



**Consumer  
Focus**

Campaigning for a fair deal

# Draft Single Equality Scheme 2011-2013

September 2010 Release

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## 1 Foreword

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I am very pleased to be able to introduce Consumer Focus's draft first single quality scheme (SES) and associated action plan.

All public bodies are quite rightly required to have such a scheme, but there can be few for whom it matters so much as Consumer Focus.

We exist to make sure that all consumers get a fair deal, and we have a statutory duty to advance the interests of disadvantaged people. Consumer Focus and our predecessor bodies have a distinguished record in terms of representing the needs of consumers who are less able to act in their own interests, whether through their own circumstances or the nature of markets and public services.

I am proud of our influence on topics from fuel poverty to payday lending and digital inclusion to JobcentrePlus, as well as how we pick up equality issues within our analysis of areas affecting all consumers. Our Extra Help Unit provides a lifeline service to vulnerable energy and postal consumers, while our Scottish Accessible Information Forum aims to make information in Scotland more accessible to those who need it. But we must not be complacent and this draft document sets out some tangible ways in which we intend to improve.

We need to find ways to broaden the range of our procurement and increase the diversity of our recruitment and contracting.

We will embed our new thinking on disadvantage and the work we have been piloting in Consumer Focus Wales on equality issues for policy work. I believe we can break new ground here, acting as an exemplar for others. We are also developing our corporate planning and project management systems, so we prompt more discussion about equality issues as we create our annual workplan and then scope and design individual projects.

These are immediate actions but looking slightly further ahead I want us to find a way to widen and deepen the pool of potential policy staff in particular, and to find new ways of measuring our impact on different groups of consumers.

This is a living document and we would welcome all feedback on it and approaches which will help us deliver greater equality for consumers. It is not an add-on to our work, nor a piece of bureaucracy. Rather, it is fundamental to who we are and what we stand for.

Mike O'Connor  
Chief Executive  
Consumer Focus

## 2 About Consumer Focus

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Consumer Focus is the consumer champion for England, Wales, Scotland and (for postal consumers) Northern Ireland. We operate across the whole of the economy, persuading businesses and public services to put consumers at the heart of what they do.

Consumer Focus gives a strong voice to consumers on the issues that matter to them and works to secure a fair deal on their behalf.

We work with consumers and a range of organisations to tackle the problems customers face and to achieve creative solutions that make a difference to people's lives.

## 3 Introduction

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This is Consumer Focus's first Single Equality Scheme (SES). Through this draft scheme, we aim to reaffirm and strengthen our commitment to equality and diversity issues as a fundamental component to the work we do. Alongside this, we remain committed to providing an inclusive work environment that values everyone fairly.

This SES sets out our commitments to ensure that our work reflects the diverse needs and experiences of all consumers in the UK. It is a framework that will help us fulfil our obligation to the public sector equality duties.

It will cover the existing equality duties (race, gender and disability) in line with current legislation, as well as the new strands (age, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnerships, pregnancy & maternity, sexual orientation and socio-economic disadvantage) as set out in the Equality Act 2010, to come into effect in April 2011.

Parallel to and complementing our Equality and Diversity duties, the Consumers, Estate Agents and Redress Act 2007 identifies particular provisions which guide our work, including regard for consumers who are one or more of the following:

- disabled or chronically sick
- of pensionable age
- with low incomes
- residing in rural and remote areas

We're aware that all consumers can be disadvantaged at particular times in their life, as a result of personal circumstance which they face, situations they find themselves in, or characteristics of the markets they are in.

This Scheme reflects our realistic ambitions for the future and is an important step forward in demonstrating a commitment to promoting equality and diversity in all that we do.

## 4 Background: Our equality duties

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There are currently three equality duties set out in law, covering Race, Gender and Disability.

- ✓ The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a duty on public authorities to have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
  - promote equality of opportunity
  - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.
  
- ✓ The gender equality duty was introduced in the Equality Act 2006 and requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment (including for transsexual people)
  - promote equality of opportunity between men and women.
  
- ✓ The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 places a duty on all public authorities to have due regard to the need to:
  - promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
  - eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act
  - eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
  - promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
  - encourage participation by disabled persons in public life
  - take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons.

The new Equality Act 2010 introduces a number of measures to strengthen and simplify equality law, including placing a new single Equality Duty on public bodies.

The general Equality Duty will cover the existing equality duties of –

- ✓ race;
- ✓ gender;
- ✓ disability.

As well as the new strands of -

- ✓ age;
- ✓ gender reassignment;
- ✓ marriage & civil partnerships;
- ✓ pregnancy and maternity;
- ✓ religion or belief;
- ✓ sexual orientation..

Set out in the Act itself, public bodies will have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- advance equality opportunities and foster good relations across all protected characteristics including race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment.

In addition to the above duty, the Equality Act will place a new duty on Government Ministers, departments and key public bodies to consider what action they can take to reduce the socio-economic inequalities people face.

## **5 Context: Equality and diversity in what we do**

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### **Consumer Focus as a consumer champion**

At Consumer Focus we believe that a crucial part of our role is to listen. We therefore ask a wide range of people and groups for their views about our work, to make sure we take different views into account. Engagement with stakeholders is an important part of gathering evidence on what issues need to be tackled and where we should focus our resources. It is important to us to foster strong relationships with our stakeholders and to recognise the value of their input in defining our priorities.

One of the key ways for Consumer Focus to embed equality into our work is to assess formally the effect that a policy proposal or decision would have on different groups of people. The information gathered when developing policy proposals or providing services must be analysed to decide whether they could affect groups or communities differently and whether the differences amount to adverse impact or unlawful discrimination. This process enables actions to be taken to eliminate or mitigate any potentially unfavourable effect and, where the effect may be positive, to ensure opportunities for better delivery of outcomes, which will promote equality, are not missed.

We also take steps to ensure that our publications are available and accessible to everyone who's interested in them. Our publications are available in braille, large print and audio CD with additional arrangements for the deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired on request.

Key steps we have already taken to strengthen our equality and diversity practices include:

- completed an extensive review of how to build equality and diversity considerations into our policy work – currently being piloted by Consumer Focus Wales
- all current planning documentation is being updated to provide prompts for the consideration of equality and diversity issues
- delivered equality and diversity training to all staff and Board members
- commissioned reports on defining disadvantaged and sustainability as part of a programme to integrate consideration of these components into our work

- reviewed key performance indicators to increase the focus on monitoring our impact on disadvantaged consumers
- begun a review of the corporate style guide against accessibility best practices to identify and implement necessary changes
- implemented a publication practice and guidelines for Welsh language scheme
- provided 11 half-day events for advice providers and frontline staff across Great Britain to promote and encourage consumer empowerment through greater use of the free information, support and advice which Consumer Focus provides

### Consumer Focus as an employer

Consumer Focus strives to be an ‘employer of choice,’ where people choose to work because we offer equal and inspiring opportunities to everyone. Accordingly, we aim to help and encourage all employees to develop to their full potential so that their talents are fully utilised to maximise efficiency and deliver more impact for less.

We believe that every employee is entitled to a working environment which promotes dignity and respect to all and no form of intimidation, bullying or harassment is tolerated.

Our Human Resources Committee, Senior Management Team and Human Resources Department have a responsibility to continuously monitor and improve our equality and diversity practices. This includes ensuring that there are equal opportunities for all our staff, encouraging greater applications from groups that are under-represented in Consumer Focus generally or in specific areas of the organisation. Our action plan in section eleven outlines some of the steps we intend to take in the near term to strengthen our efforts in this regard.

Key areas where we already monitor and focus our equality and diversity practices include:

- recruitment, selection, training, promotion, discipline & dismissal
- policies with regard to victimisation, discrimination and harassment
- communication of equality and diversity policies and practices to all staff members including targeted training on bullying and harassment
- monitoring of job applicants, successful applicants, grievances, promotion, dismissal, etc.
- HR policy reviews and implementation of changes
- accessibility of our offices –access to and within our current and future buildings
- salary data to identify any gender pay gap

The 2010 Staff Engagement Survey provides an important baseline against which we will be able to measure future results.

## **6 How we developed our Single Equality Scheme**

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This SES covers all duties (existing and new) and is set-up to be able to demonstrate progress and impact.

We recognise the important role that our staff and stakeholders play in the development and implementation of our SES. Engaging with our staff and stakeholders in the evolution of this draft and leading up to its official publication in April 2011 will be critical.

A good consultation process needs to be put in place and a real opportunity given for staff, including unions, and other stakeholders to reflect, comment and contribute. The consultation process must encourage people to be involved and to consider equality and diversity issues throughout all of our work.

Our Northern Ireland national office has its own Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan. It also completes annual reports for the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland. This scheme complements the Northern Ireland scheme and Disability Action Plan already in place.

## **7 About our action plan**

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Our Action Plan sets out the actions we are currently taking – or proposing to take – to deliver our agenda.

This scheme is focused on the achievement of tangible outcomes of direct relevance to who we are and what we do, taking into account our responsibilities to all of our stakeholders.

We have identified eight corporate outcomes which apply across Consumer Focus. Some of the things that we will do, for example, equality, diversity and cultural awareness training apply to all business areas of Consumer Focus. Others are specific actions related to the work undertaken in the different areas. All actions are set out in the Corporate Action Plan in section eleven below.

Each Directorate has identified appropriate actions within their work areas to achieve the outcomes. This is a rolling three year plan and we will decide action plans each year. The local diversity champions will be responsible for keeping their business areas on target for achieving their outcomes and that diversity activity is included in their monthly, quarterly and annual reporting processes.

## 8 Our eight corporate diversity outcomes

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Our SES focuses on achieving the following eight corporate diversity outcomes:

1. Equality and diversity are fully integrated into our strategies, services, policies and plans ensuring that our behaviours match our vision.
2. Our evidence base provides insight into the diversity of consumers' attitudes, needs and experiences and allows us to focus our resources on areas of greatest disadvantage and inequality.
3. Diversity is owned throughout the organisation and all staff know Consumer Focus's equality and diversity duties and how they must behave as Consumer Focus representatives.
4. Our services, buildings, publications, documents and web publications are as accessible as possible
5. We establish new ways of educating and empowering consumers to increase equality by placing power in the hands of all consumers, not just those who are already able to act in their own interests.
6. Our activities are informed by discussion with, and the involvement of, relevant and diverse stakeholders.
7. We draw skilled staff from the widest pool, better reflecting the diversity of the consumer environment we operate in.
8. All of our staff have equal opportunity in all areas of their employment and are treated fairly and with respect.

## 9 Monitoring

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Monitoring and evaluation are essential in assessing our performance both internally and externally.

We will collect information on all strands including race, disability, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, pregnancy/maternity and socio-economic. We use this information to check on a regular basis that we are providing fair employment and services for all, and we will make this available to others so that they can be confident in our commitment and action here. Where any inequality is identified we will take action to address it.

We also intend to benchmark our performance using relevant and valid external data sources. We will be reviewing our policies and procedures to ensure that equality and fairness considerations are included. So for example our guidance notes that accompany our working planning procedures will make reference to our obligations under this scheme and our commitment to treat everyone fairly.

The public sector duty also requires a commitment to the review of all current and future policies to ensure they don't have discriminatory impacts (not just to ensure that equality and fairness considerations are included) and where appropriate to conduct equality impact assessments (EIAs).

## 10 Reporting on progress

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We will incorporate diversity reporting into our normal business reporting structure including our quarterly balanced scorecard. Progress reports on our scheme action plan will be provided quarterly to the Senior Management Team and every six months to the Board. These reports should be independently verified and also provided to staff and stakeholders.

We will also provide regular updates via staff diversity forums, which we intend to run on an ongoing basis. The Diversity Steering Group will take the lead on defining how these forums are run and what they will achieve. Where action is needed in response to these findings, Directors will take responsibility for their areas.

Consumer Focus will produce and publish an annual report on progress against the scheme both internally and externally.

## 11 Action Plan

**OUTCOME 1:** Equality and diversity are integral to all our strategies, services, policies and plans ensuring that our behaviours match our vision.

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	SUCCESS MEASURE	OWNER	Race	Disability	Gender	Gender Reassignment	Sexual Orientation	Religion/Belief	Age	Pregnancy/Maternity	Social-Economic
<p>Equality and diversity issues are considered throughout the governance, corporate planning and project management processes</p>	<p>Current planning documentation process is updated with prompts to document the consideration of equality and diversity issues.</p> <p>Collect meaningful disaggregated data in respect of the project, including the consideration and feasibility of boosting specific data sets in respect of protected groups if appropriate.</p> <p>All projects and research reports contain an equality analysis.</p> <p>Update Board paper template to include</p>	<p>Equality and diversity considerations can be shown to have been considered throughout the corporate planning and project management processes and are reflected in all new proposals.</p>	<p>Head of Strategy</p> <p>Head of Secretariat</p> <p>All Staff</p>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

	section on equality and diversity to prompt consideration and discussion.												
A new framework is implemented for considering issues of disadvantage and sustainability across all our work so that our thinking consistently and robustly identifies detriment and potential solutions to reduce inequality.	<p>Generate a set of draft principles regarding the Consumer Focus corporate approach to sustainability and disadvantage.</p> <p>Embed consideration of sustainability and disadvantage issues in all new policy proposals.</p>	Disadvantage and sustainability considerations can be shown to have been considered throughout the corporate planning and project management processes and are reflected in all new proposals.	Head of Disadvantage and Sustainability  Directors	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Procurement is used to promote equality and diversity best practices in third and private sectors.	Integrate equality and diversity into the tender evaluation criteria for consideration of prospective contractors.	Equality and diversity considerations are used when tendering and selecting prospective contractors.	Director of Finance and Operations.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
All human resources policies, practices and procedures and are consistent with legislative requirements and best practice relating to workforce equality and diversity	<p>Staff will be consulted on proposed new policies and included in the evaluation of current HR policy and practice</p> <p>Equality and diversity issues will be incorporated into all HR functions and will be reviewed regularly.</p>	All HR policies and practices reflect equality and diversity best practices	HR	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
All current and future policies have no discriminatory impacts	Where appropriate, conduct equality impact assessments (EIAs).	Evidence of EIAs having been conducted for all current and future policies.	Directors	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

**OUTCOME 2:** Our evidence base provides insight into the diversity of consumers' attitudes, needs and experiences and allows us to focus our resources on areas of greatest disadvantage and inequality.

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	SUCCESS MEASURE	OWNER	Race	Disability	Gender	Gender Reassignment	Sexual Orientation	Religion/Belief	Age	Pregnancy/Maternity	Social-Economic
<p>A clear evidence base is established for our work, in terms of how we both choose our agenda and inform our analysis of issues.</p>	<p>Identify and promote ways of improving our evidence base by ensuring data collection and research is inclusive of people from different equality group.</p> <p>Ensure an inclusive approach to the commissioning of market analysis and research by considering consumer equality and diversity issues</p>	<p>Evidence base inclusive of people from different equality groups.</p> <p>Ability to demonstrate our compliance with the Equality Act 2010.</p>	<p>Principal Researcher</p> <p>Directors</p>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

**OUTCOME 3: Diversity is owned throughout the organisation and all staff know Consumer Focus’s equality and diversity duties and how they must behave as Consumer Focus representatives.**

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	SUCCESS MEASURE	OWNER	Race	Disability	Gender	Gender Reassignment	Sexual Orientation	Religion/Belief	Age	Pregnancy/Maternity	Social-Economic
<p>All staff, management and Board are trained in equality and diversity matters</p>	<p>The Human Resources Department will identify any training needs in this area, actively take part, and encourage staff to take up the diversity training that is available.</p> <p>All employees will undergo training in equality and diversity best practices</p> <p>Every new employee will undergo a comprehensive induction programme including training in equality, diversity and human rights</p>	<p>All staff have received training and/or guidance.</p> <p>Training is rated as successful using standard post-training questionnaires.</p> <p>Consideration of equality and diversity issues are reflected throughout Consumer Focus’s work and evident in all proposals brought forward.</p>	<p>HR</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>
<p>All staff feel confident in how equality and diversity relates to policy work and how</p>	<p>All staff involved in advocacy and policy develop are trained so that they can</p>	<p>Training is provided to all staff whose role may require them to delivery policy and advocacy</p>	<p>Directors</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>

to embed and promote it through the corporate planning and project management processes.	mainstream equality understanding into their issue identification and work planning processes.	projects.											
All staff feel confident in how equality and diversity relates to procurement and how to embed and promote it through procurement.	All staff involved in the procurement of research and projects are trained so that they can mainstream equality understanding into their approach to managing externally sourced projects.	Training is provided to all staff whose role may require them to undertake procurement.	Director of Finance and Operations	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

**OUTCOME 4: Our services, buildings, publications, documents and web publishing are as accessible as possible.**

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	SUCCESS MEASURE	OWNER	Race	Disability	Gender	Gender Reassignment	Sexual Orientation	Religion/Belief	Age	Pregnancy/Maternity	Social-Economic
All our publications, documents and web publications are accessible to all	Mainstream equality considerations into communications processes e.g., accessibility, font sizes, alternative formats, website/communications, etc.	Accessible publications, documents and web publications.  Requests for alternate formats are accommodated.	Head of Communications		■							

	<p>Provide Welsh language publications in line with Consumer Focus's guidelines for Welsh Language Scheme.</p> <p>Promote and ensure the appropriateness of language in all our publication and documents.</p>												
The Consumer Focus website is accessible and inclusive.	Undertake an annual check of the accessibility of our corporate website.	An accessible and inclusive website.	Head of Communications		■								
All internal and external events are accessible and all reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate stakeholders	<p>Include a standard access statement for events in all meeting invites to external visitors</p> <p>Ask delegates at all internal and external events to evaluate accessibility. Review information after each event to ensure that we are meeting delegate needs.</p>	Accessible internal and external events	All staff		■								

**OUTCOME 5: We establish new ways of educating and empowering consumers to increase equality by placing power in the hands of all consumers, not just those who are already able to act in their own interests.**

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	SUCCESS MEASURE	OWNER	Race	Disability	Gender	Gender Reassignment	Sexual Orientation	Religion/Belief	Age	Pregnancy/Maternity	Social-Economic
Consumers have access to information and tools to take action for themselves	<p>Consumer Focus Labs to identify and build specific online tools for use by consumers</p> <p>Develop and distribute consumer rights cards in Scotland and Wales</p>	<p>Minimum of 3 online tools released per fiscal year</p> <p>Consumer rights cards are distributed to consumers</p>	<p>CF Labs</p> <p>Consumer Focus Scotland/Wales</p>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Advice providers are informed by Consumer Focus with information to promote consumer empowerment	Provide information and events for advice providers and frontline staff across Great Britain to promote and encourage consumer empowerment using the free information, support and advice which Consumer Focus provides	Consumers increase the usage of free information and support provided by Consumer Focus	Policy Leads	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

**OUTCOME 6: Our activities are informed by discussion with, and the involvement of, relevant and diverse stakeholders**

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	SUCCESS MEASURE	OWNER	Race	Disability	Gender	Gender Reassignment	Sexual Orientation	Religion/Belief	Age	Pregnancy/Maternity	Social-Economic
The voices of the most vulnerable and marginalised consumers are given weight and consideration	Widen out the identification of issues, in particular in consultation with equality groups and their representatives.	Our activities will be more robust to scrutiny and challenge.	Directors	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Strong stakeholder engagement and representative participation in our work				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

**OUTCOME 7: We draw skilled staff from the widest pool, better reflecting the diversity of the consumer environment we operate in.**

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	SUCCESS MEASURE	OWNER	Race	Disability	Gender	Gender Reassignment	Sexual Orientation	Religion/Belief	Age	Pregnancy/Maternity	Social-Economic
<p>The recruitment processes encourage the development of a diverse workforce representative of the community we serve</p>	<p>Recruitment training courses to cover current equality and diversity issues relating to recruitment and relevant to the new duties under the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>Recruitment and selection monitoring and review of workforce profile will be carried out for all aspects of employment and the data will be used to inform employment practice, taking any necessary action as appropriate.</p> <p>Work with recruitment agencies set up to recruit applicants from diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>Annual report contains an equality statement and progress report.</p>	<p>Progress towards a workforce that is more representative of the community we serve at all levels of the organisation.</p>	<p>HR</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>	<p>■</p>

**OUTCOME 8: All of our staff have equal opportunity in all areas of their employment and are treated fairly and with respect.**

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	SUCCESS MEASURE	OWNER	Race	Disability	Gender	Gender Reassignment	Sexual Orientation	Religion/Belief	Age	Pregnancy/Maternity	Social-Economic
Improved staff diversity declaration rates	<p>Complete an internal publicity campaign to improve declaration rates</p> <p>Work to improve staff perceptions of why they should declare</p>	Achieve a declaration rate of 80% by 2012.	HR	■	■		■	■	■	■		
Harassment, discrimination and bullying are not tolerated, and are actively eradicated	<p>Support mechanisms will be in place for staff who report discrimination, harassment and bullying.</p> <p>Bullying and harassment training provided to staff and management.</p>	80% of staff are confident in management's ability to identify, tackle and eradicate discrimination, harassment and bullying in all areas of employment.	HR	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	The promotion of a variety of working arrangements that meet the needs of service users whilst maximising the contribution experienced staff can make throughout their		HR	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

	working lives by offering choice and flexibility.											
All staff have equal access to the necessary training and development opportunities	All employees should have individual Reviews and Development Plans that have been agreed and are reviewed regularly.  Information on training and development opportunities should be widely publicised and all employees will be encouraged to undertake training and development, which will enable them to progress within Consumer Focus	% of employees who feel they are supported with the learning and development needed to do their job	HR	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
No significant gender pay gap (<5% considered insignificant)	Salary data is collected and reviewed to identify any significant pay gap, with any necessary steps, or positive action, taken to eliminate.  Gender pay data is made transparent by publication	No significant gender pay gap	HR			■						

## 12 Alternative Formats

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If you require this publication in braille, large print or on audio CD please contact us. For the deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired, contact Consumer Focus via Text Relay:

From a textphone, call 18001 020 7799 7900

From a telephone, call 18002 020 7799 7900

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