

AGENDA ITEM 7
REPORT NO. VAL/15/15

HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

EQUALITIES MAINSTREAMING AND EQUALITIES OUTCOMES PROGRESS REPORT

In March 2013 the Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board published its Equalities Mainstreaming and Equalities Outcomes report, which was updated in October 2014.

The report noted the Board's strategic position and outcomes which were summed up as follows:

- So far as the electoral registration function is concerned, the period from the start of 2013 through to the summer of 2015 is taken up with great change in the registration regime allied to three major polls – the European election, the Scottish Referendum and the UK General election. The change from household to individual electoral registration is a fundamental one and is seen as a prime focus for attention in the equalities field given the particular characteristics of the change of regime and the known difficulties affecting the relevant groups
- Rating – the rating revaluation due to be held in 2015 will now take place in 2017. This means that the bulk of the preparatory work will take place in 2014 – 2016 as the valuations will require to be finalised by the end of the summer in 2016
- The Council Tax regime is currently a stable function, however the Scottish Government has indicated that they are reviewing its future and it is possible that it will be replaced following the next Scottish Government election in 2016
- So far as the Board's role as an employer is concerned, during a time of severe restraint in public expenditure, it seems unlikely that other than in short term arrangements to deal with the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER), there is likely to be any expansion of the staff compliment and turnover in staff is likely to be low other than that engendered by retirements. Given these circumstances there is likely to be limited scope to affect change through the recruitment channel.

Against that background and recognising that the rating and council tax function are largely property based, it seems clear that the main focus in the next two years requires to be in the electoral registration field.

This is not to suggest that when it comes to service delivery, there are no issues which can arise in the rating and council tax areas. These however are less likely, less obvious and plausibly may well be of a similar character as those that arise in the electoral field.

The Board's obligations as an employer must also assume a prominent position.

Accordingly the following outcomes are proposed:

Outcome One

People feel involved and are able to participate in public life and influence decision-making

This outcome shall be supported by:

- The existence of a comprehensive publicity plan supporting participation
- Integration of the equalities element with the Electoral Commission performance standards regime
- Engagement with individual equalities groups to ensure removal of barriers to registration as the IER regime enters its transitional phase
- Ensure all property that should be taxed is included in the valuation roll and council tax list.

This will require a number of measures to track progress which are provisionally as follows:

- Number on the register relative to population estimates and census outputs
- Number of responders to household and individual canvass as a proportion of the total number of households
- Number of corrections and complaints
- Feedback from survey of equalities groups
- Reports by auditors

Outcome Two

We will improve customer satisfaction rates in particular from people with protected characteristics

The following steps shall support this outcome:

- Focus on improved materials using straightforward language tested with relevant groups in partnership with other EROs and the Electoral Commission
- Improved communication with particular target groups through engagement with individual equalities groups and other agencies representing those with protected characteristics and seeking to remove barriers to registration
- Develop public engagement strategy

In order to track this outcome the following will be examined:

- Public performance survey via random sampling of transactions with the department
- We will monitor performance more generally via partners' survey work, such as Electoral Commission and Highland Council research and reports by representative groups
- Number of complaints
- Analysis of the number of electoral errors that come to light

Outcome Three

Increase the proportion of staff and job applicants who feel they are treated fairly, particularly those with protected characteristics

The Board is a relatively small organisation with low staff turnover which limits the capacity to address any imbalance in the workforce. As part of this exercise it is acknowledged that younger people, particularly those under the age of 30, are under-represented.

This outcome shall be supported by the following:

- A systematic review of employment policies to ensure fair and equal conditions and opportunities
- Promotion of work experience opportunities
- Increased training in equalities matters for staff at each of the departments offices
- Increased commitment to training where there is an identified need for the organisation to improve the skills of staff
- Reduction in occupational segregation where this contributes to an equal pay gap and generally seek to reduce the gender pay gap
- Review of recruitment channels to improve access to opportunities
- Promote full use of flexible working and maternity and related arrangements
- Promote career progression schemes

In order to track this outcome we shall require the following:

- A periodic staff survey to monitor and record staff opinions, perceptions and satisfaction
- Analysis of employment data and recruitment monitoring statistics
- Assessment of equalities monitoring statistics

Adopting these outcomes will require that a revised Equalities Plan be prepared that sets out in greater detail the steps that will require to be taken to advance towards these outcomes. It may also be necessary to modify some of the measures that are proposed. This is particularly so in the electoral field where the intention to integrate some of this work with the Electoral Commission will give rise to the opportunity to merge statistical requirements when the Commission guidance on individual electoral registration is published.

Progress to date

Since its publication of the report in March 2013 the Valuation Joint Board has seen changes within its senior management team. A new Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer was appointed in October 2013 which subsequently resulted in a senior management team restructure in the summer of 2014.

Due to this restructure progress on the outcomes was limited between the end of 2013 until new appointments were made in September 2014. Since this period however much work has been carried out on all of the outcomes identified especially around electoral registration.

The Scottish independence referendum on 18 September 2014 was a historical event not only because of the large turnout and engagement of electors across Scotland but because the franchise was also extended to allow 16 and 17 year olds the opportunity to vote for the first time.

It was estimated that 97% of those who were eligible to vote had registered by the registration cut-off date of 2 September 2014.

Individual electoral registration replaced the previous household system in Scotland on 19 September 2014. The new system means that responsibility to register falls to each individual instead of the head of the household notifying the Electoral Registration Officer who is resident in a property. Individuals now have the opportunity to register online via the government digital service with their details being verified against records held by the Department of Works and Pensions.

This has resulted in changes to working practices, write outs to all electors within Highland & Western Isles, training for all staff employed by the Board, public engagement and software changes. Six temporary staff have been employed to assist with the implementation of the new system.

Bulk preparatory work for the 2017 revaluation will commence in April 2015 with work expected to be completed by the end of summer 2016.

A breakdown of progress to date for each outcome follows below:

Outcome One

People feel involved and are able to participate in public life and influence decision-making

- A public engagement strategy was submitted to the Electoral Commission on 18 October 2013 for the introduction of individual electoral registration. The strategy focused on results from the confirmation dry run which was carried out in the summer of 2013 which matched electoral registers against the Department of Works and Pensions Customer Information System database. The results along with census information allowed the Electoral Registration Officer to focus on particular groups of under-registered individuals to engage with.

Work on the public engagement strategy commenced in November 2014 and is currently ongoing. This has seen the distribution of posters and information leaflets to a number of organisations including doctor and dentist surgeries, secondary schools, libraries, community centres, leisure centres, service points and solicitors/housing associations to name but a few.

Adverts have been placed in community magazines and a till roll campaign was carried out with Argos and Homebase stores for a six week period from the beginning of February 2015.

Further work on the engagement of students and young persons has still to be carried out along with individual equalities groups to ensure removal of barriers to registration and this work will be completed before the registration deadline for the General Election on 7 May 2015.

- Some equalities training has been carried out by electoral registration staff with the following groups:
 1. Deaf Action
 2. British Sign Language
 3. Gypsy/Traveller awareness – Highland Council
 4. Language Awareness training for frontline staff – Workers' Educational Association (WEA) Scotland
 5. Working with interpreters and other types of Communication Support – Highland Council
 6. Understanding Disability – Highland Council

Electoral registration staff will continue to carry out training as and when courses are available.

Posters have been displayed at area offices in Inverness, Wick and Dingwall advising all customers that interpretation services are available via the lead authority, Highland Council identified providers for face-to-face interpretation services. Interpretation services are available from Global Language Services or from the Highland Council's Customer Service team who provide communication support for those who are deaf, deafened, deafblind or hard of hearing.

A British Sign Language video on services available from the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer is available on the Highland Council's website and youtube via the following links:

http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/751/equality_diversity_and_citizenship/315/british_sign_language_videos_about_our_services/6

<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheHighlandCouncil>

- Translation services are available through Language Line for telephone translations for any customer whose first language is not English. Information on how to access the service has been made available to all reception staff with laminated language identification leaflets available at all reception areas.
- Through best value, completion certificates and building warrant lists properties that should be taxed are included in the valuation roll and council tax lists.
- The transitional canvass for individual electoral registration commenced in October 2014 with the new register of electors being published on 27 February 2015. The first "business as usual" canvass commences in July 2015 with statistical information being available on the number of responders to the individual canvass compared to historical information available on previous household canvasses prior to the publication of the new register of electors on 1 December 2015.
- The newly published register of electors on 27 February 2015 showed that the register had remained relatively static since the last published register on 10 March 2014.

- The Valuation Joint Board has a very low level of clerical errors and despite workload pressures in the lead up to the Scottish independence referendum there were only a total of 15 clerical errors.
- In April 2013 a new complaints handling procedure was implemented with two guides being issued to staff, Complaints Handling Procedure – internal document and Employees Guide to the Complaints Handling Procedures.

The Valuation Joint Board has a very low number of complaints each year. The number of complaints has increased between November 2014 and February 2015 due to the implementation of individual electoral registration but this has mainly been due to confusion surrounding opting in or out of the open (edited) register.

- Feedback survey from equalities groups has not been carried out to date but will be progressed once all work has been completed on the public engagement strategy.
- A timetable has been created to look at updating all policies and procedures currently held by the Board and this programme will be completed by the end of 2016. As part of this work a revised Equalities Plan will be submitted to Members of the Valuation Joint Board later in 2015.
- We have no adverse feedback from auditors.

Outcome Two

We will improve customer satisfaction rates in particular from people with protected characteristics

With the introduction of individual electoral registration, a large number of forms and letters have been produced which are based on user testing by the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission. All publicity materials used for the public engagement strategy have been produced by the Electoral Commission.

The following progress has been made to date:

- Where possible the Valuation Joint Board uses plain English in its communications but all letters will be evaluated in due course to ensure best practice as part of Highland Council's corporate membership of the Plain English Campaign.
- Work on improved communication with particular target groups through engagement with individual equalities groups has still to commence but will be carried out as part of the public engagement strategy in 2015.
- The Valuation Joint Board are currently looking at mobile solutions to assist with door to door canvassing such as the use of mobile tablets to encourage electoral registration online. The use of mobile technology will be trialled within care homes in due course and its success or otherwise will be monitored prior to the 2015 canvass of electors.
- Each of our area offices displays "Have your say about our service" questionnaires in reception areas for members of the public to complete. Most of the forms

received are compliments about the service customers have received from employees of the Board. If any issues are raised these are flagged to the Office & Support Manager to investigate and take any necessary remedial action.

- Monitoring of performance is carried out by Performance Standards for Electoral Registration Officers which are completed and submitted each year to the Electoral Commission. Since November 2012 the outcomes have been included as part of the Annual Report which is published at the end of each year. Work still has to be carried out with Highland Council on research and reports from representative groups and this will be targeted towards the end of 2015.

Outcome Three

Increase the proportion of staff and job applicants who feel they are treated fairly, particularly those with protected characteristics

The Board has seen a very low turnover of staff since the publication of the report in 2013. As part of the introduction to individual electoral registration six temporary members of staff have been employed since November 2014 and January 2015.

The following work has been or is being undertaken:

- A timetable has been produced to update employment and health & safety policies and procedures. Work is hoped to be completed by the end of 2016 on updating all policies and procedures.
- The Board will review work experience opportunities and the under-representation of younger people particularly those under the age of 30.
- In April 2015 an employee review and development plan will be introduced for staff. This will be an annual review carried out by line managers and will focus on health, safety and wellbeing, workloads and performance, skills and development and communication where employees will be given the opportunity to seek any additional training relevant to their role and to highlight any underutilised skills that they may have.
- Reduction in occupational segregation – whilst there has been a reduction in the gender pay gap across male and female employees, the Board is still working to reduce the ratio of male/female employees. As an employer turnover in staff is low other than that engendered by retirements.
- Currently all vacancies are advertised through local press however a review will be undertaken to look at advertising via the myjobscotland portal.
- Maternity leave and paternity leave arrangements are in place across the Board with advice for staff being constantly monitored. Flexible working has been in place for a number of years with a larger number of staff now taking advantage of flexible working arrangements such as reduction in hours worked, flexible working patterns and homeworking.

- The Valuation Joint Board promotes career progression schemes and currently has two members of staff on a career progression scheme.
- A staff satisfaction survey is to be issued to all staff in summer 2015 with results co-ordinated by the Office & Support Manager.
- Work on analysis of employment data, recruitment monitoring statistics and equalities monitoring statistics has still to be carried out.

Equal Pay Statement and Staffing Information

Under the statutory regime there is a requirement to publish an equal pay statement and to publish information as to the characteristics/demographics of the Board's employees and the gender pay gap. The equal pay statement is attached as Appendix 1. The terms are the same as those which are proposed for approval by the lead authority, the Highland Council. The updated statistical material is set out in Appendix 2 with the gender pay gap information set out in Appendix 3.

Reporting

The Board is required annually to report and publish information on equalities matters. It is intended to accommodate this requirement by including a section in the annual report that is produced each year which will draw together performance, equalities and financial information from 2015.

Review

It is a requirement to review equalities practices, policies and outcomes from time to time. A suitable timeframe for review is after the introduction of individual electoral registration which is likely to conclude by the end of 2015.

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HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

EQUAL PAY STATEMENT

1. The Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board is committed to the principle of equal pay for all its employees and aims to eliminate any sex bias in its pay systems.
2. The Board understands that equal pay between men and women is a legal right under both domestic and European law.
3. It is in the interest of the Board to ensure that it has fair and just pay systems. It is important that employees have confidence in the process of eliminating sex bias and the Board is committed to achieving this through consultation with employees and the recognised trade unions.
4. The Board recognises that gender segregation in the workforce may have an effect on equal pay gaps. The Board is committed to monitoring and analysing areas of gender segregation in identifying appropriate equalities action and outcomes.
5. The Board believes that by eliminating sex bias in its pay systems, it is sending a positive message to its employees and the Highland/Western Isles communities. It makes good business sense to have fair and transparent reward systems and it also helps the Board to control costs.
6. The Board's objectives are to:
 - Identify and eliminate any unfair, unjust or unlawful practices that impact on pay
 - Take appropriate remedial action
7. The Board will publish progress against action plans and review this statement every three years.

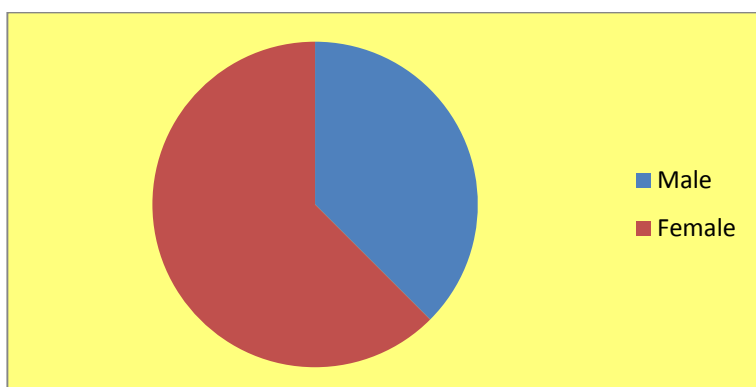
Moray House
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HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

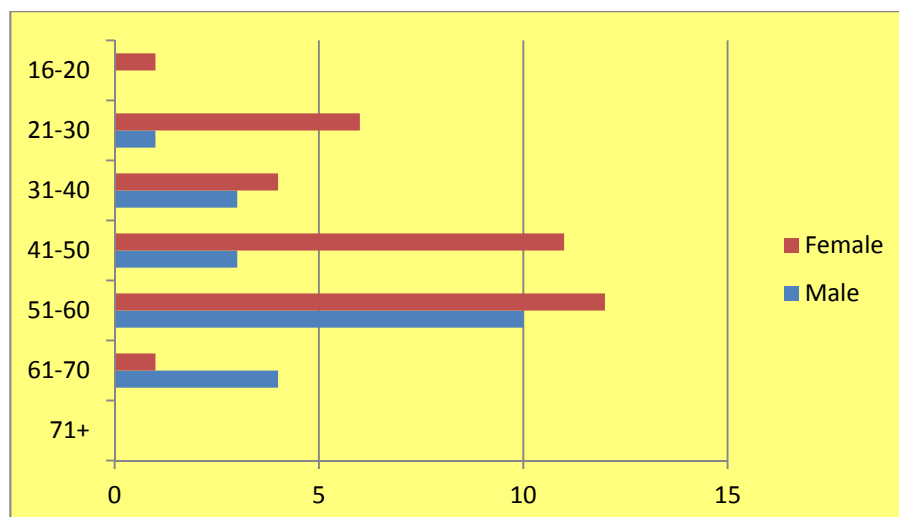
EQUALITIES MONITORING AS AT 31 MARCH 2015

Employees by Gender

Male	Female
21	35

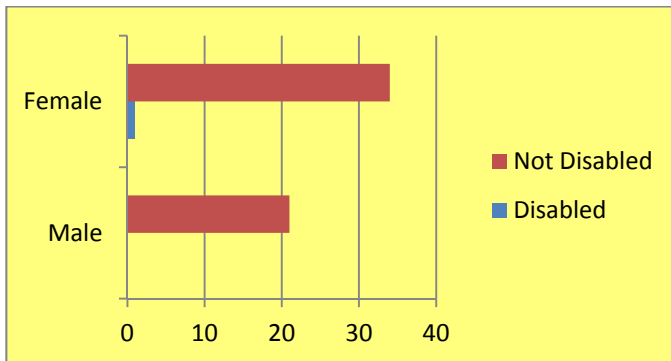
Employee Age Distribution

Age Range	Male	Female
71+	0	0
61-70	4	1
51-60	10	12
41-50	3	11
31-40	3	4
21-30	1	6
16-20	0	1



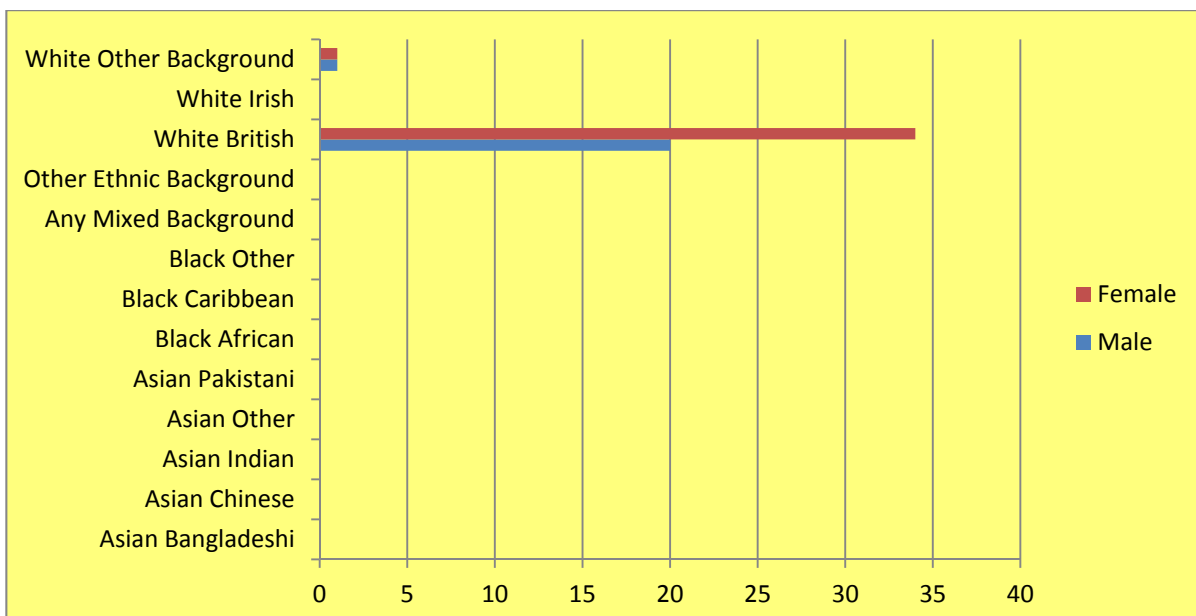
Disability

	Male	Female
Disabled	0	1
Not Disabled	21	34



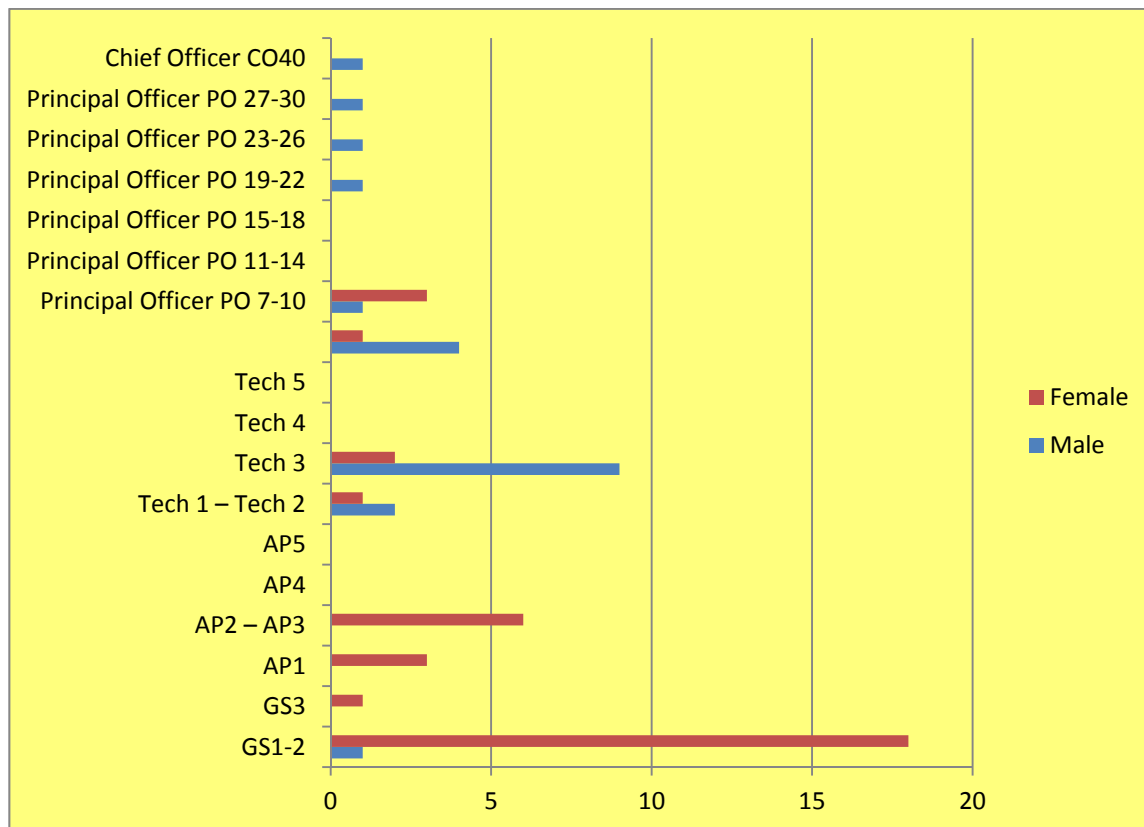
Ethnic Group

Ethnicity	Male	Female
Asian Bangladeshi	0	0
Asian Chinese	0	0
Asian Indian	0	0
Asian Other	0	0
Asian Pakistani	0	0
Black African	0	0
Black Caribbean	0	0
Black Other	0	0
Any Mixed Background	0	0
Other Ethnic Background	0	0
White British	20	34
White Irish	0	0
White Other Background	1	1



Average Salary

Salary Grade	Male	Female
GS1-2	1	18
GS3	0	1
AP1	0	3
AP2 – AP3	0	6
AP4	0	0
AP5	0	0
Tech 1 – Tech 2	2	1
Tech 3	9	2
Tech 4	0	0
Tech 5	0	0
A&P Grade 6 - Principal Officer AP6 PO3-6	4	1
Principal Officer PO 7-10	1	3
Principal Officer PO 11-14	0	0
Principal Officer PO 15-18	0	0
Principal Officer PO 19-22	1	0
Principal Officer PO 23-26	1	0
Principal Officer PO 27-30	1	0
Chief Officer CO40	1	0



HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

GENDER PAY GAP DATA AS AT 31 MARCH 2015

Combined Gap

Male	Female
£367.803 – combined salary for all 21 male employees	£374.9968 – combined salary for all 35 female employees
Average hourly rate = £17.51 per hour	Average hourly rate = £10.71

Gender pay gap – difference between the average male and female pay rates. It is calculated by dividing the average female hourly pay rate by the average male hourly pay rate.

$$£10.71 / £17.51 \text{ per hour} = + 0.61\%$$

Full Time Gap

Male	Female
£367.803 – combined salary for all 21 male employees	£317.9935 – combined salary for all 30 full time female employees
Average hourly rate = £17.51 per hour	Average hourly rate = £10.60

Full time gender pay gap is the gap between the average hourly rate of female employees who work full time and male employees who work full time.

$$£10.60 / £17.51 \text{ per hour} = + 0.60\%$$

Part Time Gap

Male	Female
£367.803 – combined salary for all 21 male employees	£57.0033 – combined salary for all 5 part time female employees
Average hourly rate = £17.51 per hour	Average hourly rate = £11.40

Part time gender pay gap is the gap between the average hourly pay rate of female employees who work part time and male employees who work full time.

$$£11.40 / £17.51 \text{ per hour} = + 0.65\%$$

	Combined Gap	Full Time Gap	Part Time Gap
All employees	+ 0.61%	+ 0.60%	+ 0.65%

Positive figures indicate a pay gap to the detriment of female employees while negative figures indicate a pay gap to the detriment of male employees