

EVALUATION OF

EQUINET

THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF

EQUALITY BODIES

For the financial year of January to December 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assessment of performance against EU Network outputs and outcomes of the logic model of PROGRESS

Logic Model Element	Performance
Output 1: Relevant advocacy, institutional and capacity building work	Chapter Three reports that EQUINET has successfully met all of its output targets. The network has provided relevant promotional, institutional and capacity building work for its members; identification of good practices; delivery of information and awareness-raising activities; and networking with national members and other stakeholders. It continues to be a challenging task for EQUINET to meet the timeline set for the production of publications.
Output 2: Accurate monitoring/ assessment reports on implementation & impact of EU law & policy	Draft monitoring/assessment reports on implementation and impact of EU law and policy have been produced through the activities of EQUINET's Working Groups, although there has been a slight slippage in time for full production.
Output 3: Accurate position/policy papers and analysis;	- ditto -
Output 4: Identification of good practices;	Reports and papers are generated through the exchange of good practices of member organisations during Working Group meetings.
Output 5: Information, awareness-raising and campaigning activities, networking with national members organisations and other stakeholders	The evidence shows that the management of the network, the engagement of members, the dissemination of information and awareness-raising has been central to the work of EQUINET during this financial year. Overall satisfaction rates with the networking opportunities of EQUINET are high (the mean for use, content, design and helpfulness of the network is 4.16 from a scale of 1-5 slightly higher than for the previous year).
Immediate Outcome 1: Improving the organisational capacity and management of European networks	Evidence shown in Chapter Two reveals that EQUINET has met the standards of Immediate Outcome No 1. An effective and efficient governance and Secretariat has again operated extremely well and EQUINET has reached a good form of stability. Member satisfaction rates are high with regard to the efficiency and effectiveness of the governance and Secretariat structures. The organisation is well respected at the European level. The strategic plan has functioned well as a tool for ensuring focus and for monitoring performance; and there has been some increase in efficiency through the implementation of additional and tighter procedures. Policies and procedures continue to be appropriate to the development of the organisation. There is still room for even greater efficiency and cost reductions during 2012. The Board need to continue to address the issue of staff development and it is vital for them to discuss and articulate a policy for sustainability and development of EQUINET.
Immediate Outcome 2: Voicing the concerns and expectations of people exposed to social exclusion,	Satisfaction with the network as a whole is slightly higher than last year. Members appreciate the publications, and training seminars as well as their involvement in Working Groups. A fact sheet was produced on Rights of Roma People and a report on Trans

discrimination and gender inequality and formulating them to inform and influence policy making at national and EU levels	people – these have been based upon the evidence produced by members about the persistence of inequalities with regard to these groups. However, they were not so successful in terms of generating follow-up work and initiatives by members. A perspective on Tackling Ageism and age discrimination has also been produced and is available on the website.
Immediate Outcome 3: Reinforcing the skills of the networks and its members' organisations to advance, support and further develop EU objectives and priorities at national level	Chapter Four offers evidence that members have learnt and applied new knowledge gained through their participation in training and Working Groups. A higher proportion of respondents stated that they had applied this in the workplace compared to last year. There is also evidence that EQUINET's trainings and activities have influenced the development of EBs. The concept of utility continues to be central to the success of the network.
Immediate Outcome 4: Better integrating of cross-cutting issues (e.g. gender, poverty and non-discrimination)	Training courses and Working Groups have addressed cross-cutting issues and different grounds of discrimination during the year, and the attendance rates continue to be very high.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The year has again been successful for EQUINET. The organisation is even more well-known at the European level and the targets set by the membership during its AGM have been largely met; although there has been some delay in final production of publications and completion of the ad-hoc initiatives. Overall most satisfaction ratings are slightly higher than for the previous year.

Relevance

The data show that the network model of organising is highly relevant to the performance of a European intermediary and appears to meet the needs of most participants and performs a very good function for the Commission; high numbers of participants continue to attend training courses and Working Groups and it is clear that they have been satisfied.

Efficiency

The Secretariat and Board meetings have worked well during the year and there is evidence that EQUINET has reached a good level of stability. The model of governance works well for the network. Systems work well. A variety of efficiency measures have taken place, including the production of fact sheets and the use of the internet for dissemination instead of production of high cost publications. The doubling up of meetings has also cut costs. The Secretariat has again received high ratings for efficiency from its members. There is some evidence to suggest that training courses could be further refined and there is a continuing need to monitor the engagement of members in the Working Groups and to meet the target set for production of publications. There have, however, been important slippages in completion of the website.

Effectiveness

Overall ratings for most activities and events have been slightly higher than for the previous year. Members have learnt new skills and applied their learning in the workplace and some members

believe that EQUINET has influenced the development of their organisations. There are good ideas for increasing the advocacy role of EQUINET.

Sustainability

This is an area that was not addressed during 2011 by the Board.

The following recommendations have been generated from the findings:

Governance and strategy

It has been a particularly good year for the governance and management of EQUINET. From the following list, the main priorities are to address staff development and produce a sustainability plan. It is recommended that the Board:

- discusses and articulates a policy for sustainability and development of EQUINET (as planned for 2012);
- explores different ways of increasing efficiency and reducing costs yet further;
- additional efficiency measures could include more use of teleconferencing, reduction in the numbers of staff and Board members at training and seminar meetings, new forms of publishing information through fact sheets and use of the internet;
- continues to ensure a good working relationship between the Board and Secretariat, with continued high level policy and strategic inputs from the Board and operational matters dealt with by the Secretariat;
- ensures that the staff appraisal system incorporates a planned schedule of training for staff and that this is supported with a small training budget.

Outputs

EQUINET has met most of its output targets for the year. From the following list the main priorities are to review the training courses and assess the publication targets as shown below:

- Improvements to the training courses could be made by more clearly targeting training so that different levels of training could be offered in line with the needs of members, perhaps for: (i) high level senior management (as already provided), (ii) experienced staff members, (iii) less experienced staff members.
- Improvements to the training courses should continue to cater for the diversity of skills required by equality body staff and the different levels of staff skills in different equality bodies.
- EQUINET should take account of the views expressed in the survey about topics for future training courses (see Table 8)
- EQUINET should assess the linkages that could be made between Working Groups and between Working Groups and trainings.
- Moderators of Working Groups should negotiate appropriate working methods with participants, set clear objectives and agree on final reports at the beginning of each year so that the obligations of members are made clear.
- If the budget allows, there should be more Working Group meetings and/or the time spent at one meeting should be extended so as to increase engagement of participants.

- The Board should review the number of publications that Working Groups are capable of producing within a twelve month period and ensure that all Working Group participants are aware of the targets.
- The Secretariat and Board should involve Members in the process of choosing topics for the ad-hoc initiatives.
- EQUINET should continue to stimulate and support debate among members in relation to standards for Equality Bodies. This debate should build awareness of what is currently in place and further develop thinking as to the approach for and content of further standards required.
- EQUINET should continue to explore within the membership the further development of its contributions to policy-formation at the European level on foot of the work and experience of its member equality bodies. It should explore how to support the contribution by member bodies to policy formation within their own jurisdiction and their contribution if EQUINET were to push for the proposal of a more comprehensive horizontal EC Directive to combat discrimination members. This could be done through the AGM, training and the work of the Policy Formation Working Group.

Promotion and communication

Work on the website is the priority for 2012.

- The new website should be up and running as soon as possible.

Outcomes and networking

Networking between members has continued to improve. In order to build on the energy of the network, EQUINET could find additional ways to increase member involvement, whilst taking into consideration workload, limited availability and interests of members. EQUINET should:

- Continue with delivery of capacity building events and find even more ways of involving its members.
- Find new ways to increase involvement, such as more face-to-face opportunities; improvement of technology to promote informal learning and collaboration through the website; mentoring and matchmaking between new organisations and relevant older organisations.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Terms of Reference

In November 2011, Amber Analysis UK was commissioned by EQUINET - the European Network of Equality Bodies - to undertake a technical evaluation of its fourth year's funding from the European Commission's *PROGRESS* programme.

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- assess the process of managing EQUINET, its various activities and planning for its future
- review the delivery by EQUINET of information and services to its members, including the quality, use and relevance of the outputs of EQUINET
- appraise the likelihood for participation in EQUINET's activities to support and strengthen the capacity of the member organisations
- make recommendations for the future enhancement of the organisation

A summary of the relationship between objectives and research methods is shown in Appendix 1. This evaluation was carried out in three stages, using the DAC criteria of 'Relevance', 'Efficiency', 'Effectiveness' and 'Sustainability'.

1.2 Methodology

Stage One:

- a) **Observation and attendance at the High Level Meeting of Heads of National Equality Bodies and the AGM** of November 29th/30th and **interviews** with participants, including a **group discussion** with Board members.
- b) **Face-to-face interviews** with all EQUINET staff and one EQUINET member in Brussels.
- c) **A review of documentation**, including activity monitoring reports; EQUINET's values/operating principles, policies, strategies and plans; performance data and evidence of the range of work carried out.
- d) **Desk research** including internet searches, analysis of other relevant documentation

Stage Two:

- a) **Email survey of 229 participants of EQUINET events – to which 50 responded**
- b) **Short set of email questions for relevant members of the European Commission and European NGO networks**
- c) **Telephone interviews and email questions** with 10 members.

Stage Three:

- a) **Analysis of findings**
- b) **Report to EQUINET**

A description of methods and a list of organisations that responded to the survey and a list of organisations to which additional questions or interviews were addressed are shown in Appendix 2.

1.3 EQUINET in brief

EQUINET started as an informal network in 2003 and was formally established as a network in 2007. It operates as a platform for exchange and cooperation amongst and with specialised Equality Bodies (EBs) across the European Union and beyond. Its mission is to:

'enable Equality Bodies to achieve and exercise their full potential at member state level by sustaining and developing networking between and a platform for Equality Bodies at the European level'.

In order to achieve this mission, EQUINET facilitates exchange and sharing of practical experience, expertise and good practices in the implementation of EU anti-discrimination law; peer support among national equality bodies; capacity building and training; and a platform for dialogue with European institutions and stakeholders.

Since 2007, EQUINET is legally established as an international not-for-profit association (Aisbl) with an operational Secretariat based in Brussels. EQUINET has been funded through the European Commission's *PROGRESS* programme - the mission of which is to strengthen the EU's contribution in supporting Member States' commitments and efforts to create more and better jobs and to build a more cohesive society. This evaluation reports upon the EU Network Outputs and EU Network Immediate Outcomes of the programme's logic model.

1.4 Structure of the report

Chapter Two assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of EQUINET's structure, governance and Secretariat, and addresses the issue of sustainability. Chapter Three sets out the progress made by the Network towards meeting its output objectives. Chapter Four examines the extent to which the Network is achieving its purpose (or expected outcomes) and looks at the issue of networking. Chapter Five provides an overview of achievements and recommendations for strengthening the network in the forthcoming years.

2. THE NETWORK

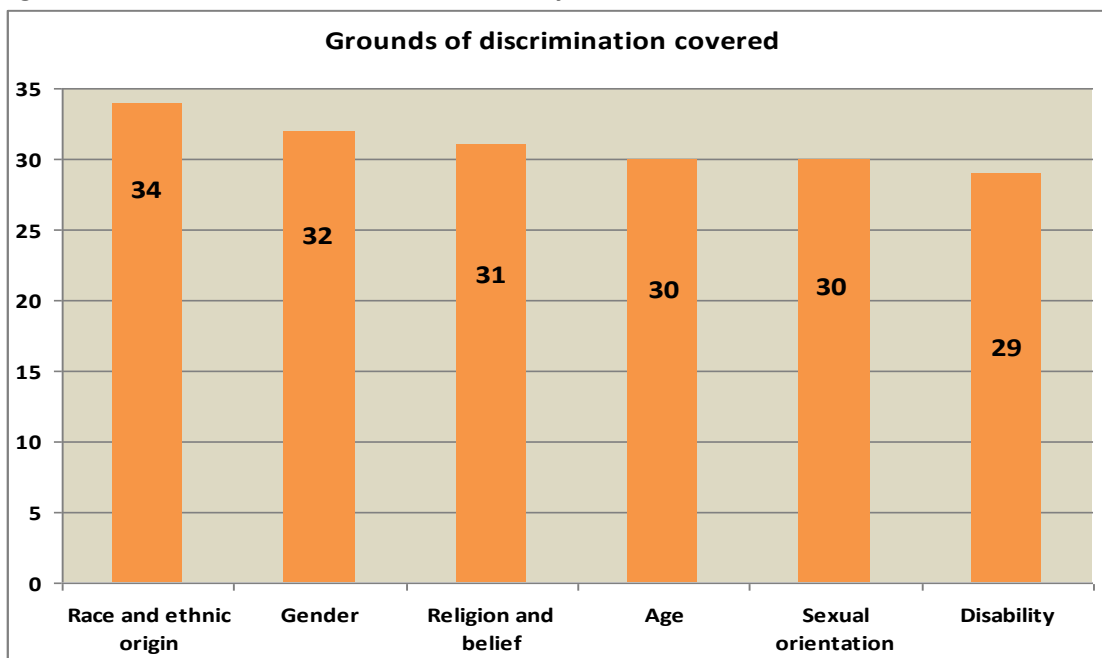
2.1 Set up of EQUINET

Since the Treaty of Amsterdam came into force in 1999, new EU laws, or Directives, have been enacted in the area of anti-discrimination, which aim at providing a *minimum* level of legal protection from discrimination for everyone in the EU. Specialised/statutory Equality Bodies (EBs) have become crucial to the enforcement process of this equal treatment legislation. In 2007, at the time of the emergence of the PROGRESS EU funding programme, EQUINET, which had for five years previously operated as a project-based network of Equality Bodies, was established as a registered non-profit International Association under Belgian law (AISBL).

EQUINET members, the total of which had risen to **37 organisations from 30 European countries (including the 27 EU Member States)** by the end of the AGM of November 2011, promote equality through awareness building, effective enforcement and implementation and possible levelling up of European and national equality laws, and they help to develop and implement policies and practices that promote and ensure equal treatment and combat discrimination. The membership has diversity in relation to:

1. Their functions, which span from bodies with a quasi judicial function to those that play promotional roles.
2. The grounds they cover, with some bodies dealing with a single ground and others dealing with a multiplicity of grounds, as shown in Figure 1 below.
3. Their structure, with some bodies as stand-alone organisations and others that form part of organisations with a wider remit.
4. Their scale and resources.

Figure 1: Grounds of discrimination covered by members



2.2 Objectives and activities of EQUINET

The purpose of the EQUINET Network is to ensure that specialised EBs can benefit from each other's experiences and expertise in their constant efforts to improve the enforcement of equal treatment laws, policies and practices and so that the EBs united in EQUINET can make their views heard at a European and a national level in order to contribute to the effective implementation and enhanced impact of existing legislation as well as the possible development of new laws in the field of anti-discrimination.

The activities of EQUINET include:

- Cooperation/networking opportunities with exchange and sharing of practical experience, expertise and good practices through working groups
- Production of reports and papers (perspectives, factsheets)
- Peer support
- Capacity-building and training seminars
- Platform for dialogue with European institutions and stakeholders

In line with 'networking' good practice, an important principle of EQUINET is that its actions and policy opinions come from the expertise and practice of its members.

2.3 Structure of EQUINET - Governance and Secretariat

The structure of EQUINET consists of an Annual General Meeting (AGM), made up of all network members; a bi-annually elected Executive Board voted in by members during the AGM (including a Chair plus a Treasurer nominated by the Board); a Secretariat headed by an Executive Director, Working Groups (discussed in the following chapter) made up of members of the Network, as well as ad-hoc group initiatives on issues of shared concerns.

Members of EQUINET vote biannually at the AGM to delegate the responsibility of overall strategic management of the network to an Executive Board which is supported by an administrative Secretariat. The Board submits proposals for EQUINET's strategic and operational direction to the AGM, so that they can be discussed, reviewed and agreed with members. The Board then reports each year on progress towards meeting the agreed objectives. A critical role, and a delicate balance, for this type of network governance is for Board members to work closely with the Secretariat, providing guidance and support, whilst at the same time monitoring its efficiency.

EQUINET's policy is to try to ensure a cultural and regional balance, as well as to encourage gender balance and diversity in the broadest sense, amongst its Board members. The following table shows which countries/organisations were represented at Board level for 2009-2011 and which countries/organisations were voted in during the AGM of 2011 for the period of 2011-2013 (during 2011 it was agreed that membership of the Board would be increased from seven to nine members):

Table 1: Organisations/Countries represented at Board level

2009-2011	
Ombud for Equal Treatment	Austria
Centre for Equal Opportunities & Opposition to Racism	Belgium
Danish Institute for Human Rights	Denmark
Defender of the Rights (successor to the HALDE)	France
Equality & Human Rights Commission (resigned May 2010)	UK- Great Britain
Equal Treatment Commission	Netherlands
Equality Ombudsman (January 2011)*	Sweden
Greek Ombudsman (commenced May 2010)	Greece

* The representative from the Swedish Equality Ombudsman resigned in January 2011. The remaining Board Members ruled that, given the short time left before the next board elections (November), it would not bring any added-value to replace that representative. The Board remained with six members until the end of its mandate.

2011-2013	
Ombud for Equal Treatment	Austria
Centre for Equal Opportunities & Opposition to Racism	Belgium
Office of the Ombudsman	Croatia
Defender of the Rights (successor to the HALDE)	France
Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson	Lithuania
National Commission for the Promotion of Equality	Malta
Equal Treatment Commission	Netherlands
National Council for Combating Discrimination	Romania
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	UK – Northern Ireland

EQUINET's Secretariat has a small team of four staff members: an Executive Director, a Policy Officer, an Administration and Finance Officer, and a Communications Officer. During the year two trainees held short placements in the Secretariat. Between them staff members oversee the network, support working groups, contribute to the design and running of training courses, prepare publications, monitor developments in the equal treatment legislation, provide communication services to support the network and liaise with EU institutions, Agencies and stakeholders.

2.4 Efficiency and Effectiveness of Governance and Secretariat

Governance

Whilst it is vital for networks to keep their structures simple¹, the type of governance and management of its components, are likely to be critical for network effectiveness². The 'network administrative organisational form' (NAO) chosen by EQUINET works more effectively than others if the network's task requires significant interdependence among members and there is a need for high level network coordinating skills and task-specific competencies. This form is also likely to

¹ *A Good Practice Handbook for Networks*. Broadcasting Commission of Ireland.

² Provan K, Kevis P, *Modes of Network Governance: Structure, Management and Effectiveness*. Oxford University Press on behalf of Journal of Public Administration, Research & Theory, 2007. The article identifies 3 forms of governance for networks: 'shared participant governance', 'lead organisation governance' and 'network administrative organisation'.

enhance network legitimacy, so that it can deal with unique and complex network-level problems and issues, and thus reduce the complexity of fully shared governance. In the case of EQUINET the Secretariat plays a key role in coordinating and sustaining the network and centralising some of the functions that help to build specific skills but the network is externally governed by members to facilitate their interdependent action. In this structural form the board should address strategic-level network concerns, leaving operational decisions to the Executive Director of the Secretariat.

As shown in the 2009 and 2010 evaluations, the successful adoption of a form of network governance is likely to be based upon four structural and relational contingencies³ shown in Table 2. Column two of the Table shows the optimum dimension of the contingencies for the NAO form of governance to be most effective for achieving network-level outcomes. Column three documents the situation for 2011 (evidenced through interviews and survey feedback from members). Results suggest that EQUINET's governance structure continues to be appropriate.

Table 2: Contingencies for effective NAO governance

Contingencies	NAO most effective	Situation in EQUINET
Trust	When moderately to widely shared among network participants	Trust has increased still further during 2011. One reason is that more members have external challenges and membership of EQUINET is seen as a form of possible protection.
Size of the network	When relatively moderate to many network participants	Moderate membership size but growing each year. Issue of applications from organisations not covered by the Progress programme could create future dilemmas.
Goal consensus	When network-level goal consensus is moderately high	The clarity and focus of the strategic plan has created ever greater efficiency and effectiveness and serves as a good tool for monitoring targets. Members have good understanding of goals.
Nature of the task	When need for network level competencies and interdependence between members is high	Continued participation in training courses demonstrates the need for high network competencies; there have been higher levels of involvement in policy development through the year; there is significant interdependence amongst members attending Working Groups; there is membership validation for promoting standards for EBs.

Every network is also characterised by three major tensions, (i) *efficiency versus inclusiveness*, (ii) *internal versus external legitimacy*, and (iii) *the need for flexibility versus stability* and these

³ *ibid*

tensions must be recognised and responded to. EQUINET seems to have managed these tensions well through the year. The strategic plan has served a variety of purposes in this regard: It has improved efficiency by setting targets that are easily monitored by the Board; the development of the plan became an excellent opportunity to establish additional external credibility; and by seeking collaboration with members in its development, Board members were instrumental in building further trust within the network. As shown in previous evaluations, the efficiency of EQUINET seems to be well appreciated by members; and the flexibility of the network, as yet, does not appear to be threatened, although staff members fear that there is an increase in the diversity of needs amongst members which could become difficult to meet within the budget.

Although all Board members are involved in decision making, monitoring of targets and agreement of the content for papers, it is generally agreed that the role of the Chair has been particularly effective to the success of EQUINET this year:

“The Chair has done excellent work. She has spent a great deal of time supporting the staff team. I believe she has had contact with the Director on a weekly basis. They obviously have different roles and the relationship has been very productive. We are very happy too with the capacity of staff.”

“EQUINET always had good governance – with good members from the beginning. They are all very good people. A lot of work was done on the plan which is now very clear. And we have now linked it directly into our own work plan. It is a very good instrument to get people concentrated on what are the objectives and how they could be achieved. So it is good for having a double-check on everything.”

Table 3 below shows that Board attendance rates for 2011 were very high (100% attendance apart from one meeting with one person missing).

“EQUINET is important to me and I believe that, just like me, all Board members take their responsibilities very seriously.”

“We have concentrated very hard on the outputs of EQUINET this year and because the strategic plan is so clear, it has been helpful for us to monitor our progress against our targets.”

Table 3: Attendance at Board meetings

Date of meeting	Attendance rates of members
17 January 2011	6 members, plus Secretariat/1 Board adviser
29 March 2011	6 members, plus Secretariat/1 Board adviser
31 May 2011	6 members, plus Secretariat/1 Board adviser
13 September 2011	5 members, plus Secretariat/1 Board adviser
30 November 2011	9 members, plus Secretariat

2010 had been a year dominated by the difficult task of producing a new four-year strategic plan for EQUINET; the analysis of Board minutes for 2011 seems to reveal that this plan has formed an excellent framework for governance reporting. The structure of Board agendas is similar for each meeting and the minutes document how discussions take place and how decisions are made by Board members. A reading of the minutes reveals a stable organisation that is seriously monitored by the Board. Outputs are monitored against budget requirements and against the targets of yearly plans. Indeed much of the Board discussions for 2011 focused upon the design, implementation and monitoring of deliverables. Additional issues discussed by the Board related to problems experienced by members, such as the trend towards the merging of organisations; applications from new members (including one or two organisations that would not be covered by the PROGRESS programme); agreement of moderators for Working Groups and agreement of new rules for the election of Board members – including the increase in Board membership and the development of a new geographic grouping for voting that would improve membership representation, whilst retaining continuity of some existing Board members. A member of the Board also acts as Moderator to the Policy Formation Working Group which is responsible for the production of EQUINET perspectives (agreed by the Board). The Board is also responsible for oversight of all reports from the Working Groups, production of papers for special initiatives and the drafting of notes and statements for the EC. This working Board is, therefore, heavily involved in some way with all outputs of the organisation. Nevertheless, the delicate balance between governance and monitoring has been well managed.

During 2010 there had been some dissatisfaction with the procedure for the 2009 AGM Board Elections because it had not been successful in generating votes that fully reflected the diversity of the membership. The evaluator can report that the new voting procedures for the 2011 AGM seems to have been more successful:

“I am very happy that we have a Board with more representatives from Eastern Europe and greater representation from smaller organisations.”

“The election procedure for the Board worked well this time. We put a lot of time into discussing different ways that the elections could be held and I think we have now done quite well.”

The Secretariat

Interview and questionnaire responses show that members are highly satisfied with the efficiency of the Secretariat. Questionnaire respondents rated very highly the efficiency of the EQUINET Secretariat in providing added value and useful support (mean score of 4.55 on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is not at all efficient and 5 is very efficient). This score is slightly higher than the previous year's rating of 4.2.

The most common remarks made by survey respondents show that members of the Secretariat respond promptly to enquiries with useful information, the staff are supportive and approachable, and events are well organised with members being kept well informed. Specific comments are shown below:

- Rapid and useful response to queries
'The Secretariat's attitude was always a positive one and we got full and rapid support anytime we needed it. They helped us through any type of problems we had, financial or organisational'.
- Supportive, helpful, approachable and professional
'Exceptional persons, a credit to EQUINET'.
'The contact I have had with the secretariat has always been very helpful and very professional'.
- Events are well organised and members kept well informed
'They keep us well informed of all the activities and give us enough time to participate and give input on the different items they are coordinating. They have also been very helpful when we have requested information from other members'.

As reported in all EQUINET evaluations, the Secretariat is highly respected by members and by European Institutions, including the Commission and FRA. Staff members themselves report that it has been a very busy year; in their opinion most things have run smoothly, there are tighter controls of financial matters and the management of training and high level meetings works well. There is, however, a strong feeling that more outputs are promised year on year whilst the diversity of membership and their expectations increases as new members join the network. This creates pressure upon the small staff team.

The retention and development of staff teams within small organisations with tight budgets will always be problematic. EQUINET is no exception. Funds are not allocated to the development of staff skills but neither is there a systematic approach to thinking through what cost effective options might be available. One view held by some Board members is that there are many opportunities available to the EQUINET staff for learning 'on the job' anyway because they are involved in a variety of different activities. As a consequence, staff members have not benefited from any specific training during the year but there is the expectation that during 2012 one member of staff will be trained in the use of new software – which should result in the reduction of book-keeping costs – and the Board have made recommendations that management training should be made available for the Executive Director.

The budget and sustainability

A new membership fees system had been introduced during 2010 (following AGM decision), introducing a three-levels system of membership fee related to annual budget of members resulting in an increase of the membership fee for some bodies with resources above a given threshold and there were fears that this would create difficulties for those EBs that were already experiencing problems due to the economic downturn. Fortunately, this fear proved to be false. The amount of funds available for EQUINET and the relationship between EC funds and those generated through membership is shown in Figure 2.

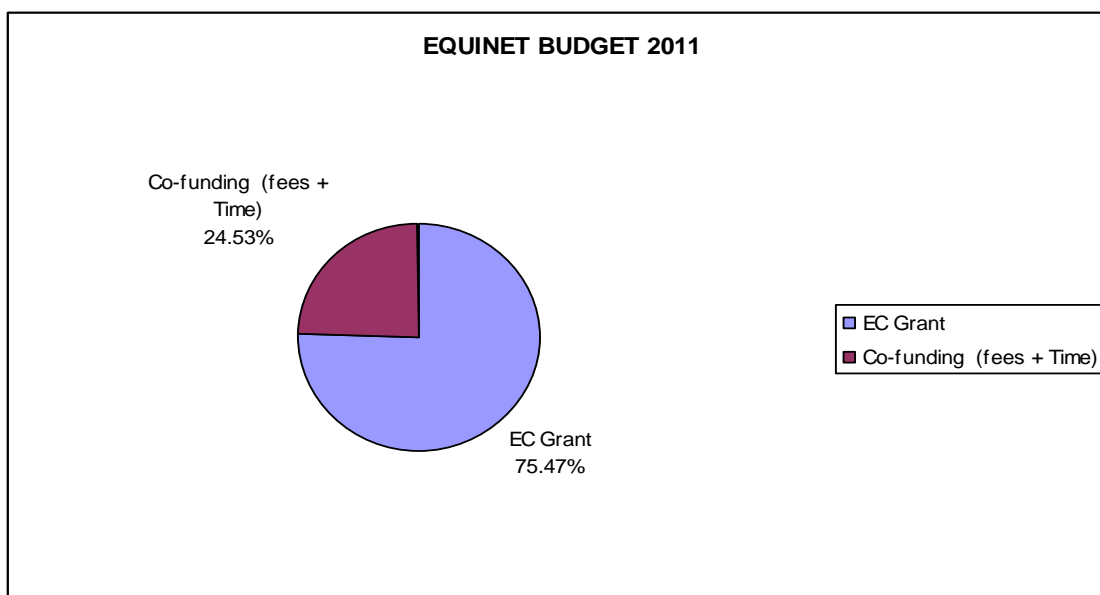
Figure 2: Budget for 2011

Figure 2 shows that EQUINET has only two sources of income: the membership and the European Commission. The former represents only 24.5% of the planned budget for 2011 and this reliance of the organisation upon a single source of funding and a consequent potential for non-sustainability should the PROGRESS programme discontinue, has been an issue identified in each of the evaluations and recommendations have been made that a sustainability plan should be produced. Early in the year, following the production of the strategic plan, the Board had decided to address the issue of sustainability. However, in the context of priority setting and various view points this was a task that was again delayed:

“We have not dealt with the sustainability issue. We worked hard on the strategic plan last year and so we concentrated on the delivery of outputs this year.”

“There is no strategy at all at the moment and that leaves us feeling a bit vulnerable.”

“I think the membership is the only possibility for growth but they have their own problems now.”

“Fundraising is not easy for us. We are a network of public bodies – not of NGOs where we could approach foundations for grants.”

There seem to be divided views about the issue of sustainability. On the one hand, there is the belief that: (i) the EU will continue to give 100% support to EQUINET since there is synergy of objectives between the two bodies; (ii) effort should be put into raising at least additional small pots of funding for specific outputs; and (iii) the issue of sustainability should be taken more seriously because the PROGRESS programme is coming to an end in 2013 and there is no guarantee that this support will continue.

Individuals holding the first view believe that States should fund EBs and if that is so for national bodies at the membership level, that should be so for the network as a whole at the European level – even though this is not the responsibility of the Commission. They believe that if EQUINET were to raise more funds from elsewhere to run workplan activities this would provide the Commission with good reason to reduce its grant; and so taking a realistic approach, this group is not convinced that looking for money elsewhere is a good idea; they are eager to look at how to do things with less rather than more money.

The second view is that as membership grows, the need to raise further funding is becoming ever more likely, this may be from other donors or from within the membership:

“We only have a limited amount in the budget – this is a problem because we could extend our services and diversify but it is too difficult without additional funds.”

“EQUINET could start to explore potential for other donors as a possible source of funding to specifically support the participation of interested and relevant Equality Bodies that are outside the scope of the Progress Programme.”

“Trainings are getting more and more popular and our Centre decided to pay for two more people to go on the training because we are so happy to have it. Other members could choose to do this”.

However, members of small organisations are not necessarily of the same mind.

“There is a limit to how much our organisation would pay for its membership. And I think some of the organisations even smaller than us would also have the same problem.”

With regard to the third view, few people believe that it would be possible to generate sufficient funds to sustain the network without contributions from the Commission, which makes the idea of sustainability impossible without EU funds.

One of the difficult issues addressed by the Board and linked to that of sustainability relates to the requests it has received from potential members who are located outside the area covered by the Progress programme. The Board questioned whether EQUINET and its Secretariat could withstand possible new additions with its consequent increase in costs and work. It was decided that in the current context, EQUINET should limit its membership to the area covered by the Progress programme and that, if prioritised by the new board to be elected, EQUINET could as part of the 2012 workplan explore new possibilities of funding to be able to support them in the future.

Efficiency

If additional funds are not yet available, one option is to explore ways to increase efficiency and reduce costs. In fact, the evaluation of 2010 reported that in addition to the high satisfaction levels of members, they also made suggestions that the Secretariat should reduce costs and increase efficiency.

The evaluator found evidence that certain efficiency measures have been taken through the year and this issue continues to preoccupy the Board for the coming year:

“We have started to use FRA and Commission events to save money. FRA had a meeting and we organised one Working Group meeting around the same time and that saved money. At the AGM too there was a FRA meeting and this backed on to the High Level Meeting so we could rely on FRA for plane tickets. This doesn’t really save money for EQUINET but it helps the Equality Bodies.”

“It is always useful to work with members for events too. For the activity we ran in Denmark, the EB hosted the meeting. This saved money. We also realised that it would not be money well spent to follow up on the Trans and Roma issue.”

“We are going to make it possible for teleconferencing. Sometimes staff members travel to a less centrally connected city in Europe for a Working Group meeting for instance, which takes too long and is too expensive – it can also take three days to travel to and attend a one-day training course. We are also talking about how the Board meetings can be more efficient – we are already starting to talk to each other in the evening when people arrive because people have to stay overnight anyway and this is time well spent for getting to know each other – it creates a different atmosphere for meetings. We also have to question whether it is efficient to have all nine Board members at training events and the staff too.”

“We are thinking about how to reduce book-keeping costs. If we buy the new software we can train a staff member to do this work.”

A further area where the Secretariat has managed to save costs relates to the publications. Some of them are now only available on the website, whilst others have smaller print runs and in some cases fact sheets, instead of large reports, have been produced.

2.5 Conclusion

It has again been a very good year for the governance and management of EQUINET and evidence shows that EQUINET has reached a good form of stability: the organisation is even more well-known and respected at the European level; the network helps the Commission and FRA to reach out to Equality Bodies in a regular and coordinated way, and it also gives them the possibility of receiving coordinated feedback from Equality Bodies; the strategic plan has functioned well as a tool for ensuring focus and for monitoring performance; and there has been some increase in efficiency through the implementation of additional and tighter procedures. The model of governance chosen by EQUINET works efficiently and effectively and continues to be appropriate. Systems have operated effectively and policies and procedures continue to be appropriate to the development of the organisation.

There is still room for even greater efficiency and cost reductions during 2012, although it will be difficult to implement because of the increase in membership. Additional efficiency measures could include: more use of teleconferencing; reduction in the numbers of staff and board

members present at training and seminar events; and new forms of publishing information through fact sheets and use of the internet.

The Board does need to address the issue of staff development. The staff appraisal system should become more systemised with the addition of a planned schedule of training for staff, including management training for the Executive Director. Board members should ensure that there is a small training budget to support this.

Finally it is vital for the Board to discuss and articulate a policy for sustainability and development of EQUINET.

The evaluator confirms that EQUINET has successfully met the standards of Immediate Outcome No 1 in the PROGRESS logic model:



Immediate Outcome 1: Improving the organisational capacity and management of European networks.

3. PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING OBJECTIVES

3.1 Introduction

The strategic plan of EQUINET 2011-2014 has four main strategic objectives:

1. To enhance the capacities of staff members of EBs
2. To enhance the institutional development of the EBs
3. To contribute to policy formation at the European level
4. To strengthen the network itself

Each year a work plan is drawn up guided by these strategies. Targets are set for the delivery of specific services to meet each strategic objective and members agree the work plan at each AGM. This chapter describes the progress of EQUINET in relation to its delivery of the products and activities (outputs) it carries out on behalf of its members. Data used for evaluating outputs has come from interviews with members, training course evaluations and the analysis of an email survey sent to 229 participants of EQUINET events during 2011. Fifty surveys were completed. This gave a response rate of 22% (compared to a response rate of 28% in 2010 and 15.8% in 2009). The quality of the 'open' responses from members this year was poor, however, and the fact that it took much longer to generate a reasonable response rate suggests that members could be finding it difficult to produce new insight into their satisfaction with EQUINET.

3.2 Satisfaction with EQUINET products and activities

Ninety-six per cent of the email survey respondents had used EQUINET's products. Respondents were asked to rate EQUINET products and activities on three *criteria*: 1) content; 2) design; and 3) helpfulness. In each case, a *five-point scale* was used. In assessing their satisfaction with the content and design of each product, a scale from 1 to 5 was used, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 5 is very satisfied. Respondents were also asked to rate the helpfulness of each product, also using a scale of 1 to 5, 1 meaning not very helpful and 5 meaning very helpful. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Rating of EQUINET products and activities

Product/activity	Mean		
	Content	Design	Helpful
Training and meetings			
Communication training: Effective Communication Strategies for Equality Bodies	4.47	4.47	4.11
Legal training: Conflicts between the Right to Equal Treatment and Other Fundamental Rights	4.52	4.36	4.33
Legal seminar: Legal Developments and Concepts in the Field of Equality and Non-discrimination in Europe	4.00	4.00	4.12
AGM	4.29	4.33	4.14
High-level Meeting with Heads of National Equality Bodies	4.17	4.11	4.05

and European Institutions			
Participation in Working Groups	4.19	4.05	3.95
Publications			
2011 Perspective: Tackling Ageism and Discrimination	4.45	4.36	4.45
2011 Perspective: Equality Bodies and National Human Rights Institutions – Making the Link to Maximize Impact	4.54	4.31	4.46
2011 Factsheet: Equinet’s Work for the Rights of Roma People	4.46	4.38	4.00
2010 Opinion: Making Equality Legislation Work for Roma and Travellers	4.23	4.15	3.93
2010 Opinion: Making Equality Legislation Work for Trans People	4.77	4.62	4.31
2010 Opinion: Addressing Poverty and Discrimination: Two Sides of the One Coin	4.77	4.62	4.46
2010 Report: Dynamic Interpretation – European Anti-discrimination Law in Practice V	4.39	4.24	4.22
2010 Report: Effective Strategies to Empower Civil Society	4.50	4.42	4.08
2010 EQUINET Annual Report	4.13	4.25	3.94
Communication: EQUINET Website	4.04	3.83	3.92

These figures suggest that, in the main, respondents were well satisfied with the products and activities of EQUINET, the commonest mean scores being between 4 and 5. On the whole, the scores were slightly higher than the previous year, apart from scores for the website.

The overall mean scores according to type of EQUINET products/activities are shown in Table 5 (figures in brackets relate to the scores given for 2010):

Table 5: Overall ratings 2011 and 2010

Product/activity	Mean 2011 (2010)		
	Content	Design	Helpful
Training and meetings	4.27 (4.03)	4.22 (4.12)	4.12 (3.94)
Publications	4.47 (4.20)	4.37 (4.16)	4.21 (4.03)
Website	4.04 (4.08)	3.83 (3.84)	3.92 (4.11)

Overall, statistics for training and meetings and publications are higher for 2011 than for 2010. This is not true for the website, which has lower ratings than for the previous year. The ratings for the publications are higher than for the training courses, meetings and website; this is the same situation as in the previous evaluation. Compared to last year, respondents considered the website to be slightly less helpful (mean score decreased from 4.11 to 3.92), but the publications to be more helpful (from 4.03 to 4.21).

These ratings are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Training and meetings

Each year EQUINET has planned two training seminars - one of which focuses on legal issues and the other on policy. This year the policy training was replaced by a training seminar on: 'Effective Communication Strategies for Equality Bodies'. This training course linked directly to the new Working Group that had been established earlier in the year (see below). This year the legal training was about 'Conflicts between the Right to Equal Treatment and Other Fundamental Rights'. In addition, two further meetings were held: a legal seminar on 'Legal Developments and Concepts in the Field of Equality and Non-discrimination in Europe' and a 'High-level Meeting with Heads of National Equality Bodies and European Institutions'.

For each training seminar, a good set of papers are sent by the Secretariat to participants. They include a set of aims and objectives, details of the programme, a comprehensive list of resources such as lists of Articles, appropriate Directives, and other recommended reading, plus details of travel and accommodation. The Secretariat is responsible for briefing presenters and participants who are expected to carry out advance work on the case studies prior to attending the seminar. The website is used to promote the training and holds all information pertaining to each course. In order to encourage a higher response rate to the evaluations of training and other events, the website also contains an online evaluation questionnaire for participants to complete once they return to their offices.

Participation rates are high for these trainings and events as shown in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Participation in training courses and events

Training course/events	No. of participants
Legal seminar on Developments & Concepts in the field of Equality & Non-discrimination in Europe (March 2011, Brussels)	85
Training (a): Communicating Equality: Effective communication strategies for equality bodies (May 2011, Copenhagen)	57
Training (b): Conflicts Between The Right To Equal Treatment And Other Fundamental Rights (September 2011, Vienna)	54
AGM (November 2011, Brussels)	79
High-Level Meeting Between Heads of equality Bodies and European Institutions (November 2011, Brussels)	77

Results from the evaluators' survey show that the highest satisfaction scores were given for the communication and the legal training courses (as shown in Table 4), whereas the legal seminar received the lowest scores. The legal training was considered to be particularly useful for understanding the link between the different discrimination grounds and human rights, sharing of good practice and stimulating new approaches, as well as adding value to existing work.

One respondent had learnt about insurance packages using gender as a factor in calculating premiums from the legal seminar, which had helped in working with insurance service providers. Another respondent, however, thought the topic very specific which did not meet the requirements of his/her daily work.

With regard to findings from the evaluators' survey, the greatest benefit reported by members from attending the training courses and meetings was the value of learning from and sharing with other members. Examples of feedback include the following (a more detailed assessment of outcomes is given in Chapter 4):

- Trainings and meetings provide a platform for sharing good practice, and learn latest legal developments.
- A great opportunity to learn from others' experiences as the whole concept of discrimination is relatively new in this country.
- It offered space for the direct sharing of information.
- It covered the experience of many countries; it is very important to learn from each other.
- It was helpful in providing new knowledge relevant to the daily work of participants.
- Legal trainings are very helpful to get an overview of the legal situations in the different countries and to exchange experiences.

The evaluators also analysed the evaluation forms completed by participants at the end of each training event and they too show high satisfaction rates overall. The legal training in Vienna received the highest scores and although the overall rating for the communications training and the legal seminar are similar, the latter has higher scores for almost all dimensions, apart from the interactivity of the course, which was very much appreciated by participants of the communications training, where a new methodology known as the 'World Café' was employed.

Some key points from the forms are shown in Table 7 (satisfaction rates of 'excellent', 'strongly agree' and 'agree' have been used as the statistical basis). Number of respondents for each question answered for each training event is shown in the relevant column heading:

Table 7: Snapshot of satisfaction rates from each training course

	Training (a)* <i>Sample:</i> 29(50% <i>response)**</i>	Training (b)* <i>Sample:</i> 31(57% <i>response)**</i>	Legal Sem (c) <i>Sample:</i> 42(49% <i>response)**</i>
Overall rating	95% (29)	97% (31)	95% (42)
Relevant to participant's job	76% (29)	93% (31)	88% (41)
Lived up to expectations	82% (29)	97% (31)	78% (42)
Well informed about objectives	86% (29)	97% (31)	93% (42)
Activities allowed participants to put learning into practice	51% (29)	83% (30)	88% (42)
Useful materials	76% (29)	88% (31)	88% (42)
Participants learned about the concept	59% (29)	93% (31)	90% (42)
Interactive workshops	79% (29)	93% (31)	66% (42)
Will be helpful for work	65% (29)	84% (31)	86% (42)
Adequate networking opportunities	79% (29)	87% (31)	59% (42)

* Training a) = Communicating equality, b) = Conflicts between right to equal treatment & other fundamental rights, c) Legal seminar on Developments & Concepts in the field of Equality & Non-discrimination in Europe

** The number of respondents to each question is shown in brackets

These figures show that the legal training in Vienna on ‘Conflicts Between the Rights to Equal Treatment and other Fundamental Rights’ was rated more highly than the others on almost all dimensions apart from the ‘activities allowed participants to put learning into practice’ (20% of the respondents had suggested making the activities more stimulating) and ‘it will be helpful for my work’ (although this dimension is not low and nobody disagreed with the statement). In fact all but one of the participants responding to the questionnaire said that the training had been excellent, very good or good. There was a feeling amongst the participants that time was too short and one third of the participants suggested extending the duration of the course. Utility is always important for the legal training courses because many of the EBs find it helpful to send their lawyers on these courses.

Ideas for training course topics

Respondents to the evaluators’ survey were asked to provide ideas for training topics, which are shown in Table 8:

Table 8: Ideas for training content

Discrimination	Standards and evidence	Legal matters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train the trainer for anti-discrimination awareness raising • Pay transparency • Discrimination in organisations • Maintaining and managing equality agenda in face of economic challenge • Links between equality work & human rights with focus on a specific discrimination ground • Breaking stereotypes from a psychological and sociological perspective • National and local tools that complement anti-discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of promotion and monitoring and protection • Shifting burden of proof in discrimination cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation/reconciliation with ECJ cases • Provision of public housing and resultant case law • Legislation on access to and supply of goods and services • Strategic use of law in courts, policies and legislation • Empower civil society organisations to bring cases and lobby for new laws/policies
<p>Specific grounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quotas in relation to gender • Age discrimination in connection with goods and services • Social status and discrimination • Criminal policy and discrimination • Equality and immigrants’ rights • How to investigate sexual harassment and trends in the field • Discrimination on ground of nationality vs discrimination on ground of ethnic origin 		

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which a course in organisational management would be of interest to their equality body. The mean response was 3.78, which indicates some level of interest, but not exceptionally high.

Improvements to training

None of the respondents to the evaluators' email survey provided suggestions for improving the training. However, four interviewees, who were asked questions about the training, felt that there were significant improvements that could be made. The main issue is that the number of participants is considered too high for a training to be fully effective:

"It is more and more difficult to meet the diverse needs of members. We should have a way of splitting them into smaller groups so that the group work can be more effective. We should learn from private institutions – they produce real training. The courses should be more focused or tailor made for specific participants."

"There could be say four trainings with say a dozen participants or we could have the same place with different rooms for two different courses going on. The legal training should also be longer – that is often mentioned in evaluations."

Previous evaluations have suggested that there should be greater differentiation between training courses, so that they are specifically targeted towards individuals with relevant qualifications. High level seminars were established as a result of this finding two or three years ago and this has been a successful venture.

Perhaps now is the time to think of further diversification of legal seminars/training to meet the needs of different staff members: (i) for high level senior management (as already provided); (ii) for experienced staff members, (iii) for less experienced staff members. This would necessitate the targeting of specific participants for each course but it need not necessitate holding separate courses. The same course could be delivered for the two different target groups at the same time. The day could start with a general introduction for the whole group, and then the two groups can split and work in separate rooms. Coming together at the end of the day may or may not be a good idea, depending upon the subject matter. This suggestion is not necessarily appropriate for the policy trainings; except that attempts should be made to target Policy Officers from those organisations that have them. In order to implement such a change, it would be vital to target the specific audience for each level of training.

One issue that has popped up in previous evaluation findings relates to the need for more interactive workshops (and in some cases presentations) that allow time for discussion and the sharing of experiences. The communications training was able to test out a new methodology that increased interactivity but it is not thought appropriate for the legal training.

"It worked well – with more informality and circular tables for people to speak freely, with snacks and drinks to emulate a café world. We were very pleased and will use it again but probably not for the legal training."

Strangely enough, as shown in Table 7, the interactivity of workshops within the legal training was rated more highly than that of the communications training. However, this probably has more to do with the expectations of participants than anything else. It is also disappointing to note that ratings in the communications training for ‘learning of the concept’ and ‘activities allowed them to put learning into practice’ was extremely low. This suggests that the membership puts more value upon ‘utility’ than process, which has always been the case. High standards of content, high standards of efficiency, good time-keeping and the quality of resources have always been areas of importance to the membership. The recommendation is, therefore, to ensure that the methodology is relevant for the topic and for the specific participants. As one interviewee reported:

Case study: A participant found the communications training to be of excellent value. She had been involved in the Communications Working Group, during which time she was able to share with members the significant problems of communication experienced by Equality Bodies.

“Our topics are very sensitive; we can’t communicate about diversity in the same way as you can sell a product. But communications is not seen as important by the membership compared to legal work. Yet, if diversity issues are not dealt with carefully we can easily have a crisis in the organisation. The training gave us ideas of when you should reply to the media, and when you should not; whether it is useful to campaign or not etc – it was very practical.”

For three years this participant had been thinking that the organisation should have a communications strategy. The impact of this training resulted in the development of the organisation’s first communications strategy, and recommendations from the training were incorporated into it.

“Lawyers can be boring. We should limit reporting back. We must be creative in offering quality time. Just by listening you learn nothing – it has to be interactive too. But we must make sure that the methods are appropriate to the subject matter and to the audience. Some legal trainings have used the facilities of EBs’ training departments to make it more interactive.”

Working groups

The membership of Working Groups is officially updated by Heads of Equality Bodies throughout the year and the moderator of each group is nominated by the Board. Two objectives are central to the implementation of Working Groups: the concept of involvement and ownership by the members; and the need to build up a practical body of materials to document how anti-discrimination law or equality policy is handled in the field.

Previous evaluations have raised criticisms of the Working Groups, with regard to the lack of coherence between the groups, confusing titles that make it difficult for members to understand what the group is about and the rationale for their existence. The Board took account of evaluation recommendations when they formulated the new strategic plan with its four objectives and they now provide greater coherence for the existence of the four Working Groups, the titles of which are:

- Policy Formation (this WG is seen as so important that it will always have a Board member as its moderator)
- Equality Law in Practice (replacing Dynamic Interpretation)
- Strategy Development (replacing Strategic Enforcement)
- Communication Strategies & Practices (a new Group)

During the past year, three of the working groups (Equality Law in Practice, Strategy Development and Communication Strategies) met twice and the other one met once. Colleagues otherwise communicate with each other electronically by presenting case studies, sending in questions, elaborating answers and testing models. The final document that emerges from this process is compiled/edited by the moderator, and the Secretariat takes on the responsibility of producing a report or paper.

These four Working Groups operated in 2011 and the number of meetings held and publications produced to date is shown in Table 9:

Table 9: Meetings and outputs from Working Groups

Working Group	Policy Formation	Equality Law in Practice	Strategy Development	Communication Strategies & Practices
Function	Prepare perspectives on current policy developments at European level that will be based on the experience and work of equality bodies implementing equal treatment legislation at Member State level.	Share information on; advance understanding of; build skills in & take initiatives in relation to legislative developments; national and international jurisprudence; interpretation of legal provisions and strategic litigation at all levels & areas in the field of equal treatment.	Share information on; develop understanding of; build skills in and take initiatives in relation to the development and implementation of strategic approaches by equality bodies to their mandates.	Share information on; enhance strategic capacity in and take initiatives in relation to the development of effective communication strategies and practices of equality bodies.
No. of meetings	1 meeting with members	2 meetings with members	2 meetings with members	2 meetings with members and 1 teleconference
Publications and reports	(I) Perspective on "Tackling ageism and discrimination" (II) Perspective on "Equality Bodies and National Human Rights Institutions: Making the Link to Maximise Impact"	(I) Report on "limits of freedom of religion and the conflicts between equality legislation and the freedom of religion"	(I) Report on "Developing a strategy for equality bodies to provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination"	(I) Factsheet on "Planning an integrated communications campaign for National Equality Bodies" to be downloadable by early March 2012

Survey respondents who had attended the Working Groups were asked to rate their overall satisfaction: this rating is fairly low (mean of 3.92). Satisfaction with specific aspects of the working groups is shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Satisfaction with particular aspects of the Working Groups for 2011 and 2010

	Mean 2011	Mean 2010
Efficiency of Secretariat support (1=poorly organised to 5=well organised)	4.75	4.21
Quality of the working group reports, opinions/statements (1=poor to 5=good)	4.17	3.93
Content of the work exchange and meetings (1=inappropriate to 5= appropriate)	3.97	3.62
Involvement of all participants (1=not involved to 5=involved)	3.72	3.45

2011 results are slightly higher on each dimension than for the previous year. Again, the efficiency of management and support from the Secretariat was rated highly. The least satisfactory elements of the Working Groups were considered to be the involvement of all participants and content of the work exchange and meetings, a similar finding to all previous years.

The Equality Law in Practice WG decided to do things differently during 2011. Instead of focusing on several cases and asking each participant to analyse how to solve issues within their jurisdiction, it was decided to analyse cases around a single issue - religious discrimination and prejudice. Members of the group chose this topic because it is one of the most difficult issues affecting Europe today. The report produced from this process focused on cases related to this issue with application in different areas such as employment, service provision, education etc. Around five people were nominated to write different sections of the report, which required standardisation.

“We try to focus on an issue where uncertainty or lack of clarity exists in terms of interpreting the law. We try to focus on themes or problems that are dominant in Europe. We thought next year we might focus on the effects of the recession on discrimination.”

Strengths of this new approach included: (a) the ability to have more depth by looking at different issues relating to religious discrimination; (b) the greater ease in drawing conclusions; and (c) the collection of a larger number of cases (the report is likely to contain as many as forty or fifty cases rather than the previous three cases). However, sufficient weaknesses were identified which will likely lead to a return to the old way of working. These relate to the issues of participation, consistency in the production of the publication and management of the process:

“It is harder to get everyone involved to the same degree because only four or five people are involved in drafting summaries and for those not involved in this process, their contribution is more limited; the production of the publication is more time-consuming because the moderator has to make sure there is sufficient detail in each case, with standardisation to ensure consistency. This has proven to be very difficult.”

“It was less coherent this year. There were exciting discussions but only some were asked to write a chapter. This meant there was a lot of work for some people but not

for others, so some did not feel engaged. This has always been a problem in all groups but the new method made it worse. It was managed well but we lacked the time so the publication is not yet finished.”

A successful link was made between the Equality Law in Practice Working Group and the legal training/seminar because some of the key issues worked on by the WG became an inspiration for the training. One interviewee felt that there was overlap between the Equality Law in Practice and the Policy Formation Working Groups and recommended that participants could identify themes to work on together

There is general agreement amongst members that there is now greater clarity about the titles and objectives of Working Groups since the changes that were made in 2011. This was particularly so for the Strategy Development WG, which previously had a title that made it difficult for people to determine its objectives. This Working Group has been more successful this year. The time line was improved by agreeing on membership and the coordinator earlier in the year and consequently they moved more quickly through topics, making it less stressful to complete the report.

“When we meet everyone is engaged and genuinely interested in the topic and sharing experiences. We get a good discussion going at the meeting. We want people to continue discussing, putting together draft texts, sending them around so that others can provide comments. But that bit doesn’t really work well and it didn’t last year. It is difficult to get engaged when not in a meeting and if it is done through email it is always the same people who respond. It is not lack of interest, people are just so busy.”

“What we are trying to do in this Working Group is complicated because we are not doing comparative work. What we are trying to do is to go beyond comparative work and to use the experience to formulate something in terms of a strategy. Then one EB responds for the different chapters of the report but not that they express their own experience but that of everyone. This takes time and so we have asked to produce a report every two years instead of every year so that we can go deeper and this has been agreed by the Commission.”

There is a belief amongst those interviewed and those who responded to the questionnaire that the quality of the publication is good.

Comments from the survey made about the reasons for satisfaction with Working Groups this year are shown in the following Table 11:

Table 11: Reasons for satisfaction with the Working Groups

Content:	Organisation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in the way of working from dealing with three cases to dealing with a broader theme in more detail • Topics close to practice of equality bodies • Useful tools and reports • Sharing experiences about providing independent assistance to people pursuing complaints about discrimination • Analysing a range of legal issues • Sharing information about communication strategies • Ensuring national jurisprudence is in accordance with practice in EU member states • Exchange of experience in field of conflicts between fundamental rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very well organised • Very well moderated • Chair of WG is very effective

Dissatisfaction expressed in questionnaires was fairly low this year but comments focused on: lack of involvement of some members caused by the chosen working method and topic; difficult to find common interest or learning between different members.

Improvements to working groups

The following suggestions were given as to how working groups could be improved in general:

- there should be more discipline during meetings to ensure that all points on the agenda are covered;
- consideration should be given to extending meetings to 1.5 days;
- methods for involving all members should be addressed;
- there should be less homework;
- meetings should be held twice a year instead of once;
- there should be more practical undertakings;
- by picking two or three problems we could have a more detailed discussion;
- there should be more clarity about objectives and outputs;
- The Equality Law in Practice WG should become more involved in exploring strategic litigation in the ECJ or domestic litigation.

The meeting of publication deadlines continue to be problematic (this matter is addressed in the following section).

Publications

EQUINET has an ambition to become a major source of information on equal treatment good practice in Europe and to inform on EU equal treatment regulations, policy and practice. Publications tend to emerge as an output from the Working Groups, as shown above. Each year,

the evaluation shows that the Secretariat and working group members have difficulty in meeting the final target on time. The status of publications as at today's date is as follows:

Table 12: EQUINET Publications 2011

Working group/ad hoc initiative	Title	Status
Policy Formation	<i>Perspective: Tackling Ageism and Discrimination</i>	Completed and available on the website http://www.equineteurope.org/58822.html
Policy Formation	<i>Perspective: Equality Bodies and National Human Rights Institutions – Making the Link to Maximise Impact</i>	At the printer (hard copies available as of 7 th February 2012) Available on website http://www.equineteurope.org/136462.html
Equality Law in Practice	Report on “limits of freedom of religion and the conflicts between equality legislation and the freedom of religion”	Report to be finalized in March 2012
Strategy Development	Report on “Developing a strategy for equality bodies to provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination”	Report to be published in March 2012
Communication Strategies & Practices	Fact sheet on key communication principles for national equality bodies (working title)	Fact sheet to be finalized in January 2012; Electronic document only (no hardcopies foreseen)
Roma initiative	<i>Equinet Factsheet: Equinet's Work for the Rights of Roma People</i>	Completed and available on the website: http://www.equineteurope.org/423598.html Printing done on a ad hoc basis (approx. 500 hard copies to be disseminated in January 2012)
Trans initiative	Making Equality Legislation Work for Trans People	Reports to be finalized in January/ February 2012
	Promoting diversity in the workplace – A case study (working title).	To be finalized in January/ February 2012 Publication will be available electronically only
	An e-newsletter	8 emailed publications have been produced through the year

The idea of sending out an e-newsletter was first tested in 2010. This was welcomed by members but in the early days it was difficult to get them to contribute to its content. This process has improved so that now an invitation to submit news is generally sent out 2 weeks before the planned publishing date and a regular feed of information tends to come in from members. The newsletter is now emailed to a contact list of around 550-600 contacts (members and externals). The survey findings show that the distribution of the e-newsletter continues to be well received by members.

As indicated in Table 4 and 5, the email survey showed that satisfaction rates of members were higher for publications than for other activities and products. This is particularly the case for two of the Opinion papers: *Making Equality Legislation Work for Trans People* and *Addressing Poverty and Discrimination*. As in last year's evaluation, respondents were least satisfied with the helpfulness of the Opinion *Making Equality Legislation Work for Roma and Travellers*, which was given a mean score of 3.93 (see Special Initiatives below).

Very few comments were made in the questionnaires about publications: the Equality Law in Practice report was considered useful in dealing with issues in one respondent's work; for another, this Legal Working Group report provided a useful analysis of key discrimination issues and how the domestic or EU discrimination law may need to be improved or clarified. The reason for the paucity of feedback could be associated with the fact that fewer members are reading or using the publications. The utility of the publications has been questioned by members in previous evaluations and interviews reveal that these concerns remain:

"I am not so clear about the usefulness of the reports. I don't think they are used much, not because of the quality but because of the inability to share work with other audiences. The main audience is the membership and others may be interested such as the Commission but the audience is limited. The Policy Formation publications are a bit different because they are there to inform the Commission and others. We need to find out better ways of sharing experience – perhaps more occasions for sharing orally."

"There are other ways to disseminate publications. EQUINET could do more on that. I think they send them to the Commission and have them on the website and at events. They should be sent to relevant Parliamentarians, the European Court of Justice, people who work on the Directives and lawyers doing infringement proceedings against states and who need to be protected."

Last year's evaluation recommended an in-depth review of the publications with regard to accessibility, content and design but this does not seem to have been carried out in a strategic manner, although some adjustments were made by the Secretariat in order to reduce costs and increase accessibility. As a consequence, some of the publications are now only available through the website and in some other cases, fewer hard copies are produced and the document is uploaded to the website. A further trial innovation has been tried out during the year: the Roma initiative was produced as a fact sheet and the Communication Working Group planned for the production of a fact sheet rather than a full publication.

"This is more in keeping with our subject matter. We could save a lot of money but it is a trial at the moment because we are not sure that it would be appropriate for other areas"

"The idea of fact sheets is a good idea – I am not sure it would work for our Working Group but it is possible that there are other issues that could be addressed more succinctly."

“Fact sheets are a great innovation but they would not be relevant for all of the Working Groups.”

Ad-hoc special initiatives

EQUINET’s strategy contains an objective to establish and support specific ad-hoc member networking initiatives on issues of shared concerns. During the year two initiatives were taken up: (i) the Roma initiative and (ii) the Trans initiative. Whilst the publication for the latter received the highest scores from the survey, these two initiatives have been considered by staff and a few members to be rather unsuccessful this year.

“Last year there was good momentum behind these two initiatives and we were planning to follow up with different meetings. But this year we were taken aback that members just lacked the interest. The Trans and Roma initiatives just seemed to die out and we struggled to raise interest amongst the members. I suppose it is not necessarily appropriate for all organisations. We didn’t pick the right time to finish it.”

According to four interviewees, it was hard work to get the position across to members on these two topics, even though the Roma issue is related to the EU framework and has become problematic in many countries across Europe. According to one interviewee it was not clear who had the main responsibility for this initiative and it was difficult to know how to get members behind the initiative. The most important problem to address is clearly related to the manner in which a topic is chosen. Although there was a general belief that both issues were relevant to most members, it was obviously not so. In order to complete these initiatives, there is a need for members to engage with the topic, contribute to discussions and to the production of the publication/fact sheets. However, as reported by one interviewee:

“This takes a lot of time and effort on the part of the Equality Bodies. Some members don’t see the benefit of engaging on the issue within the EQUINET framework. There is a need to be clear about the purpose of EQUINET’s work on the topic and a need to do the groundwork with members in a different way. The Trans issue is not something many EBs would deal with and so it is not surprising that many had no interest in this but it was good that EQUINET followed it up because it is a new discrimination ground and not many know how to deal with it.”

Website and promotion

The website is the essential and primary means of communication with network members. It is used to share information and facilitate discussion. Respondents were asked to rate particular aspects of the EQUINET website, as shown in Table 13 (1=poor and 5=good).

Table 13: Satisfaction with particular aspects of the website

	Mean
Quality of the content	4.18
Relevance of the content	4.12
Information is easy to find	3.88
Speed of uploading content	3.80

The ratings from the survey for the website are similar to those of last year, the main differences being the relevance and quality of the content, which have increased (from 3.80 to 4.12 and 3.89 to 4.18 respectively), and the speed of uploading, which has decreased (from 4.07 to 3.80).

The website contains a forum for members to engage in informal information exchange with each other. Members post a question and others can offer advice, engage in the debate or learn from the experience of others. Forty two exchanges were stimulated during 2010 but during 2011 that number had reduced to 32. It is not clear why there should be a reduction but certainly these numbers could have been improved if the new website had been completed as planned for 2011. Last year's evaluation reported that the site was to be dismantled during 2011 and a completely new site was to be established. This had been budgeted for and ratified by the Board. Unfortunately there have been severe delays with regard to this element of the work plan. It was reported that staff workloads were so heavy that it became impossible to focus on the website. This is a disappointing finding bearing in mind that websites are the key communication tool for organisations nowadays and could be an important device for facilitating more communication between members.

Several respondents made suggestions for additional content for the website, such as: a media resource would be useful; more national case law from member countries; more public facing aspects; more user friendly access and content; a tool for pinpointing funding proposals for specific issues; more practical information about tools and policies for counteracting discrimination in the US and Canada; results of activities of working groups and materials from seminars, trainings and conferences.

The issue of standards for Equality Bodies

EQUINET also has a strategic objective 'to contribute to the development of binding standards for the Equality Bodies'; and this topic was the focus of a High Level meeting (HLM). The backdrop to the HLM was conditioned by the impact of the economic downturn and the trend towards the merging of equality and human rights organisations in some jurisdictions. Members discussed the fact that the impact of the poor economy stretches way beyond the difficulties associated with managing austerity budgets and mergers. With the ever rising levels of poverty, there now tends to be a political backlash whereby those who are most discriminated against are likely to become further victimised. In this context there is a belief amongst many of the EBs that the development and implementation of international standards is vital so as to protect the National Equality Bodies.

"To have a clear set of standards could be an important tool when we are trying to push things nationally in different countries."

"We already have the UN standards and so why do we need a second set? We need clarification but that is particularly difficult in this economic climate."

The High Level meeting was considered successful but discussions with members showed there to be quite a lot of confusion amongst members about the issue of standards, which suggests that the starting point for EQUINET is to define exactly what is meant by 'standards for Equality Bodies'. The following quotes are representative of a number of comments made to the evaluator:

“Some of the members understand it very well but I don’t think all members are at all clear about it. I am not sure that many of them see the need for common standards anyway. We are all struggling to formulate our work. Again it is important for EQUINET to help members understand why it is important for everyone to develop standards. To get people engaged, first it is necessary to clarify what it is that is being talked about.”

“I think they are talking about minimum standards of what they want governments to follow but if they want them why haven’t they got them?”

“There seem to be three options here and in such a large group of people the conversation goes backwards and forwards between them. Are we talking about standards that governments should employ, such as ensuring that EBs have independence and appropriate resources? Or are we talking about a good practice management quality assurance system? Or are we talking about the need to measure and ensure the quality of effectiveness? I think we need to be clear about it.”

The outcome of the HLM debate suggests that members believe EQUINET could play an important role in Europe of advocating for a strong focus on equality issues during the economic downturn. There is a critique emerging amongst some members about the manner in which this is carried out – as shown below in the ‘needs of members’ section.

EQUINET support to Equality Bodies

On a number of occasions where a member organisation feels that its independence or effectiveness is threatened or hindered and expresses a specific request for support, EQUINET takes steps to support the EB by all means possible. Following an official request from the Head of the concerned EB, EQUINET’s Executive Board and Secretariat will issue statements and letters of support to relevant EU Commissioners and Ministries at national level. Such actions guarantee that concerns are expressed to influential decision makers and stress the importance of maintaining effective national EBs across Europe to promote equality and fight discrimination. More than nine members have been supported in this way since 2008, three of them in 2011. The case study shown here demonstrates how effective this role can

Case study: “A few years ago Parliament adopted an amendment to the Law on Equal Treatment and the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men by which it extended the competence and functions of our EB. Additional staff and budgeting was assigned to us but in face of the worldwide economic recession the government reduced the overall budget by approximately 40%. The Board of the Parliament recommended merging us or delivering some functions through other Ombudsmen institutions. We contacted EQUINET for advice. We were given details of a member that had handled a similar situation who was helpful and provided strong arguments that we used to back up our position. Finally, we approached EQUINET with the official letter asking them to address the Parliament. We presented our position to the Parliament but we received no response. We felt we needed external support to put some pressure and obtain an articulated statement. We couldn’t mobilize NGOs, trade unions, lawyers and academics as in other countries. EQUINET is recognized on the European level, it has its status among its members and European institutions. Therefore, EQUINET’s address could encourage Parliament to come up with a favourable decision. EQUINET addressed their letter to the Speaker of Parliament and the Head of the Committee on Human Rights encouraging them to secure our independence ensuring that we were capable of carrying out our functions adequately and effectively. We strongly believe that the EQUINET letter was a decisive argument. As a result the Parliament gave up discussions on our merger and assured our independence.”

be. This interviewee said that the experience made them realise that belonging to something that has a voice, reputation and recognition is important. EQUINET is very careful to confine its level of support to only that of sending letters in cases such as these.

3.3 Needs of members

With a mean score of 3.93 (on a scale of 1-5) (which is similar to 3.90 for 2010 but lower than the 4.24 given for 2009) on the question of how well EQUINET had met their needs, members seem fairly satisfied with EQUINET. The questionnaire also asked respondents to name their three most important information needs at the moment. Their responses fall into a number of categories, with the largest area of need being 'information about discrimination'. The list of ideas and suggestions for other activities that emerged from the survey are shown in Appendix Three.

70% of members stated that they would use EQUINET to meet their needs (compared to 76% in the previous year) and only 2% stated that they would not (compared to 4% last year and 11% in 2009 - 14 respondents did not answer, however). The main reason given for why they would use EQUINET to meet their needs is that the network has proved to be a reliable and timely source of information.

The most fundamental question for EQUINET is whether the members believe there to be a continuing need for the network. Since this is crucial to the sustainability issue, the evaluator addressed this question to interviewees.

"I see no reason why not given the decreasing resources of members. Without the support of EQUINET, there would be no appetite to organise training. Co-operation would slowly die out."

"Certainly there is still a role for EQUINET. It is important at the EU level because EQUINET needs to keep the equality issues high on the agenda of politicians and bureaucrats during the economic downturn. It is difficult but they need to work with the Commission."

Indeed the greatest value of EQUINET for many of the members seems to be the role it can play at the European level. There is clearly evidence that EQUINET has become ever more recognised at the European level (the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Commission keynote speeches and other attendances from the Commission, the Fundamental Rights Agency FRA, European Gender Institute EIGE and other European institutions at the High Level Meeting is evidence of that). Nevertheless, there is some debate about the nature of EQUINET's role:

"From my perspective I think EQUINET should build up support to members, provide them with guidance and it is important to spread out the training so it is accessible to most. But at the same time they should be more strategic and open the envelope: they should be telling the Commission what they should be looking at and what anti-discrimination tools are effective. They need better understanding about how to influence Brussels. They think they are influencing Brussels by being in Brussels and

having meetings. The real power is when members are doing something concrete in their own state that supports what the Commission is talking about.”

“We want EQUINET to influence those people in the Commission who would influence our government.”

There is a view among some members that because EBs are working on behalf of the most under privileged, these organisations are not doing their job properly if they do not learn how to be good advocates. This is an area where EQUINET could be more proactive. Their belief is that EQUINET should teach them how to be effective in relation to their own governments by providing guidance on ‘influencing skills’. In their view, there is a misconception about lobbying and EQUINET needs to focus on empowering members. For instance as a suggestion made by a respondent, if there was a joint article published in European national newspapers by the Commissioner and EQUINET and the EBs signed at the national level it would give greater support and status to the local level. Such a co-ordinated approach would be seen in Brussels as extremely important. This should not be a problem to the Commission: indeed it needs strong and influential Equality Bodies and if EQUINET is providing empowerment to the national level, this is in accordance with the Commission’s objectives.

“I have always said that EQUINET should focus on the key issues of where they want change. Sometimes there is too much of a general discussion about issues. The problem is that some of the members don’t think EQUINET should be trying to change things. We believe our role is to influence and change things so I recommend that they need to be more proactive in what they are saying. Sometimes there is too much discussion but nothing is done about trying to change things and people reading their documents could easily say ‘what is the point of this?’”

“The Directives are not clear and EQUINET could draft up some ideas about the Directive issue and draft a letter calling for it to be agreed. EQUINET should be trying to make a difference. They should be trying to influence European policy about equality. They could do Statements on other issues.”

3.4 Conclusion

EQUINET has been successful in meeting most of its output targets for this year. The network has provided relevant promotional, institutional and capacity building work for its members; identification of good practices; delivery of information and awareness-raising activities; and networking with national members and other stakeholders.

Members expressed high satisfaction with most of the outputs. Statistics for many of the activities were slightly higher this year than for the previous year. Targeting of training courses could be improved by offering three different levels for participants.

Satisfaction rates for Working Groups have increased slightly and there is general agreement that there is greater clarity about their titles and objectives. The efficiency of administration of trainings and the Working Groups by the Secretariat is greatly appreciated. Additional linkages could be made between Working Groups and between Working Groups and training courses.

Moderators should negotiate appropriate working methods with participants, set clear objectives and agreement on final reports at the beginning of each year to make clear the obligations of members. If the budget allows, there should be more Working Group meetings and/or the time spent on one meeting should be extended so as to increase engagement of participants.

The e-newsletter is well received and the production of fact sheets and use of the internet for dissemination is much appreciated. It continues to be difficult for EQUINET to meet the timeline set for the production of publications. The Board should review the number of publications that Working Groups are capable of producing within a twelve month period and ensure that all Working Group participants are aware of the targets. The ad-hoc initiatives were unsuccessful and in future members should be more involved in choice of topics.

Ratings for the website are similar to the previous year. However, there has been a severe slippage in time for the completion of the new site. The Board should ensure that this is a priority in 2012. EQUINET must continue with delivery of capacity building events and find even better ways of involving its members. The stimulation and support of one-to-one exchanges is also recommended.

There is clearly room for EQUINET to carry out some awareness-raising exercise on the issue of standards for the Equality Bodies. It should be made clear which type of approach EQUINET is promoting.

Overall, EQUINET seems to be meeting most of the needs of members but there are some good ideas within the membership about its advocating role. This should be explored by the Board and the Secretariat because, if done carefully, it would strengthen member organisations if they received guidance on 'influencing skills' and if the network were to develop a programme to push for the proposal of a more comprehensive EC Directive to combat discrimination, it would be well received by members.

The evaluator confirms that EQUINET has met the standards of Outcome 2 and 4.

Immediate Outcome 2: Voicing the concerns and expectations of people exposed to social exclusion, discrimination and gender inequality and formulating them to inform and influence policy making at national and EU levels.

Immediate Outcome 4: Better integrating of cross-cutting issues (e.g. gender, poverty and non-discrimination).

4. PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reported upon the delivery of outputs. This chapter describes the outcomes or benefits accrued to members as a result of participating in EQUINET activities. The evaluator has used data from interviews and email questionnaires to evaluate this issue.

4.2 Outcomes

80% of the questionnaire respondents had attended training courses during the year and they were asked to rate the extent to which they or their organisations had achieved the following outcomes as a result of their attendance (on a scale of 1-5 where 1= not at all and 5=very much).

Table 14: Outcomes for participants attending training courses

Outcomes	Mean 2011	Mean 2010
I learnt new knowledge	4.41	4.27
As a consequence I have provided advice on these subjects to citizens	4.30	3.35
I have been able to apply this new knowledge and information in my work	4.08	3.81
EQUINET's work has influenced the development of my organisation	3.89	-
My organisation has recently produced information on these topics	3.88	3.87
My organisation has developed new services	3.87	3.94
My organisation has recently lobbied government on these issues	3.84	4.03
I have established new networks with people I met	3.68	3.87
My organisation has (or I have) become more involved with EQUINET	3.53	4.59
We have developed new codes and standards on these topics	3.48	3.81

These results suggest that many participants have learnt new knowledge and applied this knowledge in their work as a result of attending training courses. Since last year, a higher proportion has provided advice to citizens; the mean score increased from 3.35 to 4.30, which is particularly encouraging. This year, for the first time, we asked the question about organisational development and the extent to which EQUINET may have contributed to the development of the EB. The rating is reasonably high. However, there does not seem to be a great deal of appetite for training on this issue (a mean score of 3.78 to the question of whether they would appreciate training in organisational development).

Specific examples of outcomes are given below.

Established new networks:

- During meetings and outside of EQUINET activities, many members reported exchanging ideas and good practice, discussing problems and collaborating with other members.

- Two members established contact about their national legislation on gender equality in goods and services.
- Several had invited other members to be speakers and partners for national projects or conferences.
- One had asked other members for feedback on planned activities for the creation of material in Braille.

Learnt new knowledge:

- Information from workshop on freedom of speech will be used for internal education and discussion.
- Analysis of the application of the anti-discrimination legal concepts in the field of insurance services.
- Interesting approaches in case testing, solving, exchanging experiences and perspectives.
- Legal seminar was particularly helpful in providing information on the latest developments in discrimination law at domestic and ECJ level.
- Legal training provided knowledge on cases relating to conflicts and the relationship between discrimination law and human rights law.
- In communication training, especially the effectiveness of methods and the value/challenge of technological, social networks and new communications tools.
- Link between the right to equality and freedom of speech/equality and human rights.

Applied new knowledge in work:

- Several members reported that the knowledge had been used in internal training, discussion in working groups and conferences.
- Used information gained from the legal seminar, for example the discussion of the Acharts case relating to discrimination has informed domestic work on the issue.
- The training in communication strategies brought new orientation and goals for own communication strategies.

Provided advice to citizens:

- Advice to transgender persons and headscarf in the workplace.
- In daily work when giving advice in cases and presentations on anti-discrimination legislation.

Organisation produced information on these topics:

- Equality for transgender persons, headscarf at work, equality in housing, sexual harassment, requirements for job advertisements.
- Discrimination against children of Roma origin and disabled children in education, attitude against migrants and third-country nationals.
- Publishing a research report on religion or belief discrimination.
- Flyers about trans people and headscarves.
- Anti-discrimination advice leaflet.
- Published a report on discrimination and Roma community.

Organisation more involved with EQUINET:

- New employees attending trainings, others becoming members of working groups.

Organisation developed new services:

- Developing a new strategy for communication.
- Promotional work on equality issues.
- Interactive mapping tool for Roma problematic areas and settlements.

Organisation lobbied government:

- Ongoing discussion on independence and resources.
- EQUINET provided crucial support to one member, expressing support and concern regarding the political attacks and budget cuts undertaken by the government.
- Responding to government consultation on Test-Achat case.
- Making legislative proposals, e.g. on Roma issues, migrants' rights.
- Amendments to the national strategy against racism.

EQUINET's work influenced development of organisation

- Both in terms of general philosophy in approaching equality issues as well as in dealing with cases on specific issues.
- Some issues have become more focused, e.g. the need for more strategic ideas both within EQUINET as well as at the national level.
- Motivation, capacity and alliance

4.3 Relevance of network model

Writers on networks believe that the network is the key tool for social transformation because its mode of social organisation is more biologically adaptive, more efficient, cooperative and more "conscious" than the hierarchical structures of modern civilisation⁴.

Organisations join networks for a variety of reasons: to gain legitimacy, enhance performance, acquire improved information, attain more resources⁵, etc. Regardless of the specific reason, all members of a network are seeking to achieve some end that they could not achieve independently. This issue has been explored in previous evaluations.

Managers of networks have to understand the needs of members and be flexible enough to respond quickly with the delivery of new services. 'Utility' continues to be a very important concept valued by EQUINET members (as shown by this evaluation and that of previous years). Members are professionals who are dealing on a daily basis with cases of discrimination. They need to access as many practical resources as possible to help them solve the problems of their clients. This concept needs to be borne in mind in the design of any EQUINET activity.

The major problem with 'networking' initiatives, however, is that they tend to be an extra and voluntary activity for members. There are costs to networking and benefits. EQUINET members continue to express difficulty in engaging in the Working Groups, although there is high

⁴ Ferguson M, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980)

⁵ Provan K, Kevis P, *Modes of Network Governance: Structure* op. cit.

satisfaction when the process goes well. EQUINET must ensure that the Working Groups are beneficial to members and not to the needs of the organisation to grow and meet its own targets.

The type of organisational body that can best facilitate networks is one with significant influencing skills rather than command and control skills and EQUINET has established itself as a well respected initiative with good networks at the European level.

It is evident from the questionnaires that members consider the EQUINET network to be of a reasonably high value, since in response to a question asking them to rate how valuable the network had been, the mean score is 4.02 (on a scale of 1-5 where 1=very little and 5=very high value). This is higher than the score given in last year's evaluation (3.79). Interviews support this finding.

Overall satisfaction rates with the networking opportunities of EQUINET are quite high with a mean of 4.16 (on a scale of 1-5). This again is a slight increase on the mean score for the previous year (4.02).

Members were asked to rate (from 1-5 where 1=very little and 5=very much) to what extent the EQUINET Secretariat enabled them to be involved in various activities. The answers are presented in Table 13.

Table 15: Extent of involvement

Involvement in:	Mean 2011	Mean 2010
Participation in working groups	3.85	3.98
Peer networking	3.56	3.66
Production of EQUINET reports, opinions/statements	3.41	3.60
AGM	3.27	3.65
Design and content of trainings	3.16	3.11
Strategy for EQUINET	2.72	3.68

These scores are not high and are fairly similar to last year's, with the exception of involvement in EQUINET's strategy, (from 3.68 to 2.72, which is not a surprising finding because members were very involved in the development of the strategic plan during the previous year). Suggestions given for other ways in which the Secretariat could involve members include more opportunities to network and discuss the role of Equality Bodies including evaluation of work, focussing on 'what works' and how to demonstrate the value of Equality Bodies; help in determining topics for the legal seminars; and assistance in arranging meetings.

Improvements to the network that were suggested by some of the members fell into two categories:

- i) Internal matters:
 - Training on mediation (which will be the topic of the next Legal training course)
 - More stress on regional work

- More working opportunities together
 - Making easier the connection to the forum and following up of questions posted to the forum
 - Longer time for trainings to allow for networking
 - Less surveys from EQUINET and its partners
 - Recognition of the differences as well as similarities between members and how they approach and manage the equality agenda.
 - More cooperation with the national bodies in the field of interpretation and implementation of anti-discrimination law
 - Better coordination in respect of selections of topics chosen to focus on
 - More involvement of members and working group participants in the content and design of trainings and working groups, taking into account the diverse interests and needs
 - Improve sharing of experiences and knowledge platform, perhaps through the development of a formal system to support this
- ii) External focus:
- More focus on trying to influence key EU institutions and securing legislature and policy change on key equality issues.

4.4 Conclusion

Although members had less opportunity to be involved this year compared to the previous year when they had such high involvement in the strategic planning for the network, there is evidence that they have learnt and applied new knowledge gained through their participation in training and Working Groups. A higher proportion of respondents stated that they had applied this in the workplace compared to last year. There is also evidence that the influence of EQUINET's trainings and activities have influenced the development of EBs. Fewer respondents reported that their organisations had lobbied their governments on issues they had learnt about through their involvement with EQUINET. Findings suggest that the network model adopted by EQUINET is effective. There are opportunities for members to be involved, particularly in the Working Groups. However, there is still room for the Secretariat to find ways to increase involvement. More face-to-face opportunities can be encouraged; technology could be improved to promote informal learning and collaboration through the website; mentoring and matchmaking between new organisations and relevant older organisations should be facilitated.

EQUINET has successfully met the standards for the Immediate Outcome 3:

Immediate Outcome 3: Reinforcing the skills of the networks and its members' organisations to advance, support and further develop EU objectives and priorities at national level

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of main findings

The advantages of network coordination in both public and private sectors are considerable, including enhanced learning, more efficient use of resources, increased capacity to plan for and address complex problems, greater competitiveness, and better services for clients and customers (see Alter and Hage, 1993; Brass et al., 2004; Huxham and Vangen, 2005)⁶. On the basis of the data given in earlier chapters of this report, the following section makes an assessment of progress against the DAC criteria shown in 1.1 and provides recommendations for reflection.

Relevance

The data show that the network model of organising is highly relevant to the performance of a European intermediary and appears to meet the needs of most participants and performs a very good function for the Commission; high numbers of participants continue to attend training courses and Working Groups and it is clear that they have been satisfied.

Efficiency

The Secretariat and Board meetings have been efficient during the year and there is evidence that EQUINET has reached a good level of stability. The model of governance is appropriate for the network. Systems work well. A variety of efficiency measures have taken place, including the production of fact sheets and the use of the internet for dissemination instead of production of high cost publications. The doubling up of meetings has also cut costs. The Secretariat has again received high ratings for efficiency from its members. There is some evidence to suggest that training courses could be further refined and there is a continuing need to monitor the engagement of members in the Working Groups and to meet the target set for production of publications. There have, however, been important slippages in completion of the website.

Effectiveness

Overall ratings for most activities and events have been slightly higher than for the previous year. Members have learnt new skills and applied their learning in the workplace and some members believe that EQUINET has influenced the development of their organisations. There are good ideas for increasing the advocacy role of EQUINET.

Sustainability

This is an area that was not addressed during 2011 by the Board.

⁶ Collaborative networks, structural holes, and innovation. A longitudinal study. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 45: 425-455. Alter, C. & Hage, J. 1993.
Brass, D.J., Galaskiewicz, J., Greve, H.R., & Tsai, W. 2004. Taking stock of networks and organizations: A multilevel perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47:795
Huxham, C. & Vangen, S. 2005. *Managing to Collaborate*. London: Routledge.

Overall conclusion

There is evidence that exchange of professional advice, attendance at training courses and use of publications have led to outcomes that meet the requirements of PROGRESS, the main funder of EQUINET.

5.2 Recommendations

The year has again been successful for EQUINET. The organisation is more well-known at the European level and the targets that were set by the membership during its AGM have been largely met, although there has been some delay in final production of publications and completion of the ad-hoc initiatives. Overall most satisfaction ratings are slightly higher than for the previous year. The following recommendations have been generated from the findings:

Governance and strategy

It has been a particularly good year for the governance and management of EQUINET. From the following list, the main priorities are to address staff development and produce a sustainability plan. It is recommended that the Board:

- discusses and articulates a policy for sustainability and development of EQUINET (as planned for 2012);
- explores different ways of increasing efficiency and reducing costs yet further;
- additional efficiency measures could include more use of teleconferencing, reduction in the numbers of staff and Board members at training and seminar meetings, new forms of publishing information through fact sheets and use of the internet;
- continues to ensure a good working relationship between the Board and Secretariat, with continued high level policy and strategic inputs from the Board and operational matters dealt with by the Secretariat;
- ensures that the staff appraisal system incorporates a planned schedule of training for staff and that this is supported with a small training budget.

Outputs

EQUINET has met most of its output targets for the year. From the following list the main priorities are to review the training courses and assess the publication targets as shown below:

- Improvements to the training courses could be made by more clearly targeting training so that different levels of training could be offered in line with the needs of members, perhaps for: (i) high level senior management (as already provided), (ii) for experienced staff members, (iii) for less experienced staff members.
- Improvements to the training courses should continue to cater for the diversity of skills required by equality body staff and the different levels of staff skills in different equality bodies.
- EQUINET should take account of the views expressed in the survey about topics for future training courses (see Table 8).
- EQUINET should assess the linkages that could be made between Working Groups and between Working Groups and trainings.

- Moderators of Working Groups should negotiate appropriate working methods with participants, set clear objectives and agree on final reports at the beginning of each year so that the obligations of members are made clear.
- If the budget allows, there should be more Working Group meetings and/or the time spent at one meeting should be extended so as to increase engagement of participants.
- The Board should review the number of publications that Working Groups are capable of producing within a twelve month period and ensure that all Working Group participants are aware of the targets.
- The Secretariat and Board should involve Members in the process of choosing topics for the ad-hoc initiatives.
- EQUINET should continue to stimulate and support debate among members in relation to standards for Equality Bodies. This debate should build awareness of what is currently in place and further develop thinking as to the approach for and content of further standards required.
- EQUINET should continue to explore within the membership the further developments of its contributions to policy-formation at the European level on foot of the work and experience of its member equality bodies. It should explore how to support the contribution by member bodies to policy formation within their own jurisdiction and their contribution if EQUINET were to push for the proposal of a more comprehensive horizontal EC Directive to combat discrimination members. This could be done through the AGM, training and the work of the Policy Formation Working Group.

Promotion and communication

Work on the website is the priority for 2012.

- The new website should be up and running as soon as possible.

Outcomes and networking

Networking between members has continued to improve. In order to build on the energy of the network, EQUINET could find additional ways to increase member involvement, whilst taking into consideration workload, limited availability and interests of members. EQUINET should:

- Continue with delivery of capacity building events and find even more ways of involving its members.
- Find new ways to increase involvement, such as more face-to-face opportunities; improvement of technology to promote informal learning and collaboration through the website; mentoring and matchmaking between new organisations and relevant older organisations.

APPENDIX ONE

A summary of research methods

Objective	Indicators/evidence	Methods
1. The process of managing EQUINET, its various activities and planning for its future (including an assessment of the appropriateness of its institutional structure and the process for developing the strategic plan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of policies and practices • How activities/services are identified internally • Promotional activities • Accessibility to the membership • Issues around working with a diverse membership • Quality of governance • Process for strategic planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk research • Interviews with staff and Board Members • Analysis of internal systems • Email survey to members • Telephone interviews with members
2. The delivery by EQUINET of information and services to its members, including the quality, use and relevance of the outputs of EQUINET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of services offered • Types of capacity-building provision used • Quantity and quality of services • Reasons for using/not using services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk research • Performance management records • Email survey to members • Telephone interviews with members
3. Appraise the likelihood for the outcomes of EQUINET to strengthen member organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction rates • Evidence of outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face interviews • Outcome email questionnaire • Telephone interviews
4. Make recommendations for the future enhancement of the organisation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the findings from document review, desk research, email questionnaire and interviews

APPENDIX TWO

METHODS AND SAMPLE

- Face to face interviews were conducted with each of the EQUINET staff members and a staff member of a Belgium member
- The evaluator attended and observed the proceedings of the AGM
- Face to face interviews were conducted with a sample of EQUINET members, two Board members and the Board adviser at the AGM and a group discussion was carried out with Board members
- Telephone and email interviews were conducted with twelve members of EQUINET, including two Board members and one former Board member
- An email questionnaire was sent to one member of the European Commission
- An email survey was sent to 195 people who are staff members of the equality body membership and members of other organisations invited to EQUINET events, responses were returned by 54 individuals. This represents a 27.5% response rate.
- A review of documentation, including activity monitoring reports; EQUINET's values/operating principles, policies, strategies and plans; performance data and evidence of the range of work carried out.
- Desk research including internet searches, analysis of other relevant documentation

Organisation respondents to EQUINET questionnaire and interviews

Ombud for Equal Treatment	Austria
Centre for Equal Opportunities & Opposition to Racism	Belgium
Institute for Equality of Women & Men	Belgium
Commission for Protection Against Discrimination	Bulgaria
Office of the Public Defender of Rights	Czech Republic
Office of the Commissioner for Administration	Cyprus
Danish Institute for Human Rights	Denmark
The Board of Equal Treatment	Denmark
Ombudsman for Equality	Finland
EHRC, UK	Great Britain
Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency	Germany
Greek Ombudsman	Greece
Equal Treatment Authority	Hungary
Equality Authority	Ireland

Centre for Equal Treatment
 National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
 Equal Treatment Commission
 Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
 The Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud
 Human Rights Defender
 National Council to Combat Discrimination
 Commissioner for Protection of Equality
 Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
 Office for Equal Opportunities
 Spanish Race & Ethnic Equality Body
 Fundacion Secretariado Gitano
 The Equality Ombudsman

Luxembourg
 Malta
 The Netherlands
 Northern Ireland
 Norway
 Poland
 Romania
 Serbia
 Slovakia
 Slovenia
 Spain
 Spain
 Sweden

	No. of respondents	% of respondents
Austria	6	12%
Belgium	5	10%
Ireland	5	10%
Denmark	4	8%
Greece	4	8%
Hungary	2	4%
Serbia	2	4%
Sweden	2	4%
Spain	2	4%
Czech Republic	2	4%
Romania	2	4%
Cyprus	2	4%
Slovak Republic	1	2%
Slovenia	1	2%
Northern Ireland	1	2%
Norway	1	2%
Netherlands	1	2%
Great Britain	1	2%
Finland	1	2%
Bulgaria	1	2%
Luxembourg	1	2%
Malta	1	2%
Germany	1	2%
Poland	1	2%
Total	50	

Organisations sent additional email questions and/or answered telephone interviews

Centre for Equal Opportunities & Opposition to Racism	Belgium
Commission for Protection against Discrimination	Bulgaria
Defenseur Des Droits	France
Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson	Lithuania
National Commission for the Promotion of Equality	Malta
National Council to Combat Discrimination	Romania
Slovak National Centre for Human Rights	Slovakia
Equality Ombudsman	Sweden
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	UK-Northern Ireland

European Institutions

European Commission
Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)
European Network Against Racism (ENAR)
European Trade Union Congress (ETUC)
UEAPME
Age Platform EU
ILGA-Europe

APPENDIX THREE

THE NEEDS OF MEMBERS

i) Information about discrimination:

- Gender equality in work, goods and services
- Trans sexuality
- Ethnic data collection
- Concept of reasonable accommodation
- Good practice in preventing victimisation
- Development of equality law
- Using alternative dispute resolution with specific groups
- Future strategy in diversity and equal treatment in the labour market
- How to promote social change in the field of equality
- Helping civil society organisations to become effective advocates for equality
- Build awareness and training of key actors in the field of discrimination

ii) Information about developments in the EU:

- Legal developments
- Case law
- Good practices
- EU policy direction in area of Equal Treatment and Fundamental Rights
- Information about the preparatory works of EU organs on discrimination issues
- Information and systematisation of jurisprudence of the ECJ

iii) Sharing Information with other members:

- Database of cases solved by equality bodies
- Decisions issued by equality bodies
- Information on key domestic and ECJ cases relating to discrimination or the Charter of Fundamental Rights
- Difficulties and how to overcome these in austere times
- Relevant decisions regarding reasonable accessibility of people with disabilities
- Legislation and policy concerning gender minorities
- Activities on theme of freedom of expression

iv) Organisational development matters:

- How to be more effective at the regional level
- Dissemination channels
- Enhanced public profile
- Clear and accurate information to the public
- Merging of an equality body with a human rights body

Other activities for the future

Ideas for future activities included the following:

- Public international conferences on equality topics

- Opportunities to travel to other members and to develop projects with them
- Chatroom on the internet
- More work on targeted violence
- Sponsored tour of equivalent organisations in US, Canada and Australia or experts from these countries to speak
- Identify key targets for better ways to communicate as an organisation to key stakeholders
- Anti-discrimination and social inclusion project resources seminar
- More basic cross cutting tools
- A model anti-discrimination law and regulation/clause
- A list of ideas that equality bodies could present to local governments that want to use their powers to promote equality
- Researchers to examine the socio-economic costs of discrimination
- Consider developing some regionally-focused work.
- Developing a network of high level experts that can help EQUINET push the envelope on developments within the EU as well as, for example, the courts.

LOGIC MODEL ARTICULATING EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF KEY EU-LEVEL NETWORKS IN SUPPORT OF THE REALISATION OF PROGRESS EXPECTED OUTCOMES -

Outcome of Social Agenda

More & better jobs, & more cohesive societies that offer equal opportunities for all, in Member States

PROGRESS Ultimate Outcome

1. Member States implement laws, policies & practices in a manner that contributes to the desired outcome of the Social Agenda.

PROGRESS Intermediate Outcomes

1. To bring about effective application of EU law in all Member States

2. To help positively change the understanding and promote ownership among policy/decision-makers and stakeholders in Member States, and the Commission, of EU objectives and priorities

3. To strengthen partnerships with national and pan-European stakeholders in support of EU objectives and priorities

PROGRESS Immediate Outcomes

Effective information sharing/learning in Commission & across Member States on EU law & policy related to PROGRESS

Well-informed EU policies and legislation in PROGRESS areas relevant to needs, challenges/conditions in Member States

Better integration of cross-cutting issues and greater consistency in EU policies & legislation related to PROGRESS

Greater capacity of national and pan-European networks to support, promote and further develop policies and objectives related to PROGRESS policy areas

High-quality and participatory policy debate at EU and national levels on law, policies & objectives in areas related to PROGRESS

EU Network Immediate Outcomes

Improving the networks' organisational capacity and management

Voicing the conditions, concerns and expectations of (1) people exposed to social exclusion, discrimination/gender inequality or (2) organisations providing services to people exposed to social exclusion, discrimination and gender inequality

Reinforcing the skills of the networks and its members' organisations to advance, support and further develop EU objectives and priorities at national level

Better integrating of cross-cutting issues (e.g. gender, poverty, non-discrimination including accessibility)

EU Network Outputs

1. Relevant advocacy, institutional and capacity building work

2. Accurate monitoring/assessment reports on implementation & impact of EU law & policy

3. Relevant position papers, analysis

4. Identification of good practices

5. Information, awareness-raising and campaigning activities, networking with national members organisations and other stakeholders