

EQUALITY REPORT ON STAFFING 2006-07

Introduction

1. Over the past year, much has been achieved in driving forward the equality agenda within the Welsh Assembly Government's Human Resources Department. A new approach to HR policy development and evaluation was approved. Several new strategies and policies have been adopted, including an innovative Domestic Abuse Policy. Considerable progress has also been made in improving perceptions of the Assembly Government among under-represented groups. We continue to monitor and benchmark our work.

2. In highlighting the wide range of activity that the Assembly Government has undertaken to promote equality and diversity, this report will:

- consider strategies and policies introduced over the past year
- discuss the impact of major operational changes including mergers and the Location Strategy.
- focus on key areas of the HR Department's work, including recruitment, training and development, performance management and the Dignity at Work policy.
- examine measures to improve perceptions of the Assembly Government among potential employees from under-represented groups will then be examined
- provide an update on the accessibility of Assembly Government Buildings; and
- outline the use of benchmarking, as a means of maintaining high standards in equality.

Strategies and Policies

Diversity Delivery Plan

3. In November 2006, the Assembly Government launched its Diversity Delivery Plan, in response to the Cabinet Office "Delivering a Diverse Civil Service: A 10-Point Plan". The Diversity Delivery Plan sets stretching targets for the percentage of women, minority ethnic and disabled staff in the Senior Civil Service and at Grades 6 and 7, to be achieved by April 2008. These targets are underpinned by a range of challenging actions across the 10 areas identified in the Cabinet Office "10-Point Plan". The areas covered are:

- Targets
- Measurements and evaluation
- Diversity Champions' Network
- Leadership and Accountability
- Recruitment
- Development

- Behaviour and culture change
- Diversity impact of efficiency and relocation reviews
- Mainstreaming
- Communication.

4. Progress against actions and targets is regularly monitored, identifying both successes and areas for improvement. Our commitment to driving forward and monitoring progress was recognised in March when, following rigorous self-assessment and peer review by other Government Departments, the Assembly Government was placed in the top 5 Departments for the progress it had made against the Cabinet Office 10-Point Plan. We are now providing help to Whitehall by supporting less successful departments.

Equality Schemes and Single Equality Action Plan

5. Over the past year, in line with equality legislation, the Assembly Government has developed and implemented its Disability Equality Scheme (DES). Furthermore, in accordance with good practice, the Assembly Government also put in place its Gender Equality Scheme (GES) in March of this year. HR Department has demonstrated its commitment to promoting equality and addressing under-representation in the workforce by drawing up action plans in accordance with both of these Duties. Progress on implementing the action plans is monitored quarterly. The Assembly Government is now looking to mainstream equality throughout its business functions and, as part of this process, is developing a vision for equality which reaches across all the equality strands via development of a Single Equality Scheme.

Domestic Abuse Policy

6. The Domestic Abuse Policy and Guidance have been launched to support staff. The Policy was introduced, in part, because of the effect that domestic abuse can have on the work of the organisation, giving rise to staffing issues such as poor attendance and loss of productivity. A significant reason for its introduction, however, is that the Assembly Government aims to be an exemplar of good practice towards its staff. The policy is therefore supported by extensive guidance, setting out how staff suffering domestic abuse, their managers and colleagues, should be supported. It was jointly developed by HR Department and the Trade Unions. Other organisations involved in its development include:

- South Wales Police
- Cardiff Women's Safety Unit, an exemplar project funded by the Assembly Government and recognised throughout the United Kingdom
- Corporate Alliance UK, an employer organisation headed by Baroness Scotland, which aims to promote the development of domestic abuse policies and which includes among its membership KPMG, Body Shop and AOL.

7. The Policy was benchmarked against Cabinet Office's existing policy and the policy being developed by the Scottish Executive. It came into effect in November 2006, but a high profile launch was held on International Women's Day 2007. Feedback has been excellent, with both men and women staff reporting that their awareness has been considerably raised. Following the launch, it was agreed that the Domestic Abuse Hotline Number, funded by the Assembly Government, would be included on the payslips of all staff, every month.

Equality Impact Assessment of Policies

8. A number of policies and action plans for driving forward the equality agenda have been developed and implemented over the past year. However, if equality is to be mainstreamed and given proper weight in everything we do, it is essential that the equality implications of all HR policies are thoroughly assessed. To ensure that this happens, a mandatory Equality Impact Assessment must be carried out for all new policies and for any existing policies that are being updated. The Strategic Equality and Diversity Unit (SEDU) has developed an Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit to enable cross strand working which has been piloted since March 2007 in HR Department and across a number of policy divisions. In March 2007, the Management Board approved a new approach to policy development and evaluation, based on a project and programme management model. The Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit forms part of this overall approach.

Operational Developments

Mergers

9. 2006-07 saw the consolidation of the merger in which 1,700 staff from the former Welsh Development Agency, Wales Tourist Board, Education and Learning Wales, ACCAC, Wales Youth Agency and DYSG joined the Welsh Assembly Government in April 2006.

10. Work within the HR Department concentrated on four areas:

- Pay and Grading Review – working in partnership with the Trade Unions to design a new pay and grading system to match the business needs of the post merger organisation.
- Job evaluation – to allow staff from the former Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies to move onto Welsh Assembly Government terms and conditions of service.
- Pension administration – to set up the arrangements for staff to make a decision on the future of their pension provision.
- Internal Change – embedding the new teams and structures formed within the HR Department as a result of mergers.

Work on all four areas progressed during the year and it is expected that the mergers project will be completed by the end of this year.

11. A major challenge, however, has been ensuring equal pay. Prior to the mergers, the Welsh Assembly Government pay system, introduced in 2001 for staff below the Senior Civil Service, was successful in reducing the pay gap between male and female employees. Following the mergers, however, a significant number of staff are on different pay and conditions. Maintaining and improving equal pay for staff is a key objective of the pay and grading review referred to above. In August 2004 the pay gap between average male and female pay was 5.4 per cent. This steadily decreased to 3.8 per cent by March 2006. After the merger, it was closer to 11 per cent. The reason behind this change is mostly the relatively large number of male senior (Senior Civil Service feeder grade) managers in the former Welsh Development Agency. Some analysis has been carried out on the impacts of different models on equal pay. This will be mainstreamed into the new system.

12. The impact of the mergers on the gender balance of staff within the Welsh Assembly Government is shown in Table 1 & 2 below. For the Senior Civil Service and the workforce as a whole there has been limited impact or a slight increase in the proportion of women employed, but there is a more significant impact on the SCS feeder grades where the proportion of women fell as a consequence of the merger. The further impact of mergers on the diversity of the Welsh Assembly Government workforce will not be fully assessed until the roll out of the HR IT system to all staff later this year. This will allow more complete data on race, gender and disability, as well as broader aspects of equality such as sexual orientation and religion and belief to be collected from all staff. Table 3 however gives a snapshot view of the current representation as at 31 March 2007.

Table 1

Welsh Assembly Government – Senior Civil Service		
	per cent	
	March 2006	March 2007
Proportion of SCS – Female	35	35
Proportion of SCS 2 and above – female	19	24
Proportion of SCS – BME	1.4	2
Proportion of SCS – disabled	4.1	4

Table 2

Welsh Assembly Government – Feeder Grades		
	Per cent	
	March 2006	March 2007
Proportion of feeder grades – female	44	41.9
Proportion of feeder grades – BME	2.7	2.7
Proportion of feeder grades – disabled	6.1	4.2

Table 3

Welsh Assembly Government - Staff in Post 31 March 2007		
	per cent	
	March 2006	March 2007
Total	100.0	100.0
Of which:		
Men	44.2	42.6
Women	55.8	56.8
Unknown		0.6
Minority Ethnic ¹	2.7	3.1
Disabled ¹	5.0	4.0

¹ Based on partial data only for March 2007 – to be completed once HRIS rolled out

HR Information System and the HR Equality Report

13. The roll out of the HR IT System is key in monitoring the diversity of Assembly Government staff. The Department is now at an advanced stage in piloting U-Access, the means by which individual staff can access their own personnel records. The roll out of U-Access will also enable individuals to update their own equality data. To date, 330 user accounts have been activated. The pilot, covering approximately 1, 000 staff, will be completed by early June and the roll out should be completed by mid July. Following the roll out, it will be possible to track the agreement of Annual Performance Management Plans and both in-year and end of year performance ratings.

The On-Line Recruitment Management System, which will be discussed in more detail later in the report, enables the Assembly Government to monitor diversity aspects of recruitment.

Location Strategy

14. The Merthyr Tydfil Office officially opened in November 2006. It currently holds 460 staff, of whom 60 were recruited through external competition and the rest relocated from other offices. Planning for the new offices in Aberystwyth and Llandudno Junction is well under way. The Aberystwyth Office will hold 550 staff and the office in Llandudno Junction will hold up to 650 staff.

15. The Location Strategy aims to promote equality of opportunity across Wales and to give potential and existing staff the opportunity to pursue a wide range of career development opportunities in their chosen locality. To capitalise on the opportunities that the Location Strategy has created for increasing staff diversity, outreach work has been undertaken by project managers in the areas of the new offices, to ensure that groups representing all equality strands are engaged in discussions about recruitment and awareness raising.

16. It is recognised that the Location Strategy will have a major impact both on the staff who choose to relocate and on those who do not relocate with their jobs and must therefore find new postings. Specific HR policies have been developed and staff and trade unions have been consulted on them to ensure that they are equitable for all. A People Plan has been drawn up for Aberystwyth and Llandudno Junction. The Plan sets out how the HR aspects of the Location Strategy are to be managed prior to the opening of the new offices in 2009. It also contains details of the support available to all staff affected by the relocation, including those who do not move with their posts.

17. Work has already been carried out to assess the equality impact of the Location Strategy. However, an equality report, which is currently being prepared, will amount to a full Equality Impact Assessment of how the Location Strategy Programme and related HR policies have performed against the Assembly Government's Equality Impact Testing Indicators. The Equality Report will be finalised by July 2007 and will include an action plan, to be passed to the Aberystwyth and Llandudno Junction Project Boards for delivery.

Recruitment

18. The external recruitment moratorium remained in force in the Cardiff area during the past year, to ensure that staff, displaced by restructuring and the relocation of jobs to Merthyr Tydfil, Aberystwyth and Llandudno Junction, could be helped to find new postings. Recruitment has, however, continued for specialist posts across Wales, posts outside the Cardiff area and those scheduled for relocation, where the post-holder chose not to relocate. Between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007 133 members of staff were

recruited, compared to 208 in the previous year. A breakdown of applications in relation to gender, race and disability can be seen in Table 4 below.

19. The posts were advertised in key newspapers, chosen for their recruitment and/or Welsh language platform. Relevant national newspapers and trade journals were also used. The Bilingual, professionally designed advertisements were presented in a format recommended by Disability Wales for people with visual impairments.

Table 4

Staff Recruitment (External) 2006-07*				
	Applicants	Per cent	Appointments	Per cent
Total	1217	100.0	133	100.0
Of which:				
Men	589	48.4	56	42.1
Women	628	51.7	77	57.9
Minority Ethnic	37	3.0	1	1.0
Disabled	44	3.7	10	7.5
*Information provided as part of the application process by applicants includes internal staff who applied in open competition, and some candidates for whom diversity data are unknown.				

20. Internal recruitment exercises have also reduced with 416 exercises being undertaken in 2006-07 compared to 579 in the previous year. A breakdown of applications in relation to gender, race and disability can be seen in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Staff Promotion (Internal) 2006 – 07 **				
	Applicants	Per cent	Promoted	Per cent
Total	830	100.0	216	100.0
Of which:				
Men	453	54.6	103	47.7
Women	377	45.4	113	52.3
Minority Ethnic	13	1.7	2	0.9
Disabled	29	3.6	9	4.2
** Includes some candidates for whom diversity data are unknown.				

Training and development

Access to Training and Development Opportunities

21. It is vital that all staff, including those from under-represented groups, have access to the courses that will enable them to do their job and develop their career. To ensure that this happens, effective monitoring needs to take place. Between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007, the attendance details for staff on all Welsh Assembly Government Core Training Programmes have been captured on the HR Information System. Following the roll out of U-Access, it will be possible to report accurately on the attendance of under-represented groups at all training sessions. This will help to ensure that potential barriers are identified and addressed proactively. In the meantime, however, Eliesha, the core training provider for the Assembly Government, records and acts upon requests for reasonable adjustments relating to the training courses they provide..

22. As well as focusing on under-represented groups, it is recognised that a wide range of training opportunities need to be made available to staff throughout Wales. For that reason, following the Investors In People assessment and recommendations, the first meeting of a cross-departmental working group was held in March 2007, to look at increasing training and development opportunities in mid Wales.

Investors In People

23. On 29 November 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government received confirmation that we have attained the new and more rigorous Investors in People Standard. Focusing on strategic and management practices, we were recognised for having taken *a more pro-active approach to equality and diversity and for greater awareness and sensitivity*. In addition, the lead assessor's report highlighted a number of effective working practices, including the communication of the equality and diversity objectives, the work of the central equality and diversity team and the awareness that managers have of the different needs of their staff.

The Bilingual Skills Strategy

24. A key element in our efforts to ensure equality is the need to give full recognition and support to the Welsh language. For that reason, the Bilingual Skills Strategy, launched this year requires all divisions to think strategically about their bilingual skills capacity. An evidence base is currently being developed to identify an objective skills analysis, comparing the level of Welsh language skills required for all posts and the level of skills attained by staff. The data gathered by Departments, this far, is being collated and input into the HR IT System. Opportunities to acquire and develop Welsh language skills are available to staff and these will help to close gaps in capacity.

The Leadership Programme

25. Having considered measures to ensure equality in the provision of training and development opportunities, it is also important to highlight some innovative training and development programmes taken forward over the past year. These include the Leadership Programme and Pathways to Success, launched in October 2006, which form a key part of the Assembly Government's wider approach to developing capability and capacity. The Leadership Programme supports our commitment to diversity. It is open to all staff and aims to develop talent at all levels. One of its aims is to ensure that our leadership in the future more closely reflects the society we represent. Participants on the Programme will have a wide range of opportunities, including:

- Developing greater self awareness amongst participants
- Attending formal workshops to develop and enhance leadership skills
- Coaching other Leadership Programme participants
- Taking up mini-secondments
- Participating in corporate assignments.

26. Line managers are supported to encourage staff from under-represented groups to apply for places on the Programme and commitment to diversity is an active consideration in the assessment of applications. An initial review of applicants showed that the gender balance was 56 per cent female and 44 per cent male. The proportion of applicants with a disability was 2.5 per cent, 1 per cent of applicants were from minority ethnic backgrounds and 1.4 per cent were lesbian, gay or bisexual. The review of diversity statistics has shown that more needs to be done to encourage applications from under-represented groups. Methods of publicity and awareness raising for those groups will be evaluated prior to the next tranche and ideas for different approaches generated by consulting the staff networks which are linked to the equality strands. Positive action elements of the Programme will be considered as part of our overall review of equality and diversity in learning and development.

Modern Apprenticeships

27. An innovative Scheme, which is still in the early stages of development, is the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to Modern Apprenticeships. A project manager was appointed in March 2007 to take it forward. The aim of the Scheme is to develop the capacity of existing staff and to recruit between ten and fifteen Foundation Modern Apprentices through a pilot. Applications will be encouraged from under-represented groups, through targeted advertising via Careers Wales. To be eligible for the Foundation Modern Apprenticeship Programme, applicants must either have 2 GCSEs, or NVQ1 or equivalent. Foundation Modern Apprentices will be in post in Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil by September 2007. If successful, the pilot will pave the way for future Foundation Modern Apprenticeship vacancies at the new offices in Aberystwyth and Llandudno Junction.

Performance Management System

28. Throughout 2006-07, a new performance management system was developed and launched on 2 April 2007. The supporting guidance includes examples of behaviours linked to the Skills and Behaviours Framework. In addition, the system continues to require all staff to include a Diversity Objective in their Performance Management Agreements. Training on the new system was carried out in March and April 2007. Following its launch, procedures will be put in place to ensure consistency of standards and identify any possible bias.

Dignity at Work

29. "Dignity at Work" is the Welsh Assembly Government's policy on combating harassment and bullying in the workplace. During 2006-07, 2 formal investigations of harassment/bullying complaints have been undertaken and there have been 30 complaints dealt with informally compared to 19 in 2005-06. The increase, however, seems relatively comparable with the increase in the number of staff, following mergers as there were 4.8 complaints per 1000 staff this year compared to 4.5 in the previous year. The total number of complaints raised since the policy was introduced can be seen in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Number of Dignity fo Work complaints raised since policy introduction		
Year	N° of Informal Complaints	Complaints per thousand staff
2003	30	8.4
2004	29	7.5
2005	19	4.5
2006	30	4.8

30. The existing Dignity at Work policy has been in place since September 2005 and one of the commitments was to review it regularly. A Project Officer has been appointed to review the existing policy and implement any changes. It is envisaged that a new or amended policy will be in place by November 2007.

Perceptions of the Welsh Assembly Government as an Employer

31. Research into perceptions among minority ethnic, disabled and socially excluded groups about the Assembly Government as a potential employer was commissioned in 2005 and a report was produced later that year. The report concluded that many in those groups had the perception that the Assembly Government did not provide career opportunities for them. Internal and external recruitment processes were seen as long and cumbersome and a barrier to under-represented groups applying for posts. A range of measures were recommended to improve the situation.

32. Over the past year, considerable progress has been made towards implementing those recommendations in the following areas.

E-Recruitment

33. In November 2006, a comprehensive On-line Recruitment Management System (ORMS) was introduced for all posts below Senior Civil Service level. All generalist posts are sign-posted to the Assembly Government website, though advertisements also confirm that hard copy packs are available and that application forms can be completed off-line. In designing the ORMS, equality issues were taken fully into account. As the ORMS is provided bilingually, the Welsh Language Unit was involved in its design. Arrangements were also made for the Shaw trust to test the system on people with a range of disabilities, including people with partial vision, no vision, dyslexia and physical disabilities, such as limited arm movement. The system supplier is currently taking forward suggested improvements.

Outreach

34. Despite the recruitment moratorium in the Cardiff area, outreach activity has been undertaken, focussing on awareness raising and developing relationships with local career and equality representatives, including organisations who can advise on effective engagement with under-represented groups. In Mid and North Wales, work is under way to promote the range of opportunities that will be created when the new offices are opened. Stakeholder groups have been established with local representatives, to ensure that they are kept informed of progress.

35. Extensive marketing has been undertaken, including attendance at 23 careers fairs throughout Wales and 60 advertisements in the minority press. The Assembly Government has also been a support sponsor for all four major career events in Wales. In addition, the Assembly Government has established links with the Welsh universities and is developing a programme of activity specific to graduates and undergraduates. As a result of these links, the Assembly Government has a presence at the majority of career events that the universities host.

36. Meetings are being held throughout Wales between the HR Outreach Team and Careers Wales Branches, to discuss future collaboration, with a particular emphasis on mentoring and placement opportunities. A training programme has also been developed, which outlines the key principles of the Assembly Government's competency-based application process. The programme is currently being rolled out to careers advisors and other interested parties.

37. A three-year Outreach Strategy is currently being developed, identifying the range of outreach activity to be taken forward. The Strategy also includes avenues that will be explored, to ensure that members of under-represented groups have maximum exposure to the employment opportunities available within the Assembly Government.

Work Placement Schemes

38. Placements are an effective way of targeting under-represented groups and enabling them to experience the range of employment opportunities that the Assembly Government has to offer and the culture of inclusion that is promoted internally. Therefore, over the past year, efforts have been made to increase the number of placements offered on existing schemes, as well as piloting new schemes.

Existing Schemes

39. In summer 2006, the Assembly Government offered more places than ever before on the Cabinet Office summer schemes for minority ethnic and disabled students. The Assembly Government offered placements for seven minority ethnic students and eight disabled students. In addition, the Assembly Parliamentary Service provided placements for two candidates, one on each scheme. Evaluation mechanisms were put in place for the schemes and the feedback will allow improvements to be made for summer 2007.

40. Summer placements were also provided to three talented minority ethnic students on the Windsor Fellowship Programme. Later in the year, however, it was agreed that the current programme, which provides undergraduates with two short summer placements, should be replaced with a 50-week placement that students would take up on graduation. The new arrangements, which will come into force in 2008, will increase the likelihood of Windsor Fellows seeking permanent employment with the Assembly Government.

Pilot Schemes

41. Three new positive action placement schemes have been piloted over the past year. HR Department is working with Scope, a disability charity expanding its operations in Wales, to place disabled graduates who have successfully obtained places on Scope's Leadership Recruitment Programme. Three Graduates on the Leadership Recruitment Programme were placed in departments across the Assembly Government in January 2007 and more placements will be taken up later in the year.

42. Working with Women Connect First, an organisation supporting minority ethnic women, the Assembly Government provided 50-week placements for three women from minority ethnic backgrounds. An interim evaluation has been carried out and recommended improvements will be taken onboard when the pilot is rolled out across the organisation. A 50-week placement has also been provided for a Traveller identified by Cardiff's Traveller education Service. The placement has worked very well and the Assembly Government is looking at ways of building on the links that have been established. We are also committed to providing placements for people with a wide range of disabilities. Talks have been held with Elite, a consortium committed to assisting disabled people into employment, to

consider how a placement scheme for disabled people can be set up within the Assembly Government. A commitment has also been given to act as a host to a British Sign Language (BSL) Apprentice as part of the BSL Futures project.

Increasing Participation of Under-Represented Groups on Mainstream Placement Schemes

43. In addition to setting up schemes specifically aimed at members of under-represented groups, the Assembly Government encourages members of under-represented groups to participate on mainstream schemes, including two-week pupil work experience and the 50-week Undergraduate Scheme for sandwich year students. With regard to the former, a meeting was held with Careers Wales in October 2006, to agree the steps that would be taken to target under-represented groups more effectively. These steps included providing information on the Careers Wales Website encouraging pupils from under-represented groups to apply to the Assembly Government for work experience placements. In addition, diversity monitoring now takes place for all pupils on work experience at the Assembly Government to assess whether there has been an increase in the proportion of pupils from under-represented groups accessing these opportunities. This approach will be evaluated in September 2007 and further action will then be taken if necessary. With regard to the Undergraduate Scheme, discussions were held with all the university career services in Wales. As a result, the universities agreed to use a range of approaches to raise awareness of these opportunities among students from under-represented groups.

Diversity Training

44. A range of diversity training has been provided over the past year as can be seen in Table 7 below. In addition, HR Equality and Diversity Team delivered 16 awareness sessions on age and disability legislation and a further 18 awareness sessions on gender and sexual orientation legislation in offices throughout Wales. 435 staff attended these.

Table 7

Diversity Related Training delivered as part of Core Programme	
COURSE ATTENDED	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
Action Centred Manager	99 attendees
Equality & Diversity Awareness	48 attendees
Mentoring	14 attendees
Reception Stage 3 - Equality & Diversity	144 attendees
Recruitment & Selection Interviewing	225 attendees

British Sign Language and Deaf Awareness Training

45. To mark British Sign Language Week, Deaf Equality and British Sign Language Taster Sessions, delivered by deaf trainers, were run between 12 and 16 March. Due to the success of these sessions, funding has been reserved to run British Sign Language Courses Levels 1 and 2 for Assembly Government staff in 2007.

Equality and Diversity Training Research Project

46. In March 2007, work commenced on a review project looking at legal requirements and best practice in the provision and delivery of equality and diversity training for all staff. The Learning and Development Team will establish what constitutes best practice and how that can be effectively delivered across the Assembly Government. A report, outlining the research findings, will be produced in July 2007, along with proposals for a staff training and development programme. In developing the programme, HR will work closely with the Strategic Equality and Diversity Unit and the Trade Unions.

Staff Networks

47. The Assembly Government has put considerable effort into supporting networks for staff from under-represented groups, so that they can have the advice and support that they need. Staff networks are also important because they put forward suggestions to improve our policies and promote good practice. In 2006, a women's network was relaunched. Women Together is open to all women staff within the Assembly Government. There was also a relaunch of the Minority Ethnic Staff Network. The minority Ethnic Staff Network is committed to influencing Assembly Government policies and contributing to their success, as well as supporting its members to fulfil their potential. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Group continues to operate as a social networking group. However, members have agreed to establish a sub-group with responsibility for reviewing relevant policies. The Assembly Government continues to consult the Disability Advice and Support Network (DAAS) on issues affecting disabled staff and customers. Improvements instigated by DAAS over the past year include:

- Improved access to the Merthyr Tydfil Office for disabled staff and visitors
- The purchase of a telex machine for Cathays Park
- The attachment of a hearing enhancement system to the television in CP2 reception, so that hard of hearing staff and visitors can follow plenary debates.

We look forward to continuing to work with the staff networks to improve working conditions for staff from under-represented groups.

Assembly Government Estate

48. Much has been accomplished over the past year to ensure equality and promote diversity. The need to ensure that Assembly Government

buildings and facilities are accessible to all staff and visitors is also a key element in improving equality. Throughout 2006-07 the aim in managing the Welsh Assembly Government estate has been to provide, as far as practicable, buildings which give equal access and functionality for all people. The Tir Gofal merger in October 2006 saw the number of buildings in the estate grow to in excess of 90 property holdings. Disability access audits are regularly undertaken at all sites and a programme of improvement work was undertaken during the year. The rationalisation of the Assembly Government estate in Carmarthen saw staff relocated to modern, compliant accommodation in the town, allowing for the disposal of premises which did not comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. All new property acquisitions, fit-out works or alterations to existing buildings are sourced and designed to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act regulations.

Benchmarking

49. Although much has been achieved in promoting equality and diversity across a range of HR activity, we cannot afford to be complacent. The Assembly Government therefore takes the opportunity to benchmark policies and practices on equality against those of other public and private sector organisations. This approach is effective in highlighting achievements and identifying areas for continued improvement. The following are used for benchmarking purposes:

- The Opportunity Now Benchmarking Toolkit for gender
- The Race for Opportunity Benchmarking Toolkit
- The Employers' Forum on Disability Toolkit
- The Stonewall Workplace Equality Index for sexual orientation.

50. This year, the Assembly Government:

- was the second highest scoring employer in Wales against the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and was 51st in the top 100 employers across the United Kingdom
- achieved a gold award for the fourth time in a row for gender benchmarking
- in disability benchmarking achieved 66 per cent , compared to an average of 59 per cent across the public sector as a whole
- and holds a silver award for race benchmarking.

51. In addition, as mentioned earlier in the report, the Assembly Government was judged to be among the top 5 Government organisations across the whole of the UK in terms of progress against the Cabinet Office's 10 Point Plan for delivering a diverse civil service.

J D SHORTRIDGE
Permanent Secretary