

## Set 2

## InfoSheet 2.7

# Recruitment and Selection

## What is Diversity?

### What is diversity?

*A diverse organisation is one which values difference. It is one which recognises that people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions. Diverse organisations encourage and harness these differences to make their services relevant and approachable. A diverse organisation draws upon the widest possible range of views and experiences, so it can listen to, and meet, the changing needs of its users, staff, volunteers, partners and supporters.*

### **Volunteering England**

### **How is Diversity different from Equal Opportunities?**

There are five main differences:

#### **1. The reasons for adopting equal opportunities or managing diversity**

Many organisations adopt equal opportunities policies because of external pressures. Wilson and Iles suggest that this response "varies between a narrow minimalist response to legislative requirements, and a wider concern that people should be treated equally, based on ethical and human rights or moral arguments. Managing diversity on the other hand is internally driven, from a commitment by the organisation and its key players".

The driving force behind introducing diversity management policies is seen as the 'business case' - that a diverse workforce will result in more focused marketing, greater creativity and decision making and happier staff who stay longer.

Looking at the marketing example - the voluntary sector supports and works with a diverse range of service users, supporters and partners. If the 'public face' of an organisation reflects that diverse public, then individuals will more easily identify with it, thinking "this is an organisation for me". Volunteers are the public face of many organisations, and if diverse, will be more welcoming to users and members. Also, if volunteers are drawn from a wide sector of the community, then they each tell their friends and family, raising the profile of your service.

**In summary:** Equal opportunities is often seen as a legal requirement, which is imposed by external forces. Managing diversity is internally driven.

#### **2. Operational or strategic focus**

Organisations working within an equal opportunities framework often concern themselves with policies and procedures to check that they have operated within the law (eg: with the Race Relations, Sex and Disability Discrimination Acts). These organisations often meet their formal obligations, but do little more. Wilson and Iles say that "underlying the equal opportunities paradigm is the model of the organisation as a rational, even-handed structure, operating fairly and dispensing justice".

Managing diversity is more strategic and commitment is more than adherence to legal responsibilities - it is a value that needs to be taken on by all levels of staff and volunteers and translated into organisational culture. Wilson and Iles suggest that "persistent inequalities in the public sector are underpinned by the fact that equal

opportunities remains an add-on to the value system of an organisation.

On the other hand, organisations [managing diversity] perceive consequent organisational practices as an investment".

**In summary:** organisations effectively managing diversity look at outcomes as well as processes and procedures, and shift equal opportunities to be more strategic rather than operational.

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### 3. The perception of difference

Organisations which manage diversity view differences between people as an advantage. Whereas organisations working solely within the equal opportunities framework assume that people from different backgrounds are outsiders who should be helped to 'fit' into the usually white able-bodied norm of the organisation, as it exists - this is often described as the 'assimilation' model.

Those working within a diversity framework, on the other hand, expect organisations to adapt to embrace different individuals. These differences may be visible such as colour, sex, ethnicity, dis/ability, sexuality or age but they may be less obvious such as class, religion or work style. So when looking at the 'make up' of your volunteers, keep these less visible experiences and attributes in mind. Such differences may be potentially enriching to your organisation.

**In summary:** the equal opportunities approach is trying to right a wrong for certain groups, whereas by managing diversity organisation are trying to get it right for everyone.

### 4. The focus of initiatives

Many organisations working within an equal opportunities framework focus on groups of the population protected by law ie: women, people from ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. The group approach is often known as 'positive action', where groups under-represented in organisations are sometimes 'encouraged' to come on board - through additional and targeted recruitment advertising or training for specific groups within an organisation, for example. Positive discrimination once applications are received is not legal, however.

Organisations which manage diversity, on the other hand, renounce the group approach and choose to focus on developing all individuals. There is a danger, however, that this may underplay the core principles of equal opportunities.

**In summary:** Organisations which work within the equal opportunities framework adopt a group approach, whereas the focus in the diversity model is on developing individuals.

**5. Different theoretical bases**

Equal opportunities has to operate with an assumption that there are relatively simple and narrow knowledge bases operating in the organisation and management world - single best ways of doing things. In contrast, managing diversity accepts a much greater plurality of human knowledge and experience - with no one perspective being more 'correct' than another. It suggests that there are multiple theoretical approaches that may be useful. However, as much diversity work will continue to focus on specific groupings like ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and women, this distinction between the two approaches may not be that useful in practice.

**Equal opportunities and managing diversity - the models compared**

<b>Equal opportunities (EO) - the old approach</b>	<b>Managing diversity (MD) - the new approach</b>
Externally driven  - Rests on moral and legal arguments  - Perceives EO as a cost	Internally driven  - Rests on business case  - Perceives MD as an investment
Operational  - Concerned with process  - Rational organisational model  - Externally imposed on managers	Strategic  - Concerned with outcomes  - Internalised by managers and employees  - Appreciation of organisational culture
Difference perceived as other/problematical  - Deficit model  - Ethnocentric, heterosexist  - Assimilation advocated  - Discrimination focus  - Harassment seen as individual issue	Difference perceived as asset/richness  - Model of plenty  - Celebrates difference  - Mainstream adaptation advocated  - Development focus  - Harassment seen as organisational climate issue
Group focused  - Group initiatives  - Family friendly policies	Individual focused  - Universal initiatives  - Individual development  - Employee friendly policies
Supported by narrow positivist knowledge base	Supported by wider pluralistic knowledge base

Source: Wilson and Iles (1996) *Managing diversity: evaluation of an emerging paradigm*, Proceedings of the British Academy of Management Annual Conference.

### Conclusion

Having considered this summary of differences you may have a sense that diversity is very similar to equal opportunities or you may think it is a new and very different perspective.

Current thinking about how diversity works in practice in organisations is developing all the time. Whether you believe diversity should complement or supplement equal opportunities, building these approaches into your volunteering recruitment and development practices will bring benefits, not only to the volunteers themselves, but to the organisation and your users.

### Footnotes

1. Wilson, W and Iles P (1999) '*Managing diversity - an employment and service delivery challenge*', International Journal of Public Sector Management. **12**: 27-40.

*This InfoSheet is based on information from the Diversity Challenge Website [www.diversitychallenge.org](http://www.diversitychallenge.org)*