



Transform Management Consultancy  
Brookside  
Adforton, Leintwardine  
Herefordshire, SY7 0NF  
UK

T: +44/0 845 862 5247  
F: +44/0 870 051 2234  
E: [admin@trans4mgt.com](mailto:admin@trans4mgt.com)  
[www.trans4mgt.com](http://www.trans4mgt.com)

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# Equinet– European Network of Equality Bodies

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## External Evaluation of 2016 Activities

### *Final Report*



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March 2017



## 1. Executive Summary

**Equinet chooses to carry out an external evaluation each year to help organisational learning.**

- Previous evaluations have found Equinet to be working very successfully
- Equinet feels that an evaluation can help it learn from its experience by having external oversight

**While the approach taken in this evaluation was similar to previous years,**

- Members and selected external stakeholders were invited to complete a short online survey
- Certain members, board members, staff and other stakeholders were interviewed in person or by phone
- The topics under consideration touched on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, Equinet's impact, the quality of delivery and how well it is run

**...it may be worthwhile considering reducing the frequency of external evaluations in future.**

**Meantime, this evaluation, during the year of EQUINET's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, shows Equinet to have had another very successful year.**

- It is on track to deliver its Strategic Plan
- The volume of its activities is stable...
- ...while satisfaction levels amongst members and external stakeholders remains very high
- Most members use Equinet's knowledge and work in their own organisations
- Equinet continues to enjoy high levels of credibility as one of the accepted actors within the EU system

**As it works towards its next strategic plan, EQUINET needs to reflect on several emerging factors...**

- It should think about how it can fill the need amongst its target audiences for stories that fill the gap in knowledge between big data and individual cases
- It should consider how it embraces and leads through the greater complexity that comes with greater size and higher levels of success

- It should reflect on how momentum and energy can be sustained in a maturing network that is moving out of its early youthful phase

**These challenges are all about leadership, and in a year of governance transition, it will be essential that the high-quality leadership that has been enjoyed so far is sustained in the years ahead.**

**A birthday is not a birthday without some birthday wishes. Here are five.**

- EQUINET and its sector come through the current period of political and narrative challenge in good shape
- EQUINET finds ways to reach more deeply into member organisations to touch in a meaningful way with the leaders of tomorrow alongside the leaders of today
- EQUINET is as embedded at the political level in Europe as it is at the official level
- EQUINET develops its offering to embrace the multi-pace Europe that seems to be emerging politically and finds ways of deepening its relationships with NEBs wherever they are in the spectrum of European integration
- EQUINET finds ways to keep the network fresh and young as it matures into its second decade.

**Thus, overall, as in previous years, Equinet continues to be the right organisation, doing the right things, in the right way, as all report.**

## 2. Introduction

### This report

This report represents the findings and conclusions of an external evaluation consultancy, commissioned by Equinet, of its activities during 2016.

### Evaluation Objective

During the planning process for the evaluation, Equinet made clear that the proposed evaluation was not only to fulfil the requirements for evaluation under the terms of its funding from DG Justice, under its Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014-2020.

Indeed, it is the view of the board of Equinet that they value the feedback and potential for learning that an evaluation can bring and so wish to deploy the findings to help reflect on strategic direction, achievements and pointers for the future. Thus, by seeking the views of members and other stakeholders on a confidential basis, one may ascertain, it is hoped, the key issues for them that Equinet should address during the year ahead.

### Equinet

Equinet was established legally as an international not-for-profit association (Aisbl) in 2007. Its Secretariat is based in Brussels. Equinet has been funded through the European Commission's PROGRESS programme until the end of 2014, and is now funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme programme as mentioned above, the objective of which is to 'contribute to the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty, the Charter and international human rights conventions, are promoted and protected'.

Equinet's 2015-2018 Strategic Plan proposes four key objectives:

- 1) Building capacity and peer support of equality bodies.
- 2) Contributing to the European equality agenda
- 3) Serving as a knowledge and communication hub on equal treatment
- 4) Consolidating the network and the position of members

There is continuity between this strategic plan and the previous one, Equinet's first. The themes of capacity building and support for members, being a centre of expertise and acting as a policy interlocutor between the sector and European Union institutions were amongst the ideas of the previous plan. At the point of this evaluation, Equinet was two years into its Plan.

## Factors informing our Approach

Organisations of a similar nature and working in a similar way to Equinet share certain characteristics that inform our approach to this external evaluation. Membership organisations, interlocutory organisations and supra-national organisations are all inherently complex to manage – and Equinet is all three!

Typically for **membership organisations**, there is a tension on the one hand, between representation and using democratic approaches to decision making and, on the other hand, arriving at efficient means by which to direct and control the organisation's actions. Dysfunction can occur either when the need for full consultation slows effective executive action, or when overly hasty management action undermines proper accountability by the governing bodies. In our experience, membership organisations have to arrive at their own unique approach to managing this tension in order to develop more appropriate decision-making processes.

**Interlocutory organisations** are also complex to manage. Simultaneously meeting the needs of member bodies for information, support, etc, while also meeting the needs of the major funders, such as the European Commission, for a high level of credible political insight can be challenging to combine successfully. Given limited resources, it is easy for both parties to feel dissatisfied without careful stakeholder management.

A further challenge arises from this. It is inherently difficult for organisations such as Equinet to demonstrate the impact that its work has. Attributing a change (for example in policy) to Equinet's efforts is not easy unless those affected by Equinet's work admit to its influence. This problem impinges directly upon the thinking behind the methodology deployed in this and its predecessor evaluations: Equinet's reputation amongst key stakeholders can be used as proxy indicators for impact<sup>1</sup>.

**Supranational organisations** are complex to manage because their 'reach' is so broad. The reality of geography, national and managerial culture differences, as well as language, make the basic running of the organisation and all its interactions more complex. The wide range of political interests of each of its members will also create an essential tension, in the sense that pleasing one member or group of members may lead to the displeasure of others.

Finally, the previous paragraphs have used the term 'organisation' to describe Equinet. Yet Equinet is a **Network** with a small secretariat to support it. The nature of authority and control within a network is fundamentally different from authority in a more conventional organisational structure. The decision making style in a network needs to be lighter of touch, geared to coalition and consensus building and patient with the notion that things can take their time in such an environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Burns, S (2000) *Outcome monitoring* Charities Evaluation Services, UK

The ability of such an ‘organisation’ to really appreciate the nature of these complexities and work within them, will to a large measure, we assert, determine its success.

## Method

The agreed method for the evaluation again comprised three stages (Table 1).

In slightly more detail, this process involved the following **key activities**:

### Stage 1: Engagement

- a. Review all documentation provided by Equinet, including relevant planning, funding, internal and external reports, etc.
- b. Agreement of an interview protocol and the content of a short online survey

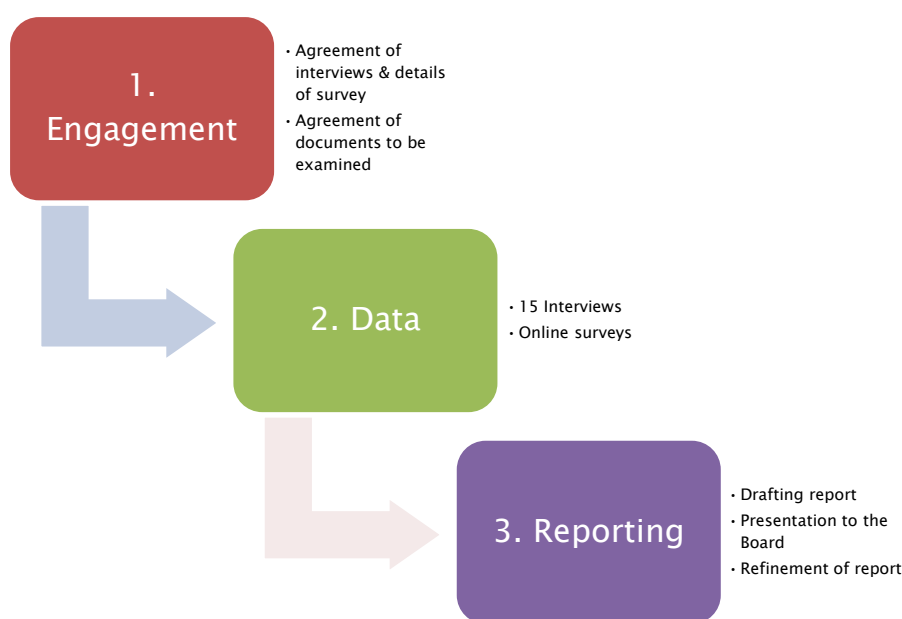
### Stage 2: Data Collection

- a. Administration of a short online survey on the perceptions of effectiveness and impact to each of Equinet members and other key stakeholders
- b. Interviews by telephone and in person with a small sample of Members’ representatives and staff members by telephone and in person (7 carried out (of whom 5 were also members of the Executive Board), 4 external stakeholders and 4 members of staff) totalling **15 interviews**.

### Stage 3: Reporting

- a. Analysis of data and preparation of a narrative report for discussion with the Executive Director and dissemination for consultation with the Executive Board
- b. Presentation of the draft report to the Executive Board meeting on 16 March 2017, followed by final revisions and sign-off

Table 1: Outline Method – Three Stages



The data collection process started in January 2017, with the evaluator’s interviews in Brussels, and continued, with further interviews and an online survey throughout and early February, while the draft report was completed in late February 2017. The final report of the external evaluation was completed for submission by early March 2017.

### The focus of the Questions asked

The questions in 2016’s survey are similar in many respects to the questions posed in previous years, although as ever, there are some refinements. For example, where last year we considered members’ views on the implementation of the then quit new strategic plan, this year we are beginning to look ahead to the next plan. However, many of the topics are the same and findings from previous evaluations will be compared with this year where helpful.

Consistency where possible is desirable because it enables performance tracking. Thus, we will consider the extent to which performance against the strategic plan is on track in this report.

### Questions asked in the Surveys and Interviews

The online **members’ survey** had the following structure of 10 question topics:

After background questions, the topics were:

1. The extent to which Equinet is so far on track to deliver its Strategic Plan...
2. ...with a probe on the report on Standards in Equality Bodies

3. The perceptions of Equinet’s performance from a work delivery or quality standpoint...
4. ...with a probe on reports in general...
5. ...and the report on the European Directory of Equality Bodies as a particular probe
6. The extent to which members make use in its work of the knowledge, skills and learning gained as a result of Equinet’s activities...
7. ...and the estimated proportion of the member’s staff who make use of the knowledge, as described in the previous question
8. The extent to which the member organisation is better equipped to engage at the European policy level as a result of Equinet’s work and presence
9. The extent of Equinet’s and its members’ influence amongst EU institutions
10. The extent of Equinet’s and its members’ influence amongst other stakeholders
11. The effectiveness of the Governance of Equinet
12. The effectiveness of Equinet’s secretariat administratively...
13. ...and in performing its role more broadly
14. Network decision making

**External stakeholders** had a subset of the four most relevant questions (i.e. excluding the management questions), while the **interviews** also took a subset of four (external) or five (member) questions to try to use the scarce interview time to the best effect by getting under the surface of the survey data.

## Online Survey

There were far fewer responses to the members’ online questionnaire this year: 35 responses compared with 68 responses last year and with 66 responses the previous year and 67 in 2013). It is not clear why, but the feeling perhaps that there is questionnaire fatigue may be a factor to consider. However, 29 countries were represented, indicating that the voices of most member states and associated states were heard in the process. Where previously there were multiple responses from the same country, this year it was typically one response or in some cases two (three from one country only).

There were also fewer returns from the short survey of external stakeholders as well – 15, compared with 25 last year. However, a similar range of countries’

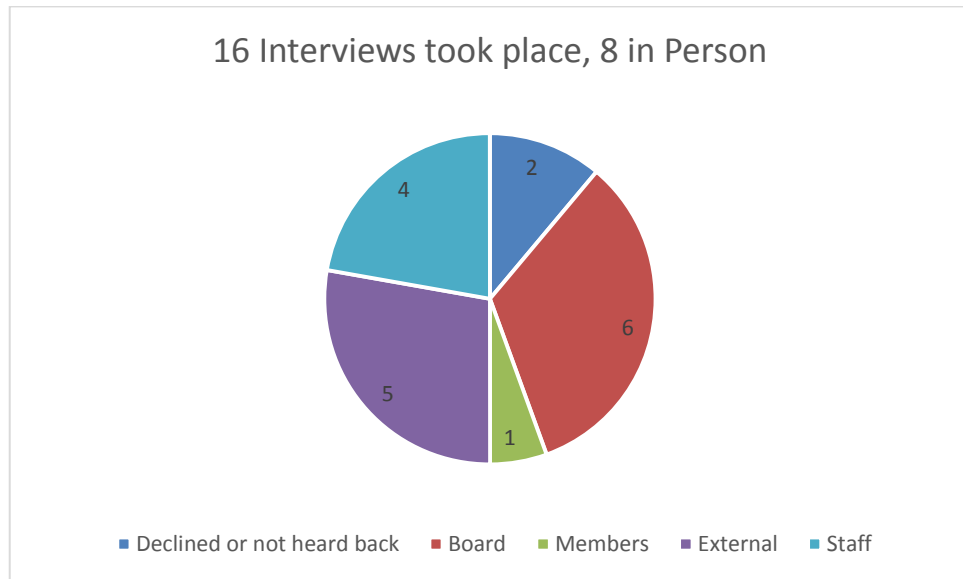


voices were heard, 5 (6 last year), with a focus on Belgium due to the number of external stakeholders who are based there.

## Interviews

Sixteen interviews were carried out (15 in 2015, 12 in 2014, 13 in 2013, 10 in 2012), following a pre-agreed interview protocol, with a selection of seven members, four members of Equinet staff team, five voices from the Commission and other stakeholders.

Figure 1: Interviews



## Report

This report provides a lengthy exposition of the data from the survey and interviews in order that Equinet can use the data for its own analysis. However the core of this report is quite short comprising the Executive Summary (at the beginning of the report) and the Final Reflections sections (at the end of the report). The conclusions from each of the ten question topics, follows the data.

## 3. Data and Findings

### Introduction

The presentation of the data follows the structure of the survey (and interview protocol) in terms of topics and questions within each topic. Conclusions are drawn later at the end of each section.

## Strategy and Strategic Positioning

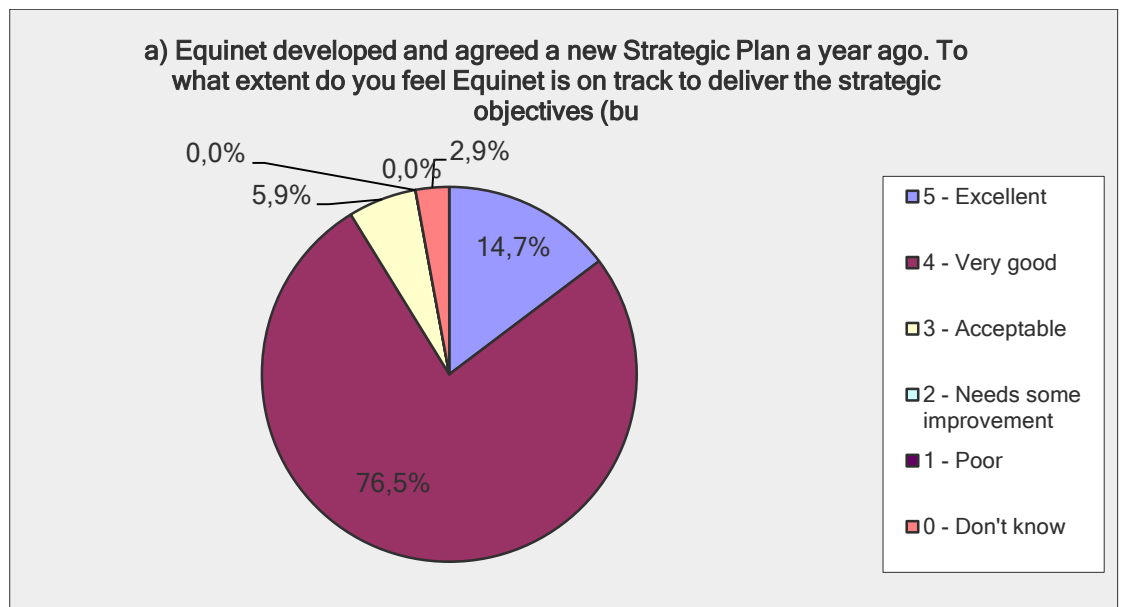
### Delivery of New Strategic Plan

Equinet has a four-year planning cycle and a new Strategic Plan was agreed for 2015-2018. The new plan is therefore in its third year. Equinet also produces an annual Work Plan and budget for approval by the AGM each year. The annual Work Plan mirrors the Strategic Plan in that it takes each of the strategic planning objectives and considers how they will be operationalised in the year ahead. The annual Work Plan specifies exactly what learning and other events, publications, etc. will take place in the year ahead.

These processes are all signs of good practice and a well-run organisation.

### Member Survey Scores

**QUESTION 1a: Equinet developed and agreed a new Strategic Plan a year ago. To what extent do you feel Equinet is on track to deliver the strategic objectives (building capacity and peer support of equality bodies; contributing to the European equality agenda, serving as a knowledge and communication hub on equal treatment; and consolidating the network and the position of its members) over the period 2015–2018?**



There were 34 (48 last year) responses from members. The profile of scores is like last year, with a slight shift from Excellent to Very Good over the year past.

### Member Survey Comments

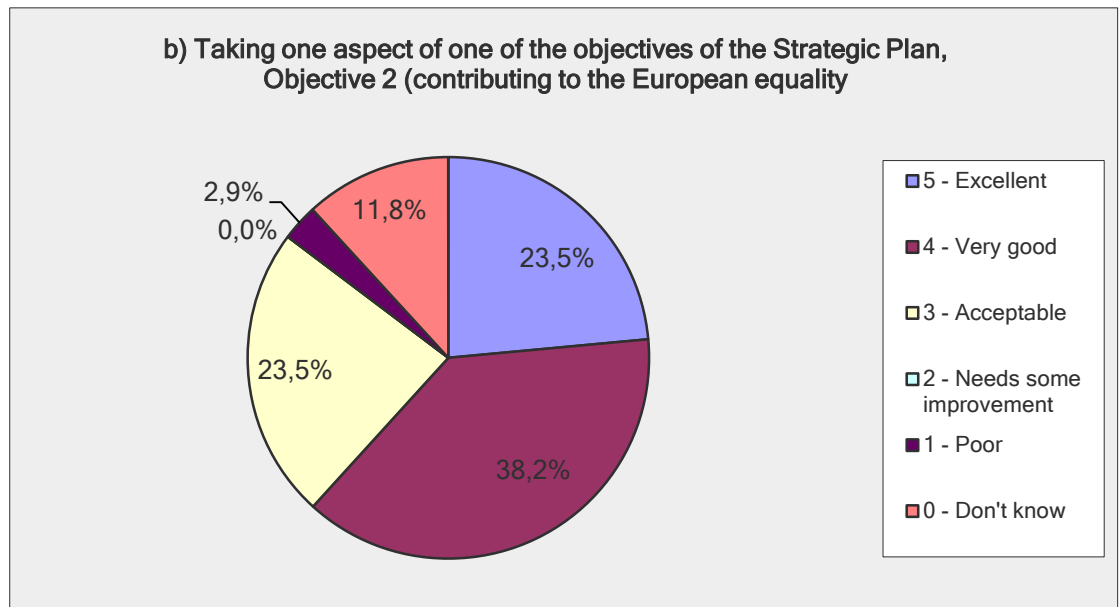
- Seminars and conferences as well as newsbooks and bulletins highly contribute to the building of knowledge and capacity. They also contribute to networking among member institutions.
- Our experience is that Equinet has continued to develop its relations with and contributions to the European equality agenda in a fruitful way, for example more contacts with the Commission in matters regarding equality.

- The Plan itself was a good reflection of what needs to be done by way of priorities and annual business planning has been effective in progressing these.
- EQUINET has definitely supported its members in their capacity building development through a strong system of communications.
- EQUINET ensures that the voice and concerns of its members are brought to the attention of EU and European institutions.
- The Working Paper on developing standards for equality bodies has definitely enhanced the work of its members.
- The development into not only being a network for sharing knowledge and experience to also contributing to the equality agenda in Europe is a very good development.
- 

**Member Interview Comments**

- The strategy was developed from a good process and the output was of high quality.
- Evidence of positive positioning comes from EQUINET’s good knowledge of funding calls – useful to us.
- There is less political support for our topic than there use to be and some of the rhetoric is challenging. We have to face this. Our work on standards is helpful in this regard.
- In a post-fact influenced policy arena, it is essential that the network uses its influence with the data but also to tell the story of the issues its members address the an impact they are having. This relates also to an emphasis on values and upon ‘defending’ the territory.

**QUESTION 1b) Taking one aspect of one of the objectives of the Strategic Plan, Objective 2 (contributing to the European equality agenda), Equinet launched a major new Working Paper during 2016 on Strengthening and Developing Standards for Equality Bodies. To what extent in your view has this work and document been well received and is beginning to be of support to your organisation?**



**Member Survey Comments**

- The Working paper on standards is a very useful tool as they describe what should be the characteristics for an Equality Body. For example, our institution has had great support from

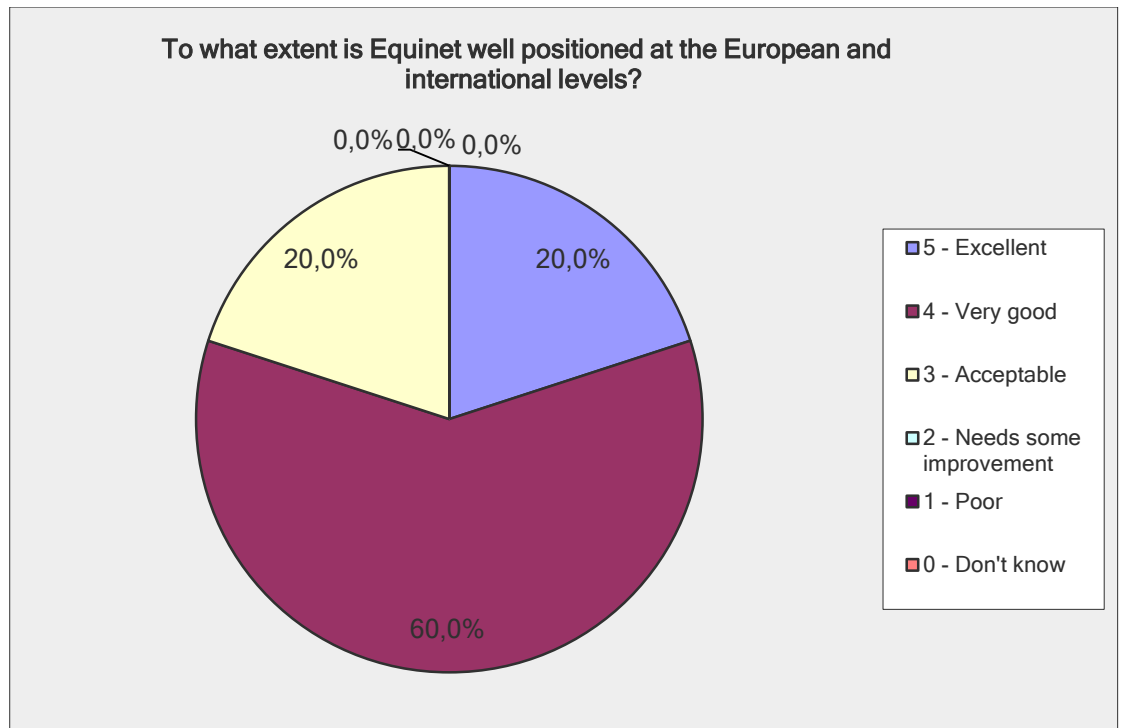


the working paper in its contact with the committee of inquiry appointed by the government to investigate, among a number of different areas, the role and responsibilities of the Equality Ombudsman. The Working paper is also a safeguard in case of future changes in the attitudes towards our institution concerning mandate, resources etc.

- It was a useful reference while doing legal research and overview of legal framework that regulates the work of national Equality Body. Research was performed by our project partner Lithuanian Center of Human Rights. The project is funded by the EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme
- It was a significant achievement to work together to produce the Working Paper – the Cluster approach worked well and the resultant Working paper has been well received and proved valuable in raising the debate on the needs for standards
- I really appreciate the Toolbox – Implementing Standards.
- This working document supported [name's] contributions to the consultation process on the drafting of the Human Rights and Equality Commission and Equality Bills that are envisaged to be enacted.
- As far as I know, the document hasn't yet been analysed by the organisation's top management
- I have noticed your work in this field, and talked to other members who have said this is important to them, especially in times like these when anti-discrimination rights and the institutions watching over them, are under a lot of pressure.
- The Working Paper is excellent, pertinent and timely. So far it hasn't received much consideration at political level due to national elections and the appointment of new Minister and Secretary of State, which are factors clearly exogenous to the Paper itself.
- The paper is well done, supports internal discussions of the organization, so far no improvements at national level
- Since its creation, the [name] has always had a mandate which is broader than the minimal standards, listed in Equinet's paper.
- Countries are very different

## External Survey Scores

### Question 1 To what extent is Equinet well positioned at the European and international levels?



### External Survey Comments

- Just to ensure proper visibility of its activities and members activities.
- Excellent regarding the European level. I cannot assess the extent to which Equinet is active internationally.

### External Stakeholder Interview Comments

- Equinet is uniquely well positioned for its core roles of interlocutor (between NEBs & EU institutions) and of capacity building of NEBs. Thus, when it speaks, it has credibility and is seen to add value.
- The area that needs further development, from a EU institution viewpoint, is EQUINET's ability to 'tell the stories' of EBs. Data trends are important, individual stories of cases illustrate the points, but even more value is added when EQUINET can speak powerfully about the trends in cases, the policy developments across its membership, the themes in EB work plans, etc
- I have the sense that EQUINET can strengthen further its links with other external policy actors
- We have had a very good dialogue on the topic of violence against women
- There is a need to raise the profile of the impact of and issues faced by NEBs
- EQUINET has a very positive persona - independent and rigorous - it is vital that it remain so
- It is very hard to show the impact of EQUINET and NEBs, but this is very important, for example within European political circles.
- Much of EQUINET's focus and credibility is derived from its mandate: it can do things that no other organisation can easily do, not least on the question of gender. EQUINET is in the right place doing the right things.

## Conclusion

It is hard to find a dissenting voice amongst those questioned to the notion that EQUINET is the right organisation with the right brief, well positioned to do the right things and has a clear sense of direction with a plan that is on track so far.

While one in five respondents claim that EQUINET is ‘acceptably’ positioned, one does not discern many reflections as to how it may be even better positioned.

Taking one aspect of the work, the Working Paper on Standards, that document seems to have met with clear approval and while it is acknowledged that countries are indeed different and the document hasn’t necessarily had great impact, it seems that the sector sees this document as important and well-timed.

External stakeholders, in one or two cases, provide some hints about how EQUINET may sharpen things up even more, with reflections on how the stories of what’s going on in the sector, the trends can better be understood and disseminated. There is a sense that this may be a felt gap and a sense too that really added value can be had from improving in this area.

## Work Performance

### Equinet’s Year in 2016 at a Glance Compared

Here is a selection of some simple statistics to give a hint of Equinet’s production and the cost at which it was delivered during 2016, compared with 2015, 2014 and 2013 (Figure 4). These data are drawn from Equinet’s output Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and other sources.

Figure 2: Overview of Equinet's Activities over Three Years

Item	Quantity 2016	Quantity 2015	Quantity 2014	Quantity 2013
Reports published	5	5	8	8
Promotional materials issued <sup>2</sup>	7	5	7	14
Unique website hits per month <sup>3</sup>	2500	2382	1578	1398
Training and other learning events	9	14	5	13
Average attendance at the training and learning events <sup>4</sup>	22	32	73	27

<sup>2</sup> In the 2015 calculation, the following are included: Equinet Highlights, Brochure, key rings, notepads, roll-up stands, but if we should include all publications, this should increase by 5 to 9.

<sup>3</sup> Users that have had at least one session within the selected date range. Includes both new and returning users.

Communications events <sup>5</sup>	2	2	2	3
Participation in the Communications events	78	41	49	79
Gender balance at learning and communication events (women: men) <sup>6</sup>	No longer collected	No longer collected	46:21	83:17
Meetings of the five Working Groups (reduced to four Working Groups in 2015)	8	8	10	10
Average number of participants at each WG	19	18	20	20
Steering Committee meetings planned and held	4	5	5	5
Size of Secretariat (permanent employees, excluding interns)	6	6	5	5
Expenditure	€979,046	€919,805	€943,144	€944,000
Daily cost of running Equinet	€2,680	€ 2,520	€ 2,584	€2,586.00

This table illustrates that the volume of business very much carries on at a similar pace to previous years, with a slight revision downwards as there was an acknowledgement that slightly fewer activities may yield slightly more impact.

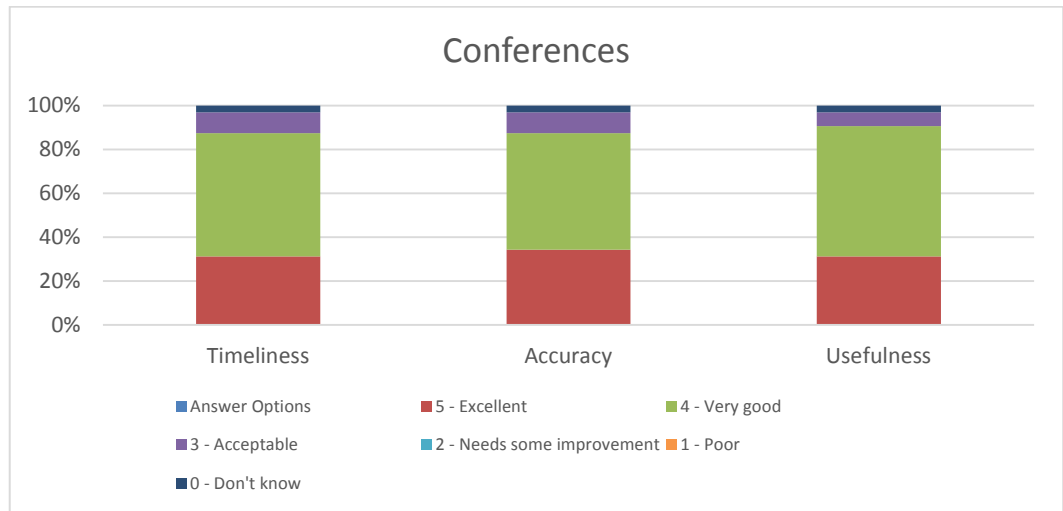
<sup>4</sup> Excluding conferences this year

<sup>5</sup> Considering this the conferences that Equinet organize (Gender Equality & Freedom of Movement Directive)

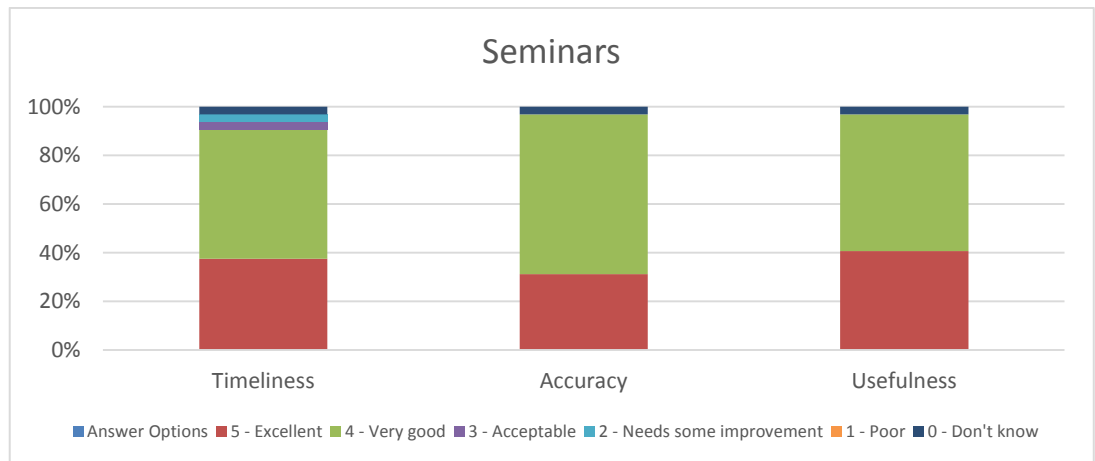
<sup>6</sup> No information was gathered on gender balance this year, as it is no longer requested by the EC, and it removed from our lists as not being sensitive to other genders.

Member Survey Scores

**QUESTION 2a (Members):** Taking each of the work areas in turn, what is your view of their timeliness, accuracy and usefulness, i.e. their quality and impact?

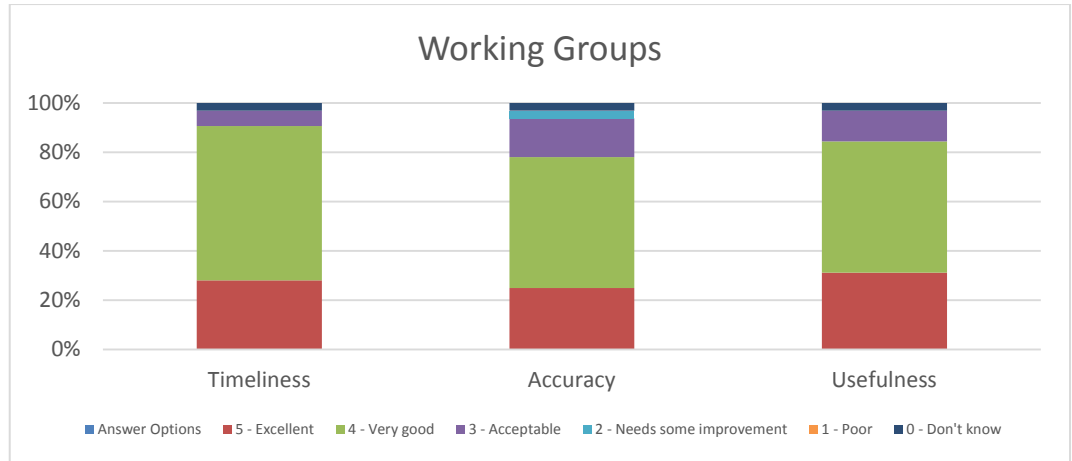


These represent similar scores to last year.

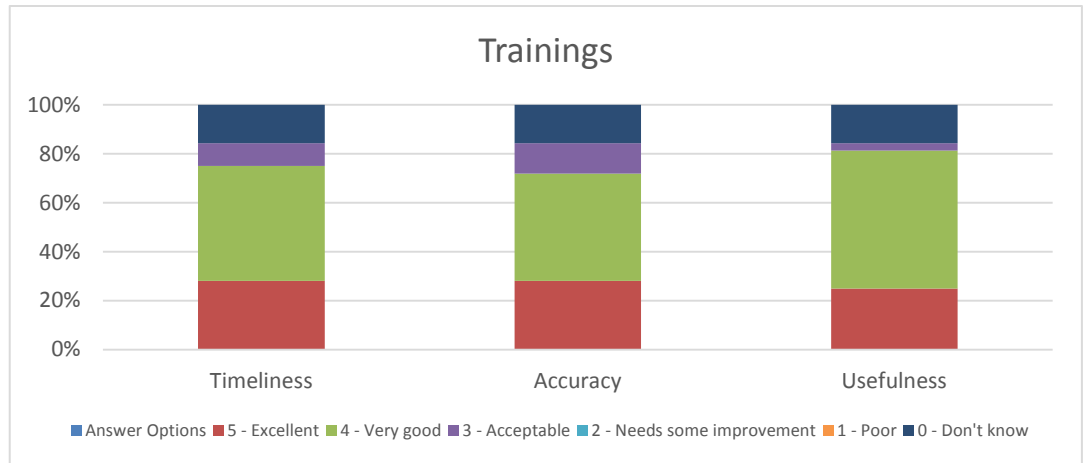


While broadly similar scores to last year, there is perhaps a slight uptick over the year past.

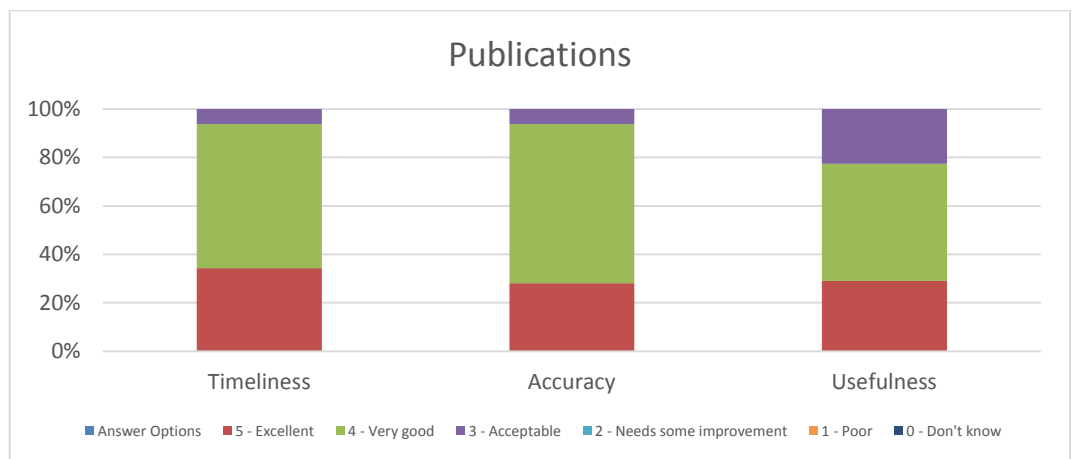




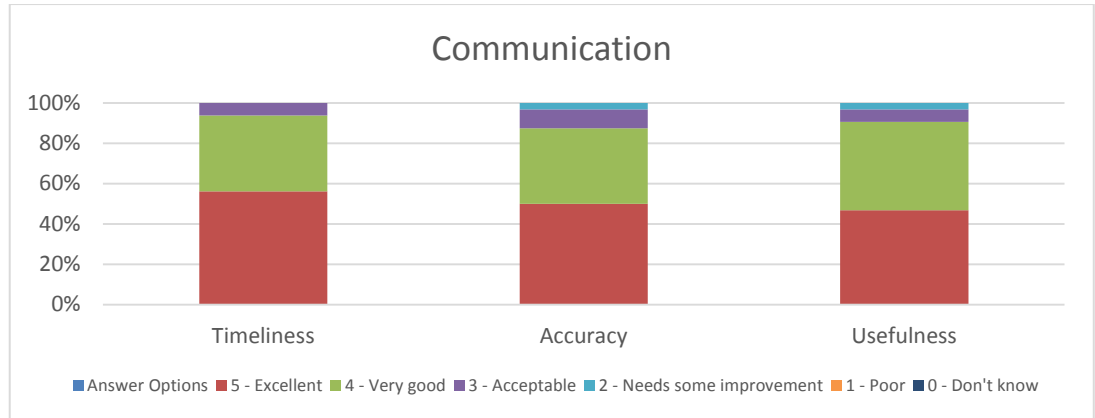
While the profile is similar to last year, the proportion of ‘excellents’ is lower but the proportion of ‘very goods’ is higher.



The results are similar to last year.

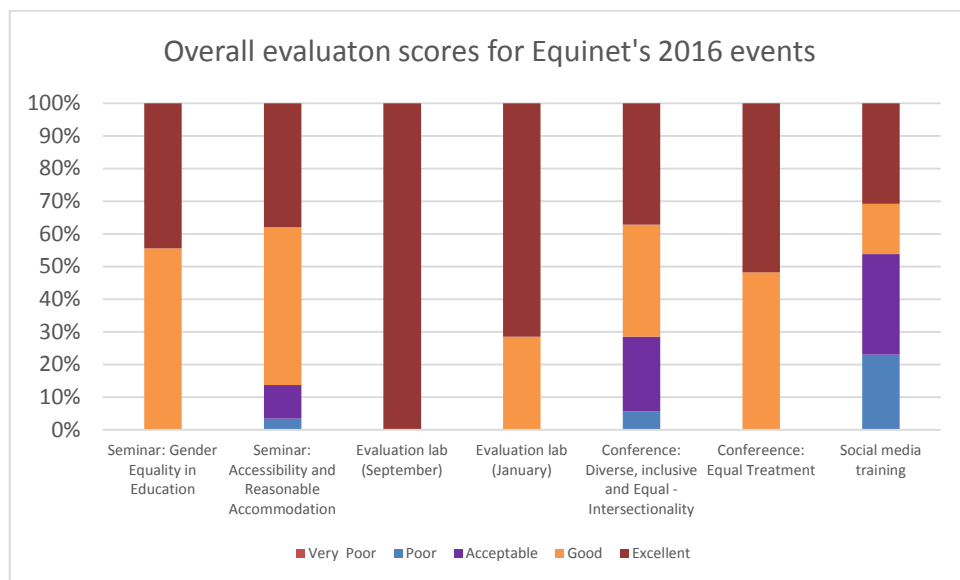


Overall the proportion of ‘very good’ and ‘excellent’ is higher, but of those ‘excellent’ shows a slight fall from last year.



Not directly comparable with last year, since previously the data were separated between internal and external communications, but these scores are generally very high in both years.

These scores broadly accord with Equinet’s own post-event evaluation data. Taking three of the questions from the participants’ evaluation sheets for the training and evaluations, a positive picture emerges:



While a couple of the scores seem slightly patchy, notably social media training, the scores are generally high and slightly higher than last year overall.

### Member Survey Comments

**QUESTION 2b) (Members): How could the needs of Equinet’s highly diverse membership be met better in the future?**

- We value the continuous use of the cluster format with its focused way of working with clear mandates, goals and time limits. The clusters give more flexibility and is a suitable format considering the diversity of needs that exist among the members. The clusters also makes it easier for us to prioritize, both regarding in which groups to participate and whom to send.

- Seminars and trainings could be more tailored to needs of different categories of bodies but also in relation to different categories of staff in the same way as training is done for communication officers. We are aware that such a working format could result in smaller but more meetings.
- Language remains an issue so encouraging translations of key documents could help.
- More short-term projects to willing organizations that have similar powers.
- Don't have any specific idea, I don't think that diverse membership is a relevant issue right now
- Consider back to back meetings to reduce travel time and costs.
- Survey Equinet members about the themes/subjects they need/want to work in Equinet
- Thematic working groups, clusters are a good solution. But also information concerning fields outside of our competences are useful and inspirational, so diversity of members is not a conceptual problem (on the contrary), although it may cause difficulties in organising from time to time.
- I think it would be ideal if seminars are held on more specific topics, for example, focusing on discrimination faced by people with disability. The conferences organised are sometimes generic and for all equality bodies dealing with different issues (racial discrimination, gender, disability), and hence not specifically target the issues faced by for instance, people with disability.
- In addition, it would also help if there are disabled people speaking during conferences and also attending conferences and other activities organised by EQUINET.
- I haven't given this a lot of thought, but maybe some regional meeting points should be considered? I find that both the language issues and the fact that the Nordic countries are quite similar, makes it especially useful to work together with Nordic members.
- I have only attended one seminar, but would like to give you credit for the way you managed to make it relevant for representatives from very different disciplines (I work in communications, but thought the presentations of law cases were really interesting and not too hard to follow.)
- The new cluster for quasi-judicial bodies is a great way to address specifics, applicable for the institutions with broader mandates. Perhaps dividing the members into smaller groups, based on their similarity could be beneficial for certain activities. This is something Equinet is already doing to a certain extent, but maybe it could be developed further.
- To organize thematic meetings according to protected grounds and according to the role of NEBs in discrimination
- We believe Equinet secretariat works very good in organizing events on the key topics which are relevant for the member states.
- As the member states are very different, it is possible that all member states are not interested in all topics.
- Equinet is already doing the best – listening in the needs and wishes of the member states.
- More sharing of cases and solutions.

## Interview comments – Members

### Highlights of the year included:

- I have admired the skill of listening in action to really hear what members are feeling and using that information to facilitate greater understanding and better joint working. Some of these conversations are long-terms ones.
- High-level attendance at some of our meetings, eg AGM...
- ...and high-level involvement in some of the key policy areas: hint of a breakthrough at this level? We have an increasingly strong sense of legitimacy
- As a newcomer, I particularly enjoyed the conferences
- Choice of topics, eg religious rights...
- ...intersectionality...
- ...disability...
- ...and young people... are important issues and ones that can easily be overlooked.
- Seminars – they have improved a lot over the years
- ...the high standard of speakers
- Communications, especially the new Comms Strategy in place, but also examples like the excellent newsletter
- Excellent website – a key resource
- Higher social media presence
- Our first foray into press releases
- Gender equality network
- Policy working group
- Consultation meetings and opportunities to work with ENNHRI
- Great informal contact at the official and political levels
- The professionalism of all the events
- Just opportunities to come together and share perspectives and experience, in spite of our differences

### Challenges in the year included:

- The very size and complexity of the network is a challenge – and one that needs to be taken forward
- I feel the need for specific information on how things are in other EBs, e.g. study visits, rather than simple information exchange, so perhaps EQUINET can facilitate this?
- What happens to Europe itself – Brexit, several key national elections
- Not sure the Evaluation Lab was such a success
- Securing funding for the involvement of NEBs from non-Member States, e.g. Georgia and Moldova.
- How to get the message across, through the ‘noise’ of publications and papers: how we ensure we are heard
- Not much media take-up yet, e.g. of our press releases

- Website is still not fully in place e.g. the Directory not yet fully promoted.
- There are some existential threats out there to our issue and we must be alert to them in our work planning and increase the level of solidarity within the network
- Is there a little bit of 'member fatigue'? Being pushed a little too hard? How do we sustain the energy?

## Conclusion

We see in the scores and from Figure 2 that EQUINET has maintained its level of activity and retained its high scores during the year past. So, already one can observe that the year has been a very positive one.

However, it is in the narrative comments that the real colour of the year emerges. Key highlights start with the Standards publication and the mature way in which disagreement seems to have been handled until a shared position could be reached that, once published has had some notable impact, early days though this still is for a long-running topic.

While there were highlights such as this, frequent mention was made of the routine things that EQUINET does: the clusters, the seminars, the trainings, the conferences, working groups and the professional way in which all meetings are arranged. But it is not just the formal element that is noticed here; the essential nature of a network is professional networking for the sector in question and mention is made here of the great value that all formal interactions afford members just to swap stories and professional experience. The overall feeling that emerges from these comments is maturity, professionalism and engagement.

There is at the same time a rather beguiling conundrum: on the one hand, observers notice that the network may just be beginning to be slightly overworked, a little tired, surveyed out. On the other hand, there is the sense too that EQUINET is beginning to 'break through', to be welcomed into the offices of the most senior level players in EU institutions. It is beginning to be recognised for the standard and relevance of its contribution and is getting more calls from the top. That degree of credibility is an accolade, but it rests on the health and quality of the network to sustain the credibility.

As well as a conundrum, there is also an irony! Just as EQUINET is being heard and welcomed in new ways, a recognition of the maturity and power of the network, the direction of the policy is turning negative to equalities in many member state capital cities. While EQUINET may be being heard more, the issues it represents is all the harder to represent. And some of the comments in the interviews are picking up on this: how can we be heard? How can we get our story across? How can we make sure our message gets above the noise?

Meantime, and more prosaically, but equally as important there are hints in the data for a little more segmentation of events, a little more focus on specific and unnoticed policy topics, questions that are perhaps just outside the mandates of some organisations, for more regional groupings. Thus, while the bigger picture

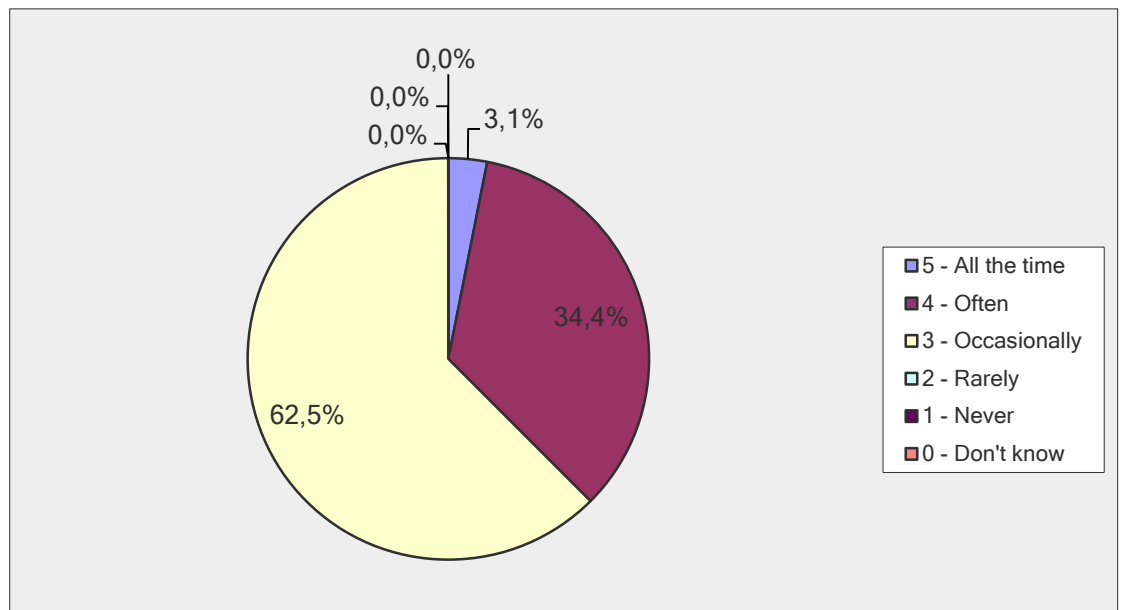
is changing, there may be hints too of ways in which the routine can be even more powerfully nuanced to please members even more.

But the overall takeaway on EQUINET’s activities during the year? To reiterate for avoidance of doubt: 2016 was another high-quality performance.

## Publications

### Statistical scores – Members

**QUESTION 3a** During the year, EQUINET has published 6 reports; to what extent does your organisation make use of these (and previous) publications of EQUINET in your work?



**QUESTION 3b)** In October 2016, EQUINET launched the European Directory of EQUALITY bodies. Do you find it useful? Do you use it in your work? Do you have suggestion for improvements?

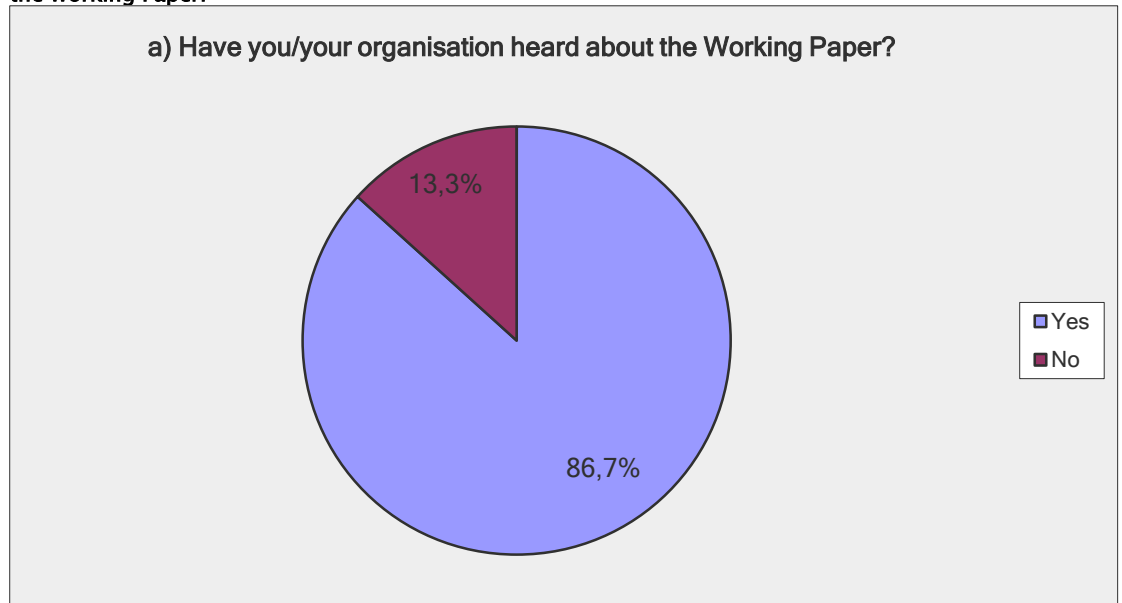
### Member Survey remarks

- Yes, this is a useful document. The website is a little out dated in its overall appearance, but this is not a hindrance to its usefulness in any way.
- Yes, we use it both to learn more about other institutions and referring others who ask for information about us in English to look into the directory.
- One kind of information that maybe should be included as a table is the different forms of discrimination that the bodies have to handle such as direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and inadequate accessibility.
- Frequently used to collect information on scope of functions, domains and grounds of equality bodies in other countries
- Its very useful, especially in regard of comparison with other equality bodies
- Yes, we find it very useful.
- Useful yes, haven't yet used it for our work but just dipped into it for reference

- We use it rarely. That means it requires more promotion.
- Very useful. Great tool. Highly important to keep it updated.
- It is important and yes we find useful in contacting Network members
- Yes, even when looking for project partners.
- In Work Plan 2017, it is said that the Working Group Policy Formation except for supporting dissemination and use of publications also will follow up on them. The Equality Ombudsman support such an activity. Our opinion is that the number of reports in forms of papers and perspectives could be reduced. Before deciding about which papers or perspectives should be published, it is important to make a close needs assessment and hopes that is included in the follow up by the Working Group. What does Equinet need for its proactive work during the incoming year and how has previous documents been received by members?
- Following the proposal to reduce the number of reports the number of questionnaires to gather information from member bodies could also be reduced. Even when the questionnaires are said to be short each question tends to be divided into several parts.
- If papers or reports are based on questionnaires it would be helpful when proofreading if the questionnaire and the paper follows the same structure. There also must be time enough for close examination of the draft by the institutions which has contributed before the reports are published and/or presented at conferences.

### External Survey Scores

**Question 4: In June 2016, EQUINET launched its Working Paper on developing Standards to strengthen national equality bodies in Europe. a) Have you/your organisation heard about the Working Paper?**



### External Survey Comments

**Question 4b) To what extent has your organisation engaged with the work of Equinet on developing standards for equality bodies?**

- Our organisation has own standards which have been partially inspired by Equinet's work but [Name] has not been involved as such in the work of Equinet's standard for equality bodies.
- I believe other colleagues have been involved in this.



- We are aware that Equinet is calling for Standards to strengthen national equality bodies and included several recommendations on this in our Policy Paper on Equality & non-discrimination in April 2016.
- Yes
- We are considering a request by Equinet to develop an Opinion on this topic
- It is great WP. We've translated it in [Language] and posted it at our web site.
- So far not, to my knowledge.
- Not sure.
- To a very limited extent, as this has been considered outside of [Name's] direct mandate.
- We have a regular dialogue to ensure synergies.

### Interview Comments

- The work on standards, following an extensive four-year process, was finally and successfully launched as a publication with good representation from the Commission...
- ...and the translation of the Standards text into eight languages
- There are very different perspectives on the question of the Standards for Equality Bodies - and compromise will be important...
- ...and pushing further the standards agenda will be critical in the years ahead. Essential that this debate is positioned well.
- Make more of the 'legacy' publications

### Conclusion

The proportion of respondents who are drawing upon the published work of EQUINET is high. Perhaps many of them are not using the reports so often, but they report that they are there and of use. And in some cases, the use is extensive. The publications on Standards and Intersectionality received most mentions.

There are hints in the data about refinements, things that EQUINET is no doubt aware of, that help ensure there is greater impact from its intensive work, such as: stronger promotion within and beyond the network, improving the website, emphasising the relevance for different types of organisations, a greater focus on the various grounds of discrimination and so on.

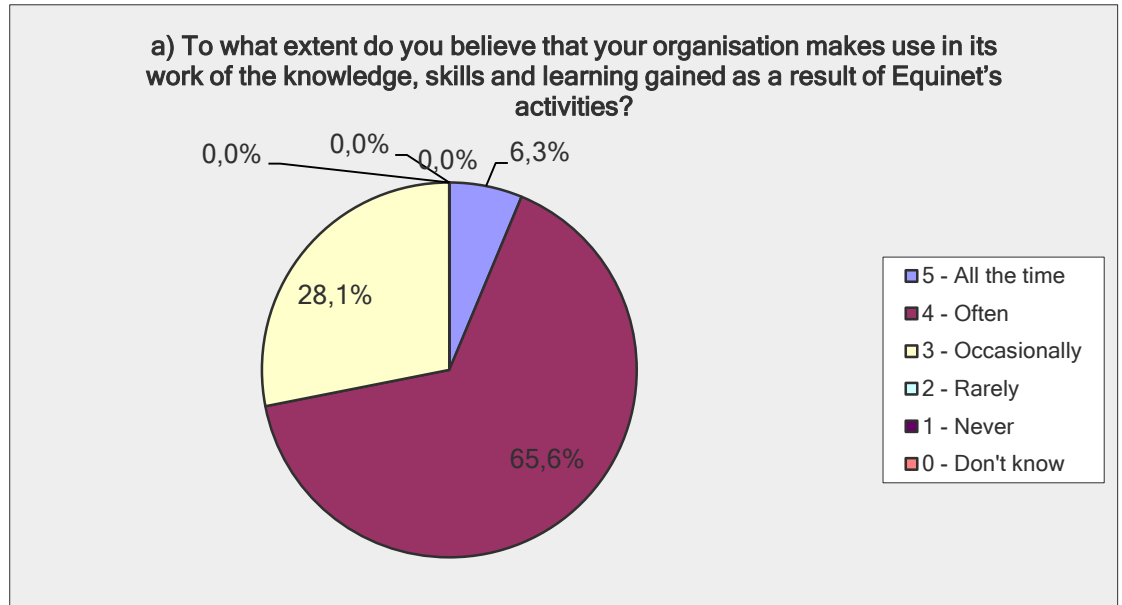
Overall, a positive note on publications. The agenda for the future is all about delivering maximum impact from them.



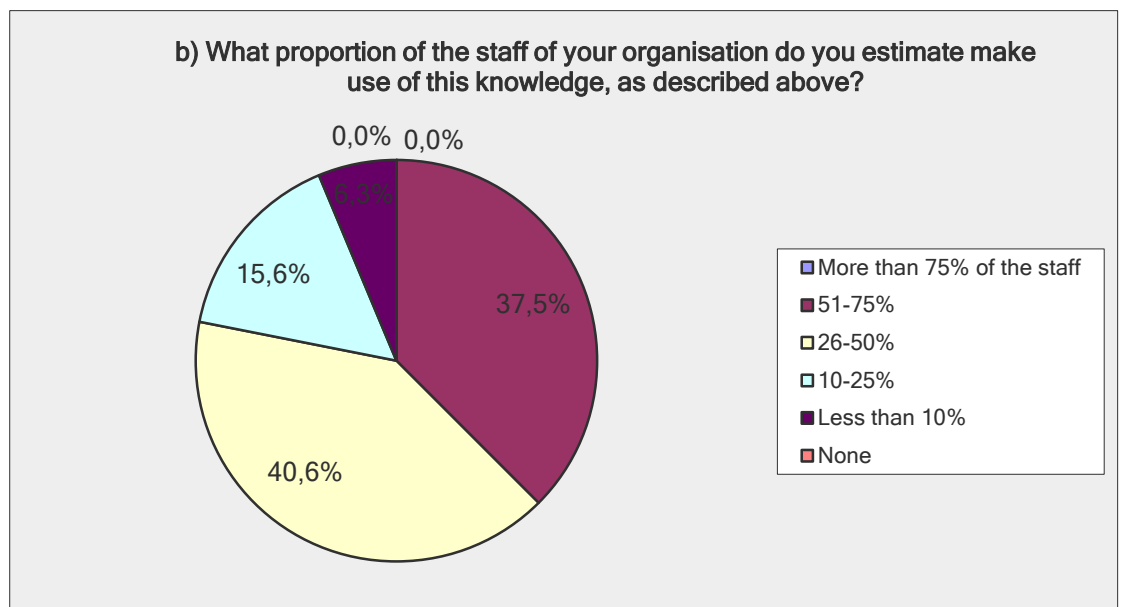
## Your Organisation and EQUINET

### Member Survey Scores

**QUESTION 4a) To what extent do you believe that your organisation makes use in its work of the knowledge, skills and learning gained as a result of Equinet's activities?**



**QUESTION 4b) What proportion of the staff of your organisation do you estimate make use of this knowledge, as described above?**

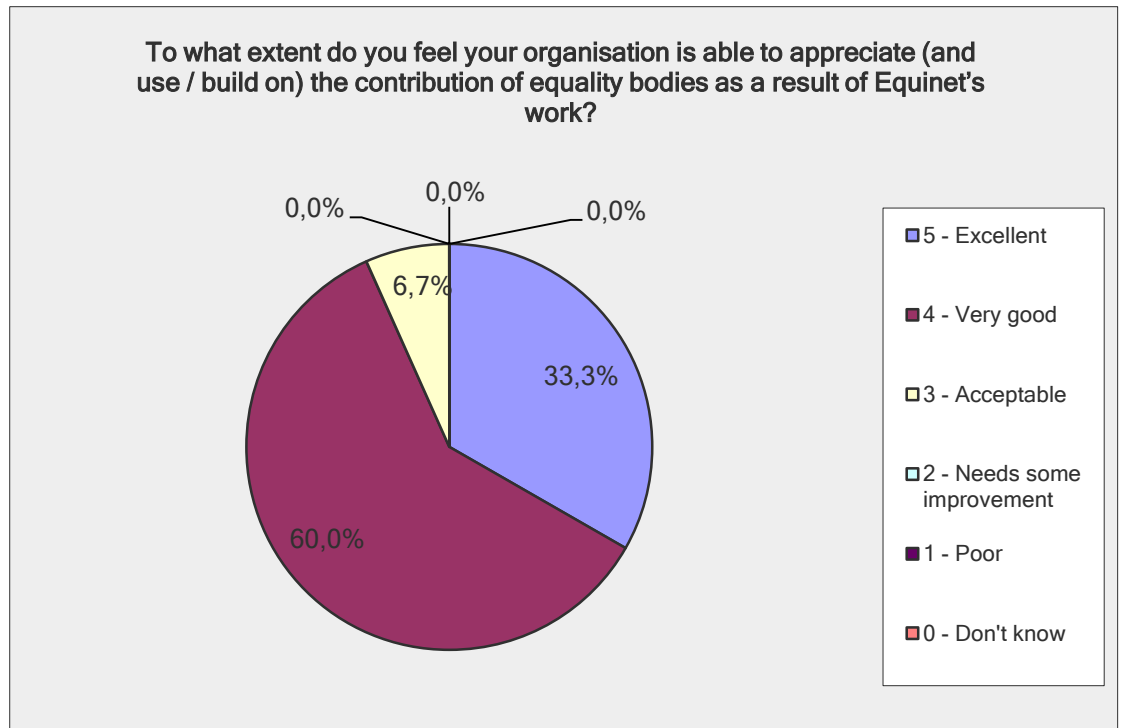


## Member Survey Comments

- It depends on the area of work and the grade of staff – policy/research/legal/communication staff more likely to use the knowledge; and professional staff more so than administrative staff
- Streaming of conferences and seminars could be a great tool how to deliver content to more staff of EBs.
- Mainly officers working on policy and training as well in the investigation of alleged cases of discrimination.
- We are an [Name], therefore, equality is only a limited field of our work.
- The [Name] Ombudsman is not an indicative case, due to the fact that only recently the field of equal treatment is a separate department within the Ombudsman with specific staff and specialization. So, it is not easy to respond accurately to the question, due to the fact that the majority of the staff is not very familiar with the specific work of Equinet. On the other hand, all staff members who deal with discrimination complaints have sufficient knowledge
- Staff who attend the activities organised by EQUINET are those mainly working in the PR, Equal Opportunities Compliance Unit and UNCRRPD sections
- We are a big organisation and our equality work is just one of the many human rights issue we work on. The number would be higher if I only answered on behalf of our equality department.
- The people attending working group get a lot of input from those, and usually have systems to share that knowledge with colleagues in their department. In our organisation, we seem to lack systems that can help us spread the knowledge to other departments as well. This is also often the case with seminars/trainings
- The majority of our officers who deal with equality/non-discrimination issues, have participated in Equinet's activities and have improved their knowledge and skills
- This is because a significant part of the administration does not get involved in the relevant anti-discrimination activities.
- The Ombudsman Office has a wide mandate, thus employees of the Office work on various topics, not only discrimination.

## External Survey Scores

**Question 2: To what extent do you feel your organisation is able to appreciate (and use / build on) the contribution of equality bodies as a result of Equinet's work?**



## External Survey Comments

- Being a membership organisation, as Equinet, and sharing some members with [name] makes it difficult to exactly identify the result of Equinet's work as a determinant for the improvement of the work of equality bodies in our organisation's work.
- It is very useful for us to hear experiences from other NEB's.
- Yes, quality outputs are always welcome and useful.
- There would still be space for closer cooperation with the national members of Equinet, when carrying out targeted awareness-raising activities in the individual Member States.

## Conclusion

These questions are attempting to get at the degree of penetration of EQUINET into member organisational life. And that degree of penetration is high, according to the survey. Almost three-quarters of members are using the knowledge, skills and learning of EQUINET. Pushing it a bit further, it seems too that in over a third of members, more than 50% of their staff team are using the work of EQUINET. And between a quarter and a half of the staff team of a further 40% of members are too.

The comments reveal what may be going on under the surface: it depends on the issue as to whether staff in member organisations pick up the work of EQUINET; penetration is higher amongst staff directly engaged with discrimination and equality; there may in some cases at least be need to disseminate to staff teams a greater understanding of what EQUINET is and

does and how it can be of value to them; and the nature of the member organisation’s internal communications can also be a factor.

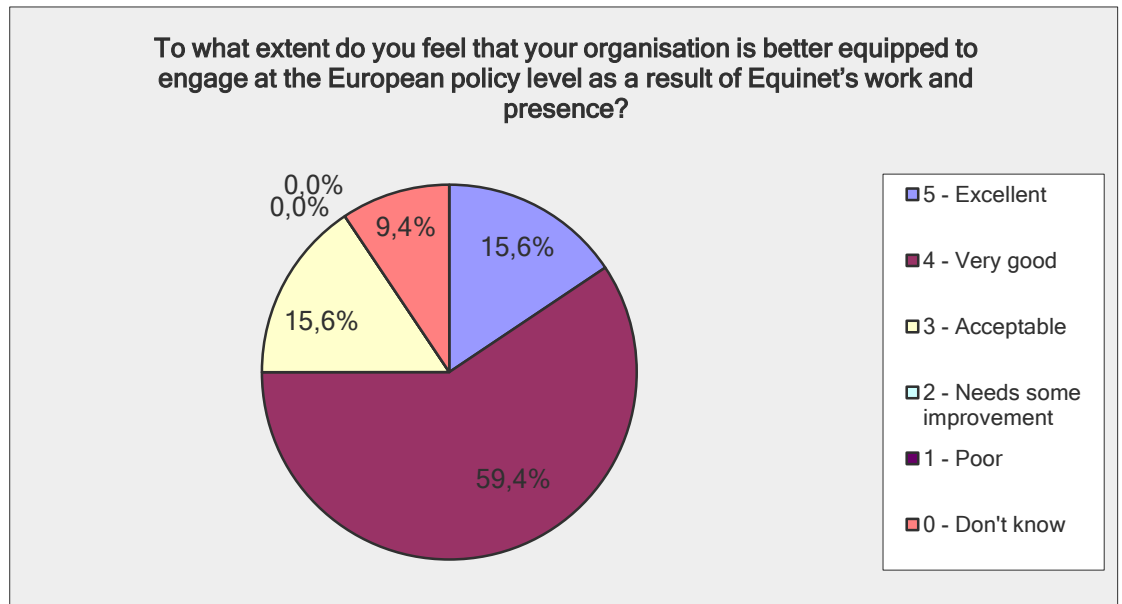
Interestingly, at least from those external agencies which responded, the level of engagement with the work of EQUINET is very high indeed: the proportion of appreciation and understanding of equality bodies because of EQUINET’s input is exceptionally high amongst this group of respondents.

What’s the message here? It seems that success is built on two things: picking the right topics that touch interlocutors’ agendas, be they internal or external, and really good information flows. Hints for the future point to even great sophistication in this two points.

## The European Dimension of your work

### Member Survey Scores

**QUESTION 5: To what extent do you feel that your organisation is equipped to engage at the European policy level as a result of Equinet’s work and presence?**



These scores are slightly higher than last year, when 13.3% scored excellent.

### Member Survey Comments

- Equinet is an important link to the European level, both by forwarding information from the EU, Council of Europe and other actors to members but also by representing the Equality Bodies at meetings which has led to a greater openness for EB contributions in different fora.
- Very good information flow and insights into what is current and relevant for our work
- Knowledge gained enhances contribution on gender equality and discrimination.
- Also synthesis in bulletins facilitates the process.
- The staff that participate in Equinet WGs and events are certainly better prepared.

- I have answered "Don't know" since we seldom operate at European policy level.
- You have useful contacts, and by letting us meet other equality bodies, you make it a lot easier for us to learn strategies from each other.

### Interview Comments

- One example of the impact for our organisation was when we consulted other EBs for something we were considering. This is pan-European action.
- In the WGs we demonstrate how equipped we are by learning, contributing and directly acting at the EU level. EQUINET facilitates this.
- For us, the work of EQUINET helps us more at the national level – we don't aim to do much at the EU level. Perhaps we could do more.
- EQUINET works to strengthen the Equality watchdogs across Europe. Our inputting to and being influenced by the Standards work is a great example of this: it helps keep equalities on the map.
- We are equipped because we help EQUINET be more equipped

### Conclusion

This is an interesting question because some members perhaps don't easily think that they are themselves working at the EU level. And yet, 75% of respondents feel that they are indeed much better equipped because of the work of EQUINET in this area.

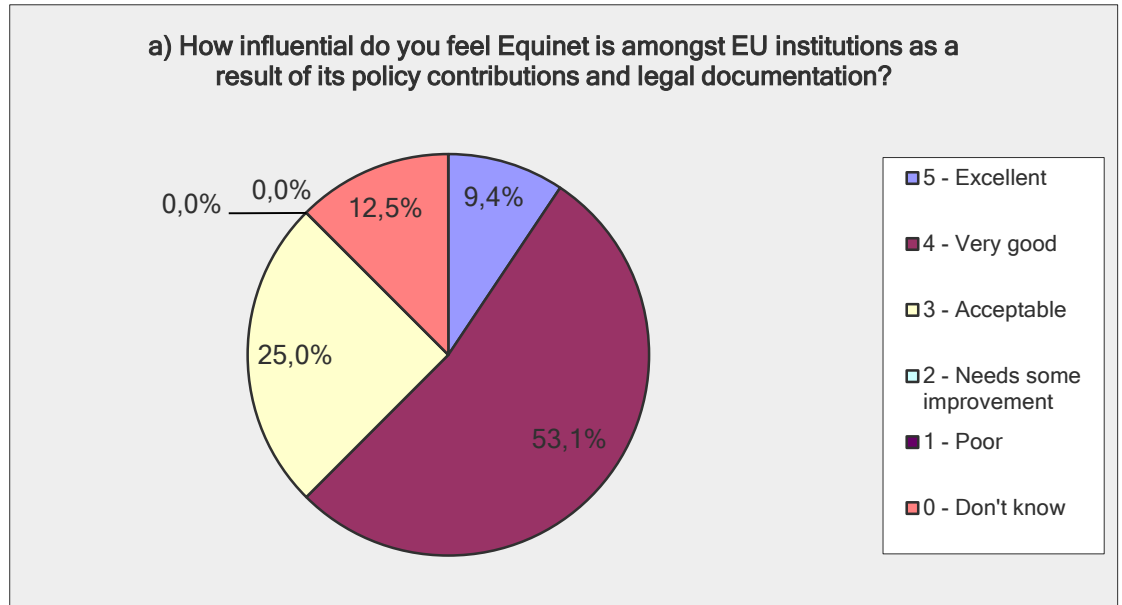
This success is attributed again to high quality information flow and, since high quality information means to be selective, it seems that EQUINET can be choosy about which information, about which topics it communicates, the way it communicates that information and the audiences for each communication, i.e. the networks.

Herein too lies the pointer for the future refinement of this. This competence is a critical one for any network leader: while intangible it is arguably the one collective skill that much need to be nurtured and safeguarded the most.

## Influence

### Member Statistical scores

**QUESTION 6a) How influential do you feel Equinet is amongst EU institutions as a result of its policy contributions and legal documentation?**

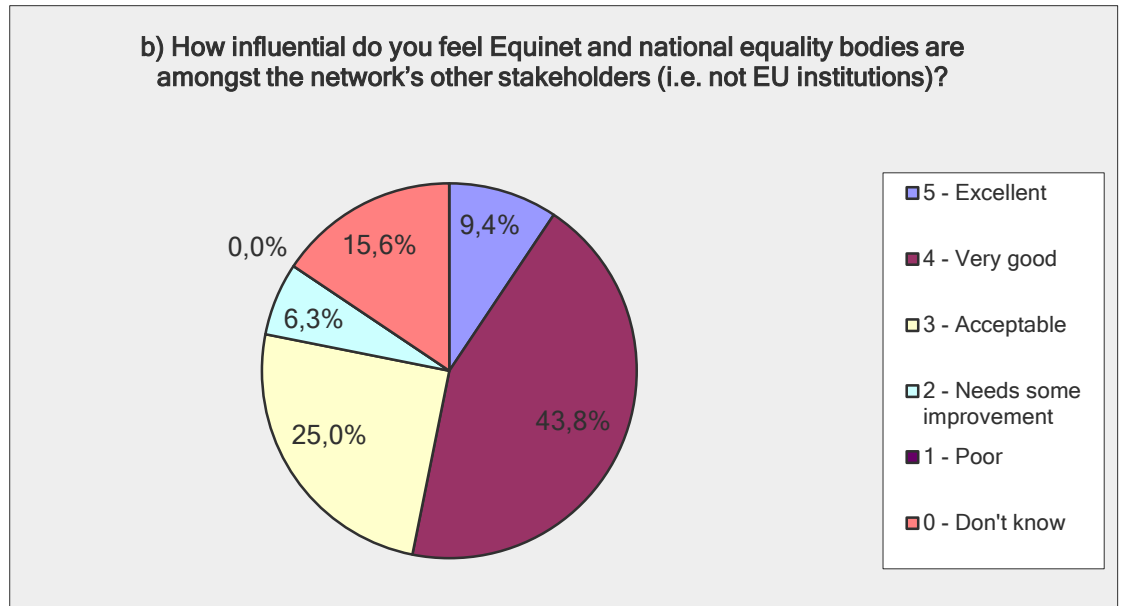


These scores are a small improvement on last year, when there were a few ‘needs improvement’ scores and now there are none.

### Member Survey Remarks

- Equinet has taken a giant leap forward as a strategic player on the field and should continue in that direction, to keep focus on what Equinet and its members themselves want to accomplish in regard to the ongoing and planned work amongst EU-institutions and formulate common positions regarding these issues.
- I think there is very strong influence – and increasingly so, our contributions are valued by Commission officials and Cabinet staff – some firsts this year like Director General of Justice speaking at AGM, Commissioner Jourova speaking at reception in June; good references to our publications and to role of equality bodies in key Commission documents; important invitations to speak at Commission events
- More engagement with Timmerman’s cabinet is highly recommended.

**QUESTION 6b) How influential do you feel Equinet and national equality bodies are amongst the network's other stakeholders (i.e. not EU institutions)?**



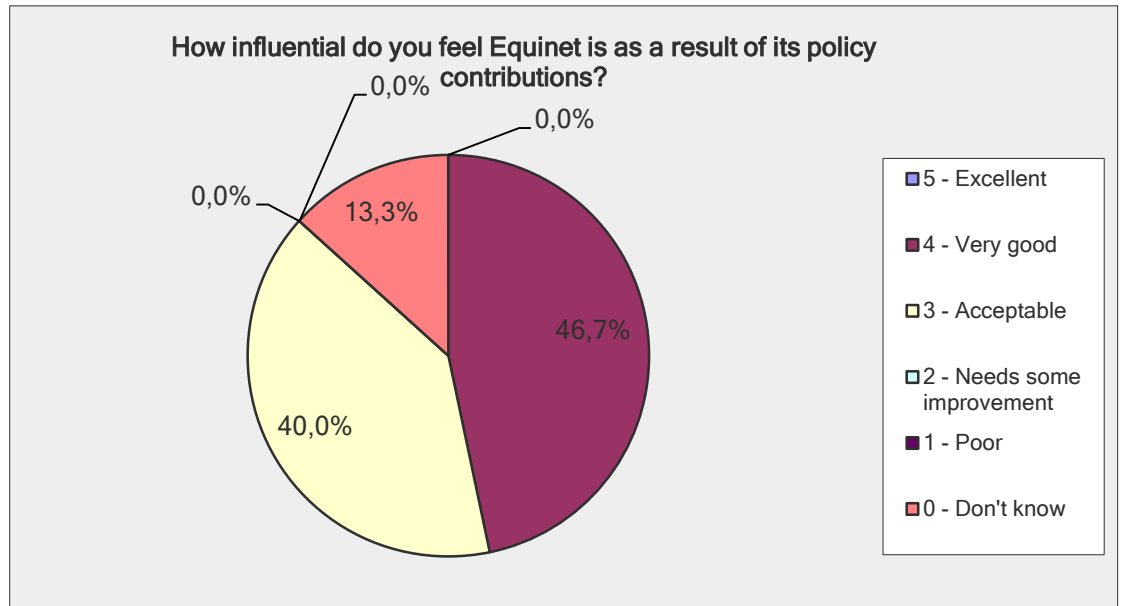
These scores represent an improvement overall on last year, in which there were fewer excellent scores and more acceptable and other weaker scores.

**Member Survey Remarks**

- To be even more effective Equinet should continue to develop an even stronger focus on what Equinet wants these institutions to accomplish and formulate common positions regarding these issues.
- Clearly Anne and the Secretariat staff are very well respected amongst other European networks
- This is something that depends more on the readiness of national institutions to draw on the expertise of Equinet, rather than on Equinet itself.

## External Survey Scores

### QUESTION 3 How influential do you feel Equinet is as a result of its policy contributions?



These scores are slightly lower than last year, when there were a number of excellent scores and only 25% who gave an acceptable score.

## External Survey Comments

- This very difficult to appreciate as not involved in the preparation of Equinet policy work, we have no full view on what are the actual policy results achieved by Equinet.
- There is still an important scope for raising its profile, in particular to national govts and to "end-users"
- Well regarded influence at the EU level. However, influence should be (and could be) increased.
- Difficult to say – but applies to many of us. as Equinet does its own advocacy on the sidelines of the rest of the NGO equality community, it's difficult to assess the impact of their positions as we are seldom together. We try to update, but it's not always easy. Equinet has a good reputation, but that does not inform us per se of what are their concrete demands and how far they are taken into account by the decision makers.
- This is also due to a slowdown of overall equality policy priorities at EU level.
- This is very difficult to appreciate as not involved in the preparation of Equinet policy work, we have no full view on what are the actual policy results achieved by Equinet.

## Interview Comments

- EQUINET has a very strong reputation and is considered as a 'reliable partner', an important attribute in that it responds and informs and its reports are well written.
- The challenge is to reach all partners with its message at a critical time, especially the parliamentary partners
- I feel that the WG makes a difference – we work well together



- It is very hard to trace from EQUINET's influence to any actual change, but the influence is surely there.
- EQUINET is a visible player on the scene – perhaps it merits a higher profile?
- They were influential on us – we borrowed their strategic plan format. Thanks!
- With changes of staff, the situation amongst EQUINET's key partners can change rapidly and it too must respond promptly to these changes
- Shame the horizontal directive has more or less disappeared.
- EQUINET is in the right places, having the right conversations, with the right people.
- EQUINET is well-placed and influential, but when it comes to the key political battle – the preservation of equality in an adverse political climate – it is not clear that EQUINET will have impact there. Yet, that is an existential issue.
- The base of EQUINET's influence is the legal mandate of members and it is vital that EQUINET can support the safeguarding of that as well as it can.

### Conclusion

These data show that EQUINET continues to be a significant player, having influence and being called upon to represent the voice of its topic and its members. There are no doubt some major issues in its working environment over which it probably has little influence, while some respondents wished it had more influence than it in fact can have.

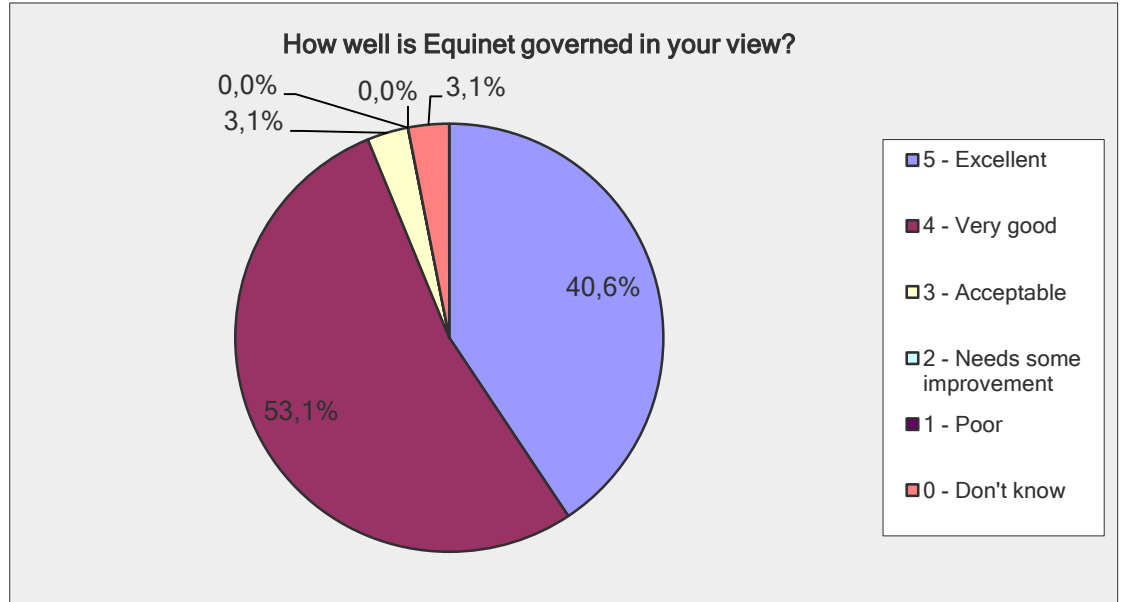
It seems to be the case that EQUINET's influence, at least amongst EU institutional and EU-level NGOs is not only strong but growing. At a time of political uncertainty, this can only be a positive thing and a position to be built upon and safeguarded in the years ahead.

There is a signal the perhaps increased attention to EP stakeholders may be fruitful.

## Governance

### Statistical scores

#### QUESTION 8: How well is Equinet governed in your view?



These scores are very similar to last year.

#### Member Survey Comments

- Clear structure in place, clear rules, open and transparent and good that elections for Board membership are also open and well done
- Excellent work by the Executive Board in promoting the goals of the network and implementing the work plan agreed by the members

#### Interview Comments

- A new governance team was elected last year and they have spent the year settling down.
- There is a good environment and relationships between board members. We can express our views and in doing so, this helps us get to the right result
- The board is inspiring for me – they give energy and are cheerful, with strong backgrounds to draw from
- We have successfully made some changes to the governance arrangements, which feels good. While not ideal for governance continuity, a two-year term is about as long as members can reasonably commit to
- There have been some challenging moments on the board: we had to settle the question of the board advisor and we are still working at getting the right collegial tone at board meetings
- While the board took a little longer to become cohesive again after the last elections, it now feels that it is beginning to perform
- Not all board members are well prepared for the meeting – essential that we all read all the papers to be able to play a full part in the meeting

- Boards set the tone for the organisation, so it is essential that board member adopt the right tone for meetings. Too quiet and there is not enough challenge, but too confrontational and there is not enough cohesion. We have constantly to work at getting the right balance.
- The board role is quite demanding – I have a lot of pressures on my time. Could the papers be shorter?
- Big changes are ahead with the changeover of Chair – we will miss the style of the current chair. The present chair is always available for meetings and calls. This is a vital quality for the next chair too.
- The board is in transition again.
- The style of the current board feels very different from the previous one
- The new board needs to work at being strategic – not quite there yet. Going forward, we need truly creative leadership for the network.
- Continue to be excellent relations between t board members and members of the secretariat

## Conclusion

It is well known in governance circles that weak governance leads to an organisation's decline. But that decline takes time. A wrong decision here, an opportunity missed there, or a vital question not asked at one point all impinge upon governance success. To be a strong governance team, a board needs to straggle the almost impossible between being a strong work team, drawing upon the richness in the room but also being brave enough to challenge assumptions and performance rigorously. All boards have scope for improvement in this regard. The problem often comes from the observation that strong boards often think they are weak, while weak boards may easily labour under the delusion that they are in fact excellent. When you're at the top, it's not easy to know which it is!

That's why feedback of the nature given in this report is so important. This kind of feedback provides signals from those who may not normally be open about their feelings to express them. In this case, the signals are very largely positive: the member scores are very high and the comments largely very positive.

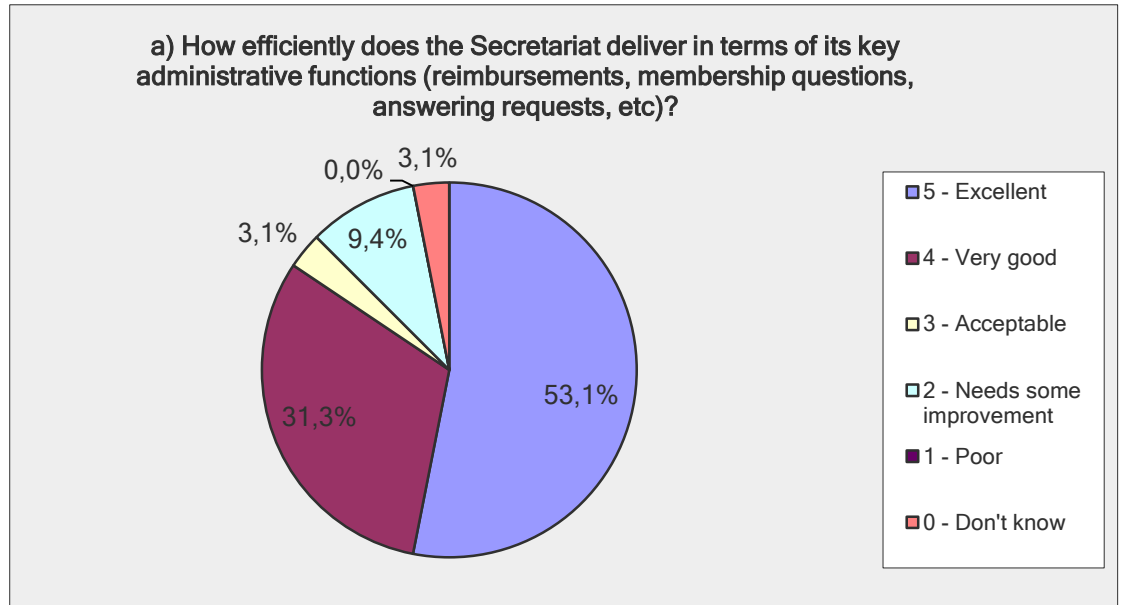
But there are at the same time some hints for the future. And they come more in the form of questions than of answers.

- What is necessary to ensure that a new board can settle down quickly
- Where a board member is not able to honour their commitments, how is that called out and spoken about
- When behaviour is not quite what is expected, how is that talked about and if necessary gently checked?
- What mechanisms can the board put in place to give a check on how strategic it is being, how well it is setting the right tone for the organisation as its overall leaders?
- Given the very short mandate for board members, how can continuity be fostered?
- What's the right process to ensure that EQUINET has the Chair that it needs for the next phase of its development?

## Equinet's Secretariat

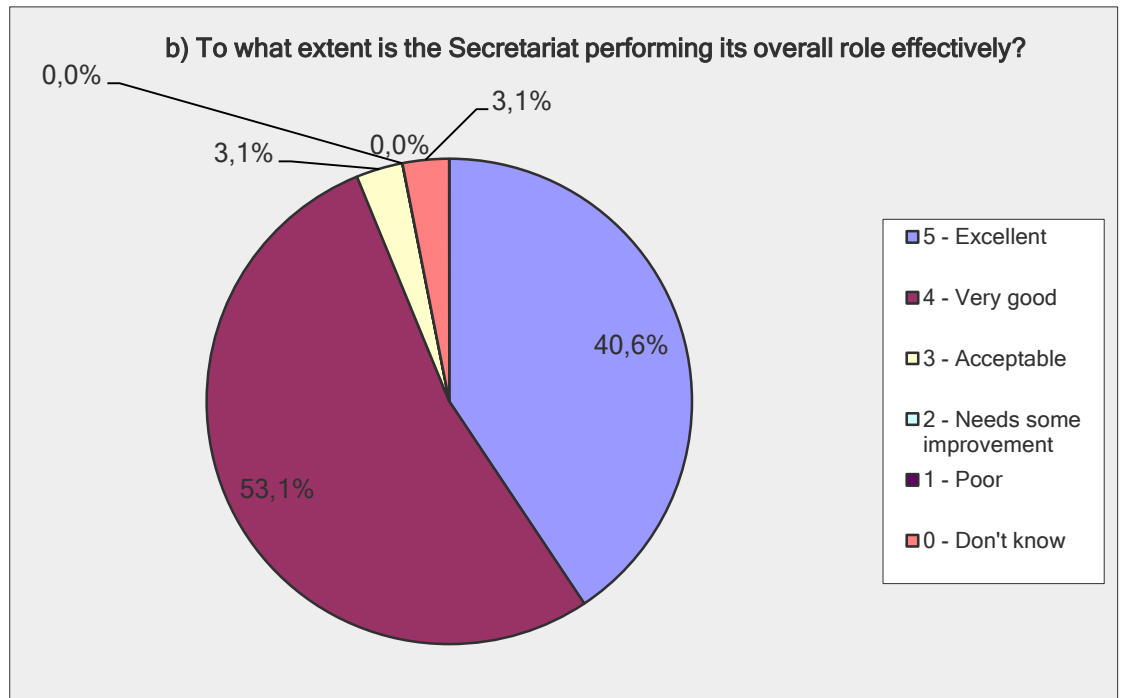
### Member Survey Scores

**QUESTION 8a: How efficiently does the Secretariat deliver in terms of its key administrative functions (reimbursements, membership questions, answering requests, etc)?**



Overall, this is a marked improvement on last year, with an increase in the number of excellent scores and a reduction in the number of acceptable scores. This overall improvement is slightly tempered by an increase from about 2% to 9% in 'Needs some Improvement'.

**QUESTION 8b) To what extent is the Secretariat performing its overall role effectively?**



**Member Survey Comments**

- We've had a full staff team this year – and this has shown in terms of our output.
- Incredible work is done by incredibly few persons. Eventual budget reinforcement should go to reinforce the strategic function to enable functions such as identification of strategic national cases of potential impact + possible intervention/other support. Too much work is put on editing/raising the quality of the reports. Better outsource reports to raise input quality and free up time for secretariat staff (see further comments below).
- Ensuring clarity of roles and making time for individual staff development needs to be addressed as well as maintaining the strong sense of team working
- We warmly welcome the planned improvements of reimbursement procedures, sometimes a more timely information on travel details would be helpful to facilitate administration in our institution.
- So proud of this team. And the response that the work has had over this last year has given the team a sense of recognition too.
- I guess the next phase is not just to maximise the capacity of the slightly larger staff team, but also to maintain that level of quality...the HR issues become more complex as we get larger

**Conclusion**

These scores are again exceptionally high and another recognition of the value that members and others see from the work of the staff team. There is a strong sense of collegiality which has been maintained, but also built upon year after year. Now with a full staffing complement, the levels of performance seem increase.

And with success come the next challenge, which in this case may be two-fold: complexity and sustaining motivation.

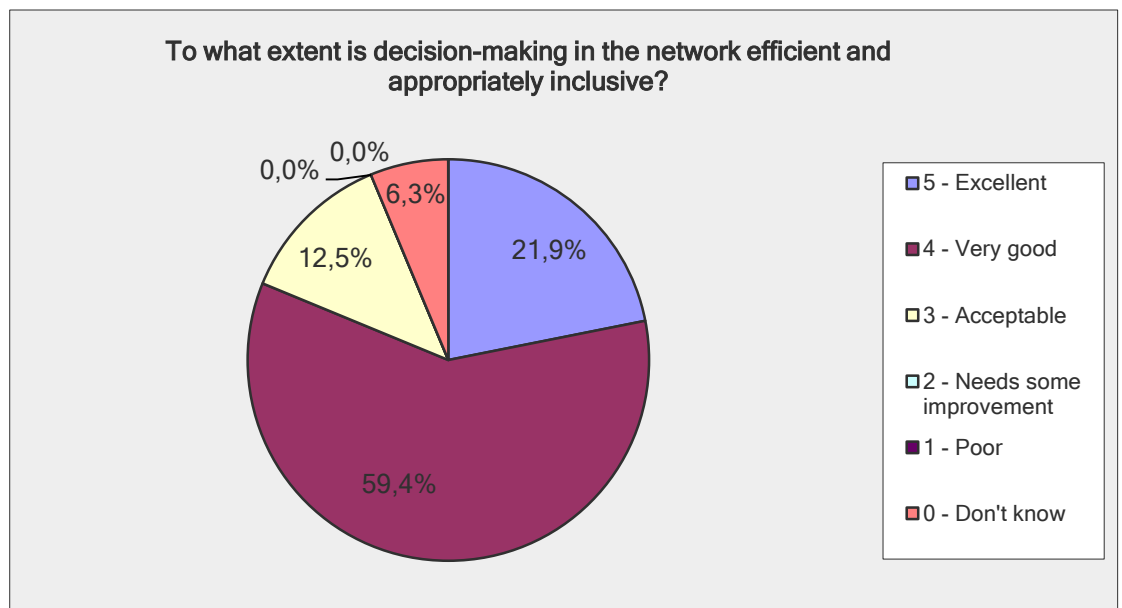
With size, even though it is still very small, comes greater complexity: more people leads to a greater range of both human dynamics, but also needs for support and clarity. As organisations become larger, they begin to need to put in place higher levels of bureaucracy and structure to regulate what was once informal in the smaller ‘family’ shaped organisation. And with greater structure and formality comes a degree of alienation. We just don’t like bureaucracies! Of course, EQUINET is still not a complex machine but even with an additional one or two people around, it will need just a little more formality to make things work smoothly.

The second challenge relates to the first. A high-performing team needs to keep that level of performance up year on year. How does it remain fresh and motivated?

## Network Decision Making

### Statistical scores

**QUESTION 9: To what extent is decision-making in the network efficient and appropriately inclusive?**



The wording of the question changed from last year, so the scores are not directly comparable, although the profile is broadly similar.

### Member Survey Comments

- The way member institutions now are involved in planning is highly appreciated.
- Democratic process at AGM.
- Listening is very strong in this network, I believe – and the desire to find a way through

- As suggested, it would be good if there are people with disabilities who attend and are the main speakers during events organised by EQUINET, since they are the one who are the experts in the field.

## Conclusion

A final question about network decision making, in which over 80% of those surveyed feel that the quality and process of decision making is high. A good score with no narrative concerns or points in the comments to speak of.

## Final Comments

### Member Survey Comments

**Question 10a) In 2017, Equinet will celebrate its 10th anniversary. Several activities are foreseen in the 2017 Work Plan (a conference, a celebratory evening and a special webpage). Which activities would you suggest to make the 10th anniversary of the network memorable?**

- A special webpage looks like good idea for a lasting way to mark the occasion, particularly if accompanied by photos from members of events over the ten-year period
- Good documentation
- The Conference
- A review of their 10-year work.
- All the above! And particularly working to ensure a clear vision for the next 10 years – for equality in Europe and for equality bodies
- All equality bodies should put the event logo on their sites. We also plan to promote the Equal Pay among practitioners and on this occasion, we will talk about the anniversary.
- As Board member I have already shared some ideas but I can't recall them right now.
- Conference
- Showcase of best practices
- A party. To have a good time all together
- Video (maybe humorous?) showing the diversity and strength of the network
- A special ad campaign of Equinet's work and history, a study comparing the past and the present of Equinet, focusing on the challenges and achievements of the past 10 years as well as the challenges of future decades.
- A party...possibly?
- An anniversary conference (with guests from other institutions) and a celebratory evening would be a great idea
- A snapshot of the activities organised by EQUINET during the past years .
- A campaign aimed at European institutions, to make use of the Equinet network? European parliament etc.
- Try to get Justice Susanne Baer of the Federal Constitutional Court in Germany to speak at an event. I heard her on 25 November 2016 at the annual legal seminar of the European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination and her speech was extremely powerful and inspirational when it comes to how to go forward with our work. Without a doubt the best presentation I have heard in my years working with equality.
- 10 years 10 stories? An online exhibition/or just on Facebook (like a bigger version of the stories in the calendar? People like to read/see real people. Small videos or text/photo based.
- Already good activities planned
- The activities planned are fine.
- Party, Party, Party!
- It might be interesting to share all those information through the Equinet Facebook profile.
- Video campaign

- An overview of the past 10 years, from the beginning to the present days
- More teamwork?

**Question 10 b) Any additional comments and reflections**

- Here's to the next ten years!
- New methods for gathering data should be considered, for example to further extend the work on collecting and results from researchers and scientists that can be useful in the development of work in our field. The Equinet Paper Sanctions Regime in Discrimination Cases and Its Effects by Katrin Wladasch of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights is a good example.
- The professional experience of working with Equinet, the possibilities it provides for peer support, knowledge exchange and strengthening the position of Equality bodies in the EU is priceless. Happy 10th Anniversary, Equinet!
- Each of the above activities foreseen to celebrate the 10th anniversary are relevant.
- Equinet has helped the CPD improve the work and reflect on some new topics/issues that were not very familiar to us being a new established institution.
- Thank you Equinet for your support and cooperation so far!
- Thanks!
- We are grateful for the work of the Equinet, because in this way we can have a greater impact on policies and strategies of the EU.
- It is very important to straighten EQUINET visibility and standards to be closer to each stakeholder in nation countries. For sample in our country when we need to give an argument in creating national standards we made a reference that it is in the line with EQUINET standard and documents. In many of those opportunities it was well accepted as the very good or even an excellent reference to our initiative. We must use it even more in creating common standards in Europe
- Equinet has done an outstanding job representing us on the European Level and bringing us into direct contact with key EU decision makers. We are grateful for this support.
- Happy birthday, EQUINET, and thank You for your work!
- It would be very useful to include in the main activities of Equinet the organisation of study visits between national equality bodies (5–6 each time) on specific issues of high interest or concern
- Keep up the good work, Equinet
- Well done for your work. It would be ideal if more practical training is provided as part of EQUINET activities.
- Sometimes the stream of questionnaires is a bit much and the timelines of questionnaires can at times be a bit short.
- Keep up the excellent work!
- Our president would be in favour of interpretation during activities, since his English is poor
- Keep working like that. Equinet has developed a lot during the last years and is doing a terrific job. It is especially encouraging for relatively weak national equality bodies.
- We did a good Job within the last 10 years!
- On behalf of the CPD I would like to thank Equinet for all the useful activities and we wish to continue our successful collaboration in the future.
- Thank you for this survey

**External Survey Comments**

**Question 5 a) In 2017, Equinet will celebrate its 10th anniversary. Several activities are foreseen in the 2017 Work Plan (a conference, a celebratory evening and a special webpage).**

- A viral capsule with a strong message on equality highlighting that it is a benefit for social cohesion in diverse societies.





- Given the current political climate in Europe and beyond as regards equality issues, I think that an alliance of international organisations working on this is more and more needed. So, whether is a conference or any other event I'd leave to Equinet's discretion, but the main thing would be to reinforce our common message and communicate jointly about it.
- Ensure national activities are taking place to reach out to potential beneficiaries of equality bodies.
- Emphasize that the existence of equality bodies are also the results of EU strength and unity.
- There is still a long way to go and I would therefore suggest a combination of modesty and ambition.
- Do activities in and around the national or regional/local EB offices – to make it useful and impact rich for the end user: the target group. And also for national/local policy makers.
- Conference and some interesting gifts (visibility)
- Maybe an op-ed in all 28 MS, on their anniversary day, that would affirm the vision of Equinet about equality in Europe, kind of "We demand ....." which would articulate a bold vision, around "universal access" or something like that. it would also help framing some of our demands.
- An EU wide communication campaign on equality would be a very timely opportunity to raise awareness of equality bodies overall. As most cases of discrimination remain unreported, awareness raising among EU citizens remains key.
- In addition to those mentioned, a high-end audio-visual product showing the main achievements could be useful.

**Question 5b) Any additional comments and reflections**

- Keep up the good work and cooperation with us! :-)
- Equinet is a valuable partner and we are hoping to intensify collaboration in the coming years. We very much appreciate their contribution to a capacity-building session of youth organisations on anti-discrimination frameworks and would like to strive for increased cooperation between youth organisations and equality bodies in the coming years, together with Equinet
- EQUINET is an extremely valuable partner and vital to advance our work on Roma rights. We truly appreciate their professionalism, knowledge, expertise and availability to cooperate with us throughout the years.
- Congratulations for the good work! It is always a pleasure to cooperate with Equinet. The professionalism and dedication of its staff are remarkable.
- Thank you for the great work you are doing and the excellent cooperation!

**Conclusion**

There is such a strong sense of celebration in these eclectic comments! A sense of a milestone being marked, of a job started and done well and of an organisation that has grown to maturity after its first ten years. Most of all, perhaps, the notion that EQUINET is a 'valued partner' – we need you, keep doing the good work.

There are some interesting suggestions in the comments and all of them can be and many of them will already have been considered. The notion of ten years, ten key point and ten key stories is attractive and may be something that members can put on their own websites with a logo.

But it's the riotous enthusiasm of these last comments that comes across strongly – there is warmth and enthusiasm at the centre of the thoughts here.

## 4. Analysis

### Birthday Blessings: Reasons to Celebrate

As EQUINET prepares the cake and thinks about lighting the candles for its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, it has several reasons to be cheerful, to think that, at the grand, old age of 10, it has lived its short life well and, that the last year has been a particularly good one.

We're often told to 'count our blessings' but we seldom do. In the experience of this consultant, many policy networks fail to understand the attributes that follow, so let's break the habit of not counting our blessings here. Funnily enough, there are ten of them – 10 candles on the birthday cake.



1. **EQUINET is strategically well-positioned:** It has a clear and needed niche and fills that niche well, according to respondents.
2. **EQUINET understands what a network is:** It understands that a network is subtle and not like an organisation, entirely based on relationships and shared interest, so the mechanisms of control are different and focused on influence and addressing pressing common needs, creating coalitions and providing social and intellectual leadership.
3. **EQUINET has aligned its membership and its key external stakeholders to its niche,** so that it has become a shared cause. The critical mediator, fostering this alignment is the board and its governance role. Alignment is very hard to achieve and very hard to maintain. EQUINET does this exceptionally well.
4. **EQUINET strives for high quality.** It knows that the quality of the substantive policy work that it carries out and the way that it carries out all that it does must

be of high quality and that quality is a journey to get better each year. This point is evidenced in the scores that have been given each year. But these scores are not automatic and must each year be delivered through hard work. Everyone in EQUINET understands this implicitly.

5. **EQUINET understands that its work is for the long-term:** The issues that EQUINET addresses are not ones that can be ‘fixed’ within a parliament, but perennial issues that must be worked away at carefully. This means that conversations and relationships, institutional as well as individual, must be long-term and EQUINET understands this well too.
6. **EQUINET is learning to embrace its own difference** and, thereby, manage conflict very well: This attribute has been tested and found to be strong in the work on Standards for equality bodies. The traits involved have been listening, given space for expression, seeking common ground, not grand-standing, taking a long view, never seeking to marginalise. It is rare for organisations to do this well, but EQUINET does so.
7. **EQUINET understands that it must be consistent** in its work output and quality: To maintain a high reputation, work quality – the quality of publications, of events, of communications, of interlocutory work, of member services - must be high every time, year on year. This is very hard. It requires total dedication and not just enthusiasm or skill. EQUINET has shown this attribute in all the evaluations of the past few years
8. **EQUINET has good judgement** about the issues and when they are ready to be aired: In the policy arena, you need to hit the (policy) wave just before it breaks. So, you must spot the right issues early on and develop or research them well before they break, so that you can time your outputs to land just when policy makers and influencers need them. This is very hard. But the evidence from this and previous evaluations is that EQUINET is getting better and better at this, with the notable examples of Standards and Intersectionality this last year.
9. **EQUINET seeks depth in its relationships** with its members and partners: The data in this evaluation show that EQUINET’s penetration into member organisations is very high. The same seems to be true amongst those other external agencies it seeks to work with and influence.
10. **EQUINET is open to learning and to feedback:** The way EQUINET is open to feedback from, for example, these evaluations, but also other forms of feedback is remarkable and to be highly commended. This attitude of mind marks an organisation that is keen to learn, to squeeze the potential learning from any situation. Understanding and working with failure – for failure is always close to us – is well documented as one of the key ingredients of success in organisational and leadership life.

### Birthday Blues: What’s not to like as you get older?

It wouldn’t be a 10<sup>th</sup> birthday without a few disappointments or anxieties. Maturing is a demanding process, and there are often things that are not quite right for the big day. Happily, there are only five in EQUINET’s case and they emerge directly from the data in this research.

1. **Coping with the negative external narrative:** The political head-wind that EQUINET is facing in relation to equality and human rights continues, as many of the respondents note, and the very future of an integrated Europe may be at stake. Without being in any way distracted from its mandate, EQUINET needs



to face into this question. How, in an increasingly 'post-fact' environment, does EQUINET get its message across. However, while this may be the macro point, more prosaically, but equally importantly, individual member organisations are struggling domestically with this head wind. The forces that are at play are far bigger than one organisation or network, but there are hints in the data about the appropriate response. In the past, these evaluation reports have noted the value that good quality data about the trends, e.g. in cases and local policy issues, can play in making the case. There remains a gap, it is noted this time, in helping, for example, officials and parliamentarians, understand what these trends mean in terms of stories. There is a space between the macro-

data and the micro-case, that EQUINET can, it was said, usefully and more confidently fill. In popular language, this is about taking back the narrative, but it would be an important element in any case, whatever the political climate and one that EQUINET may consider how it goes about doing that more intensively.

2. **Greater size leads to greater complexity:** Organisations that are successful tend to grow. And with growth in the number of members in the network, in the number of staff with support needs to be met, in the number of external relationships to be sustained and in the number of issues that must be handled, comes complexity. Complexity is inherent, then, in a successful organisation. We see the signs and strains of this success in little 'symptoms' like member fatigue, as expressed in the lower number of people participating in surveys – including this one – and in staff whose support needs are not being met in the same way, or in members who are feeling that their particular interests – to do with their region or their mandate, for example – are just not quite being addressed well enough. The problem with complexity is that it gets worse the more successful you are. But we know that successful organisations are the ones whose leaders can embrace and manage or at least lead through the complexity. Complexity is the job of the leaders, in this case the senior staff and most especially the board. It would be too trite to say that if the problem on the board agenda is simple, it probably shouldn't be on the agenda, but that thought may be a guide for evaluating board discussions, at least in general terms. And job of leaders in this situation is to make things simpler for others.

3. **Sustaining momentum in a maturing network:** This point relates to the last. This report has observed that one of the hallmarks of success in EQUINET's case (and in any professional service organisation) is delivering high quality *consistently*, year in, year out. This is where the real leadership skill comes in ensuring that the pace of things is stretching while remaining sustainable, and that colleagues' energy levels can be renewed for the next challenge. There are only very few signs that this issue is causing difficulties now but it will inevitably come to the fore in the years ahead. Part of the response to this question is to be found in the data: segmentation, i.e. meeting different needs in a range of ways that more sensitively touch their interests or needs. This agenda will likely remain a critical one for the foreseeable future.
4. **Sector boundaries: Is EQUINET's niche that clear?** So many of our conclusions are based on a foundations stone – that EQUINET's strategic positioning is sound, it has a clear niche, we all know what it's there for. But is it really? Some don't think so, but are only prepared so far to speak softly about it. From the point of view of professionals in the field, it may be very easy to see the difference between equalities and human rights, but from a public perspective the clarity of that difference can be more difficult to understand. And of course, in some countries the respective institutions have been merged. So, when it comes to the pan-European level, what's the response? The response so far has been a wise one: to cooperate very closely to try to ensure that there is neither overlap nor gap in terms of how policy stakeholders and overlapping members are dealt with. Of course, in practice, this can sometimes work smoothly and sometimes not, so smoothly as noted particularly in last year's evaluation report. Working this question through to a conclusion will be one of those longer-term discussions that EQUINET has shown it can excel in.
5. **Building creative leadership:** All the four challenges outlined above point to one thing – leadership. But what is the nature of this leadership? It is obviously not the command and control style of leadership, but a leadership that has high levels of emotional maturity and sees its role as an influencer and not a LEADER (in caps). How does leadership like this happen? It happens in every conversation that the leaders (or the leadership collectively) have with anyone they are working with, because each time they speak, a leader is setting a tone from which others will take a cue, a hint. This is as much about the issues that are picked up as about the way in which they are picked up. EQUINET has been blessed with a heritage of high quality leaders at the executive and non-executive levels, who fulfil all these requirements (and others). In a year of governance transition, ensuring that this rich inheritance can be passed on is of the highest priority, in the view of this report, for the future of the network.

### Birthday Wishes: When I'm 20, I'll...

The questions picked up in the previous section point to challenges now and to thinking too about the new strategic plan to be developed during this year. But what of the longer term? If ten years is a short time, the next ten will pass very quickly. At the tenth birthday party, what are we wishing for a successful twenty-year old in ten years' time? Interestingly, there are five of these too.





When EQUINET is 20, it will...

1. **Still be here:** If we follow something like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, survival is surely not something to be aimed for on its own, but at the same time survival must be a question that deserves asking in the tough climate outline in this report and elsewhere. The challenge is understanding the high level of volatility politically across the continent, the impact it may have on the sector and the difficulty there is in predicting how things may go. It is interesting that in this week, as this report is finalised, the European Commission has issued its own set of five scenarios for the future of the Union, with the invitation to Member States to help decide which is the one to aim for. Scenario planning is not a way of predicting the future, but it can be an effective way of an organisation or network to come to terms with the types and scale of change that it may face in the years ahead. Of course, it can inform strategic planning as well. An additional activity to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> birthday may be a commission to develop an understanding as to how the equalities and human rights scene may develop over the next ten years.
2. **Be nurturing the sector leaders of tomorrow:** EQUINET takes steps to reach deeply into its member organisations. It has been successful at this. In ten years' time, today's junior professionals will be their organisation's leaders, the leaders of the equalities sector. We see in the data that there is still a way to go to create an understanding of what EQUINET is and does at the more junior levels of member organisations. This then is one of the next challenges, to figure out how to reach this audience in a meaningful way. Perhaps more systematic thinking can take place on this question in the next strategic planning round.
3. **Embedded at the top political as well as top policy levels:** EQUINET has strong relationships wherever it turns, it seems, but it is safe to say that within the European institutions those relationships are strongest the official level in the Commission than in the Parliament. And there seems from the data in this report to be an interest in hearing more from EQUINET in this institution. This

opportunity touches too on the earlier question of narrative and having the stories to address if not shift the narrative about equalities in Europe. And it speaks too to the thought in the data that EQUINET needs to deepen its story-telling capacity in the space between big data and case histories.

4. **Be embracing the new vari-speed Europe:** Whatever the outcome of the current year's elections, the geometry of Europe is set to become more complex over the years ahead. EQUINET understands this and is keen to see the involvement of NEBs from states that are not yet accession states, but on the periphery of Europe. As Europe evolves, so will the geometry of its membership and, thereby, the need to involve in more creative ways, with different levels of funding, NEBs from across the new Europe.
5. **Be keeping the network's passion alive:** As organisations mature, they can easily become tired or being ever so slightly to gather dust. The organisation life cycle graph describes this trend very well. It will be the job of the board, in particular, to be alert to any signs of aging (as opposed to maturing) in the years ahead to make sure that EQUINET remains the fresh and energetic organisation that it is today

Ten reasons to celebrate the tenth birthday; five areas to reflect on and address; and five wishes for the next ten years.  $10+5+5=20$ . A simple formula to guide the network as it matures and navigate the increased level of complexity within its sector and in its external environment.

## 5. Appendix

### Member Survey Questions

#### Q.1: Strategic Plan

a) Equinet developed and agreed a new Strategic Plan a year ago. To what extent do you feel Equinet is on track to deliver the strategic objectives (building capacity and peer support of equality bodies; contributing to the European equality agenda, serving as a knowledge and communication hub on equal treatment; and consolidating the network and the position of its members) over the period 2015 to 2018?

#### Reflections?

b) Taking one aspect of one of the objectives of the Strategic Plan, Objective 2 (contributing to the European equality agenda), Equinet launched a major new Working Paper during 2016 on Strengthening and Developing Standards for Equality Bodies. To what extent in your view has this work and document been well received and is beginning to be of support to your organisation?

#### Q.2: Performance

a) The European Commission, as principal funder, likes to define work quality in terms of its timeliness, the accuracy with which it is executed and how useful the work was. Taking each of



Equinet's main work areas in turn, what is your view of their timeliness, accuracy and usefulness, i.e. their quality and impact? (Score 1–5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is excellent)

Timeliness

Accuracy

Usefulness

Conferences

Seminars

Working groups

Training

Clusters

Project: Evaluation

Lab

Publications

Internal

Communication

External

Communication

b) How could the needs of Equinet's highly diverse membership be met better in the future?

### Q.3: Building capacity of and peer support for equality bodies

- \* a) To what extent do you believe that your organisation makes use in its work of the knowledge, skills and learning gained as a result of Equinet's activities?
- \* b) What proportion of the staff of your organisation do you estimate make use of this knowledge, as described above?

**Reflections?**

### Q.3: Publications

a) During the year, Equinet has published 6 reports: Making Europe More Equal: A Legal Duty? research; Innovating at the Intersections. Equality Bodies Tackling Intersectional Discrimination – perspective; Evaluation Lab Project – booklet; How to build an equal pay case – handbook; Equality bodies and integration of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees – factsheet and compendium of good practices; Developing Standards for equality bodies – working paper.

To what extent does your organisation make use of these (and previous) publications of Equinet in your work?

c) In October 2016, Equinet launched the European Directory of Equality Bodies. Do you find it useful?

Do you use it in your work? Do you have suggestions for improvements?





#### Q4: Your Organisation and EQUINET

a) To what extent do you believe that your organisation makes use in its work of the knowledge, skills and learning gained as a result of Equinet's activities?

Reflections?

b) What proportion of the staff of your organisation do you estimate make use of this knowledge, as described above?

#### Q.4: The European dimension of your work

\* To what extent do you feel that your organisation is better equipped to engage at the European policy level as a result of Equinet's work and presence?

Reflections?

#### Q.6: Influence

a) How influential do you feel Equinet is amongst EU institutions as a result of its policy contributions?

Reflections?

b) How influential do you feel EQUINET and national equality bodies are amongst the network's other stakeholders (ie not EU institutions)?

Reflections?

#### Q.7: Governance

How well is Equinet governed in your view?

Reflections?

#### Q.8: Equinet's Secretariat

a) How efficiently does the Secretariat deliver in terms of its key administrative functions (reimbursements, membership questions, answering requests, etc)?

b) How effective is the Secretariat supporting the work of equality bodies?

What are the next steps for its development in your view?

#### Q.9: Network decision-making:

How efficient and appropriately inclusive is the decision-making in the network, in your view?



**Reflections?**

**Q.10: Final Comments**

a) In 2017, Equinet will celebrate its 10th anniversary. Several activities are foreseen in the 2017 Work Plan (a conference, a celebratory evening and a special webpage). Which activities would you suggest to make the 10th anniversary of the network memorable?

b) Any additional comments and