



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Social Security Scotland Equality Impact Assessment Summary Report Volume Recruitment Project

Dignity,
fairness,
respect.

Background

This report is a summary of the Equality Impact Assessment conducted on the Volume Recruitment Project. The Equality Impact Assessment has considered the potential effects of the Volume Recruitment Project and how it impacts on groups with protected characteristics.

This Equality Impact Assessment focused on the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty: identifying opportunities to reduce discrimination; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Scope of the Equality Impact Assessment

To successfully achieve the volume recruitment requirements in compliance with the Civil Service Recruitment Commissioner Principles and the Social Security Scotland Charter, while maintaining cost and management resource efficiency and effectiveness, we have identified the need to recruit in partnership with Capita, a preferred organisation already servicing Scottish Government requirements.

The aim of the strategy is:

- Recruit a diverse range of people reflective of Scotland's working population through a partnership with Capita, in numbers that enable delivery of existing and planned devolved benefits at the right time for our clients.
- Deliver new and existing services in a timely and cost-effective way mitigating risks to planned delivery of newly devolved disability benefits.
- Work in partnership to advertise, sift, interview, and offer through a new set of processes and procedures.
- Deploy improved recruitment and selection tools designed and tested to overcome accessibility issues and encourage greater neurodiversity through Situational Judgement testing.
- Increase objective assessment through bias-free sifting not available through our current applicant tracking system.
- Have readily accessible Management Information that can be interrogated to identify and mitigate exclusion.
- Minimise the need for managers to be away from operations therefore maximising time supporting colleagues and clients.
- Mitigate any negative impact this partnership may have on our candidates by actively promoting inclusion and increase opportunity at every stage.

Key findings

Age

Scotland's Digital Strategy paper talks of an age group split between those aged 60 plus and younger age groupings in terms of both internet access and technical skills. *Source - Scotland's Digital Strategy: evidence discussion paper.* Additionally, younger age groupings have also been impacted more severely by the pandemic as they were more likely to be employed in sectors such as retail and hospitality. This said, it must also be noted that with the COVID-19 pandemic, all age groups have increasingly used technology in day-to-day life.

Disability

Whilst research has shown that there is a higher instance of digital exclusion in those with disabilities, there is also a higher risk of disabled people lacking the Information Technology (IT) skills and confidence to be able to perform well in online selection. *Source – Office for National Statistics, Exploring the UK's Digital Divide (2019).* There are however potential benefits for those with mobility issues as the online application journey may be completed in familiar environments for the candidate eliminating need to travel. Additionally, the roles being promoted via partner organisations such as “Even Break” (run by people with disabilities for disabilities) will reach specifically targeted members of Scotland's population.

Gender reassignment

The opportunity to participate in a selection process almost free of biographical data and name-blind is seen as a positive step in reducing unconscious bias across industry as a whole. Additionally, the functionality for a candidate to select “Prefer not to say” as an option is present. We will continue using GRS (Government Recruitment Service) meaning that successful candidates will not have to supply references from previous employers who may not be aware of the candidate's gender reassignment and therefore, unable to match the request with the employee.

Pregnancy and maternity

Candidates who are either pregnant or on maternity leave can participate in the virtual process at dates and times appropriate to them, potentially negating the need to travel, employ or source childcare, finance clothing and, allows the candidate to be in control of their environment. The ability to elect for flexible working is shared across all our job roles to promote work and home life balance.

Race

Increased use of technology has taken place across all ethnicities (some to a lesser extent) and as a result, our potential talent pool is growing in volume and diversity. In addition, our virtual selection process is free from all biographical data and name-blind (something not available to us through our legacy systems) therefore, the process is completely merit based where candidates only become known to assessors at the point of scoring pre-recorded interview. The Management Information suite diversity data enables us to monitor progression at each stage allowing positive action planning towards securing our diverse workforce.

Religion or belief

As we are developing a virtual process candidates are at liberty to choose days/times where they can take account of religious observance and holidays specific to them. Progression through the process is based purely on passing sift stages against set criteria/scoring where no assessor has access to biographical or personal data until the point of reviewing and marking pre-recorded interviews.

Sex

Salary scales are clearly mentioned on adverts – research has shown this to promote gender diversity and assist with gender pay-gap reporting (as males have been known to negotiate higher starting salaries where “flexible” salary scales are mentioned). *Source: Forbes, Transparency is Key to Removing the Gender Pay Gap (2021)*. The ability to elect for flexible working is shared across all our job roles to promote work and home life balance therefore, indirectly reducing risk of poverty. It also offers both direct and indirect business benefits including ability to serve customers in a timely manner to reduced office costs. CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) cites research indicating higher levels of employee job satisfaction and greater discretionary effort and improved wellbeing (7 April 2021).

Sexual orientation

Homelessness in Scotland – 24% of young homeless people are LGBTI+ which can result in underemployment as well as erratic home/job histories. *Source - LGBT Youth Scotland 2021*. The tool has been designed / tested for both desktop and mobile technology use and all language has been sense checked by our communications experts using specific technologies with the ambition of increasing inclusion.

Care Experience

A 2020 Social Security Scotland Covid-19 engagement survey asked employees about their experiences of working from home during the pandemic; these responses could also be applied to those considering participation in a virtual recruitment process. The positive was being in control of your environment and timing assessment to suit your needs, e.g., when children are in bed or when you have a

short gap in your day as well as eliminating the need to travel, fund alternative care and all associated costs. The challenge was finding a quiet place within the home to participate without interruption.

Marriage and Civil Partnership (only if activity relates to employment practises or issues)

Nothing was highlighted during evidence gathering as it would be covered under intersectional banners including age and race specific to the likelihood of accessibility to and use of technology.

Recommendations and Conclusions

This Equality Impact Assessment has identified potential impacts, both positive and negative, on those with protected characteristics as a result of the introduction of the Volume Recruitment Project.

Positive impacts include the removal of unconscious bias by anonymising sift stages, the ability for candidates to complete assessment stages at times suitable to them and the ability to elect for flexible working, promoting work and home life balance. Where potential negative impacts have been identified, mitigations have been put in place. These are detailed in the action plan below.

References

LGBT Youth Scotland. (2021), *Youth Commission: Housing and Homelessness*: Available at: [Youth Commission: Housing and Homelessness | LGBT Youth Scotland | LGBT Youth Scotland](#)

Gov.scot. *Scotland's Digital Strategy: evidence discussion paper* Available at: [Scotland's digital strategy: evidence discussion paper - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Office for National Statistics, *Exploring the UK's Digital Divide (2019)* Available at: [Exploring the UK's digital divide - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

Forbes, *Transparency is Key to Removing the Gender Pay Gap (2021)* Available at: [Transparency Is Key To Removing The Gender Pay Gap \(forbes.com\)](#)

Social Security Scotland *Covid-19 Pulse Survey (2020)* Available at: [Colleague Research](#)

Actions	Protected characteristic	Owner	Timeline
<p>Support for candidates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates who present with barriers to any aspect of the online process will be signposted towards help and the opportunity to take-up reasonable adjustments aligned to our values and equality commitments. • Employability partners such as Skills Development Scotland offer online and telephone support for candidates through self-referral. • Continue with rollout of candidate recruitment workshops for everyone including under-represented groups. These will offer the candidate support and information to assist with all stages of application and will be shared with third sector organisations and employability providers to assist them to support their clients. • Candidates will be able to try the technology to ensure there are no issues and technical support will be available to deal with any IT issues quickly and effectively. • We will adopt a lessons learned approach based on quantitative and qualitative data secured through candidate research processes examining successful and unsuccessful journeys. 	All	Resourcing	Ongoing until close of project
Sift stages of the process will be fully anonymised	All	Resourcing	Ongoing until close of project

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removing name and biographical data from sift stages will work towards removal of any unconscious bias. 			
<p>Accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The online platform aims to deliver on accessibility in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1 AA). While the vendor has provided us with a their WCAG 2.1 AA certificate we have undertaken more intense testing using both our Accessibility testing team and our model office user groups and invited colleagues with lived experience to also test (September 2021). We have discovered areas that do not meet the accessibility standards but continue to work with the Vendor to improve on these. Whilst we work on these improvements, we continue to offer additional support for candidates who may need assistance. 	All	Resourcing	Ongoing until close of project
<p>Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In developing communications elements, we have used Hemingway app online – this has suggested easier and more understandable language and sentence constructs, making things easier to read. Live Service team has reviewed elements to make sure that we are being as clear as we can on candidate communications. This team looks at language and accessibility for our Benefits 	All	Resourcing	Ongoing until close of project

<p>communications in the main. Recommendations have been taken on board and applied to drafts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User testing of communications to flush out any key changes that should be made / anything that is unclear, has been carried out via User Centred Design colleagues. • We have collaborated with our internal inclusive communications team to support messaging. 			
<p>Feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback mechanisms are being built into the tool at different points within the selection journey. Analysis of data gathered and resulting insight will support the agency identify key issues (technical or otherwise) and drive positive continuous improvement actions. 	All	HR Transformation	Ongoing until close of project