



making diversity part of our culture

Equality and Diversity Report 2009-10

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This is Muir Group's annual report outlining key achievements in Equality and Diversity activities within Muir Group. It is presented in a calendar format with key statistics within appendices.

April 2009

The Equality and Diversity Group met for the first of its regular meetings during the year. The Equality and Diversity Group is a sub-group of the Board. The Group is chaired by a Board member who is the Board Equality and Diversity Champion. A resident Board member, who has a disability, and an external Equality and Diversity consultant, who acts as a critical friend, are also members of the Group. The rest of the Group is made up of senior managers and staff from different departments including the Chief Executive.

The Group's role is to keep up to date on the changing legislation surrounding Equality and Diversity and ensure that Muir Group meets its responsibilities in this area. Regular agenda items include:

- Equality and Diversity Performance Indicators
- Equality and Diversity Service Improvement Plan
- Key Performance Indicators
- Any policy or strategy that impacts on Equality and Diversity
- Equality Impact Assessments.

At this meeting the Group looked at:

- The draft Equality and Diversity Service Improvement Plan for 2009/10
- KPIs
- Employment Monitoring Statistics
- Customer Information Profile
- Progress on the works arising from Premises Accessibility Audit.

Muir Group renews its corporate sponsorship of the Gender Advisory Bureau's (GAB) trans-awareness training programme. The scheme provides the Association with:

- free consultancy over implementing new policies and advice over workplace or service user issues with regards to gender re-assignment
- free training to key staff
- Muir Group's logo on the GAB's promotional literature
- Free short-term counselling for service users or trans persons coming out at work.

Muir Group renews its corporate membership of the Housing Diversity Network (HDN). Being a member of the HDN provides the Association with specialist Equality and Diversity information including:

- Regular e-briefing newsletters
- A mentoring programme (see May 2009 entry for further details)

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- An enquiry line for advice and information on any E&D issues
- Job advertising on the HDN website
- Housing practitioner's network
- Discounted places on seminars and events
- Tailored training and consultancy packages.

A Project Manager made a flexible working request to return to work following maternity leave from full time to part-time hours. This request could not be granted for business reasons. However, the individual was offered and accepted the position of Deputy Project Manager on a job share basis.

A Director took one week's paternity leave, which was paid at basic salary and above the statutory rate.

Recruitment and selection processes were enhanced by involving a disabled resident in the selection panel for a Customer Services Adviser vacancy.

The Association purchased and implemented ReACT, a new anti-social-behaviour (ASB) database, which will enable ASB cases to be managed more effectively and with a detailed reporting system.

The results of an Equal Pay Audit were presented to the Remuneration and HR Committee. The equal pay audit concludes that overall pay and benefits between males and females across the job evaluation groups (jobs rated as of similar value) do not highlight any significant discrepancies but further highlights the issue of uneven distribution of males and females across groups, which is an issue of equal opportunities rather than equal pay.

The Anti Social Behaviour Policy was equality impact assessed with minor amendments made to procedures to take account of individual resident needs.

May 2009

The Housing Diversity Network Edge Forward mentoring scheme was once again promoted to all staff within Muir Group. The scheme is for all under represented staff (ethnic minority staff, women, disabled staff and any other under underrepresented group) working in the housing sector to help them develop their potential and advance their career. The programme runs from September to April and mentees are assigned a mentor from another housing association. No employees from Muir Group applied to join the mentoring programme this year although one manager acted as a mentor to an individual from another housing association.

Muir Group organised an assessment and obtained subsequent funding from the Department for Work and Pensions Access to Work Team to purchase a special chair for a new member of staff with a back problem. Other adapted equipment was provided to accommodate the individual's disability.

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A dedicated Equality and Diversity intranet page was developed for staff information, which incorporates key documents such as the Strategy, Policy and diversity schemes as well as guidance on accessibility for meetings and events, cultural awareness, disability etiquette, religions and LanguageLine procedures including an on line LanguageLine training package.

June 2009

At the June meeting of the Board, the Association's revised Equality and Diversity Strategy, Policy and Service Improvement Plan was approved. The Board also approved the Association's Single Equality Scheme document, which incorporates and supercedes the Disability and Gender Equality Schemes developed in 2007/8, and is extended to cover the remaining core strands of equality, i.e. age, transgender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. The scheme also recognises that people may face discrimination for many reasons where there may be no statutory protection. The documents outline how the Association will fulfil its regulatory, legal and moral duty to promote Equality and Diversity. An extensive stakeholder consultation exercise took place on the various documents, which consisted of discussions with staff, contractors, various agencies representing the diversity strands, the HDN E&D Practitioners Group, the Think Tank (the Association's main body for resident involvement) and a small but representative 'task and finish' group of residents to seek their views on the equality and diversity strands and how these affect Muir Group as an employer and as a landlord. The Single Equality Scheme is published on the Association's website for customer information.

A new scheme at Station Green, Ellesmere Port was handed over for Social Services, which provides 8 flats and 2 bungalows for clients with learning/physical disabilities & other vulnerable people.

The Association asked a disabled resident to visit the Head Office and area offices in Helsby, Huntingdon, Burnley and Glebe Green to test the accessibility following completion of the works to make the premises compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. Some actions were identified for attention but overall access is good.

July 2009

A Community Housing Officer was granted volunteer leave to take part in and support a Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award expedition for local young people. The Association grants up to five days paid additional leave in a leave year for the purpose of staff undertaking volunteer work during normal working hours. This policy is part of the Association's wider work/life balance initiatives.

A request to work beyond retirement age from a cleaner based on one the Association's estates was granted. This was the second time the individual had requested to work beyond retirement age - on the first occasion at the age of 65, the Association agreed to the request but subject to a review after 3 years.

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The Equality and Diversity Group met for the second of its regular meetings during the year. At this meeting the Group looked at:

- Progress on the Equality and Diversity Service Improvement Plan.
- Key Performance Indicators – by exception. Two cases of domestic violence and one case of racial harassment had been reported and dealt with but are continuing to be monitored. Graphs showing the customer profile of the Think Tank (the Association's main resident involvement body) and the Editorial Panel for the Voice residents magazine indicate that the Think Tank broadly reflects the customer profile. However the Editorial Panel is less representative and efforts will be made to recruit a more diverse spread of members.
- Progress on the collation of customer profile information, which stands at 82% of customers. The information collected will be used to tailor services at an individual level. For example, one customer was referred to Women's Aid as a result of completing a customer information form, as she had used the opportunity to inform the Association that she was suffering from domestic violence.
- An interim report on the BME resident survey. Initial findings indicate that levels of satisfaction amongst BME residents are lower when compared to the results from a full STATUS survey conducted in 2007.
- The role of the Equality and Diversity Champions.
- Feedback from the Equality and Diversity Day 3 training sessions, which showed positive responses with the majority of attendees achieving a greater understanding of disability issues as a result of the training.
- The Equality and Diversity Training Plan for 2009/10 for staff and contractors, which will focus on vulnerability as a large percentage of customers fall into this category.
- Feedback from the Northern Housing Consortium/Housing Diversity Network Equality and Diversity conference, which was attended by a member of the Equality and Diversity Group.

August 2009

The Association purchased and implemented an e-learning package specifically designed for the housing sector as an induction and refresher training tool for staff. The package included a module on Equality and Diversity awareness, which all staff were requested to undertake.

A staff survey was conducted reviewing work/life balance within Muir Group with a view to considering initiatives to improve work/life balance for all staff. The review asked staff for their views on the culture within Muir Group towards work/life balance and what work/life balance initiatives would they like to see introduced. A benchmarking exercise amongst other housing associations was also conducted on work life balance initiatives in place. The surveys showed that the Association was not greatly out of kilter with work/life balance arrangements that it currently offers compared to the sector, but there was a general view amongst staff that the Association could do more to

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promote work/life balance initiatives for all staff regardless of their gender or whether they have caring responsibilities. It was agreed to implement a formal work/life balance policy and job share policy so that all staff are aware of initiatives that will be supported by the Association and to ensure consistency is applied across the organisation.

September 2009

A member of staff within the Finance and Central Services department started a one year career break to pursue personal interests. The Association's policy allows for staff with more than 3 years service to request an unpaid career break for up to two years. The policy is part of the wider work/life balance initiatives available to staff.

A Senior Finance Officer returned to work following maternity leave after making a flexible working request to return to work from full time to part-time hours, which was granted. The remaining hours were recruited on a job-share basis.

An Equality and Diversity Bulletin was published on the staff intranet, which was developed in response to the staff survey conducted in February 2009 into how well the Association communicates equality and diversity issues. The bulletin highlighted the members of the Equality and Diversity Group and the role of the group and the current topics for discussion.

Equality Impact Assessments:

- The Involving People Strategy was equality impact assessed with minor amendments made to the document with regard to translations and that all associated documents cover the seven strands.
- The Income Management Policy was equality impact assessed with minor amendments made to visiting procedures to take account of individual resident needs.
- The Equality and Diversity Policy was equality impact assessed with no adverse impact identified.
- The Data Protection Policy was considered for an equality impact assessment but as the document aims to comply with legal requirements, it was deemed not necessary to impact assess.
- The Aids and Adaptations Policy was equality impact assessed with no adverse impact identified but it was noted that contractor awareness of the diversity strands would be addressed in training to be provided.

Customer profile information was used to identify a resident who was due to turn 100 – the occasion was marked by visiting the resident and presenting her with flowers.

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October 2009

The Equality and Diversity Group met for the third of its regular meetings during the year. At this meeting the Group looked at:

- Progress on the Equality and Diversity Service Improvement Plan.
- Key Performance Indicators – by exception. Five cases of domestic violence and 4 cases of hate crime had been reported in the second quarter of 2009/10. Three of the domestic violence cases and one of the hate crime cases are still ongoing.
- Progress on the collation of customer profile information, which stands at 86% of customers.

The use of the strapline '*Making diversity part of our culture*', which was originally developed to appear on recruitment adverts to attract underrepresented groups, was extended and printed on Association letterhead paper.

The Income Management Team were having difficulty getting hold of a resident who was on the verge of being served with a Notice of Seeking Possession for rent arrears. From the customer information form it was known that Polish was his first language and he had expressed a preference for being texted as a means of communication. A text was duly sent, in English - the resident responded within five minutes, and arrangements were made to visit him. The Income Management Officer made use of Language Line's services to translate during the visit and interestingly, the resident confirmed that he had received the text in Polish, even though it had been sent in English. This is a fantastic example of how the Association has made use of the information that customers have given to us.

As part of a tackling worklessness initiative, the Head of HR gave an informal talk to residents at Gorse Hill about seeking employment as part of the projects resettlement programme. A news item was also placed in the residents Voice magazine highlighting that the Association is keen to employ residents if they have the right skills.

November 2009

The Association recruited an additional Board Member. The vacancy was publicised widely to attract underrepresented groups. 12.5% of applicants were BME, 25% female, 2.5% disabled, and 10% were non-Christian. No non-heterosexual applicants. The appointed candidate was a female/BME individual in the 36-46 age category, which has successfully increased the BME, female and younger age profile of the Board.

An Equality and Diversity basic awareness training session was provided for new staff with 16 attending.

Five half day training sessions were provided for staff and managers outlining:

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- What is Mental Ill Health?
- Dealing with distressed customers
- Mental Health and the Law

The training was arranged in response to the Association's commitments under the MINDFUL EMPLOYER Charter, which aims to increase awareness of mental health in the workplace and supporting employers to recruit and retain staff who may have experienced mental health issues. In total 40 staff attended the sessions.

The colleague contact scheme was reviewed to monitor the take up of the scheme and to establish whether there were any discriminatory incidents of bullying and harassment. The scheme consists of a small group of staff who have volunteered to act as a confidential contact to their colleagues in cases of bullying and harassment and to support and advise them on a suitable course of action. 3 cases had been referred to the colleague contacts in the previous 12 months. Only one of those related to specific bullying/harassment issues but there was no evidence of discriminatory bullying and harassment.

December 2009

The first of two Equality and Diversity training sessions on disability and vulnerability was provided for new frontline staff with 10 attending.

Concern cards were launched internally and to contractors, which aim to be completed and submitted once a serious vulnerability concern or issue is witnessed during visits to residents homes and the most appropriate agency alerted.

A 'knowing our customers' Customer Information Report was published on the intranet to give all staff an overview of how Muir Group has collected customer information, why we have collected it and what we are doing with it, i.e. targeting resources and services to specific groups and/or areas, together with detailed statistics of the customer profile.

January 2010

A Transgender Awareness training course was delivered by the Gender Advisory Bureau to 10 employees. The half day session provided staff with a basic understanding of the different Trans groups, the sex reassignment process, the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and other relevant legislation and the implications for the housing service.

The second of two Equality and Diversity training sessions on disability and vulnerability was provided for new frontline staff with 13 attending.

The first of six Equality and Diversity training sessions which focused on vulnerability in more detail was provided for frontline staff with 15 attending.

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An additional half day MINDFUL EMPLOYER training session was provided for staff with 10 attending.

A vulnerability checklist was introduced for use by Community Housing Officers at sign up. The form is intended to flag up where there are potential vulnerability issues that require support or where there may be potential risk.

February 2010

The Association's introduced an 0300 number central telephone contact and minicom number. Calls via this number are charged at a local rate (generally free with a call package deal) and are cheaper than calling national numbers that start with 08 (e.g. 0845) from landline and mobile phones. The change makes it easier and cheaper for residents to contact the Association.

Two more of the six Equality and Diversity training sessions on vulnerability in were provided for frontline staff with 28 attending. The final session was scheduled for April 2010.

The Association started using the Age Positive logo on recruitment material to demonstrate its commitment to employing workers of all ages.

A 'recruiting for attitude' project commenced linked to the existing competency framework, which will enhance the recruitment and selection processes further by the introduction of role play assessments. The new process will enable the Association to select individuals who have the right motivation and behaviours that fit the organisation's vision and values rather than simply having the relevant experience. It is anticipated that this approach will assist in recruiting a more diverse workforce.

The Association has completed 169 minor aids & adaptations and 57 major adaptations already this year. Major adaptations are currently being completed in an average of 163 days against a target of 180 days. Minor adaptations are being completed in average of 17 days, with 91% of minor adaptations being completed within our target time of 20 working days

March 2010

A further two Equality and Diversity training sessions on vulnerability were provided for frontline staff with 30 attending.

A half day Equality and Diversity training sessions on vulnerability was held for contractors in the southern region. The session was designed to raise awareness for participants of Muir's Vulnerability Strategy, why it is important and how to implement it. A second session for contractors in the north was scheduled for April 2010.

17 residents attended a training session on interviewing skills, as more residents are taking part in interview panels which enhances the staff recruitment and selection process. A diverse range of residents attended from across the country including a number with a disability.

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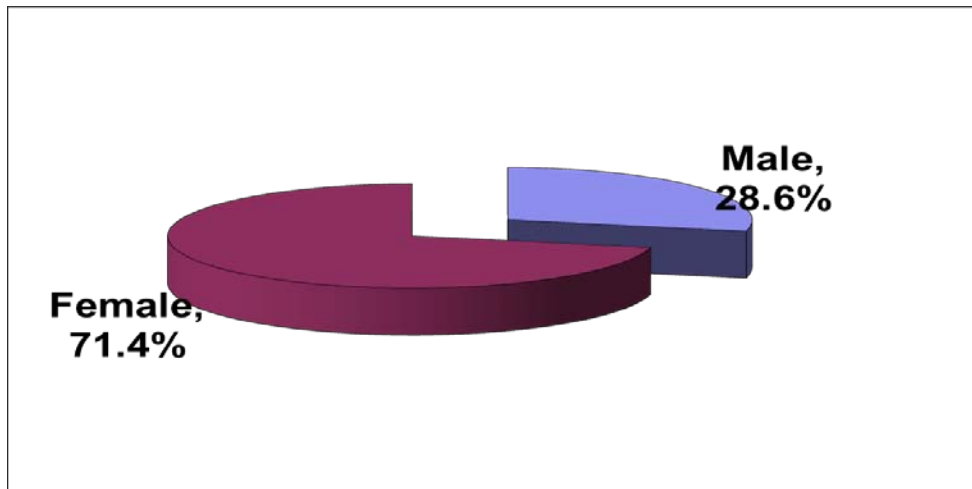
A request to work beyond retirement age from a Project Assistant was granted.

Customer profile information now stands at 87% of all residents.

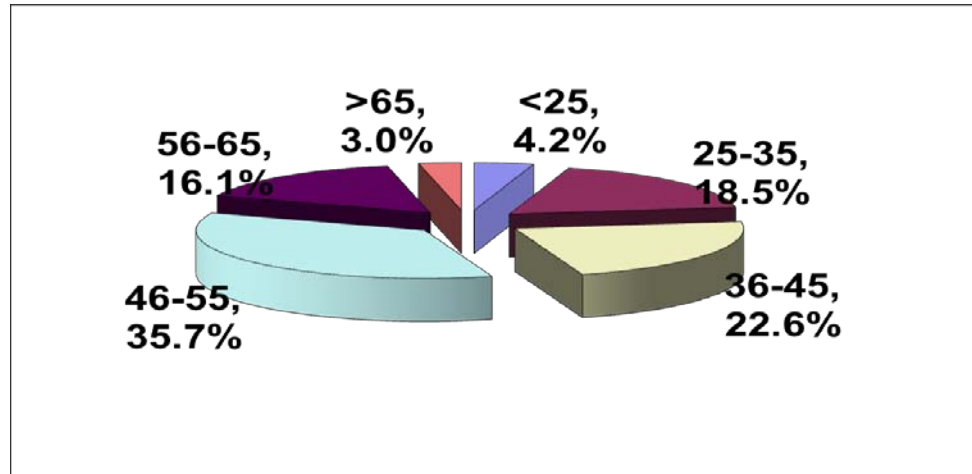
Data as at March 2010 is shown in the attached Appendices.

**Equality and Diversity Group
June 2010**

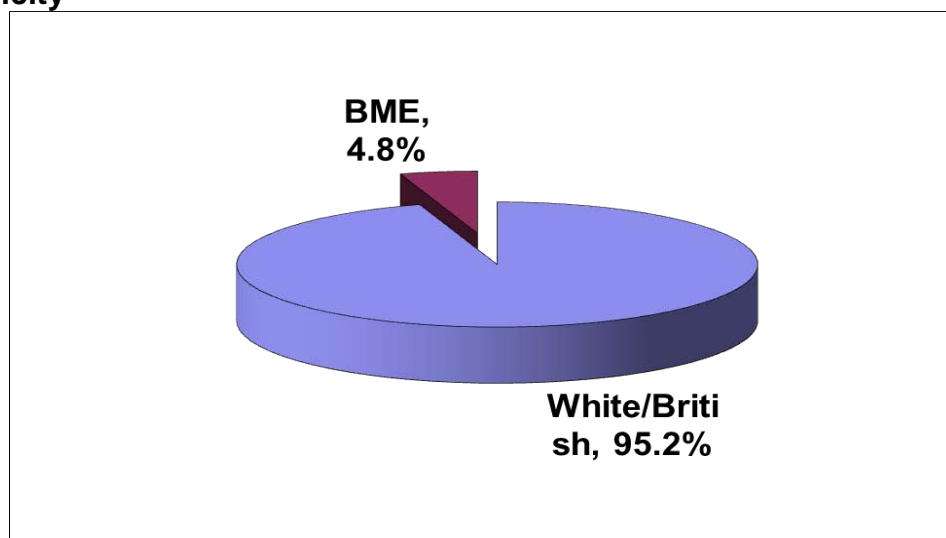
Gender



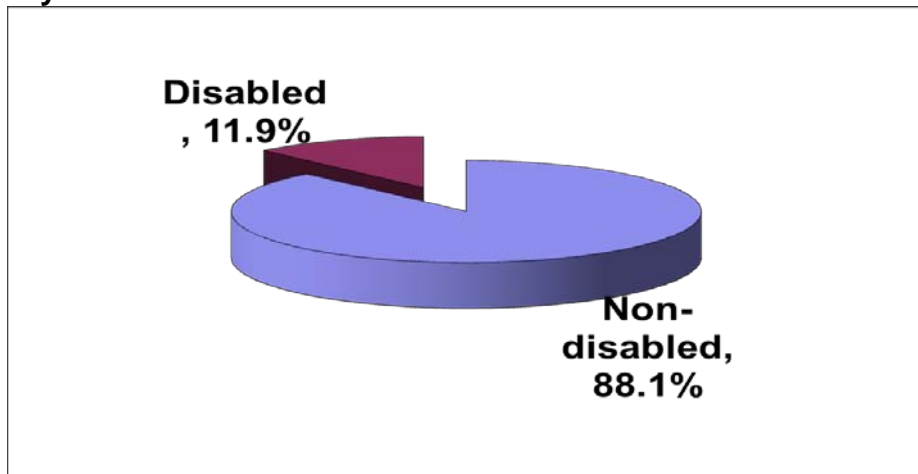
Age



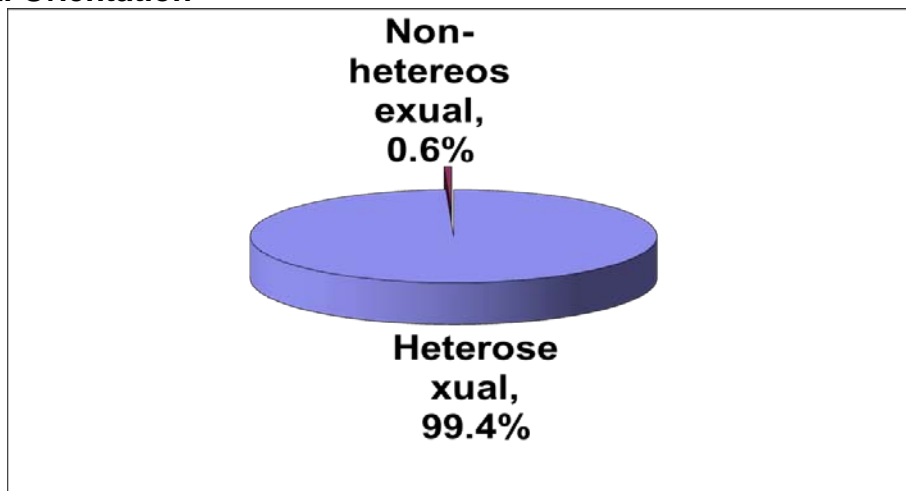
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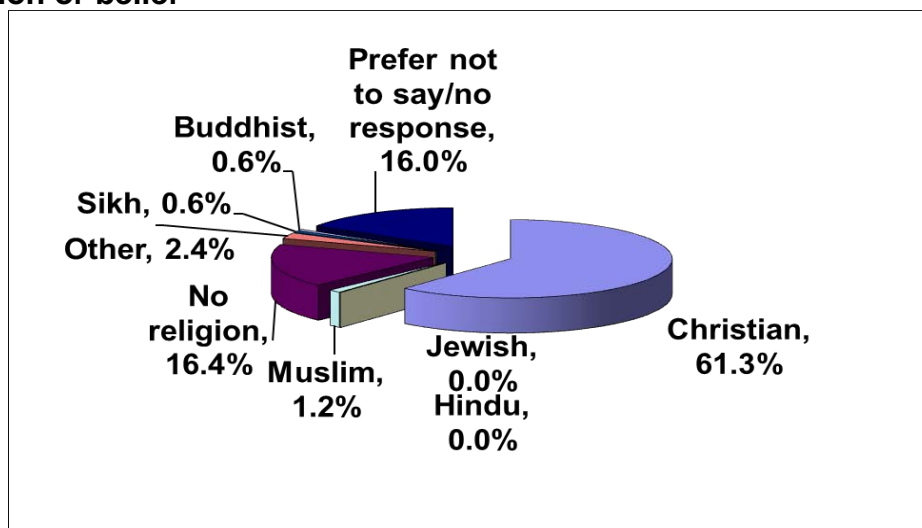
Disability



Sexual Orientation



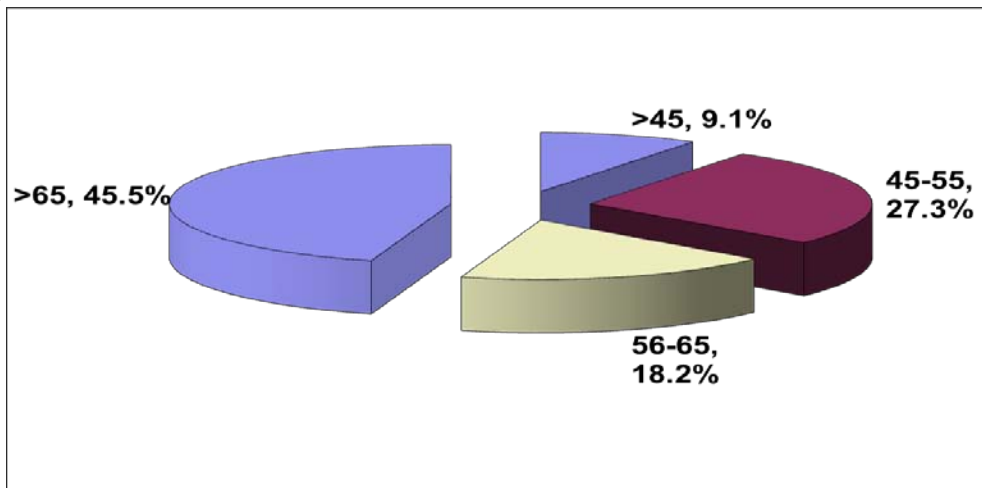
Religion or belief



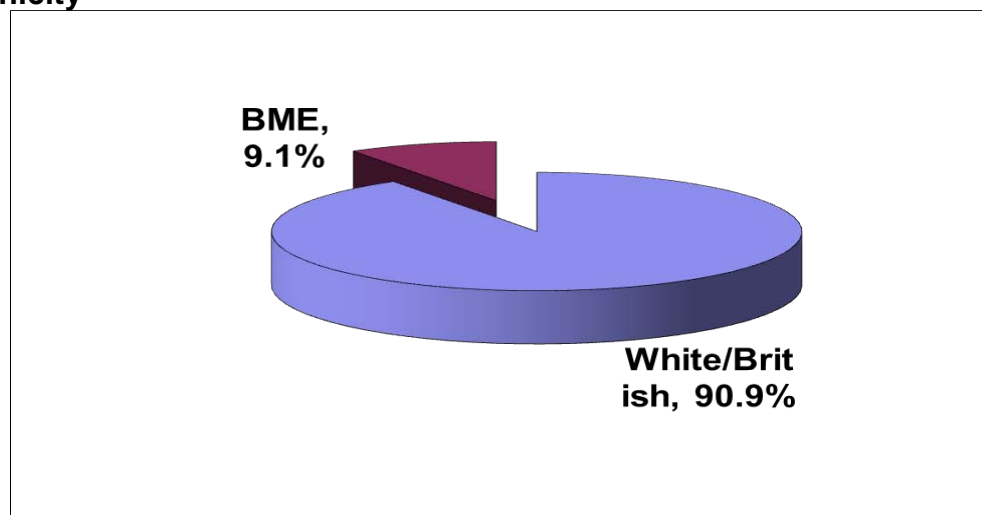
Gender



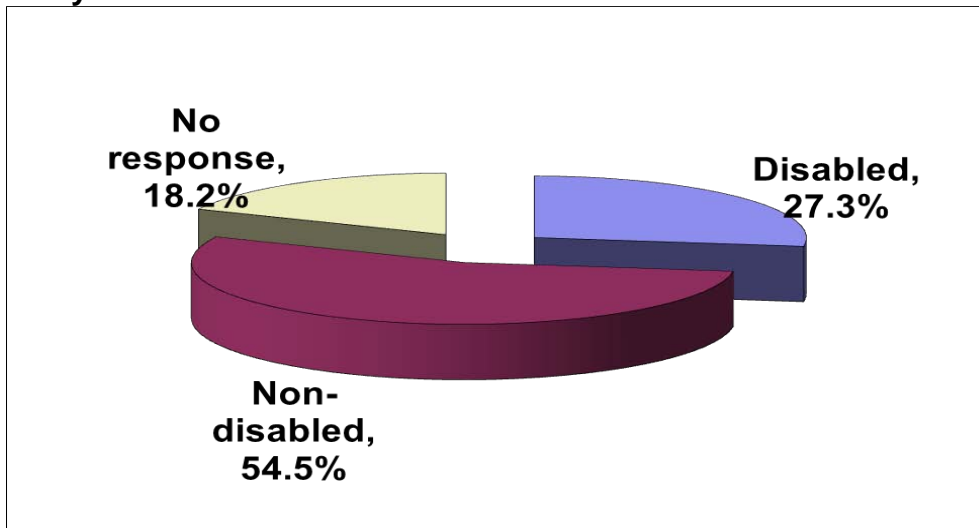
Age



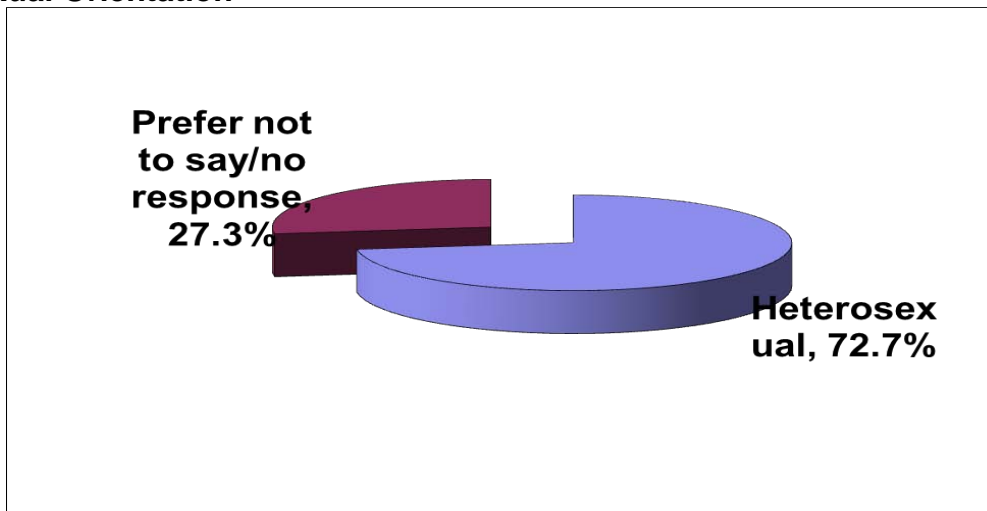
Ethnicity



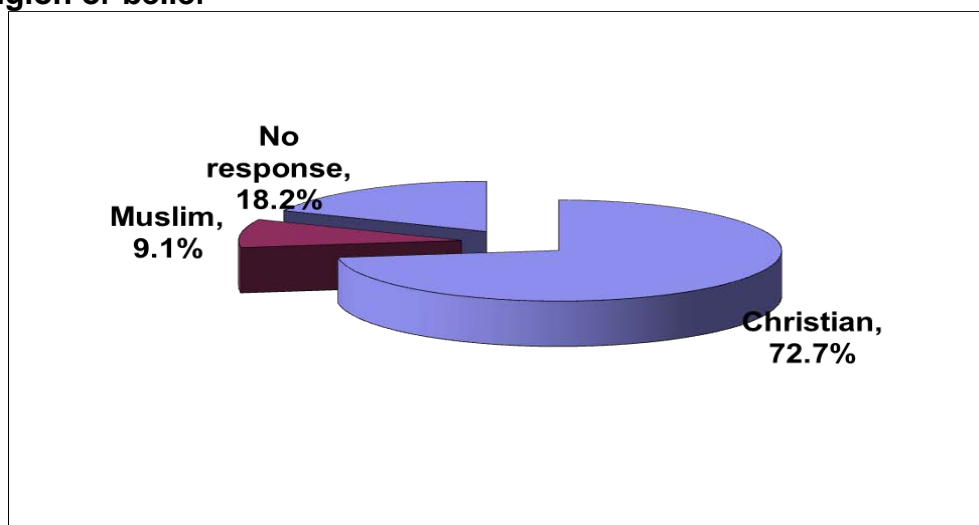
Disability



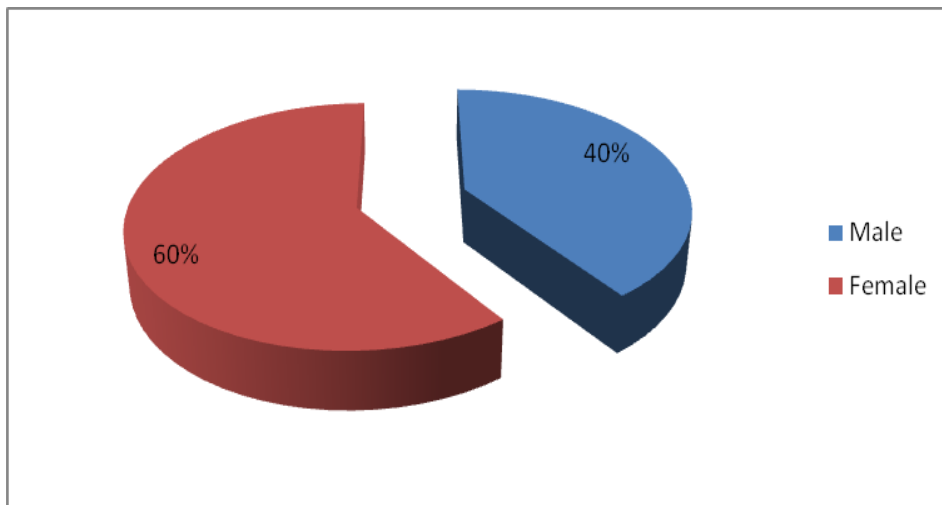
Sexual Orientation



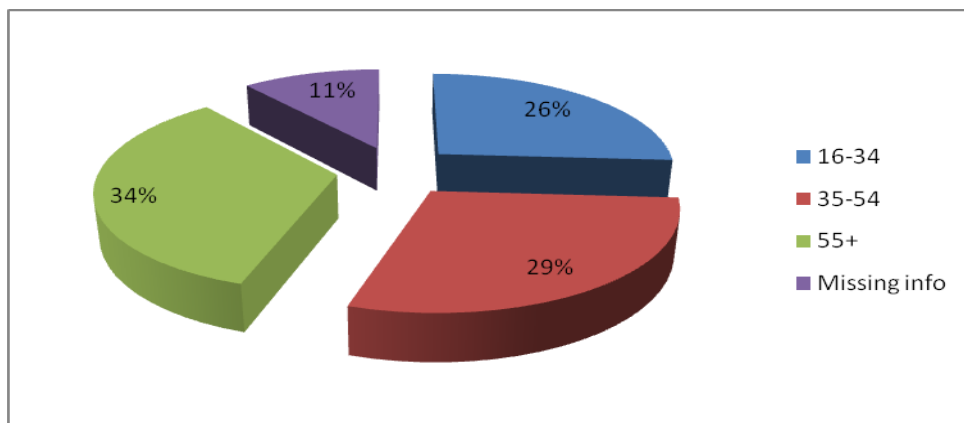
Religion or belief



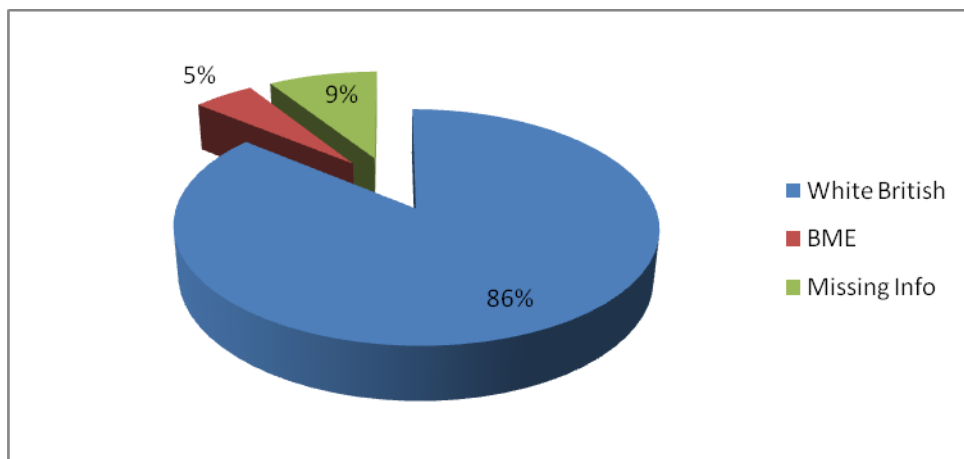
Gender



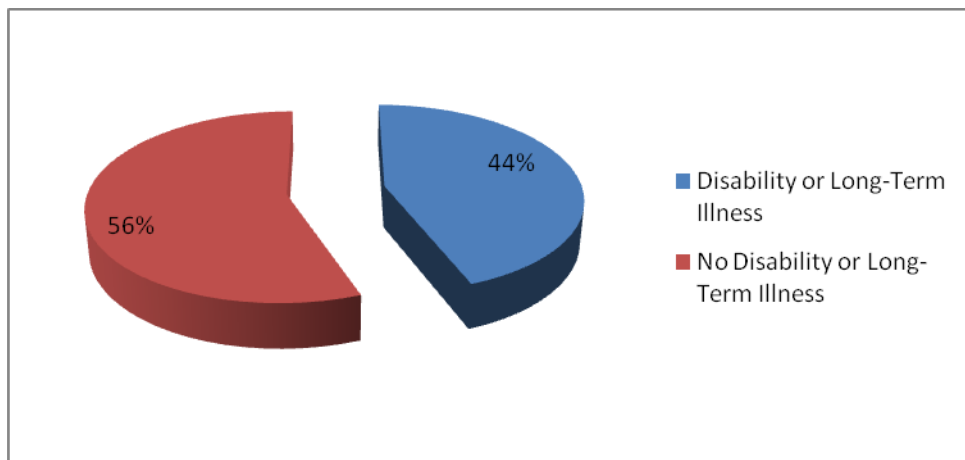
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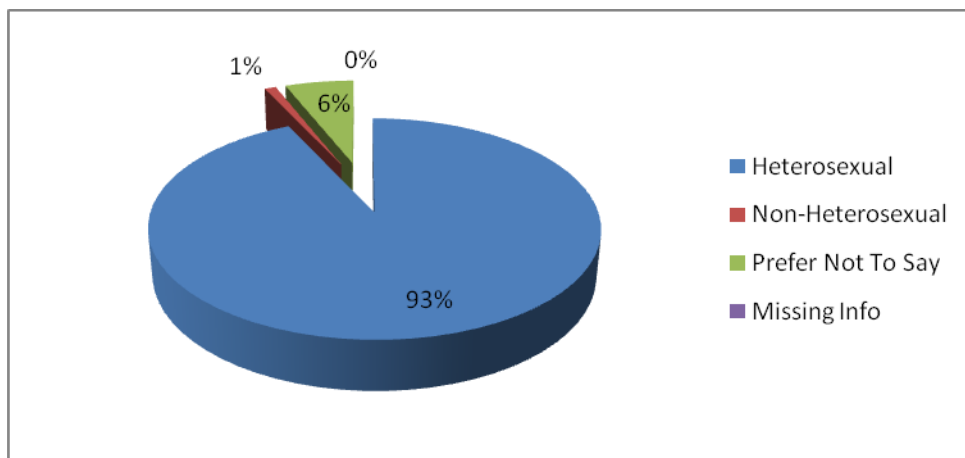
Ethnicity



Disability



Sexual Orientation



Religion or belief

