

Equality impact assessment review 2013

In 2013 HIE's equality impact assessment process and documentation was reviewed to reflect the development of equality outcomes, published in April 2013, and to increase the quality, scope and effectiveness of the assessments. The review considered learning from assessments carried out to date and identified ways in which to improve the effectiveness of the assessment process.

Assessments completed by April 2013

A total of 63 assessments were carried out prior to the review with the majority relating to projects which HIE supported. This reflected HIE's initial focus to ensure that equality impact assessment was embedded in our project appraisal process. A significant number of assessments related to HIE human resource policies and activity. Some operational strategies were also assessed. The remaining assessments related to support functions and assessments carried out in partnership with other public sector agencies.

The majority of the assessments were covered by HIE's comprehensive equality screening process and did not meet the criteria for publication. The full range of functions covered is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

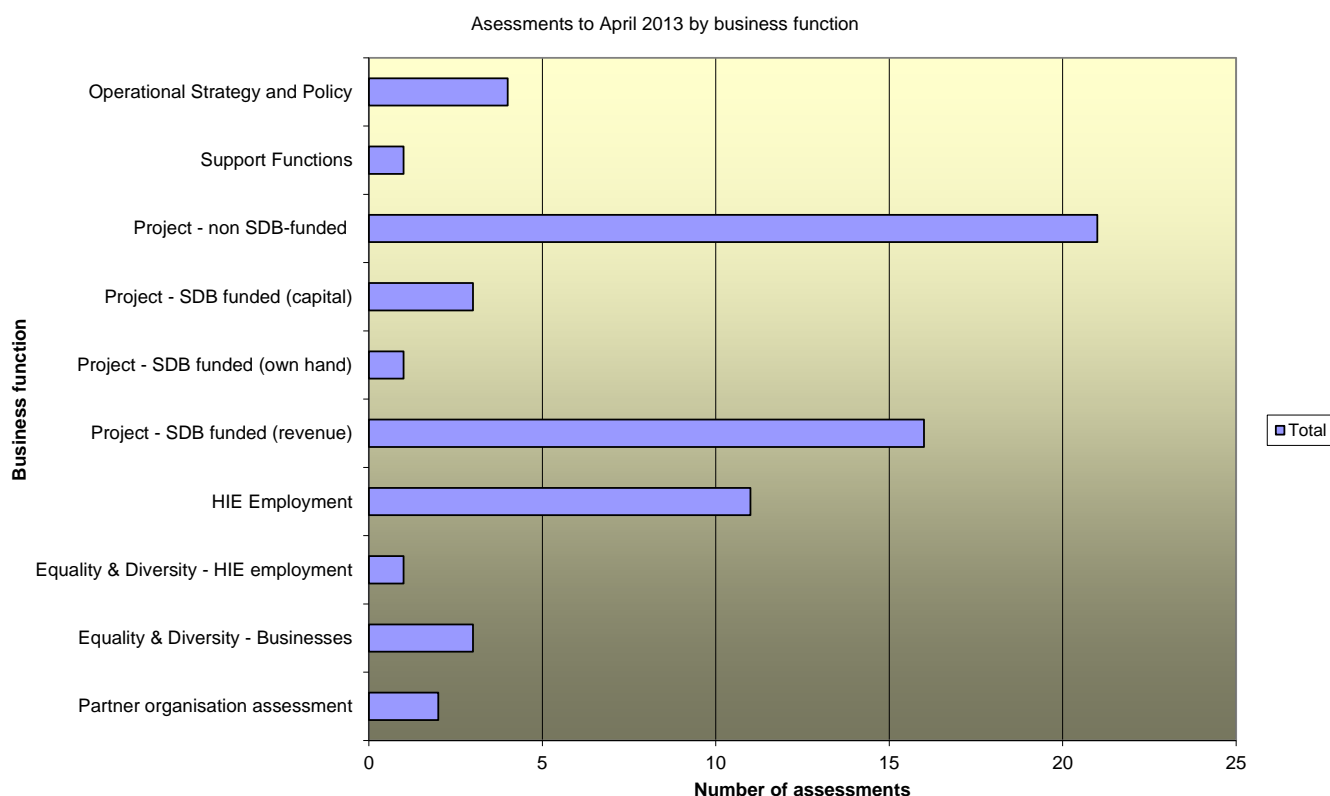


Figure 1: assessments carried out by April 2013

The assessments identified a range of potential impacts on people affected by the policies or projects, both positive and negative. This enabled HIE to maximise the benefits of what we do for a wide range of people and to minimise any adverse effects which may arise, however inadvertent. Some typical examples of impact identified are given below.

Identifying positive impact - many of the projects HIE supports resulted in job creation or helped maintain existing employment, with potential positive impact on specific groups of employees. The predominant characteristics of these people depended on the nature of employment and the sector in which the project was based.

Assessment of HIE's Graduate Placement Scheme resulted in the introduction of equality monitoring of candidates across all protected characteristics. This enabled analysis of appointments to be carried out, identifying the proportion of placements offered to men and women, older or younger or disabled

graduates etc. In conjunction with this, businesses were signposted to information on the business benefits of inclusive, often non-traditional, recruitment, which can help reduce stereotyping and bias in employment decision-making. Providing such opportunities for graduates, who generally fall into the age band 16-34 years, can help stem out-migration of young people from the Highlands and Islands.

Identifying negative impact – assessment highlighted projects which, if implemented as planned, could disadvantage some groups of people. For example a project to support business expansion in the tourism and leisure sector which was not disability-sensitive was amended to encourage the business-owner to consider the needs of disabled travellers.

Assessments were also instrumental in ensuring that any potential negative impact identified is not unlawful. For example a review of paternity provisions for HIE employees, which aimed to increase leave and pay for men and support partners who wish to share childcare responsibilities, considered the current disparity between men's and women's entitlements enshrined in UK and European law.

The need for review

Although assessments to date had contributed to the improvement of policies and projects a revised people impact assessment process aimed to align more effectively to the needs of the Equality Act 2010, addressing the three elements of the General Equality Duty to :-

- eliminate harassment, discrimination or victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity
 - by having due regard to removing or minimising disadvantage, meeting the needs of particular groups that are different from the needs of others and encouraging participation in public life
- foster good relations
 - between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

It strengthened the use of evidence, particularly the voice of those affected by our functions, and explicitly addressed HIE's equality outcomes. It took into account the findings of the Equality and Human Rights Commission research "Mitigating action within Scottish public bodies" which suggested areas for improving the delivery and outcome of equality impact assessments. HIE's revised assessment process and documentation strengthened our ability to propose robust mitigating action where required.

Finally, the revised people impact assessment process introduced consideration of human rights as an integral part of the assessment. HIE's remit as an economic and community development agency is well placed particularly to identify opportunities to promote and protect the economic, social and cultural rights of those affected by our functions.