

Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion: review of the ombudsman service's action plan

In 2010 the executive team of the Financial Ombudsman Service asked me to help in setting up an [equality and diversity](#) framework, to bring together all existing initiatives and actions. This included the ombudsman's *equality and diversity* [action plan](#).

The action plan was designed to help the ombudsman deliver excellent customer service for all its users and people. It was framed under the four assessment areas of:

- **leadership and strategy:**
Ensuring that the ombudsman service's board, executive and senior team champion equality and inclusion – both generally and by example.
- **access and inclusion:**
Developing accessible policies and practices, including the removing of any barriers to potential customers.
- **service delivery:**
Ensuring that the ombudsman service delivers fair outcomes for all – and operates its services in ways that do not unfairly disadvantage any group or individual.
- **recruitment and workforce diversity:**
Ensuring that the ombudsman service recruits high-calibre applicants at all levels from a wide pool and a broad range of backgrounds.

Having completed its action plan a year early, the ombudsman service recently invited me back to review independently its progress against the [action plan](#) and to identify its future strategic priorities.

As part of my independent review, I interviewed a number of the ombudsman service's executive team and the head of outreach, and I held several focus groups with a wide range of managers and members of staff from across the service.

My conclusion is that the ombudsman has succeeded in meeting the agreed actions set out in the 2010 action plan. The ombudsman service has a leadership team that has a clear understanding of how disadvantage impacts on existing customers and those communities who do not access services currently.

The ombudsman has a clear approach to addressing inequalities through its customer [accessibility programmes](#), such as the provision of information in a [wide variety of formats](#), an evidenced-based targeted [outreach programme](#) and through its [recruitment processes](#).

A further conclusion evidenced through the focus-group workshops suggests that the ombudsman service actively promotes an open culture based on a set of [organisational values](#), underpinned by operational activity. These include inclusion awareness events, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) staff group, and various faith forums.

The ombudsman service has now adopted the following three *strategic priorities*. These support the ombudsman's continuing commitment to the fair and equal treatment of everyone it deals with:

- **quality and customer care**
Continuing to be attuned to customers' needs. This means sharing organisational knowledge to improve customer experiences.
- **recruitment and workforce diversity**
Undertaking activities that result in the creation of a modern and diverse workforce – one which reflects the diversity of the ombudsman's customers.
- **awareness raising**
Undertaking activities that seek to inform disadvantaged communities of the services available to them at the ombudsman service.

The ombudsman service has made excellent progress in many areas. And I look forward to providing independent support as the ombudsman continues to ensure its approach remains up to date and relevant to the changing needs of its people, its customers and its stakeholders.

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about the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei)

Incorporating the Employers Forum on Age and the Employers Forum on Belief, the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (www.enei.org.uk) is the UK's leading employer network covering all aspects of equality and inclusion issues in the workplace.

We support organisations through cutting-edge research, employer lead-advice and guidance, networking events and round-table debates, and training and consultancy services. Our strategic work themes includes exploring the impact of unconscious bias in the workplace; promoting agile working practice; boardroom diversity for all; promoting inclusive working within a global context; *and* encouraging inclusive leadership.