments made tended to be inadequate;

- disabled people faced a particular problem in gaining sufficient experience for senior posts as they were more likely to stay in one post for a long period.

(c) Suggestions for action

Disability Action suggested a range of measures which SIB might take to make the organisation more attractive to disabled applicants –

- audit all recruitment documentation, including job descriptions, and identify aspects which might create a barrier to disabled people;
- develop a Disability Policy;
- provide targeted training for those involved in recruitment;
- include a welcoming statement in job advertisements, reinforced in the recruitment documentation;
- create a graduate internship to help disabled people gain sufficient experience to apply for senior posts (the BBC has an initiative of this kind in place).

Disability Action stressed that SIB needed to portray a positive image in respect of the employment of disabled people and ensure that this was embedded throughout the culture of the organisation and supported by the management board.

4.3 Further research

During the consultation period, SIB made contact with some of the employers who have been awarded exemplar employer status by Opportunity Now in order to obtain information on initiatives carried out to increase the number of women applicants for senior posts. Responses were received from Yorkshire

Forward and the NI Local Government Staff Commission and the key initiatives undertaken are summarised below.

(a) Yorkshire Forward

Yorkshire Forward is the regional development agency for Yorkshire and the Humber. They have introduced a number of policies designed to make the organisation more attractive to women, such as –

- flexible working schemes, including:
 - compressed hours
 - remote working
 - career breaks

- family friendly policies, including:
 - enhanced maternity, paternity and adoption benefits
 - buying and selling of annual leave
 - child care vouchers
 - payments towards the care of a child or elderly relative for those working outside a normal working pattern

(b) NI Local Government Staff Commission

The LGSC has been instrumental in establishing a partnership initiative called “Women in Local Councils – Making a Difference” which has been designed to attract women into local government at all levels and to encourage those already employed to apply for higher graded posts. The initiative has been successful in achieving an increase in the number of women in senior posts in NI councils, including Chief Executive posts. The initiative consists of 4 themes –

- cultural change – a series of events designed to establish a foundation for a workplace culture of equality and characterised by equality outcomes;

- work/life balance – events to raise awareness among employers and support for individual women officers to assist them to find the right balance (making use of the Investors in People work/life balance model);

- local democracy – events to raise awareness and explore how councils and political parties can establish effective member development and support systems in order to encourage a more diverse range of people to become local councillors;

- capacity building and personal development – a package of training and mentoring support, including development centres and women only training.

5. Findings

Taking into account the updated analysis of available data and research, the comments received and the results of the further research, the following conclusions have been reached in relation to the potential impact of the policy on people in the various Section 75 categories.

5.1 Religious belief/political opinion

The current workforce is fairly evenly balanced in terms of community background and the analysis of applicants for recent posts shows a fairly even proportion of applicants from the two main communities. There has consistently been a higher than average proportion of applicants who do not have a background in either of these communities (principally because senior SIB posts are advertised widely across GB and RoI).

SIB follows the NICS Code of Practice on recruitment and selection which is rigorous in terms of its objectivity regarding community background and there is no evidence to suggest that people from either background are suffering an adverse differential impact.

5.2 Ethnic background

The current workforce are all from a white European ethnic background and, since monitoring of applicants was extended to include ethnic background, there have been very few who were not white. SIB has not identified any barriers to the recruitment of people from the BME communities but will give consideration to methods of attracting more applicants from this community.

5.3 Age

The majority of SIB employees are in the 40+ age ranges. However, this is not unusual in an organisation where the majority of posts (25 out of 29) are at a senior level. There are some younger people in administrative and secretarial posts. There is no reason to believe that younger people are subject to an adverse differential impact.

5.4 Marital status

The majority of SIB employees are married but this is not unusual in an organisation with this kind of age profile. There is no reason to believe that people of different marital status are subject to an adverse differential impact.

5.5 Sexual orientation

The recent Section 75 monitoring questionnaire circulated to SIB employees included questions on sexual orientation but this is the first time such information has been requested and the data from the returned questionnaires does not provide a profile which could be compared with the results of other research. (In any case, at present there is little reliable data on the Northern Ireland population.) SIB has not identified any barriers to the recruitment of lesbian, gay and bisexual people but will give consideration to methods of attracting more applicants of different sexual orientations.

5.6 Gender

The main reason for undertaking this EQIA was the gender imbalance in the current workforce and applicant pool. The mitigating actions set out in section 6 below are designed to address this imbalance.

5.7 Disability

In terms of data analysis, the SIB workforce appears to be reasonably representative of people with and without a disability. The SIB offices are in new, purpose built accommodation with good access for disabled people and the IT system which is widely used by employees has been designed to be accessible to all.

However, following discussion with Disability Action, it is acknowledged that there is potential to better promote equality of opportunity for disabled people by taking action to make SIB a more positive employer.

5.8 Dependants

The SIB workforce appears to have a high level of people with dependant children; however, this is not unusual given the age and marital status profile.

Many of the mitigating actions set out below designed to address the gender imbalance (for example, flexible working) will also potentially benefit those with dependants.

6. Conclusions and action plan

6.1 Conclusions

As a result of the EQIA, the following main conclusions have been reached –

- Generally SIB believes that the policy is in line with best practice and significantly enhances the ability of the organisation to promote equality of opportunity. However, equal opportunities initiatives generally have a greater impact on people in groups which are in the minority in the workforce and there is therefore potential for differential impacts.
- It should be noted that SIB has no reason to believe that the policy has caused actual adverse differential impacts; for example, there have been no complaints under the equal opportunities policy since SIB was established.
- The EQIA suggests that there is a potential adverse differential impact on women because they are significantly under-represented in the workforce. SIB has an unusually high percentage of senior positions (25 posts representing 86% of the total) only 5 of which (20%) are currently filled by women. Research by Opportunity Now across the UK as a whole suggests that in the public sector approximately 40% of senior posts are held by women.
- In terms of community background, there is a fairly equal proportion of people from the two main communities in both the current workforce and the applicant pool. SIB applies the NI Civil Service Code of Practice when selecting candidates for posts and there is no evidence of any bias against people from either community background.
- In terms of disability, there is a reasonable proportion of employees who consider themselves to be disabled, but there are opportunities to

attract more disabled applicants by taking action to make SIB a more positive employer.

- In terms of ethnic background, there have been very few applicants and no employees from the BME community and SIB will give consideration to methods of attracting more applicants from this community.

- The voluntary monitoring questionnaire showed that SIB has a slightly older age profile than the economically active population with approximately 60% of employees aged over 40. This is not unusual in workforces where the majority of posts are at senior level. There is also a high percentage of married people compared with the economically active population but this is to be expected in a workforce with an older age profile. The remaining percentages are fairly close to the NI averages.

6.2 Action plan

[The conclusions of the EQIA have been considered by SIB senior management and it has been decided that the following actions should be taken to further promote equality of opportunity.]

Action Plan [ideas for discussion]

Task	Actions	Target date	Responsibility	Monitoring
1. Improving communications	1.1 Identify a dedicated SMS number to assist deaf people to contact SIB	Jun 2009		Usage of SMS number
2. Training	2.1 Develop and deliver a training programme for those involved in recruitment	Sep 2009	HR Manager*	Trainee feedback
	2.2 Provide annual refresher training	From Sep 2010	HR Manager*	Trainee feedback
3. Develop new policies: Disability Flexible Working Family Friendly Investors in People (IIP)	3.1 Develop a Flexible Working Policy to include flexible hours, compressed hours, annualised hours, home working, job share and career break	Dec 2009	HR Manager*	Monitoring arrangements to be specified in each policy
	3.2 Identify which jobs are suitable for flexible working and ensure employees in post are made aware of opportunities	Mar 2010	HR Manager*	As 3.1
Task	Actions	Target date	Responsibility	Monitoring
	3.3 Develop Family Friendly Policies to	Dec 2009	HR Manager*	As 3.1

	include enhanced maternity, paternity and adoption leave and buying/selling of annual leave –			
	3.4 Develop a Disability Policy	Sep 2009	HR Manager*	As 3.1
4. Review recruitment process	4.1 Audit all recruitment documentation, including JDs, to identify ways to portray a positive image as an equal opportunity employer	Sept 2009	HR Manager*	Effects on ratio of applicants to appointees in under-represented categories
	4.2 Revise recruitment documentation and train those involved in recruitment (see 2.1 above)	Dec 2009	HR Manager*	As 4.1

Task	Actions	Target date	Responsibility	Monitoring
	4.4 Review recruitment process and consider alternatives	Sept 2009	HR Manager*	As 4.1
	4.5 Introduce any changes to recruitment process and train those involved in recruitment (see 2.1 above)	Dec 2009	HR Manager*	As 4.1
5. Review job advertisements	5.1 Review content of advertisements to promote a positive image	Jun 2009	HR Manager*	Effects on number of applicants from under-represented categories
	5.2 Establish arrangements with other organisations to identify potential women applicants for senior posts (when advertised)	Sep 2009	HR Manager*	As 5.1
6. Change the culture of the organisation	6.1 Develop a communication programme to emphasise the importance of equality to the organisation (to all stakeholders including staff)	Sep 2009	Strategic Communications Adviser	Stakeholder feedback
	6.2 Include appropriate references to equality in corporate publications	As published		Reader feedback

Task	Actions	Target date	Responsibility	Monitoring
	6.3 Include appropriate references in performance objectives	Dec 2010		Performance appraisal
	6.4 Develop an action plan for inclusion in the new Equality Scheme in line with the likely recommendations of the Equality Commission.	Mar 2010		Monitoring arrangements to be included in the action plan
7. Graduate internship	7.1 Investigate the feasibility of establishing a graduate internship for someone from an under-represented group	Sep 2009	HR Manager*	Number of applicants and future employment of intern
	7.2 Establish the internship if feasible	Apr 2010	HR Manager*	As 7.1
8. Benchmarking	8.1 Agree an annual benchmarking programme with suitable partner organisations	Dec 2009	HR Manager*	Results of benchmarking and additional actions generated

* with consultancy support as required

7. Publication of the results of the EQIA

This report is available through the SIB website and, if requested, SIB will produce the report in alternative formats such as Braille, on disk and to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English.

Information has been made available to publications and media associated with the section 75 categories and staff have been informed of the findings (through the usual SIB communications channels).

8. Monitoring for adverse impact

SIB already carries out extensive equal opportunities monitoring, both of applicants and current employees, against 8 of the 9 Section 75 categories. This will be continued and the information obtained will be evaluated on an annual basis.

The particular impact of the actions taken as a result of this EQIA will also be monitored in accordance with the action plan set out above. The results of this monitoring will be also be evaluated on an annual basis and will be published annually.

Appendix A

**ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYEE MONITORING INFORMATION
(UPDATED TO 1 JANUARY 2009)**

1. Total workforce

When evaluating SIB employee monitoring information, account must be taken of the fact that the total workforce is only 29 and that significant differences between the composition of the workforce and that of the economically active population of Northern Ireland do not necessarily imply a lack of promotion of equality of opportunity.

Table 1: Total number of employees, applicants and appointees (no.)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Employees ¹	12	12	11	20	24	29
Applicants ²	0	55	126 ³	84	93	156
Appointees ²	0	6	0	10	8	9

¹ At end of year ² Over 12 month period

³ Appointments made in 2006

2. Gender

Since its inception, SIB has monitored all applicants for posts in terms of community background and gender and made an annual fair employment monitoring return to the Equality Commission. Data on the gender of SIB employees, applicants and appointees over the last 6 years is set out in Tables 2-5 below.

Table 2: Gender – SIB employees (%)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Male	66.7	91.7	90.9	75.0	75.0	72.4
Female	33.3	8.3	9.1	25.0	25.0	27.6

Table 3: Gender – applicants (%)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Male	0	90.9	85.7	50.0	61.3	80.8
Female	0	9.1	14.3	50.0	38.7	19.2

Table 4: Gender – appointees (%)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Male	0	100	0	60.0	75.0	66.7
Female	0	0	0	40.0	25.0	33.3

Table 5: Gender – applicants 2008 (no.)

Standard Occupational Classification	Male applicants	Female applicants	Total applicants
1. Management & senior officials	77	10	87
2. Professional occupations	43	13	56
3. Associate professional and technical occupations	4	2	6
4. Administrative and Secretarial	2	5	7

3. Community background

Data on the community background of SIB employees, applicants and appointees over the last 6 years is set out in Tables 6-8 below.

Table 6: Community background – employees (%)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Protestant	41.7	25.0	27.3	35.0	29.2	44.8
Roman Catholic	16.6	41.7	45.4	50.0	54.2	41.4
Not determined	41.7	33.3	27.3	15.0	16.6	13.8

Table 7: Community background – applicants (%)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Protestant	0	32.7	40.5	45.2	40.9	34.0
Roman Catholic	0	36.4	41.3	39.3	36.6	37.8
Not determined	0	30.9	18.2	15.5	22.5	28.2

Table 8: Community background – appointees (%)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Protestant	0	16.7	0	40.0	25.0	66.7
Roman Catholic	0	50.0	0	50.0	50.0	22.2
Not determined	0	33.3	0	10.0	25.0	11.1

Appendix B

LITERATURE REVIEW – MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2007

Best Practice Recommendations: Flexible Working
Opportunity Now, 2008

Shaping a Fairer Future
Women & Work Commission, 2006

Government Action Plan: Implementing the Women & Work Commission
Recommendations
Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006

Facts about Women and Men in Great Britain
Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007

Fairness and Freedom: Final Report of the Equalities Review
Equalities Review Panel, 2007

Executive and Management Recruitment: Encouraging Women Applicants
Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, GWA, 2002

Review of Government Advertising in Northern Ireland
OFMDFM, 2005

Appendix C**ANALYSIS OF PUBLISHED RESEARCH**

Research carried out by a number of organisations (including Opportunity Now and the Women & Work Commission) shows that women are under-represented in the workforce for a wide range of reasons. The ones which may apply specifically to SIB are that women are less likely than men to –

- apply for advertised positions;
- have the requisite qualifications and/or experience to be appointed;
- apply for posts if the employer does not have family friendly/flexible working policies in place.

2.3.1 Encouraging women to apply

Research indicates that an individual organisation can take a number of steps to encourage more women to apply for senior positions, including –

- specify in advertisements that women are encouraged to apply;
- include an indication in the advertisement that flexible working arrangements can be negotiated;
- ask senior managers in the organisation and other agencies to disseminate the information about the position to potential women candidates;
- ask professional associations and Trade Unions for the names of women working in the field and send these women the advertisement and the selection criteria;
- if recruitment agencies are used, make it clear that the organisation would like to see a gender balanced field of applicants;

- consider what the organisation can offer that would build a reputation as an employer of choice among women and attract female applicants to apply for senior positions and profile this prominently in advertisements, job information packs and on the organisation's website; examples might include family friendly policies, a values driven culture, a focus on people and innovation, opportunities for development etc.
- make it clear that the organisation is looking for transferable skills, ability and potential rather than highly specific experience and think laterally about where women may have gained valuable experience;
- do not require experience to have been gained within the last few years as this discriminates against women returnees;
- write job advertisements that emphasise a supportive, flexible culture as this will attract women applicants;
- use gender neutral wording for selection criteria;
- if graphics or photographs are used in the advertisements, ensure that they include both men and women;
- all recruitment materials should create a positive impression of the organisation as one which actively promotes equality of opportunity; they should present a distinctive, positive corporate image rather than just describing the organisation in functional terms and should speak directly to the prospective applicant, rather than merely describe the job.

2.3.2 Competencies and selection

The NICS Code of Practice on recruitment and selection emphasises that selection must be made on the basis of merit and that the candidate who is the best match to the competencies required should be appointed. However,

there is evidence that men and women who take part in selection processes assess certain competencies in different ways. For example, research has shown that men and women understand terms such as 'leadership skills' differently. It is therefore important that selection panels develop a shared understanding of the qualities they are seeking in candidates. Best practice suggests that –

- selection panels should be briefed clearly on the need to be alert for skills and competencies that are transferable to the position; they should not be locked into thinking there is only one career path to the top and that years of experience are paramount;
- selection panels also need to be aware that men and women behave differently in interview situations; women have a tendency to down play their certainty whereas men have a tendency to minimise their doubts; women are often self deprecating rather than self enhancing and tend to give team focussed answers (for example, by using collective pronouns);
- the organisation should consider alternatives to traditional interviews; for example, interviewing a candidate's superiors, peers and the staff they currently manage;
- all managers should be regularly trained on diversity and flexibility issues, especially those who are regularly involved in recruitment and selection.

2.3.3 Flexible working

Research in the UK has shown that 38% of mothers, 11% of fathers and 18% of carers have given up or turned down a job owing to their caring responsibilities. Making work more flexible enables all staff to balance their work and caring responsibilities more effectively. There is evidence that allowing staff to work flexibly can reduce sickness absence and increase productivity, especially where unsocial hours are required. Having flexible

policies may also enable the organisation to employ qualified staff who would not otherwise be able to work because of caring responsibilities.

There are a wide range of flexible working schemes such as job sharing, part time working, flexible hours, compressed working weeks, annualised hours, home working, distance working, family leave, short term leave, employment breaks, unpaid leave during school holidays. However, it is important that each organisation should select the types of flexible working which are appropriate to its size and structure; a number of management tools have been developed to assist in determining which jobs are suitable for flexible working. Once this has been determined, the organisation should promote the options to all employees and applicants and develop practical guidelines on how to manage flexible working.

Good practice also suggests that, once flexible working options have been introduced, the organisation should monitor take up and hold regular focus groups to listen to staff opinions.

2.3.4 Other aspects of best practice

The literature review suggested a number of other initiatives which will assist in promoting equality of opportunity for women –

- identify senior women role models (especially those working part time or job sharing) who will champion the spread of best practice among managers;
- work towards the Investors in People standard in order to mainstream best practice on equality and diversity and training;
- ensure all sub-contractors promote gender equality and comply with equal pay legislation;
- benchmark against employers who have been awarded exemplar employer status by Opportunity Now; in Northern Ireland these

include DEL, Local Government Staff Commission, Belfast City Council, Northern Health & Social Care Trust and the Royal Hospitals.