

# Health Service Circular



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*sets out a specific action on the part of the recipient with a deadline where appropriate*

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## THE VITAL CONNECTION : AN EQUALITIES FRAMEWORK FOR THE NHS

*Working together for quality and equality*

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For action by: Health Authorities (England) - Chief Executive  
NHS Trusts - Chief Executives  
Consortia Business Managers  
Primary Care Groups - Chief Executives  
Primary Care Trusts - Chairs

For information to: Community Health Councils, Chief Officers  
Consortia Chairs, for Distribution to Members  
Dental Postgraduate Deans  
Directors of Education & Training  
Health Authorities (England)- Chairman  
Health Authorities (England) - Chief Nurse  
Councils - Common Council of the City of London, Chief Executive  
Councils - Council of the Isles of Scilly, Chief Executive  
Councils - County Council Chief Executives  
Councils - London Borough Council Chief Executives  
Councils - Metropolitan District Council Chief Executives  
Councils - Shire Unitary Council Chief Executives  
Medical Schools - Deans  
NHS Trusts - Chairman  
Regional Advisers in General Practice  
Social Services Directors - England  
Postgraduate Deans  
Primary Care Trusts - Chief Executives  
Primary Care Groups - Chairs  
Primary Care Groups - Chief Executives  
Local Dental Committees  
Local Pharmaceutical Committees  
NHS Trusts - Directors of Personnel  
Health Authorities - Personnel Managers  
Community Health Council Chairs  
Royal Colleges  
Regional Education & Development Group Chairs  
General Whitley Council  
NHS Trusts - Nurse Executive Directors  
NHS Trusts - Medical Directors  
General Medical Council  
United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting  
Local Medical Workforce Advisory Group Chairs

Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine  
Joint Consultants Committee  
Standing Medical Advisory Committee  
Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee  
General Dental Council  
Health Unions

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**THE VITAL CONNECTION : AN EQUALITIES FRAMEWORK FOR THE NHS***Working together for quality and equality***Summary**

In line with *Modernising Health and Social Services*, the National Priorities Guidance 2000/01 – 2002/03, the new NHS framework for equality, *The Vital Connection* (published April 2000 [www.doh.gov.uk/nhsequality.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/nhsequality.htm) ) describes three strategic equality aims to be achieved by NHS organisations and their partners, together with priorities, objectives and targets beyond April 2000. This HSC summarises actions all NHS employers should take to implement the aims of the *Vital Connection*, building on the objectives already set out in *Working Together*. The human resources performance management framework, to be published shortly, will provide the framework within which progress on implementing the equalities framework will be managed.

**Action****Strategic Aims**

Chief Executives of Health Authorities, NHS Trusts and Primary Care Trusts must ensure that they are planning for and working towards the three strategic equality aims set out in the equalities framework:

- to recruit, develop and retain a workforce that is able to deliver high quality services that are accessible, responsive and appropriate to meet the diverse needs of different groups and individuals;
- to ensure that the NHS is a fair employer achieving equality of opportunity and outcomes in the workplace;
- to ensure the NHS uses its influence and resources as an employer to make a difference to the life opportunities and the health of its local community especially those who are shut out or disadvantaged.

**Targets from April 2000 - 2001**

*Working Together* required NHS employers to take action on achieving a representative workforce and tackling harassment. Chief Executives of Health Authorities, NHS Trusts and Primary Care Trusts should continue to build on progress made on these and in addition:

- should be able to demonstrate a year on year increase in the level of confidence that staff have in their ability to tackle harassment at work, as measured through the annual staff survey;
- should agree a target percentage reduction in the level of harassment at work and to have arrangements in place to be able to demonstrate this progress year on year;
- should meet the criteria to use the Employment Service disability symbol ('Two Ticks') by April 2001;

and:

- all NHS Boards should undertake training on managing equality and diversity by April 2001.

**Targets 2001 - 2004**

Targets for appointments to executive board posts will be set for NHS employers for 2001-2004:

- a national target to increase ethnic minority representation in executive posts at board level to 7% by end of March 2004 across all sectors of the NHS;
- a national target to increase women's representation in executive posts at board level to 40% by end of March 2004 across all sectors of the NHS

Local employers are to agree appropriate targets for appointments with Regional Offices by April 2001 in line with national targets

### **Workforce and education planning**

Chief Executives, together with education consortia, should take action to develop a more diverse and responsive workforce as part of their workforce and education planning for service delivery, especially in support of Health Improvement Programmes, the delivery of National Service Frameworks and the implementation of clinical governance.

### **Performance management**

A human resources performance management framework is currently being developed and will be published shortly. Performance management of the equalities framework will be taken forward within this, incorporating equalities indicators and standards as these are developed. The emphasis will be on fostering continuous improvement and sharing good practice.

Chief Executives of Health Authorities, NHS Trusts and Primary Care Trusts should also therefore, as part of the performance management cycle:

- Publish an annual "Equality Statement", as laid out in *The Vital Connection* as part of their Annual Reporting and accounting arrangements, the first reporting back on the financial year 1999-2000, setting out:

how the organisation has taken forward action on national and local equalities objectives during the reporting year;

the organisation's objectives for the reporting year 2000-2001 against the three strategic aims set out above.

- review the organisation's equality objectives and practices against agreed national equality standards, as these are published;
- work towards a core set of equality indicators and management information for their own purposes as a matter of good management practice. Employers will be able to draw on this as an evidence base for inclusion in the equality statement.

This Circular has been issued by:

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