Equinet Evaluation Lab

BOOKLET

Final Report of the Equinet Evaluation Lab Project (2015-2016)
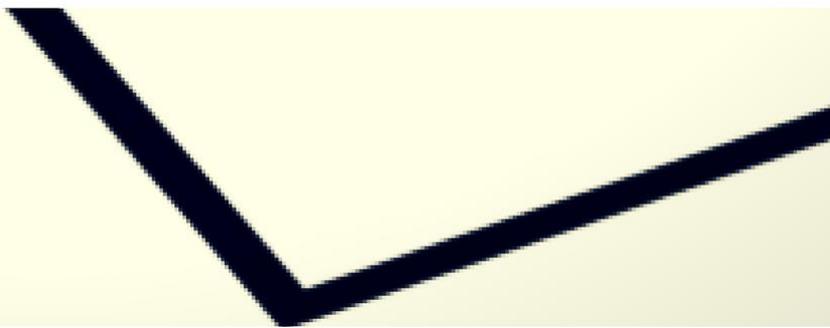
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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Equinet[1] commissioned a paper on **Processes and indicators for measuring the impact of equality bodies**. It provides recommendations on what equality bodies could do in terms of measuring the impact of their work by developing and using effective planning processes, indicators and systems of evaluation. The paper also explores the state of play within equality bodies when it comes to measuring their impact.

The paper identifies a number of challenges, such as the limited evaluation carried out by equality bodies and the pressure exercised by evaluation methodologies on their work.

The paper also outlines the benefits of evaluation for equality bodies. Evaluation enables the equality body to assess what is working well. It provides a basis from which to set targets for the work of the body. It provides a means for the body to communicate its objectives and its achievements. It enhances the quality of the work done by the body and improves its internal processes.

In 2014, Equinet launched the **Evaluation Lab**. This is a two-year project, aiming to build on the findings of the paper and provide a platform for expert staff members of equality bodies interested and experienced in the topic. Its objectives were the following:

- Discuss the findings and proposals of the 2013 paper
- Equip equality bodies with better knowledge and tools to evaluate their work
- Pave the way for further developing the evaluation work being done by equality bodies

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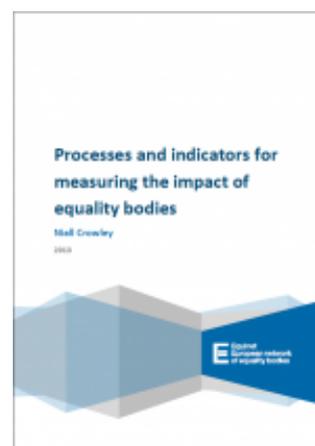
[1] Equinet, the European Network of Equality Bodies, brings together 46 organizations from 34 European countries, which are empowered to counteract discrimination as national equality bodies across the range of grounds including age, disability, gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.
Equinet promotes equality in Europe through supporting and enabling the work of national equality bodies. It supports equality bodies to be independent and effective as valuable catalysts for more equal societies.

Ten equality bodies joined the project following an open call:

[Commission for the Protection from Discrimination](#)
Albania

[Public Defender of Rights](#)
Czech Republic

[Defender of Rights](#)
France

[Greek Ombudsman](#)
Greece

[Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission](#)
Ireland

[Commission for Protection against Discrimination](#)
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

[Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality](#)
Portugal

[Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment](#)
Portugal

[Equality Commission for Northern Ireland](#)
UK Northern Ireland

[Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)
UK Great Britain

The Evaluation Lab members met three **times between June 2015 and September 2016**. The first meeting was dedicated to exploring the needs and expectations of the members and discussing findings of the 2013 paper. The second meeting focused on cases studies of approaches to evaluation work by equality bodies, advice on commissioning and evaluation and discussion on common indicators. The third and last meeting of the Evaluation Lab addressed common indicators and potential ways forward in this field, including peer review processes.

This final report aims to **gather and summarise the findings and resources** produced during the project and to share the knowledge generated among all Equinet members. It focuses on three particular aspects:

- The Planning Cycle
- Learning from the Evaluation Lab
- Moving Forward

2.   THE PLANNING CYCLE

2.1 What is the Planning Cycle?

Evaluation is part of a broader planning cycle. The four key elements of this planning cycle are[2]:

- A **strategic plan** that establishes the goals of the equality body, sets out what actions it will take to achieve these goals, and identifies the performance indicators and targets used to assess achievement of these goals.
- A **management system** to keep performance indicators under review and to ensure that they inform decision making and the work of the equality body on an ongoing basis.
- A **monitoring system** to gather data on the progress made in relation to the different indicators and targets. This includes monitoring, the inputs to and outputs from the work of the equality body.
- An **evaluation of the overall work** of the equality body **or specific fields of activity or portfolios** of work done by the equality body

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[2] Niall Crowley, Processes and indicators for measuring the impact of equality bodies (2013)

2.2 Case Study – Strategic Planning: Indicator development in Czech Republic

Veřejný ochránce práv
OMBUDSMAN

The [Development Strategy of the Office of the Public Defender of Rights for 2016 – 2021](#) is available here. It developed specific indicators for the two objectives established that relate to the antidiscrimination mandate:

1. **Better quality of assistance to victims of discrimination**

Indicators:

- Understandability of our responses and reports (focus group)
- Fulfilment of expectations of complainants (survey)

2. **Raising awareness about discrimination**

This strategic objective is based on a [survey on underreporting and access to justice](#) conducted by the Defender of Rights in 2015. The research revealed that only 11% of the respondents who felt discriminated against reported their experience to authorities or relevant organisations (including the equality body).

   a. **Awareness among general public**

Indicators:

- Number of complaints
- Number of leaflets delivered to complainants by mail or e-mail
- Number of blank form complaints delivered to complainants by mail or e-mail
- Number of downloaded leaflets or blank form complaints from internet sites
- Number of the access sights – how many times the sites have been accessed

   b. **Awareness among stakeholders**

Examples of quantitative indicators:

- Number of educational activities (number of participants) organized by the Office of the Public Defender of Rights
- Number of educational activities where the employees of the Office participated as a speakers/number of participants;
- Number of recommendations – legislative/non legislative; number of surveys and reports
- Number of recommendations accepted by various subjects (lawmakers, public authorities, private sector, etc.).

Examples of qualitative indicators:

- Fulfilment of expectations of participants in educational activities (qualitative questionnaire);
- Applicability of information in practice (follow up questionnaire – sent after some time asking whether participants used information from lectures)

2.3 Case Study – Benchmarking for Strategic Planning: France

The Department of promotion of equality of the Defender of Rights has a 3-year action plan with three broad goals:

- Fight against discrimination based on ethnic and religion belief grounds;
- Education;
- E-administration, access to social rights and equality

Each year, the Defender of Rights publishes statistics in relation to the number of complaints received by the equality body. The statistics are disaggregated per grounds and areas of discrimination. In the future, the Defender of Rights would like to use this information to set up an information system with new data which would allow for comparison on the sociodemographic profile of the complainants.

In order to better understand the gaps in access to rights, the Defender of Rights launched a survey measuring in each area of his competences (children's right, equality and anti-discrimination, security ethics, rights of the users of public services):

- The awareness of the institution;
- The prevalence of unequal treatment situations and infringement of rights experienced by the respondents (such as harassment at the workplace, discrimination, racial profiling, access to public services…);
- The awareness of rights and reporting of complaints.

The survey will help to define a first benchmark regarding discrimination in France. It will also help to define targeted strategic actions to support awareness raising programs.

2.4 Case Study – Indicator Development and Strategic Planning: Ireland

The Strategic Plan of the Irish Equality and Human Rights Commission sets out 5 goals in relation to the human rights and equality mandate of the Commission with the following indicators:

1. **Leadership**
- Increased public confidence in the ability of IHREC to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland
- Increased awareness of IHREC and understanding of its core mandate among the general public and other key stakeholders

2. **Proactive implementation of our legal powers, in particular public duty**
- Increased awareness amongst duty bearers in relation to human rights and equality law and practice

-   Increased positive action amongst duty bearers in relation to human rights and equality law and practice
-   Human rights and equality law has been further developed or clarified, including progress in the area of treaty ratification

3. Promoting understanding of the indivisibility of equality and human rights
-   A measured development in public awareness, understanding and support for socio-economic rights
-   Recognition of the value of human rights and equality considerations as part of the budgetary process
-   Improved human rights and equality data, which contributes to more evidence-based decision making

4. Making equality and human rights real
-   A measured increase in the understanding of human rights and equality, and how those rights are vindicated, among the general public, including people less advantaged
-   Progressive movement in national policy or practice in relation to relevant human rights and equality issues
-   Greater knowledge sharing and coordinated impact between stakeholders in the protection and promotion of human rights and equality

5. Intercultural understanding and diversity
-   A measured increase in public understanding of diversity and interculturalism
-   A measured increase in public acceptance of diversity and interculturalism as a positive factor in Irish life
-   Progressive movement in national policy in relation to key areas of interculturalism and diversity

2.5 Case Study – Indicators in Strategic Planning: Northern Ireland

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is required to prepare a three-year Corporate Plan and an Annual Business Plan. They have to be approved by the Sponsoring Department of the Commission. The Sponsoring Department is provided with quarterly reports on progress in achieving the objectives set out in the plans.

The current Corporate Plan 2016-2019 identifies four strategic priorities with the following objectives and indicators:

1. Champion equality and good relations

Communicate the importance of the case for equality and good relations in Northern Ireland.

OBJECTIVE: Reinforce the case for equality and good relations in Northern Ireland.
Indicators:
- Commission communications strategy in place and fit for purpose.
- Level of key stakeholder confidence.

OBJECTIVE: Work with strategic partners to shape the public policy framework to influence greater equality and good relations outcomes from key commitments in the Programme for Government, and via the full implementation of a range Northern Ireland equality strategies.
Indicator:
- Evidence of Commission messages/recommendations supported and used by key stakeholders.

OBJECTIVE: To keep effectiveness of the legislation and review in order to champion and present solutions for a more effective and streamlined framework for equality and good relations protection.
Indicators:
- Awareness of and support for Commission recommendations.
- Number of key improvements secured or committed to.

OBJECTIVE: Intervene in a number of areas of strategic importance where, through deploying the range of our powers, we are likely to secure change or challenge practices.
Indicators:
- Number of interventions and changes made as a result.
- Improved equality practice arising from the recommendations of the "Expecting Equality" investigation.

2. Challenge inequalities

Focus on where key inequalities remain through establishing and further enhancing the evidence base and engaging with partners to distill and highlight areas for improving outcomes.

OBJECTIVE: Finalise and publish the statements on key inequalities in specified public policy areas and advance research in support of developing further statements of key inequalities.
Indicator:
- Promotion of key inequalities publications and necessary actions

OBJECTIVE: Work to ensure the mainstreaming of equality and good relations considerations and outcomes across a range of public policy and service delivery areas, securing adoption of our policy recommendations to address key inequalities

Indicators:
- Evidence of stakeholder acceptance and reference to Commission statements and policy recommendations on key inequalities.
- Evidence of progress by the Executive, Departments and stakeholders to address the key inequalities.

OBJECTIVE: Use the leverage of obligations set out in key international frameworks to advance key Commission policy positions, including fulfilling our remit with NIHRC as the independent mechanism under the UNCRPD.
Indicators:
- Evidence of awareness and support for Commission recommendations to selected international mechanisms (priorities: CERD, CEDAW, CRPD)
- Reflection of Commission recommendations in International Committee concluding comments and recommendations to State parties.

3. Put the legislation to work

Support, facilitate and challenge public bodies and the private sector to improve their policies and practices.

OBJECTIVE: Supporting high levels of compliance with legislative requirements and encouraging good practice, developing our powers appropriately from advice and guidance through to compliance and enforcement.
Indicator:
- Level of compliance with FETO duties and Equality Scheme and DAP commitments.

OBJECTIVE: Maintain awareness and acceptance among employers and service providers of the importance of equality and good relations to enhance organisational performance.
Indicators:
- Delivery of effective information and advisory service.
- Provision of good practice examples for responsibility holders.

OBJECTIVE: Encourage improvements to organisational practices to address key inequalities.
Indicators:
Evidence of improvements in:
- the access to goods, facilities and services for disabled people;
- disabled people's access to employment;
- workplaces free from sectarianism, racism and homophobia;
- overcoming barriers faced by BME workers
- women's economic participation.

OBJECTIVE: Empower individuals through knowledge of their rights, the remedies and potential resolutions to complaints available under the legislation.

Indicators:
- Levels of awareness of individual rights and responsibilities.
- Delivery effective advisory service to individuals for the anti-discrimination legislation and complaints procedures with public authorities and their Equality Schemes.

OBJECTIVE: Challenge unlawful discrimination through the support of strategic cases.
Indicators:
- Appropriate redress obtained for complainants.
- Evidence that lessons arising from legal casework have been publicised and adopted.

OBJECTIVE: Investigation of complaints of failure to comply with Equality Schemes in line with the Commission procedures.
Indicators:
- Changes made as a result of investigations

4. Deliver equality effectively and efficiently

We will meet the challenge of financial constraint through continuous improvement and maximizing the use of new technology.

OBJECTIVE: Maintain a modern, professional, fit for purpose organisation which provides value for money, while meeting the challenge of reduced funding.
Indicators:
- Delivery of business objectives in cost effective manner.
- Improvements in service delivery
- Level of stakeholder satisfaction.
- Level of savings in accommodation, operational costs, staffing.

OBJECTIVE: Maintain effective corporate governance and internal control.
Indicators:
- External and internal audit outcomes
- Number of priority 1 recommendations

OBJECTIVE: Demonstrate best practice as an employer and invest in our staff to ensure excellent service delivery.
Indicators:
- Levels of staff and external stakeholder satisfaction.
- Effective leadership and management.
- External accreditations maintained or enhanced.

2.6 Case Study – Techniques for Evaluation - Surveys: Northern Ireland

Where large data sets are not available Equality Bodies may consider commissioning **customized surveys to identify inequalities** and to **help measure the impact of the Equality Body**.

1. **Surveys of Public Awareness and Attitudes to Equality and Inequality**

ECNI regularly (3/4 yearly intervals) surveys awareness of inequalities. It uses surveys to get snap shots of current attitudes and to compare these attitudes over time. A key objective of this attitudinal work is to bring about a change in attitudes. In the Equality Awareness survey, respondents are asked "social distance" questions examining the extent to which people feel comfortable with varying degrees of closeness to members of a 'different' group. Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on whether they would mind or would not mind having a member of each group as a work colleague, a neighbour or if one of them was to marry a close relative.

2. **Measuring the impact of ECNI with Employers and Service Providers**

Every three or four years, ECNI collects data from public and private employers and service providers in order to evaluate the impact of the equality legislation and the ECNI support of employers. Employers are also asked if they have revised some aspects of their policies in the light of the advice given by ECNI.

3. **Measuring the impact of ECNI on complainant**

ECNI runs a telephone Discrimination Advice service in which a number of advisors respond to approximately 3000 enquiries each year. ECNI commissions survey of the satisfaction of callers with this advisory service. The results have been very positive with a large proportion of those survey confirming that the service was of value and enabled them to secure compliance with their legal rights.

4. **Impact measurement: Using surveys and research to set and measure equality goals**

Bringing about/contributing to social change is the ultimate and long term objective of ECNI. In 2007, in its corporate plan, six priority fields were identified, based on existing research: education, employment, housing, health and social care, participation in civic and public life, and prejudice. ECNI prepared a Statement of Key Inequalities in these fields to identify and highlight some of the most pressing inequalities which need to be addressed and to encourage others to act to address these also. This acts as a benchmark and a framework against which to assess impact.

Measuring success varies in terms of efforts and sophistication to address:

- Has the statements of key inequalities been up dated?
- Has the level of public awareness of key social inequalities increased?
- What is the level of stakeholders' (public authorities, employers etc) acceptance and adoption of specific actions to address key inequalities?
- To what extent did ECNI make use of the information in its publications, in responding to consultations and in disseminating the information about the key inequalities?

2.7 Techniques for Evaluation: Britain

Equality and Human Rights Commission

1. The Logic Chain of Evaluation

In the experience of the EHRC it is vital for equality bodies to clarify concepts and agree on a common language and terminology to be able to progress with the evaluation of impact. Below we propose a set of key terms taken form HM Treasury Green Book (2011) which puts outcome and impact at the heart of the evaluation process (in contrast to it being an afterthought).
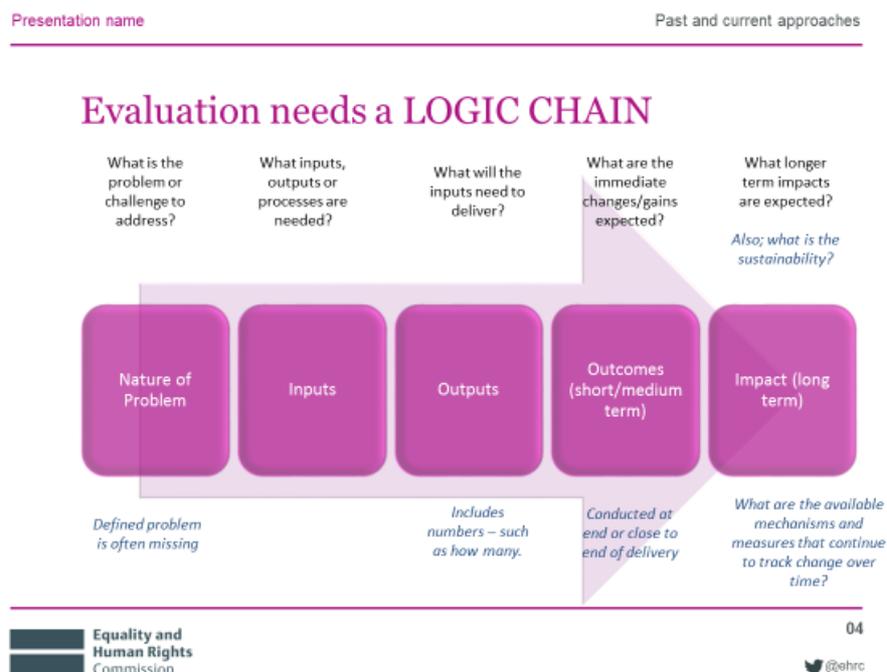
2. Former evaluation approach

The EHRC has taken several approaches over time to bring evaluation to the heart of the organisation. Each of these has strong points, but ultimately did not yield the desired result.

- **Product evaluation of projects and programmes**

- Outputs form grant programme
- Compliance of public sector organizations with Public Sector Equality Duty
- Outcome evaluation over time of Disability Harassment Inquiry

- **Process evaluation of use of inquiry powers.**
- Race discrimination in the Construction Industry Inquiry Report
- Financial Services Inquiry: Sex discrimination and gender pay gap report
- Inquiry into recruitment and employment in the meat and poultry processing sector

Both process and product evaluations provided useful insights but were not able to shed light on the orgnaisation as a whole

3. Capturing public value

In 2012, the EHRC commissioned a study to develop a public value assessment framework to better evaluate the full social and economic impacts of the EHRC's activities.
The study was designed to capture a wider range of outcomes than would be possible through conventional Cost-Benefit Analysis, evaluation and impact assessment. Public value (PV) provides a useful overall analytical framework.
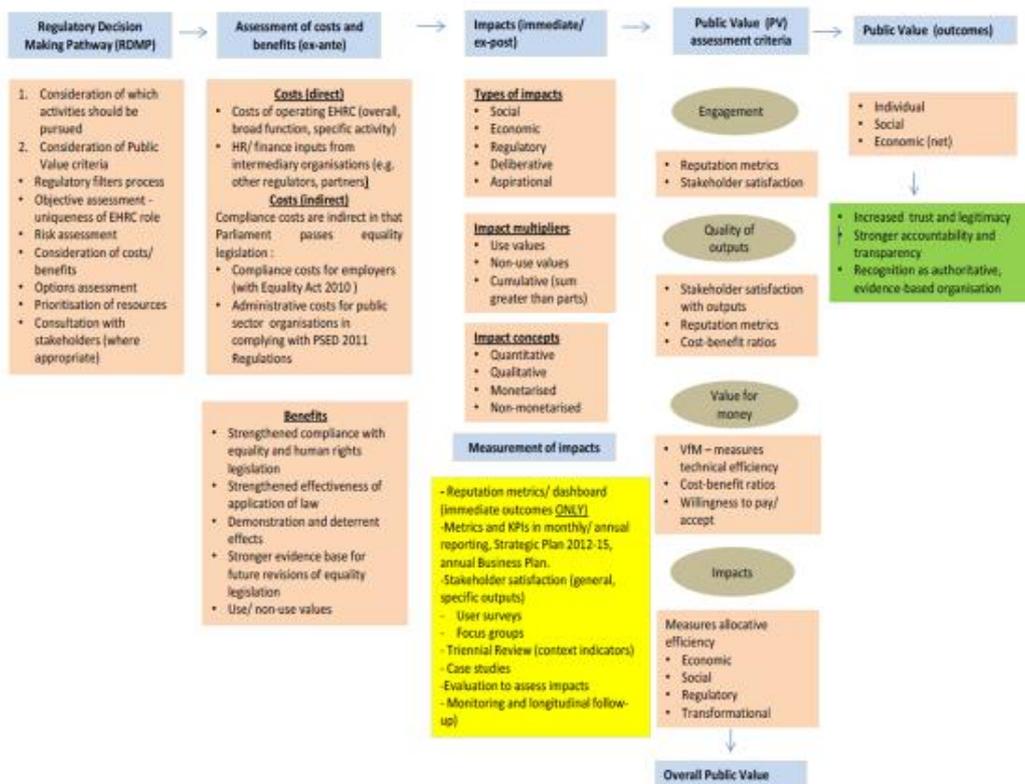
The concept, although interesting and rich, was however too complicated to be made operational.

4. Current approaches: focus on impact

A focus on impact starts with planning that identifies the desired impact and works

backward from this to establish what work is required. Evaluation is conducted against this desired impact. For this, EHRC needs to have:

- **A theory of impact** that works backward from the EHRC vision and mission to understand the projects and approaches that are most impactful in order to guide planning about future projects. This needs to be evidenced-based on previous learning from EHRC on when work has/has not been impactful, and wider learning from the sector, academia etc.
- An impact framework and measurement guidance on how to measure the impact of projects and the EHRC more widely
- Staff skills development: training for relevant staff so that there is a meaningful legacy to the work and they are able to undertake their own planning, monitoring and evaluation of impact.

3. LEARNING FROM THE EVALUATION LAB

3.1 Overview

The Evaluation Lab addressed the **specific challenges in evaluation for equality bodies**. It acknowledged and built on the work done by many international organisations on evaluation approaches but tailored its focus to the particular context, mandate and ambition of equality bodies. It involved prese**ntations from members and debate among members over three day long meetings**. This allowed for ideas to be generated, presented, teased out and further developed. Six strands of learning can be identified:

- goals pursued by equality bodies;
- the purpose of evaluation;
- the focus for evaluation; evaluation tools;
- pitfalls in evaluation; and
- factors that enable or pose barriers to evaluation.

This learning reflected an understanding of evaluation as transformational rather than transactional, in that the evidence it generates and the assessments it produces actually inform decisions being made by the equality body.

The **goals for equality bodies** were largely discussed in terms of seeking to achieve change. A shared framework that allows this change to be defined was evident. Change is sought at the level of:

- the individual that experiences discrimination.
- the institution that makes policy, employs and/or provides services.
- the society characterised by inequality for different social groups.

Change of this nature takes time and this **must be factored into any evaluation**. The scale of change that is required at each level needs to be acknowledged, particularly given the size and reach of the equality body itself. This focus on change offers a choice for equality bodies in terms of fighting the old, what is in place, or building the new future, based on equality and non-discrimination. Much of the debate was future-oriented.

The **purpose of evaluation** was seen as primarily concerned with **organisational learning to enhance the effectiveness and impact of equality bodies.** Evaluation has implications for thinking within equality bodies and techniques deployed by equality bodies. it should ensure action by equality bodies remains connected to realities on the ground. It should enable better planning and implementation by equality bodies.

Evaluation also assists with **reporting to funders**. This demands an evaluation that is concerned with the effective spend of the donor's money and the value for money achieved. Effectiveness and efficiency are core concerns in such an evaluation. However, evaluation must serve to not only to prove that action by equality bodies works but also to improve any such action.

The **focus for evaluation** reflects its purpose. The focus can be to **evaluate achievement** in terms of achieving change in society, in institutions and for individuals, against an understanding of the current situation and experience of groups experiencing inequality and of the context for the work of the equality body. This can start with problem identification and move on to evaluate impact on these problems. It can start with establishing the long-term change required and desired and work back from this to evaluate outcomes. The understanding developed as to how change happens and the quality of this understanding is crucial for such a focus. This focus most likely reflects a concern for organisational learning.

Evaluation can also be **to measure and compare performance** with some standard or with peer organisations. This requires focus on establishing and evaluating inputs, outputs and outcomes. It most likely reflects a concern for donor reporting.

Evaluation tools were explored in the context of a planning cycle that **spans strategic planning, management and implementation of plans, and evaluatio**n. The tools encompassed the standard array of data gathering, research studies, surveys, interviews, establishing benchmarks, target setting, indicator development, research studies, monitoring, surveys, interviews and focus groups.

There was a particular **focus on indicator development**. Indicators illustrate what equality bodies want to achieve. They can span inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts in doing so. Proxy indicators are important in a context where it can be difficult to track and measure change due to methodological constraints or data gaps. Proxy indicators reflect that an impact can be claimed from an output, for example, on the basis of evidence that has already established that certain actions lead to particular outcomes.

A range of **more intangible evaluation tools** emerged in the debate. These include a capacity to engage in collaborative discussion where evaluation shifted from being a form of inspection to a form of developmental conversation. They include a capacity for thoughtful judgement where evaluation shifted from being about measurement to being about evidence based assessment.

A range of potential **pitfalls in evaluation** were raised in the debates.
It is important to keep **evaluation processes proportional**, to the scale and nature of the work.
Evaluation requires **clarity** in the goals of the equality body and in the purpose set for the evaluation itself.
Evaluation can become more complex in a **context of merged bodies** where a range of mandates are implemented by the one body.
Evaluation needs to be **comprehensive in achieving visibility** for all grounds covered by the equality body and respecting the specificity of each of these grounds.

Factors that enable evaluation by equality bodies include:

- having the necessary professional disciplines available among the staff;
- capacity to commission evaluation work where there are gaps in the disciplines available;
- careful preparatory work in establishing benchmarks, setting targets, and defining indicators;
- and collaborative working with a range of stakeholders from all sectors.

The **barriers** to evaluation include:

- limited financial and human resources of the equality body;
- data gaps;
- and lack of an evaluation or learning culture within the equality body.

3.2 Theory of Change

Equality bodies are involved in the business of achieving change in society, in institutions, and for individuals. A planning cycle, including evaluation, can be developed using a theory of change approach. The discussion explored four questions.

What is a theory of change approach?

This approach informs **all stages of the policy cycle, planning, implementing and evaluating**. It is essentially a planning exercise the establishes the framework for evaluating the outcomes and impact of the work of the equality body in terms of the change it has achieved or contributed to. It reflects an understanding of equality bodies as necessary institutions of social change.

It is based on establishing the change the equality body seeks at individual, institutional, and societal levels. It requires an analyse by the equality body of how change happens in their

context. The change sought and the analysis of how change happens then shape the goals of the equality body, the activities and the mix of activities it prioritises, and the indicators it defines to track progress. It thus establishes the evaluation framework.

What does the theory of change approach involve?

The theory of change models how inputs and actions lead to outputs and then to outcomes and to impact.

It involves the equality body in:

- Setting a realistic and definite long-term goal, defined in terms of a clear outcome, then;
- Working back from this goal to identify intermediate outcomes required. What has to happen for this long-term goal to be achieved? This step can be reiterated through a set of levels with the same question posed for each intermediate outcome identified and the creation of a causal pathway, then;
- Establishing the links between the outcomes at the different levels, and their order, by exploring cause and effects, and then;
- Working out which activities lead to which outcomes and documenting the assumptions made in this, and then;
- Establishing indicators to measure implementation, effectiveness and impact.

What is the benefit of this approach?

The theory of change approach assists equality bodies in focusing on the long-term goals for their work. It enables them to be clear about **the causal links between different aspects of their work and reveals any hidden assumptions they make in this work**. It demonstrates how outcomes from their work are connected can assist in demonstrating where progress is being made towards the goal set. It should build the work of equality bodies on evidence with careful data gathering, and should use the views of stakeholders in a participative process of identifying and defining the theory of change.

Niall Crowley, independent equality and diversity expert, assisted this discussion with a presentation.

3.3 Commissioning

Four practical questions were explored in relation to commissioning evaluation, ranging across the more basic to the more complex issues.

Why commission an evaluation?

Organisational learning is a key reason with evaluation enabling a focus on the past in order to build the new. Donor demands have to be acknowledged with funder requests another key reason. Evaluation can be a three-way conversation between the funder, the evaluators and the organisation. Ultimately, it is important to ensure equality bodies are agents of change, while meeting funders' needs.

What are the stages in the commissioning process?

There are four key stages:

- **Contracting:** Contracting is about agreeing on what, who, how and when the evaluation process will happen. Background information and data should be provided at this stage. The outcomes from this stage are the contract and the outline of the evaluation approach.
- **Data collection:** The survey is planned and disseminated to relevant stakeholders. Interviews and desk research are conducted. The outcomes from this stage are that data is collected and the required voices are heard.
- **Analysis and report drafting:** Data are analysed and the report is drafted, possibly with a summary. At this stage, conclusions might also be drawn. The outcome from this stage is the draft report.
- **Development and completion:** The draft report is presented to and discussed with the organisation, revisions are agreed, and the final report is submitted. The outcomes from this stage are the agreed report and ways forward.

How to assess a tender?

Commissioning an evaluation is about finding a balance between the organisation's requirements and the evaluator's methodology and creativity. It is important to make sure that the purpose, scope, timescales and budget are clear for both the organisation and the evaluator. In assessing a tender, it is useful to examine:

- **CVs:** Have they done what we want before?
- **Scope:** Do they respond to exactly what we've asked for?
- **Time and money:** Do they do that in the timescales and budget we have?
- **Activities:** Are we happy with their approach?
- **Sparkle:** Is there a sign of imagination as well as evidence of rigour?
- **Relationships:** As people, are we confident we can work with them and our values are compatible?

John Tierney, Director of Transform, assisted this discussion with a presentation.

4. MOVING FORWARD

4.1   Common Indicators

The strategic plan is the core element in the planning cycle. The strategic plan must establish the impact sought by the equality body, the societal, institutional and individual change to be pursued, and how that change is to be achieved. It must reflect the societal context, mandate and scale of the equality body. There is, therefore, a **variety** to the strategic plans developed by equality bodies. **Indicators** are complex given the catalytic

nature of equality bodies, data deficits and difficulties in establishing causality. They serve to **shape evaluation and drive future planning**. Equality bodies, given their shared mandate to combat discrimination and promote equality, could usefully develop a set of shared core indicators for their work.

Common indicators could shape a shared approach and commitment to evaluation by equality bodies. They would serve as a standard resource for evaluation and build a common language for discussing evaluation between equality bodies. Common indicators would enable peer learning between equality bodies about evaluation and stimulate a focus on impact as well as inputs and outputs. They could serve as a reminder about the need for equality bodies to engage with the challenges of individual, institutional and societal change.

The **2013 Equinet publication on 'Processes and Indicators for Measuring Impact of Equality Bodies'** offers a menu of **thirty-seven possible indicators** that equality bodies could use. This choice respects the diversity of equality bodies and offers a framework within which to fit different functions, situations, ambitions and understandings. The framework is a useful tool and the indicators selected are comprehensive.

The menu of indicators provides the source from which to establish a small number of shared core indicators that could be used by all equality bodies. These shared core indicators could serve as a starting point around which equality bodies could develop their full set of indicators, including more internal organisational indicators.

Seven common indicators were agreed. They are all impact indicators and focus on equality bodies stimulating institutional change and societal change.

Societal Change:

- **Knowledge of the equality body** among the general public.
- **Knowledge of and commitment to the equal treatment legislation** among employers, service providers, trade unions and consumer bodies.
- The level to which the equality body voice is deemed to be an **authoritative voice**.
- Reduction in **under-reporting level**, the percentage of those who perceive that they have been discriminated against and do not take any action in response.
- Number of **strategic interventions** to champion equality at moments of tension in society.

Institutional Change:

- The number (in relation to the target set) of **policy recommendations** made by the equality body and the share of policy recommendations adopted by policy makers, including changes made in equal treatment legislation.
- The number (in relation to the target set) of **organisations**, in the public and private sectors, that have developed employment and/or service provision related equality policies, procedures and practices as a result of their engagement with the equality body.

Equality bodies can hold other mandates alongside that of equality and non-discrimination. This might lead them to frame their indicators in a different manner. However, it is important that there is an explicit equality dimension within these indicators.

4.2   Peer Cooperation

Peer cooperation involves an engagement by an equality body with relevant personnel from other equality bodies in developing **evaluation capacity and practice through peer learning**.

The ultimate purpose of such peer cooperation would be to **support the equality body** to be better informed, make better choices, make a difference in achieving change, and to be better organised in pursuit of its goals. Peer cooperation stimulates and supports a transformational use of indicators to think about what the equality body is achieving. The focus on indicators provides a structure for a learning process based on a structured exchange with staff from peer organisations.

Peer cooperation can be organised at **two key points** in the planning cycle:

- **In preparing a strategic plan** when the equality body must identify and establish indicators. Peer cooperation could be organised to support the identification and selection of indicators. It would involve a strategic discussion about the quality of the indicators and their capacity to capture the priorities of the equality body, reflect the context for the equality body, and maximise the potential of the equality body.
- **In evaluating its work and preparing a further strategic plan** the equality body must gather and analyse data in assessing progress on its indicators and deploy this new information in further planning. Peer cooperation could be organised to support this analysis and the application of the results to future planning. It would involve a strategic discussion about the data gathered and the analysis conducted, exploring what these results mean and what their implications might be for future planning.

The **Common Indicators developed by the Evaluation Lab** could serve as a key resource and framework in implementing peer cooperation.

Peer cooperation needs to be **carefully structured**. It needs the host equality body to make preparations in: developing some initial self-assessment for team members to consider, providing relevant documentation to team members, and planning meetings with relevant personnel and stakeholders and preparing the agendas for discussion in these. A template for any such self-assessment would assist in this. A jointly determined terms of reference for the peer cooperation could usefully address: objectives and scope of the exercise; roles and responsibilities among the team; and a timeline of human and financial resources required. Peer cooperation needs the full team to engage in the discussions and to agree and communicate any conclusions to the equality body. A written report could also be prepared, with consideration given to any confidentiality requirements.

Peer cooperation would benefit from a **careful selection of the peer team** so that they might be drawn from equality bodies with a similar mandate to the host equality body and that can assist that equality body in learning and problem solving. Equinet could act as a central hub around which peer cooperation could be implemented and supported.

Peer cooperation offers a better understanding of the issues by an external team that has an active involvement in the work of equality bodies; an opportunity to build solidarity and mutual capacities between equality bodies; enabling mutual learning across equality bodies; and developing a new form of horizontal accountability. It would strengthen the network of and solidarity between equality bodies and build on the informal peer review processes that happen at joint learning events of Equinet.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Evaluation Lab created a space to explore evaluation strategies within a broader planning cycle that was tailored to the specificity of equality bodies. This was a space that could reflect their particular mandates, respond to their variety, address the breadth of their endeavour, and acknowledge the particular challenges facing institutions working for change that is long-term. This space proved to be both necessary and valuable.

Evaluation explores and assesses **the contribution of an equality body to achieving change in society, in institutions and for individuals**. This purpose of achieving change is a focus for evaluation. However, it also influences the evaluation approach designed by the equality as well as the wider planning cycle implemented by the equality body.

The **practice of evaluation and a wider planning cycle among equality bodies remains to be fully developed**. Equality bodies find themselves with a variety of track records and experiences of evaluation. It will be important to continue to grow and develop effective approaches to planning and evaluation by equality bodies.

Common indicators for equality bodies were developed by the Evaluation Lab. These could enable further joint work on evaluation and should serve to stimulate a convergence in approaches to evaluation among equality bodies. It will be important to disseminate these common indicators and support a debate on how equality bodies interpret these and put them to use. The application of these indicators and the progress tracked by them could be a focus for further examination by Equinet.

Peer collaboration offers a stimulus to developing a convergence of commitment and approach from equality bodies to evaluation, suggests new ways for equality bodies to work and learn together, and in It will be important to further develop this approach, give consideration to its potential, and test it out with a number of equality bodies.

The Evaluation Lab marked an important and innovative development in the work of Equinet. It would be important for its work to have an impact and to be a focus for follow-up activities.