Written response to the recommendations from Scottish Enterprise

Thank you for your letter of 13 September 2007 enquiring on the progress made on the recommendations of the ‘Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities’ report published by the Parliaments Equal Opportunities Committee in 2006.

As you have pointed out in your letter, the previous Convenor of the Committee, Cathy Peattie MSP, invited Scottish Enterprise (SE) for a response to the recommendations and we provided our input on 11 December 2006. I attach a copy of our response for you information.

Most of the recommendations have been addressed by us in our previous response but I would like to update you on progress which has been made this year on some of the recommendations, specifically:

Recommendation 10

As you will aware. Smart Successful Scotland has been superseded by The Government’s new Economic Strategy and we are delighted that equality is referenced throughout the document.

We await the outcomes of the Equality Impact Assessment which is to be completed on the Strategy and will align our activities including those relating to disabled people, to the piece of work within the context of SE being Scotland’s enterprise innovation and investment agency.

Recommendation 14

The Business Able programme has been extended from a pilot in the SE Glasgow region and is now delivered in SE Edinburgh & Lothians, SE Dunbartonshire and SE Fife. We have recommended that other LEC areas adopt the programme and subject to our current reorganisation, expect the remaining regions to implement this. To date Business Able has launched over 215 new disabled owned businesses across Scotland.

Recommendation 15

The Equality Matters in Business project has been targeting employers in the SE and Highands & Islands Enterprise regions through a number of external events to raise awareness of the business benefits with regards the 6 equality stands, including disability

These events have included:

- Raising awareness of legislation:
- Employment opportunities
- Development and delivery of goods and services to reach these groups as consumer groups.
To date the team have delivered 8 events in a series of 13 to the business community.

Part of the content of these events has been to encourage both national and local equality and business development partner organisations to participate and gain a more active participation from their own individual membership and promote strong linkages with the Equal Matters in Business project.

**Recommendation 16**

As part of the Equality Matters in Business project internal business advisors are being trained on the legislation surrounding equality and diversity to encourage a better understanding with their own client groups In addition to this activity the Equality Matters in Business has developed a support infrastructure through the Business Gateway helpline which is available to both business advisors and external businesses This will provide a clear signposting, guidance and support to staff and companies.

Again through the external events, disability rights are one of the 6 areas being promoted Equality Matters in Business have also recently sponsored a Scottish Union of Supported Employment National Awards ceremony which focuses on individuals with a disability.

**Recommendation 17**

We are in the process of enhancing project manager and senior staff capabilities in carrying out equality impact assessments, by building in training to existing development modules This will further ensure that equality is mainstreamed in project development and delivery including provision for disabled people.

**Recommendation 138**

We have carried out a great deal of development work on our website, to ensure it is accessible to disabled people and this work is ongoing. Our web team has also been involved in raising awareness of the requirements amongst staff particularly those involved in mainstreaming equality.

I hope you find this update useful and please do not hesitate to contact our Equal Opportunities Manager, Scott Skinner, should you require any further information.

Once again may I re-iterate that we welcome the Committee’s ‘Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities’ report and recognise the positive effect that its recommendations can have on the opportunities for disabled people in Scotland.

Jack Perry
Chief Executive
Scottish Enterprise
5 December 2007
Dear Ms Peattie

Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities

Thank you for highlighting the Committee’s report on Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities for disabled people as outlined in your letter of 28 November 2006. We warmly receive this report and its recommendations as a way of not only improving the lives of disabled people but ensuring that the economic potential of engaging with all under represented groups can be maximised.

In responding to the recommendations from the report which are particularly relevant to Scottish Enterprise (SE), I would make the following comments:

Recommendation 3
The Committee recommends that all public authorities should work to the social model of disability when implementing their duties under the forthcoming Disability Equality Duty.

The social model of disability identifies ‘disabling barriers’ rather than ‘impairment’ as the problem to be addressed. Disabling barriers are the attitudinal, economic, and/or environmental factors preventing certain people from experiencing equality of opportunity because of an impairment or perceived impairment.

SE has now published an Equality Scheme to meet the specific responsibilities under the Disability Equality Duty. The team responsible framed the Scheme around the social model in relation to disability.

The Duty requires that SE lists its existing functions and policies to be prioritised for impact assessment. The processes developed for impact assessment have been influenced by the social model, where the focus is on identification gaps in service provision. SE supports the notion that the social model is the best model to challenge disability discrimination in society.
**Recommendation 7**
The Committee recommends that all public sector staff, especially in light of the Disability Equality Duty, have the promotion of equalities as part of their job description and performance competencies.

The SE Performance Management System contains a standard objective to "Maintain awareness of all network policies & procedures relevant to my job. Attend awareness, update & training sessions as required. Fully comply with and ensure direct reports comply with all relevant policies & procedures." (Please see recommendation 10, second item for the need to comply with impact assessment procedures)

In the case of equality and diversity this objective has been supplemented by mandatory training to all employees to ensure that they understand the relevance of equality issues (including disability) to their role. This has now been incorporated into our induction arrangements for new employees whilst additional training on equality and diversity issues, in particular disability, are available where required.

**Recommendation 10**
The Committee recommends that –

- the enterprise agencies reassess the importance of integrating the Scottish Executive’s Equality Strategy into their work to ensure that real benefits are provided to disabled people and other community groups and that Scottish Ministers should oversee this process;

SE takes its direction from a Smart, Successful Scotland (SSS), the Scottish Executive’s strategy for economic development. Our vision for a SSS is one where the quality of life for people of Scotland is raised through increasing everyone’s economic opportunities. SSS states, “Making Scotland an open, fair, inclusive and diverse society is crucial if Scottish economy is to realise its full growth potential.” The Scottish Executive strategy for equalities therefore underpins the SSS strategy.

In addition we work very closely with the disability representatives in the Executive’s Equality Unit and reflect their strategy in our work. For example, we were active participants in their recent Disability Working Group.

- the enterprise agencies fully integrate disability into all their future policies, initiatives and publicity material as a matter of priority; and

We have now identified and listed all existing functions and policies relevant to disability equality and have timetabled them for full impact assessment. (Forty equal opportunities champions have received training to carry out impact assessments to-date).

For all new function and policies we have developed procedures in the ‘project approval system’ to ensure that all project managers give due regard to disability. We display the “Positive about Disabilities” symbol which is present
in job adverts and other publicity material. We also display the symbol on our websites which has been tested for disability access.

- Scottish Ministers monitor and evaluate the enterprise agencies’ performance in this regard, especially when the agencies are preparing their disability equality schemes. (paragraph 345)

The Disability Equality Duty has introduced a new duty on the Minister responsible for SE to provide a report every three years on our progress on disability equality and set out a proposal for co-ordinating actions. We are working closely with the Executive’s Equality Unit and our sponsoring Division, ETLLD, to facilitate this.

In addition, along with the Executive, we have served on the Disability Rights Commission working group on the new duty and have both input and received best practice when compiling our Disability Scheme.

**Recommendation 14**
The Committee recommends that the enterprise agencies roll-out Business Able across Scotland to allow more disabled people the opportunity to start their own businesses.

The Business Able programme pilot has been very successful for SE and is currently undergoing internal evaluation to assess how it can be mainstreamed as a network product. We will include the Committee’s recommendation in this work.

**Recommendation 15**
The Committee recommends that the Scottish Executive and the enterprise agencies should work with the Disability Rights Commission and its successor, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, to raise awareness and provide information and advice to employers on the employment of disabled people. In order to achieve this, the enterprise agencies should establish networks with employers’ organisations to disseminate information and examples of good practice.

With assistance from the Executive we have recently established the Equality Matters in Business (EMB) project. This two year project covers both the SE and Highlands & Islands Enterprise areas and focuses on promoting the business case for adopting equality. The project includes disability and has the Disability Rights Commission and employers’ organisations (such as the Federation of Small Business) on its steering group. These important stakeholders will assist with promotion of disabled people’s employment to Scottish companies through the project.

**Recommendation 16**
The Committee recommends that the enterprise agencies should develop an effective means of promoting disabled people’s rights in employment as a matter of urgency.
The EMB project will have a major role in awareness raising to employers including highlighting the benefits of employing disabled people. The project will also cover legislative requirements and will provide a signposting service where advice and support can be accessed in an impartial way.

**Recommendation 17**
In order to ensure that the enterprise agencies fulfil this role and meet their obligations under the Disability Equality Duty, the Committee recommends that they should deliver an ongoing programme of Disability Equality Training for their staff to ensure that provision for disabled people is at the core of all services that the agencies provide.

See recommendation 7. In addition we have an online training resource available to all staff on how disabled people are treated equally as work colleagues and service users.

**Recommendation 18**
The Committee is of the view that the public sector should be setting an example in the employment of disabled people and the Committee recommends that public bodies should use the Disability Equality Duty to establish and deliver exemplar practices in the employment of disabled people.

SE participates actively in the Positive about Disabled People (Two Ticks) scheme. We have recently been reaccredited as a Network and congratulated on our efforts in regards to using the symbol and the commitments attached to it in a positive and proactive manner. We will act on our commitments under our Equality Scheme to develop our policies and practices in this regard.

**Recommendation 57**
In order to remove the barriers that current funding arrangements can present to disabled learners accessing further and higher education, the Committee recommends that –

- all funding providers should review their systems with a view to simplifying them and making them and making more accessible information available to students;
- the funding council and the Students Award Agency for Scotland should review the system of funding support to students where it results in students being refused funding support because the cost of communications support is deemed to be prohibitive;
- as part of the current review of funding being undertaken by the funding council, consideration be given to extending Disabled Students Allowance to non-higher level further education students or introducing an alternative model to meet the same objective. The Committee believes that this would go some way to removing the current inequalities in the student funding system; and
- any new funding mechanism should ensure that funding follows the student rather than the student having to chase funding sources and that simplified and accessible information is available (paragraph 830)
Recommendation 57 is not applicable to SE.

Recommendation 138
The Committee further recommends that public sector organisations ensure that they clearly publicise details of the accessibility of their services to ensure that those service users who may have individual access requirements are fully aware of what is available to them.

In line with our public sector duty all our services will be impact assessed to ensure that they are fully accessible by disabled people. This will include active promotion to disabled people and the removal of physical barriers as required. Our facilities and marketing teams have gone a long way towards this already by carrying out access audits on all our premises and ensuring our publication materials represent disabled people and are accessible by them.

I hope you find the above comments helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact either myself or our Equal Opportunities Manager, Scott Skinner, if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Jack Perry
Chief Executive