Written response to the recommendations from Historic Scotland

Thank you for your letter of 13 September 2007 requesting information on the agency's general view of the Equal Opportunities Committee Report entitled Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities, published in 2006.

You have asked for our general view of the Committee's report and recommendations and how we intend to implement those relevant to the agency. I aim to set this out below.

This report was of great interest to the agency policy group who are responsible for developing the equality policy. The issues of attitudes, information and physical access for disabled people are relevant to the work the agency does. The document made for very informative reading giving a steer as to how these significant barriers might be overcome.

Historic Scotland is currently developing a single policy framework to implement and amalgamate its statutory and voluntary obligations to the Equality Act 2006, the Scottish Government (SG) Departmental Equality Schemes and the Best Value, Equal Opportunities Arrangements. An integrated equalities policy will promote good practice and specify the agency’s equalities objectives, priorities and activities which are relevant to the agency’s service delivery and employment functions.

The recommendations particularly relevant to Historic Scotland relate to the legislative and policy framework set out by the Disability Rights Commission. The agency is represented on the SG Equality Scheme Implementation Group (ESIG) which has been set up to help facilitate the development and the implementation of the Government’s equality duties.

Through direction from the ESIG, the agency intends to develop its Equality Policy addressing all six strands of the equality framework through the involvement of the public and its employees. The desired outcome of this process is that the agency will have an equality policy that can be used as a guide for future agency policy developments.

One of the primary methods for ensuring that the agency meets the demands of its customers and its employees is through the application of the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process. EIAs will be applied to each new area of policy developed by the agency and each group within the agency will be responsible for ensuring that this is carried out effectively.

The agency currently meets and is covered by the SG's statutory duties for disability, race and gender. With the introduction of the wider duties of age, LGBT, and religion and belief, the agency will seek to re-visit all its policies and impact assess each of them for all six equality strands. This will ensure that the equality considerations become integral to the development of policy so making sure that everyone in Scotland can benefit from fair and accessible services.
I aim to have a completed policy in place by summer 2008. This will allow time for the necessary involvement of the public and employees and the interpretation of the information that is gathered. By the end of December 2007, the agency intends to develop a framework policy for all six strands, which will enable us to meet the SG statutory duties. Impact assessments will be an ongoing process which will need to be applied to all new policies that are developed and to existing policies that come up for review.

I trust that this letter outlines for you the activities that are taking place in the agency to develop our equality policy and emphasises the level of attention that we think this area of policy making requires.

JOHN S GRAHAM
Chief Executive
Historic Scotland
16 November 2007