

Equinet Executive Board Meeting I 28 January 2014 (09:00-16:00) Brussels, Belgium

Venue: Equinet / Belgian Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism
138 Rue Royale, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

ATTENDANCE

<u>Board Members</u>	<u>Equinet Secretariat</u>
Anna Błaszczak (AB) Michel Bonte (MB) Evelyn Collins (ECo) István Haller (IH) Sandra Ribeiro (SR) Mari-Liis Sepper (MLS) Therese Spiteri (TS) Tena Simonovic-Einwalter (TSE)	Anne Gaspard (AG), Executive Director Yannick Godin (YG), Administration & Finance Officer Tamás Kádár (TK), Senior Policy Officer Cosmin Popa (CP), Communications Officer Ilaria Volpe (IV), Policy Officer - Gender Equality Charalambos Stergiou (CS), Assistant (Trainee)
<u>Board Advisor:</u> Niall Crowley (NC)	

Observer: John Tierney (*external evaluator, Transform Ltd*)

Apologies: Néphèli Yatropoulos (NY) – *on maternity leave*

Chair of the meeting: Evelyn Collins (ECo)

Minutes: Cosmin Popa (CP), Charalambos Stergiou (CS)

MINUTES

OPENING OF THE EQUINET BOARD MEETING

ECo opened the Board Meeting on Tuesday 28 January at 09:00 and welcomed all Board Members present, John Tierney (external evaluator) and the Equinet Secretariat team. The proposed agenda for the meeting was reviewed and agreed upon by all participants.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TS informed the Board that the National Commission for protection of equality in Malta was currently operating without an Executive Director. This development brought some uncertainty for the national equality body (NEB) in its daily work, but the NEB is operating normally so far in this transitional period.

MB confirmed that the Belgian Centre is soon to become an interfederal body in 2014. The current organisation will be split into two separate institutions, one dealing with migration issues and the other functioning as the continued equality body.

ECo was to be awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD) for her outstanding contribution to the promotion of equality and good relations by the University of Ulster; this had just been announced by news release from the University of Ulster

AG informed the Board of the formal confirmation just received from the European Commission that the Equinet Grant for 2014 was approved for funding for the year.

BOARD DECISIONS

- **Equinet Board Advisor**

The role of Equinet Board Advisor was discussed and reviewed, underlining the added-value and contribution to the work by Niall Crowley in this supporting role in previous years.

DECISION: Board unanimously approves Niall Crowley as Board Advisor (effective immediately) for the duration of the Board mandate.

- **Moderator of Equinet Working Group Policy Formation**

ECo introduced her positive experience of fulfilling this role with the Working Group over the past two years and confirmed that, in view of her role as chair, she would welcome handing over the function of Working Group Moderator to another Board Member. **TSE** volunteered for the role.

DECISION: Board unanimously approves Tena Šimonović-Einwalter as new Moderator of the Working Group Policy Formation.

- **Board Conciliator (internal complaints procedure – secretariat staff regulations)**

The Equinet Staff Handbook (staff regulations) is work in progress and will be proposed to the Board for adoption at a future Board meeting in 2014.

In relation to the relevant section of the draft Staff Handbook relating to internal complaints procedure, **MB** volunteered for the role of Board Conciliator.

It was also suggested that 5 working days to respond to a complaint (as foreseen in the current draft of the procedure) might be a short timeframe and make the role of conciliator difficult. It is proposed to review this particular clause to increase the number of working days to respond to a

complaint.

DECISION: the Board unanimously approves Michiel Bonte as Board Conciliator under the proposed draft Internal complaints procedure.

It was agreed that the Secretariat will liaise with MB to review the procedure as part of the draft Staff Handbook, which is to be finalised and proposed to the Board at a future Meeting.

Niall Crowley, Board advisor, was invited to join the meeting at this point.

MINUTES OF LAST EQUINET MEETINGS

- **Previous Equinet Board Meeting (28 November 2013)**

DECISION: the draft Minutes of the Equinet Board Meeting held on 28 November 2013 are adopted by the Board and can be uploaded on the Equinet website's Members section.

- **Equinet AGM Draft Minutes**

The Board will review and approve finalized draft Minutes of the AGM 2013 at a future meeting.

- **Equinet AGM Evaluation feedback**

Comments concerning the duration of the AGM were noted. It was proposed to increase the AGM duration to 1,5 days especially for this important year with the adoption of the new strategic plan. The feasibility of this proposal will be examined by the Secretariat.

The Board also underlined the importance of trying to increase the response rate for the evaluations at the event.

EQUINET EXTERNAL EVALUATION 2013

- **Preliminary findings and exchange with Board led by John Tierney (external evaluator, Transform Ltd)**

John Tierney introduced the preliminary findings of his evaluation work to be completed by February 2014. A discussion with the Board allowed for the sharing of viewpoints in relation to the main topics and preliminary findings and recommendations emerging from this external evaluation of Equinet for the year 2013.

Please refer to Annex I below for main themes of board discussion with consultant.

STRATEGIC ISSUES

- **Planning process for next Strategic Plan 2015-2018**

The Board supported the planning process outlined in the note for the preparation of the next Strategic Plan. The questionnaire to be used for membership consultation should be kept concise and help determine what Equinet should focus on or drop from its focus of work by allowing to ascertain the priorities of members. IH offered to assist with any advice on the questionnaire.

DECISION: the Secretariat will draft a questionnaire for Membership Consultation, to be

launched to Members with a deadline end April.

Board strategic planning day: It was also proposed that the Board should dedicate a day together to discuss its vision for the strategic plan.

DECISION: Secretariat will propose dates for the strategic planning day and will identify a suitable facilitator.

- **Equinet paper on indicators for measuring the impact of NEBs**

Equinet's Working Group on Strategy Development will discuss the paper which will also inform its work this year dedicated to identifying good practices in strategic planning.

It was underlined that there was a real demand to use this report in different settings and that Equinet should explore this.

- **Equinet input into EC review of implementation of equal treatment Directives**

The European Commission (EC) used significantly and appreciated the Equinet report from the WG Equality Law in practice on the implementation of the Race and General Framework Directives in the preparation of the EC joint report published on 17 January.

The report of the Equinet Gender Equality WG on the implementation of the Gender Goods and Services Directive should aim for a similar type of impact and needs clarity with respect to policy and/or legal focus.

EQUINET WORK PROGRAMME 2014

- **Equinet paper Europe 2020**¹

The Report will be commissioned, through a restricted tender process (targeted invitations to a few suitable experts) with a limited budget available (should require around 10 days' work gathering material and analysis, but no primary research).

The Board reviewed the draft Terms of Reference proposed by the Equinet Secretariat for this project and agreed that further reference to EU structural fund should be included in the Terms of Reference as an area to be assessed and covered.

DECISION: the Secretariat will adjust and launch the restricted call for tender.

- **Equinet communications**

CP introduced and welcomed any remarks and questions on the current Equinet Communications strategy. It was suggested to make legal cases searchable on the Equinet website, at least from the reports of the Equality Law Working Group.

¹ NC – as a potentially interested expert for this work - was absent from the room for the full duration of this item of Board discussion.

- **Good practice guide on making recommendations**

TSE, MB, and ECo indicated that their equality bodies have good practices in this field that could be interesting to be shared as part of this planned work. Board members suggested that relevant good practices also exist in Sweden and Finland.

A lead expert from an experienced equality body in this area is still to be identified.

EQUINET MEMBERSHIP

- The term of Ms Renee Dempsey as Chief Executive of the Irish equality body is coming to an end at the end of March 2014 and it was announced that she will retire then.
- Moldova has new legislation and an equality body that is interested in becoming an Equinet member. IH asks if it is possible for the equality body to come to Equinet trainings and seminars (depends on PROGRESS funding regulations - Secretariat to look into this).
- New head / Executive Director of the Slovakian member equality body will attend the legal seminar.
- Hungarian Office of the Commissioner of Fundamental Rights has a new Commissioner.
- New head of the Czech member NEB and a new head appointment in Lithuania expected soon.

RELEVANT EU AND EUROPEAN STAKEHOLDERS INITIATIVES

- **Follow up joint meeting & cooperation NEBs-NHRIs-Ombudsmen**

It would be interesting for Equinet and equality bodies to discuss institutional cooperation between the different organisations at national and European level, including on effectiveness and independence. Specific grounds and/or areas of work, such as Roma, hate crime or asylum and migration, which were the focus of the meeting, are also important and useful but Equinet should advocate a more general and comprehensive approach.

- **Directive proposal Freedom of Movement EU Migrant Workers**

IV updated the Board on progress and underlined the successful contribution made by Equinet through the submission of amendments and information to selected MEPs, with these changes being generally accepted. This can serve as a useful case study on how Equinet can work to inform relevant legislative developments at EU level.

FINANCES AND ADMINISTRATION

- **Management financial report 2013 – Final reporting to EU**

YG introduced the current status and figures under the management financial report for the year 2013, which is still to be finalised with the further integration of various outstanding figures and

expenditures. Equinet 2013 accounts are expected to be finalised and closed prior to Equinet grant final reporting to EU (to be submitted end March 2014).

As expected, **YG** confirmed the gap in the 2012 co-funding in the context of the EC Audit.

Following previous meeting with EC Financial (notes provided to Board), **AG** mentioned that Equinet was given a strong signal from the EC that there is a commitment to keep the monopoly status of Equinet and ensure the financial sustainability of the Network in the long term under the next EC funding instrument *Equality, Rights and Citizenship Programme*, including with a potential budget increase and reduction in the co-funding requirement level for 2015.

== *The Chair Evelyn Collins closed the Board Meeting at 16:00* ==

ANNEX I

Main points from initial Board discussion with external expert evaluator in the context of Equinet External Evaluation process for 2013 and forthcoming process for preparation of the Strategic Plan 2015-2018

Strategic level

- The challenge is to balance the need to be “more political” with the potential threat that this might pose to Equinet’s very good institutional relations.
- Communications (external, but also internal) should be reviewed with a view to address this challenge.
- Board should try as much as possible to focus on strategic issues and seek a “division of labour” among the different Board members.
- There should be openness towards the possibility of finding non-EC funding for certain parts of the work.
- The network should remain members-led and not Board/Secretariat-led.
- The Strategic Plan needs to be more flexible and not tie the network to a certain way of organising activities every year, but without losing the clarity appreciated by members.

Services level

- Segmentation of activities in order to meet diversity of membership should be explored, but bearing in mind the implications on the budget and operations (making things shorter and impactful is more time-consuming than expected).
- More efforts should go into clarifying the differences in members’ needs based on their country of origin and institutional characteristics.
- There is a difference between “learning” and “training” events.
- More flexibility and less substantive commitment on the part of WG members over a longer period of time can be taken into consideration when designing the work for WGs.
- There should be more prioritisation of outputs and projects to ensure best quality and thoroughness as it is a drain on resources and time to aim for perfection in all activities and tasks.

Organisational level

- A review of the Board’s role in the operation of the network is needed, for example by not requiring all Board members to review all outputs.
- More efforts are needed to ensure that Equinet member equality bodies pay sufficient attention to staff rotation and involvement in Equinet activities.
- Equality bodies’ staff secondments to the Secretariat is an approach that should be explored and clarified further.
- The still small size of the Secretariat poses a challenge for effective operations and sustained quality of outputs.

Strategic Plan consultation level

- It is important to ask members about their priorities and challenges at national level, including national institutional strategies.

- Members should be given as many opportunities as possible to review the plan before approval, to make sure the “listening process” of the Board and Secretariat came to the right conclusions.
- Responses to the consultation need to be institutional (i.e. 41 replies from 41 members), but appropriate consultation with staff members within each equality body should be encouraged.
- Questions could include “what are the priorities of your equality body”, “what should be Equinet’s priorities”, and “how should the latter be achieved” to all the members’ benefit.
- Questions should be few and open, but a challenge will be to get respondents to be more specific about the actual needs.
- Questions should address problematic areas, rather than those we have had continuous positive feedback on.
- Another question could be to ask what Equinet should focus on if it had to make choices among what responses it receives.