

## Equality impact assessments: some key points

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### The legal background

1. All public bodies a legal duty to conduct equality impact assessments (EQUIAs) of their policies and programmes.
2. EQUIAs have been required since 2002 in the case of ethnicity, since 2006 in the case of disability, and since 2007 in the case of gender. In 2010 the duty is likely to be extended to age (though in the employer function only in the case of education), religion or belief, gender identity and sexual identity.
3. Public bodies are affected in all their functions, particularly
  - as an employer
  - as a purchaser
  - in policy development and service delivery.
4. Assessments must be completed whenever new policies are proposed and developed, and whenever existing policies are reviewed.
5. EQUIAs are particularly important in the case of high-profile policies, for example when a Green Paper or White Paper is being written, or when there is a ministerial announcement, or when there is substantial media, political or union interest.

### Two basic questions

6. In essence there are only two questions. But they have to be answered with regard to three separate dimensions of equality – disability, ethnicity, gender – and those responsible for a policy have to be confident they have considered the full range of evidence available. Also, we they need to answer follow-up questions.
7. The two basic questions and possible follow-ups are these.
  - **Could this policy, or does this policy, have a negative impact on one or more of the dimensions of equality?**  
  
If so, how can we change or modify it, or minimise its impact, or justify it?
  - **Could this policy, or does this policy, have the potential to have a positive impact on equality, by reducing and removing inequalities and barriers that already exist?**  
  
If so, how can we maximise this potential?

### Two stages

8. The EQUIA process has two stages, known respectively as **initial screening** and **full assessment**.

9. If initial screening shows there could be a negative impact, or there could potentially be a positive impact, or both, there must be a full EQUIA.

### **Responsibilities**

10. An EQUIA should be endorsed by the senior responsible officer (SRO). Typically, assessment of each separate strand in a policy area is conducted by the relevant policy lead.
11. Each SRO is responsible for ensuring that EQUIAs in their area are publicly available. One way of doing this is to post them on a relevant website.

### **Support and assistance**

12. The Equality and Diversity Unit at the DCSF has created an online workbook containing detailed guidance. This can be accessed at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/des/docs/EQUIAWorkbook.doc>.
13. The contents of the workbook include:
  - a suggested structure for a full assessment
  - a statement of the principles and criteria, based on combining and harmonising the legal requirements in the Disability Discrimination Act as amended, the Race Relations Act as amended, and the Equality Act
  - summaries of key facts, findings, challenges and priorities
  - suggestions on how assessments might be summarised.

### **Last but not least**

14. We conduct EQUIAs because they are a legal requirement. Also, because they valuably prompt us to ask questions, and to consider practical possibilities and opportunities, that we might not otherwise have thought of.

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Source: Adapted from a training handout used at the Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009.