

Integrating Equalities and Diversity into the DNA of SEEDA

1. Introduction

Equalities is about understanding, respecting and embracing diversity. It is about an organisation taking practical action to ensure that all that its internal and external activities:

- reflect the different needs of people
- are inclusive and open
- identify and address any inequality

It should be informed and driven by a strong up to date evidence and then implemented through an Equalities Impact Assessment process and performance management.

1.1 Furthering SEEDA's Core Objectives and Purpose

Equalities affect all people, but there are particular groups who are more likely to experience barriers to economic inclusion and activity and therefore less likely to be employed or progress within the workplace. This has a direct impact on economic development. For example, having a job means greater financial independence and therefore increased ability to purchase goods and services. Greater diversity in consumer demand can be a powerful stimulus for new markets e.g. the potential size of the disability market alone is thought to be worth around £80 billion to the UK economy, much of which relates to the increased participation of disabled people in the visitor, cultural, social and leisure economies.

Promoting equalities therefore has a direct relevance to all RDA statutory functions:

- **To further economic development and regeneration of the South East**
e.g. employing a diverse workforce can open up new markets and foster innovation in the development of new products and services. Embracing diversity can also help to address labour or skills shortages.
- **Promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness**
e.g. good understanding of equalities and how it affects consumer choice can make business more efficient and innovative. Good work place diversity policies and practices, can make businesses more competitive when competing for public sector contracts, or within a public sector driven supply chain.
- **Promote employment**
e.g. the UK has a shrinking tax base. By 2014 there will be more people over 65 than under 16. Tackling age discrimination and developing initiatives to support older workers has the potential to significantly increase the percentage of the population who are active in the economy, and are able to live independently for longer. This is a key factor in reducing pressure on the public purse

- **Enhance and develop skills relevant to employment**
e.g. Many migrant workers currently work below their skills level in the UK. Supporting migrant workers in the development of English language skills enables employers to make full use of the skills that migrant workers bring and improves business efficiency. Conversely, increasing cultural awareness within in the workplace, will also increase a business's effectiveness when seeking to expand into global markets, particularly those companies operating in the knowledge, creative and cultural economies
- **Contribute to achievement of sustainable development**
e.g. Responding to the needs of disabled people and those with caring responsibilities by increasing opportunities to work from home, contributes to reducing traffic congestion and cutting down on CO2 emissions.

1.2 Compliance with Legislation

SEEDA as a Public Body has additional duties under legislation, as well as the need to comply with legislation that affects all organisations and businesses. At present there are three main equalities strands with which we must ensure legal compliance. Our additional duties are:

Gender:

- Ensure that our services, practices and policies are developed with the different needs of women and men in mind (The Equality Act 2006, Gender Equality Duty)
- Publish a Gender Equality Scheme which is reviewed every three years (The Equality Act 2006, Gender Equality Duty)

Race

- Promote racial equality in the provision of services and to improve equal opportunities in employment (Race Relations Amendment Act 2000)
- Promote racial equality in all external operations, including policy making and service delivery, publish the results of monitoring, consultation and assessment, and make sure the public have access to the information
- Promote racial equality in employment, monitor existing staff and applicants for jobs, promotion and training by ethnic group and publishing the results every year
- Prepare and publish a Race Equalities Scheme,
- To train staff in the new duties

Disability

- Actively promote disability equality and eliminate discrimination
- Produce and publish a Disability Equality Scheme
- Make reasonable adjustment for disabled people by changing policies, practices and procedures that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to make use of a service. This includes conducting access audits or premises and making adjustments

With the forthcoming integrated **Equality Bill**, additional duties will be extended to also cover age, sexual orientation, religion or belief and gender reassignment. The Bill will streamline and strengthen equality legislation with a single integrated **Equality duty** for public bodies with some supplementary supporting duties. As well as our strategic influencing activities, there will be particular implications for SEEDA's commissioning and procurement.

2. Integrating Equalities and Diversity into the DNA of SEEDA

Though Equalities needs to be driven by policy and strategy, its delivery is not something that can be handed over to a single "Equalities Officer". It is something that should be integrated throughout an organisation and embedded in its culture.

There are three key tools for achieving this:

A. Equalities Schemes and Action Plans:

We currently have three equalities schemes (race, disability and gender) and three action plans to cover the three strands of legal compliance. In accordance with the Equality Bill we will soon be replacing them with a Single Equalities Scheme and action plan which will require engagement and commitment from the entire SEEDA staff body to ensure that:

- i. we are legally compliant
- ii. we maximise the benefit to SEEDA and staff as an inclusive organisation
- iii. we influence partner organisation as a reputable example of good practice

B. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA): This is a systematic way of finding out whether an existing or proposed policy, function, service, programme or project impacts differently on different groups. It should be an integral part of normal process. EIAs enable an organisation to assess and consult on the effects that a policy, strategy, service, programme or project has, or is likely to have, on different people. An EIA aims to ensure that as far as possible any negative consequences for a particular group or sector are identified, eliminated or minimised. They also help to check the ongoing effects of Equality policy and alert the organisation to any concerns about the way things are working in practice. SEEDA has a duty to assess and disclose the expected impact of policies, plans, strategies and functions on race, disability and gender.

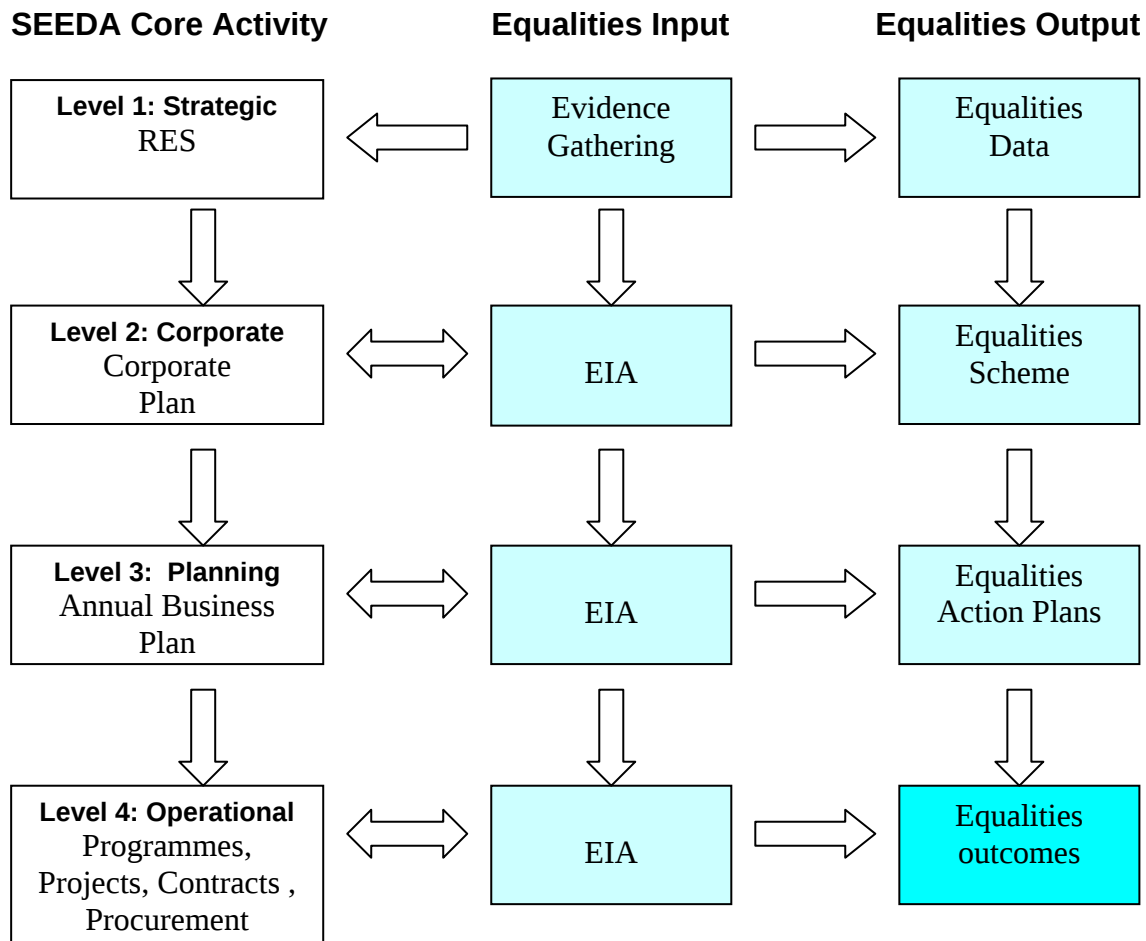
C. Equality and Diversity Data Tool:

To support staff with all of the above, we have collaborated to produce the Equality and Diversity data tool that provides useful statistics and information. This data will be a valuable support in planning projects and carrying out EIAs to assess their likely impact. The tool is available at:

<http://www.see-in.co.uk/researchdatabase/2008/equalityanddiversitydatatool.html>

2.1 Integration across the breadth of RDA activity

To be fully compliant, equalities must be integrated into each layer of activity i.e. from strategy and policy, to corporate and business planning, to consultation processes, programmes, projects, contracts and devolved delivery agreements.



Equalities also needs to be integrated into support functions such as HR related activities, communications, monitoring and review.

3. Where we are currently:

a. Equalities Schemes and Action Plans

Our current Disability Equality Scheme runs from 2006 to 2009.

Our current Gender Equality Scheme runs from 2007 to 2010.

Our 2009 to 2012 Race Equality Scheme is currently available for consultation.

Each scheme has an associated action plan with actions for teams across the breadth of SEEDA. These action plans are revised every three years.

b. Equalities Impact Assessment

All staff should now have received or be receiving EIA training. It is essential to the development, execution and evaluation of every programme and project. EIA guidance is available on the SEEDA intranet.

c. Equality and Diversity Data Tool

The tool is available for use and will soon be updated with new data. We will be providing introductory sessions to the tool for SEEDA teams.

4. Increasing Capacity

a. Advisory Team

We are putting together an external panel of experts who will be available to provide advice and support across SEEDA on equalities issues. These will be our 'Equalities Champions.'

b. Co-ordinating Team

An internal team is being created to ensure that E and D is properly embedded across SEEDA: our policy, strategy, internal and external functions.

5. What Needs to happen next:

- **Everybody:** will complete equalities training and EIA training in order to be fully aware of our duties as public sector staff. They should have read SEEDA's equalities schemes and action plans and provide input to relevant sections as required. Everyone working on the development of projects and programmes should ensure that the EIA process is integrated into their work, and is carried out meaningfully and effectively.
- **Culture Communities and Consumers Team:** Will continue to develop SEEDA's equalities policy and schemes, in line with changing legislation and economic change. This will include leading on the activities required to meet requirements under the Single Equalities Bill and managing the appointment of external Equalities Champions to provide specialist advice to functional teams in the development of their programmes and projects. The Team will also build up a virtual library of good practice, and case studies of equalities and diversity in relation to RDA statutory objectives, and ensure the data tool is relevant and kept up to date. The team will also ensure that SEEDA contributes to the work of the RDA Equalities and Diversity Policy Group and, provide briefings to SEEDA chair and CEO on joint RDA activities.
- **HR Team:** Will ensure the provision of equalities training and EIA training to all SEEDA staff and ensure compliance in recruitment and training procedures. Individual line Managers will ensure that the provision is taken up by members of their team.

- **Resources Team and Programme Office:** will ensure compliance in relation to procurement and be aware that the upcoming Equality Bill will create new duties for public bodies with regard to procurement, monitor the implementation of SEEDA's schemes, actions plans and EIA processes, at all levels, in order to ensure compliance.
- **Area Teams:** Will promote our Equalities vision and support legal compliance among partner organisations.
- **Communications Team:** will ensure compliance with the duties under equalities legislation to ensure that all information is communicated in an accessible format and is non-discriminatory.