



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
www.trans4mgt.com

Equinet– European Network of Equality Bodies

External Technical Evaluation of 2013 Activities

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January 2014



1. Executive Summary

This report concludes for a second year running that Equinet is in a very strong position strategically and in terms of performance, enjoying a high reputation for supporting members and in engaging with European Union institutions and with the EU level NGO community. This report points to four strategic questions that could inform the forthcoming strategic planning review and invites Equinet to think boldly about its strategic direction from the strong base that it has established in its first six years.

The evidence for our conclusions can be summarised against the current PROGRESS logframe criteria in Table 1.

Figure 1: Logframe Evaluation Criteria and Sources of Evidence in this Report

Logic Model Element	Evidence in this Report
Output 1: Relevant advocacy, institutional and capacity building work	The data in Section 3 on Equinet from a Service Delivery Standpoint and, later, on Equinet from the Standpoint of Profile indicate a high degree of relevance in terms of its work to support the sector and to make an impact.
Output 2: Accurate monitoring/ assessment reports on implementation & impact of EU law & policy	The data in Section 3 on Equinet from a Service Delivery Standpoint and, later, on Equinet from the Standpoint of Profile, as well as the evidence quoted in the report of Equinet's own work to monitor and evaluate its performance, paint a clear picture of success in this area. This data is supported also by strong evidence from external stakeholders as well as members of its contribution to EU law and policy.
Output 3: Accurate position/policy papers and analysis;	Again scores on timeliness, accuracy and usefulness in Section 3's paragraphs on Equinet from a Service Delivery Standpoint show this.
Output 4: Identification of good practices;	Equinet's publications, alongside positive data on timeliness, accuracy and usefulness in the section on Equinet from a Service Delivery Standpoint of Profile scores show that this identification is being done, and that it's well received.
Output 4: Information, awareness-raising and campaigning activities, networking with national members organisations and other stakeholders	Section 3's data on the effectiveness of Equinet's EU engagement and the timeliness, accuracy and usefulness of that engagement provide the evidence on this output.
Immediate Outcome 1: Improving the organisational capacity and management of European networks	The data in Section 3 on Equinet's strategic plan, the involvement of members in the planning process and the view, later in that section on the

Logic Model Element	Evidence in this Report
	relevance of Equinet's current range of services, supports a positive assessment of this outcome.
Immediate Outcome 2: Voicing the concerns and expectations of people exposed to social exclusion, discrimination and gender inequality and formulating them to inform and influence policy making at national and EU levels	Equinet works through its members and in the view of its members, satisfaction (Section 3's data on Equinet fulfilling its mission for example) support a positive assessment of this Outcome. The EU engagement scores, mentioned under Output 4 are also relevant here.
Immediate Outcome 3: Reinforcing the skills of the networks and its members' organisations to advance, support and further develop EU objectives and priorities at national level	Members are very content with Equinet's engagement at the EU level, as previously quoted, and they are also broadly satisfied with its impact on them who, in turn, have impact in their own countries within the scope and parameters of national equality legislation.
Immediate Outcome 4: Better integrating of cross-cutting issues (e.g. gender, poverty and non-discrimination)	EQUINET's successful incorporation in 2013 of the work of the previous Gender Equality Bodies' Network is evidence of a more coordinated approach, but its existing methodology, including thematic learning events, publications and communications seek to share the experience and develop the skills of member agencies' staff promotes an integrated approach.

2. Introduction

This report

This report represents the findings and conclusions of an external evaluation consultancy carried out by Transform Management Consultancy and commissioned by Equinet of its activities during 2013 for its key funding stream, PROGRESS, a fund of the European Commission's DG Justice.

Evaluation Objective

During the discussion process for the evaluation, Equinet made clear that the proposed technical evaluation was not only to fulfil the requirements for evaluation under the terms of its PROGRESS funding, but that it also wished to deploy the findings to help shape the agenda for its forthcoming strategic planning round, due to start in 2014. By seeking the views of members and other stakeholders on a confidential basis, one may ascertain what for them are the key issues that Equinet should address during the forthcoming process of strategic reflection.

Thus, this evaluation report seeks to assess the areas of interest and make appropriate recommendations for consideration.

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, whose objective is to strengthen the EU's contribution in supporting Member States' commitments and efforts to create more and better jobs and to build a more cohesive society. This funding programme is coming to an end and the details of its successor funding instrument is currently under development.

As Equinet's 2011-2014 strategic plan draws to a close, it is worth remembering its four key objectives:

- 1) Enhance the skills and capacities of the staff of the equality bodies.
- 2) Enhance the strategic capacity of the equality bodies.
- 3) Identify and communicate the learning from the work of national equality bodies.
- 4) Enhance the recognition and strategic positioning of Equinet and member equality bodies with all stakeholders at European Union level.

PROGRESS Funding Requirements

Assessment of Equinet's success in fulfilling the requirement of its grant under PROGRESS requires the development of a logframe, conforming to the overall PROGRESS logframe. In this case, Equinet has adopted five Outputs and four Immediate Outcomes, each of which has its own performance measures. Some, but not all, of these performance measures require the input of an external evaluation (i.e. this evaluation report).

The methodology behind the survey for this evaluation, our assessment of Equinet's documentation and our meetings with Equinet's members and staff were all designed to assess these performance measures, while offering Equinet an overall assessment of its strategic position.

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 technical 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 proposed methodology: Equinet's reputation amongst key stakeholders can be used as proxy indicators for impact¹.

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 of pleasing one member or group of members may lead to the displeasure of others.

Method

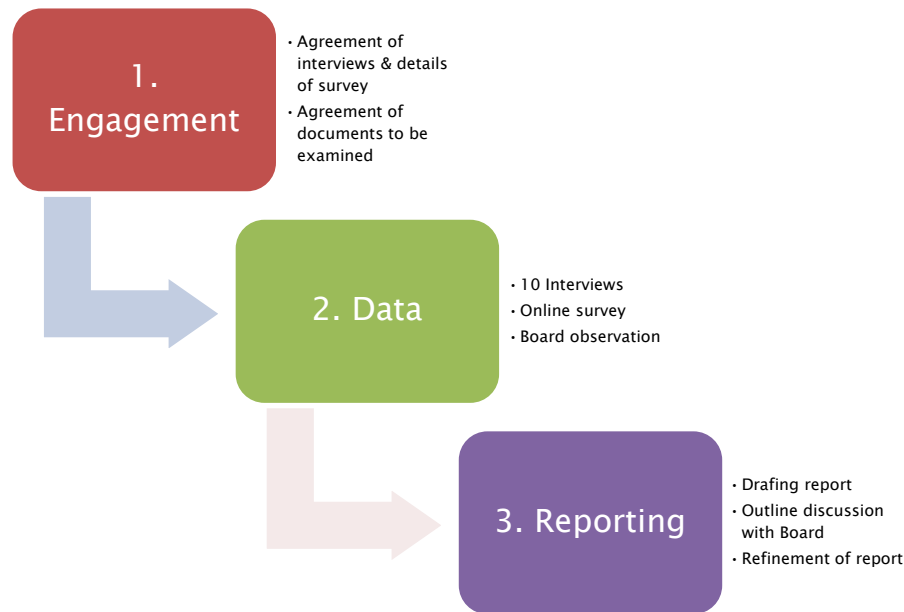
The agreed method for the evaluation comprised three stages (Table 1).

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

- A. 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

¹ Burns, S (2000) *Outcome monitoring* Charities Evaluation Services, UK

Table 1: Outline Method – Three Stages



B. Data

- a. Preparation for and input to a briefing session to the staff, and the observation of one board meeting
- b. Administration of a short online survey on the perceptions of effectiveness and impact to each of Equinet members and other key stakeholders
- c. Interviews with a small sample of Members’ representatives and staff members by telephone and in person (8 planned, 13 carried out: 8 members and board members, 4 staff members and the board advisor)

c. Reporting

- a. Analysis of data and preparation of a narrative report for discussion with the Executive Director and dissemination for consultation to the Executive board
- b. Final revisions to report, with recommendations, for presentation to PROGRESS

The process started in December 2013, with the survey completed by early January and the draft report completed by early February 2014. The final report of the external evaluation is to be completed for submission as part of Equinet grant final reporting to EC by end March 2014.

Questions asked in the Survey and Interviews

Both the online survey and the interviews had the same structure of questions, covering four topics:



1. Equinet's from a strategic standpoint, including strategic purpose, financial sustainability
2. Equinet from a service delivery or quality standpoint
3. Equinet from an organisational standpoint: governance, the AGM, decision making and the work of the Secretariat
4. Equinet from a profile standpoint: strategic positioning, stakeholder management and sector profile

The topics to be considered and the questions developed to seek evidence on them are not exactly the same as last year and thus comparison between the two years is limited.

Online Survey

There were 66 responses to the online questionnaire (67 last year) which was sent to Equinet's members and a sample of other stakeholders. Most EU and accession states were represented in the responses, along with a number of voices from EU level institutions and a few NGOs. The organisations, which contributed to the survey, are listed in Appendix C. 89% of respondents who answered the question were members of Equinet and the remainder were external stakeholders.

Interviews

Thirteen interviews were carried out (ten last year), following a pre-agreed interview protocol, with a selection of eight members, board members and the board advisory, plus four members of Equinet staff team.

Report

This report provides a fairly 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 Analysis and Final Reflections sections (at the end of the report).

3. Data

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 in the report.

Equinet from a Strategic Standpoint

The Planning System in Equinet

Equinet has a four-year planning cycle in which the strategic plan is revised every four years, while it 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. In its preparation to develop a new strategic plan, Equinet has developed a detailed process plan to guide its thinking. It has also prepared an 'Appraisal of its current operating procedures', which provides internal pointers as to the areas where it needs to develop.

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

If you think of a SWOT for Equinet, what would be the main points that come to mind?

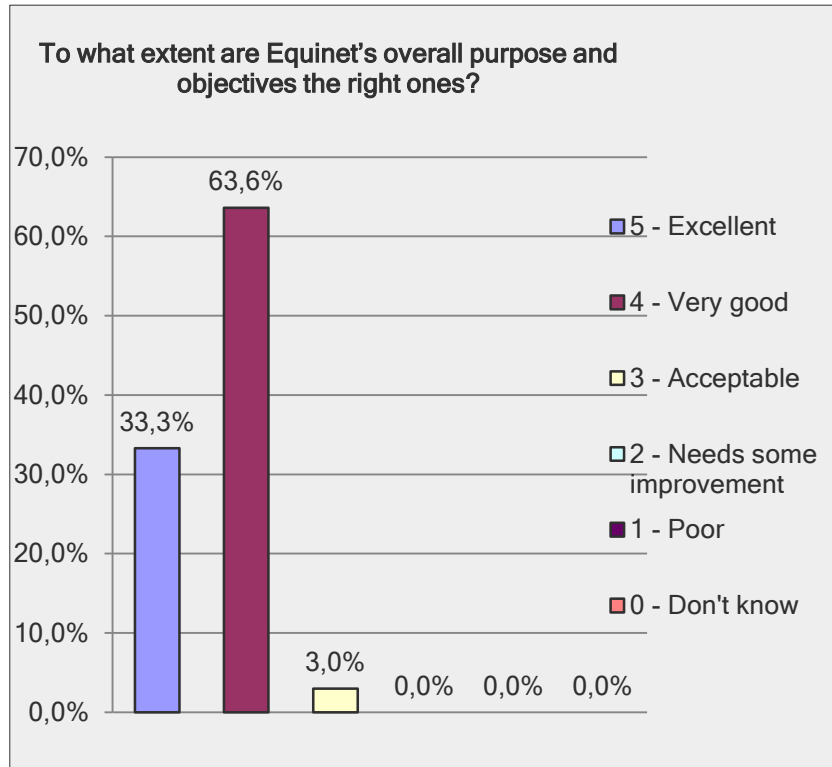
Interview comments only

- **Organisational Strengths:**
 - The model works – a members' network (bottom up) in which there are strong relationships so that help can be given informally and very effectively when needed
 - Unique structure – civil society/public service interface
 - The secretariat in terms of performance and clarity of role – responsive, not egotistical, but with plenty of expertise
 - Variety of members
 - The coverage of potential organisations in membership – almost a monopoly. Which provides a special status
 - Relationships between members and between staff and members
 - Positioning: relationships with Commission, well regarded by FRA, Council of Europe, etc
 - Good publications/outputs/events/training
 - Our knowledge, based on the experience of members
- **Organisational Weaknesses:**
 - Small size of the Secretariat to do the job needed
 - Inflexibility of service provision for range of members
 - In view of the very varied levels of expertise and seniority within the range of members, it is hard to meet the broad range of needs well – demands a more differentiated approach to training, etc
 - Financial limitations and dependency
 - Relatively unchallenging environment may run risk of complacency
 - Perhaps a little bureaucratic?

- Not political enough
- Fragility of the sector – member’s independence from their governments may not be that high
- Risk of staff turnover compromising quality
- **External Opportunities:**
 - The forthcoming strategic plan presents an opportunity to refocus a little
 - Greater influence – more listened to Deepen links with other key actors, especially with other EU level NGO networks on common issues
 - More impact and collaboration at national level
 - Addressing fully the new ‘architecture’ as structural realignment takes place in some countries, between equality, human rights and ombudsman functions
 - The sector is still quite new, so there is much to do
 - Strengthening the sector and its independence
- **External Threats:**
 - Our topic faces a headwind politically at the moment – our issue is not where the political energy is
 - Being seen as political
 - Not being able to sustain the current high level of input, ownership, etc
 - Reduction in funding levels for members and/or for us could compromise our capacity and cause us to rethink
 - The impact of human rights work on anti-discrimination casework.
 - Low level of recognition/awareness/interest at by member governments

To what extent are Equinet's overall purpose and objectives the right ones?

Statistical scores



Survey remarks to the question: what do you think is the most important strategic issue that the next strategic plan (from 2015) should address?

The 51 sets of comments can be clustered under three headings, while the number of mentions that each topic received is next to it in brackets.

- In relation to EBs:
 - Standards for EBs' work (7)
 - The learning needs or skills of EBs' staff (7)
 - The independence of EBs (5)
 - The strategic capacity/institutional development of EBs (5)
 - Collaboration, mutual exchange and solidarity between EBs (5)
 - Multiple mandates or managing the conflict of issues especially between human rights and discrimination (3)
 - Financial sustainability (2)
 - EBs' relationships with national authorities (1)
- In relation to Equinet:
 - Influencing policy at the EU and national levels (including a new Directive) (6)
 - Visibility or profile including communications (4)

- Meeting the diverse needs of the membership (3)
- Financial sustainability (1)
- Drawing on information beyond the membership (1)
- Enhance cooperation between Equinet, its members and the NGO sector (1)
- Specific topics:
 - Racism, including new racism across Europe and the implementation of the Race Equality Directive (4)
 - Gender (3)
 - Work/life balance (2)
 - Developing an anti-discriminatory culture across Europe and/or the threat to equal treatment arising from austerity (2)
 - Roma (2)
 - Multiple discrimination (2)
 - Disability (1)
 - Procurement and equality (1)
 - Facilitating better complaint mechanisms for victims of discrimination (1)
 - Legal development – focusing on the gaps in EU legislation and how they can be addressed (1)
 - Inequality and discrimination (1)
 - Social & economic cost of discrimination (1)
 - Access to civil rights for undocumented migrants (1)

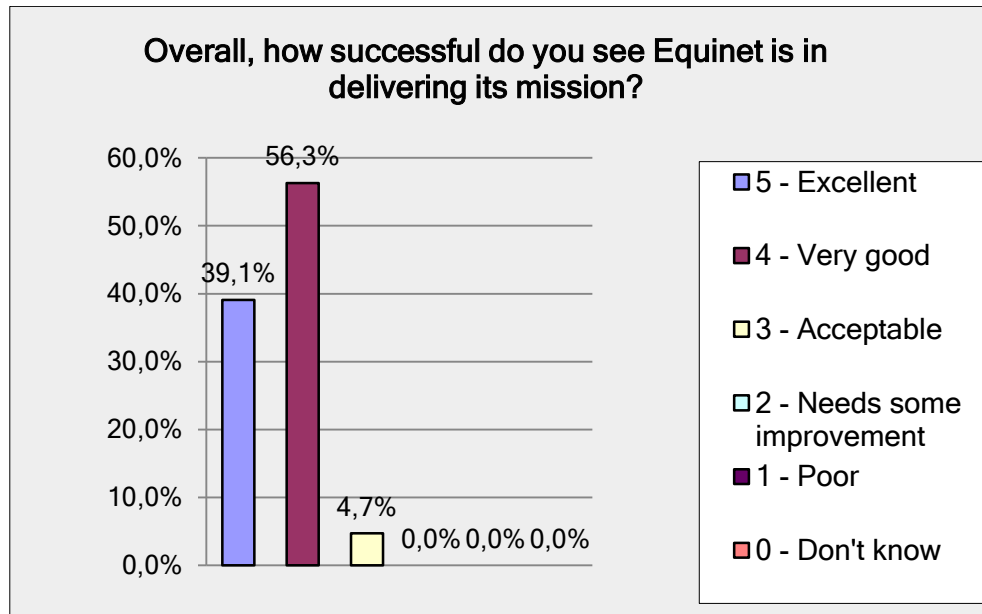
Interview comments

- It is because the process of developing it was so thorough that it enjoys the full support of members
- (For some respondents) the four pillars are still the right ones...
- ...but they could lead to new, more focussed themes of work. No fundamental change of purpose is required however.
- (But for other respondents) perhaps the first two pillars are the key ones and it will be very important to change the approach to meet the needs of members more sensitively than now
- With growth in membership but little growth in staff, we need either to grow the staff and/or refocus the work
- The presence of a strategic plan for Equinet is very important and it is important that we keep it fresh and focussed
- The solidarity that membership of the network brings is important – it feels less isolated
- The knowledge of experience on the ground is very helpful for members to influence their national governments
- Member support and policy change should be the equal twin prongs of Equinet's work

- We need a stronger profile and presence since our issue is invisible to our politicians and, increasingly to the public – we need this debate on presence now
- Strengthening equality bodies is central to our mission in my view
- Should be arguing for the inclusion of positive duties in members’ remit, eg monitoring requirements
- The key role of Equinet in as adverse a political climate as now is to be a haven for members who are assailed at home, helping to boost their morale, facilitating them to stand back and to reflect

Overall, how successful do you see Equinet is in delivering its mission?

Statistical Scores



Survey remarks in answer to the question: what would be the one thing it should do to take it to the next level?

The 17 sets of comments can be listed as follows with the number of mentions that each topic received next to it in brackets.

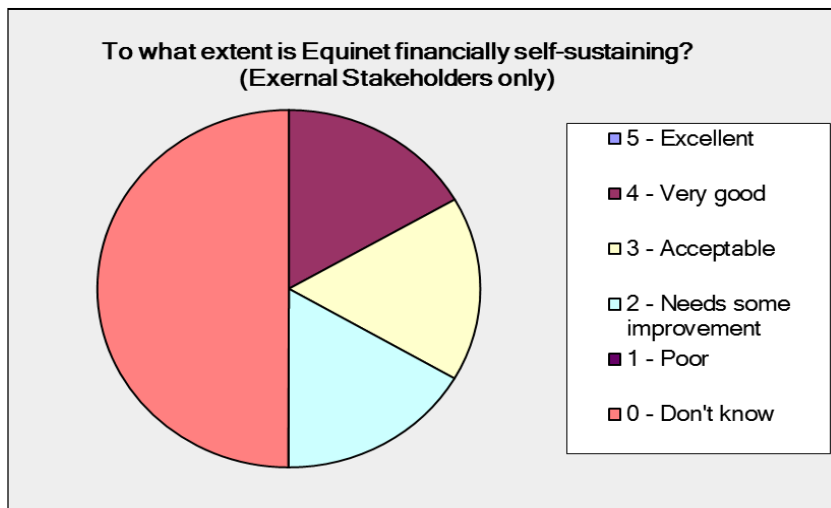
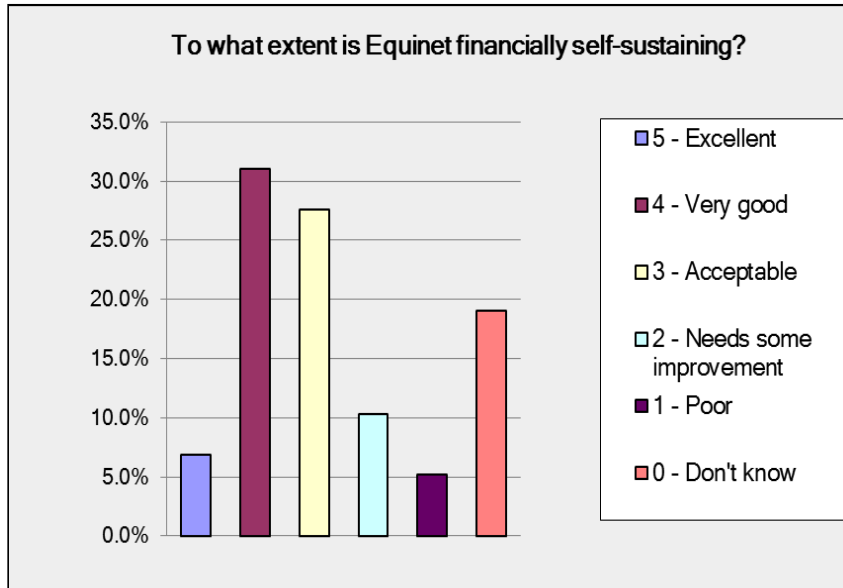
- Higher levels of engagement by (especially the inactive) members (5)
- It's fine as it is (4)
- Embedding the role of EBs nationally (2)
- Raising the profile of the network (2)
- Fostering the implementation of standards for EBs (1)
- Developing shared messaging around equality and the work of EBs to counter the prevailing negative narrative (1)
- Upgrading the learning events, eg with more external experts (1)



- Better dissemination of the work we do now (1)
- Reinforcing the role of EQUINET as a network (not an independent organisation in Brussels) (1)
- Higher levels of funding (1)
- Fewer surveys (1)

To what extent is Equinet financially self-sustaining?

Statistical scores



Survey remarks

The 17 sets of comments can be grouped into a small number of headings, which catch all of the points made.

- The EB contribution:
 - EBs should give more
 - EBs have no means of giving more
 - EBs should give a little less and EC should give a little more
 - Participation by EB staff is important
 - The nature of the EB contribution renders the funding model problematic, especially in light of the requirements for timesheets by all participating staff from EBs and the level of scrutiny by the EU funder that this can imply, effectively compromising EB independence while obliging excessive bureaucracy
 - Secure funding that is not dependent on the high use of EB staff as payment in kind
 - Communication around the payment in kind formula should be improved
- National level funding:
 - Should be sufficient to enable successful delivery of our national mandates
- EU role:
 - It is essential EU funding should be sufficient
 - They should give more
 - Should be extended, to avoid EB contributions in terms of staff time, and to secure Equinet's position
- It's fine as it is:
 - We are secure for the next seven years
 - As we are fully financed by the state, our independence and our financial positions are secure, although, as public bodies, financial sustainability isn't an appropriate goal. The same applies to Equinet.
- Doing good work:
 - This is the best way to secure our future...
 - ...while maintaining good relations with the Commission
- Broadening the funding base:

- Carry out additional projects for the EU, but via different donors
- Identify other sources of co-financing

Interview comments

- We could skew our priorities if we chase project income.
- It is better to have a single source of income and not to waste effort chasing additional funds.
- But our thinking needs to be based on a risk assessment: if our current levels of funding are secure, we can and should remain as we are, but if not, then we may need to reconsider our position on this question.
- What many members receive in benefits strongly outweighs the cost of their membership fee.
- We need external and additional sources of income, especially additional sources of funds from the Commission.
- The funding challenges of 2013 were essentially technical and bureaucratic; the matter has now been sorted out and the system works well.
- As a public body, we should only receive public income and to do differently is to violate the idea of public service. However, we could investigate additional sources of public provision of funding.
- We need to consider what additional sources of (Commission) funding may be available to use and take a pragmatic view of the matter.
- The overall model of member matched funding through subscriptions is very important – and works well. But there is little scope for real fee rises, given members' tight budgets.
- The new strategy and, as a consequence, new work programmes, may point to the need and benefit of additional sources of funding from public sources.
- We were vulnerable in 2013 and, with a change in funding scheme as PROGRESS is replaced we may be vulnerable again, but as to whether we should change our funding strategy, that is a matter that requires a lot more discussion and debate.
- We are rendered more vulnerable by restricting our source of income, so it is important to consider a range of options and within our ability to co-fund.
- We currently lack a contingency if our current sources of funding are put at risk, as they were in 2013.
- We have to stay close to the Commission to keep ahead of the funding opportunities as well as any technical challenges in relation to our funding.
- It is very important that Equinet remain a publicly funded body.
- In practice, there may not be any additional and relevant sources of funding for us from the Commission.
- We should be open to alternative sources of (public) funding for specific and relevant projects. We should not be 'absolutist' about this question.

Equinet from a Service Delivery Standpoint

Equinet's Year in 2013 at a Glance

Here are some simple statistics to give a hint of Equinet's production and the cost at which it was delivered.



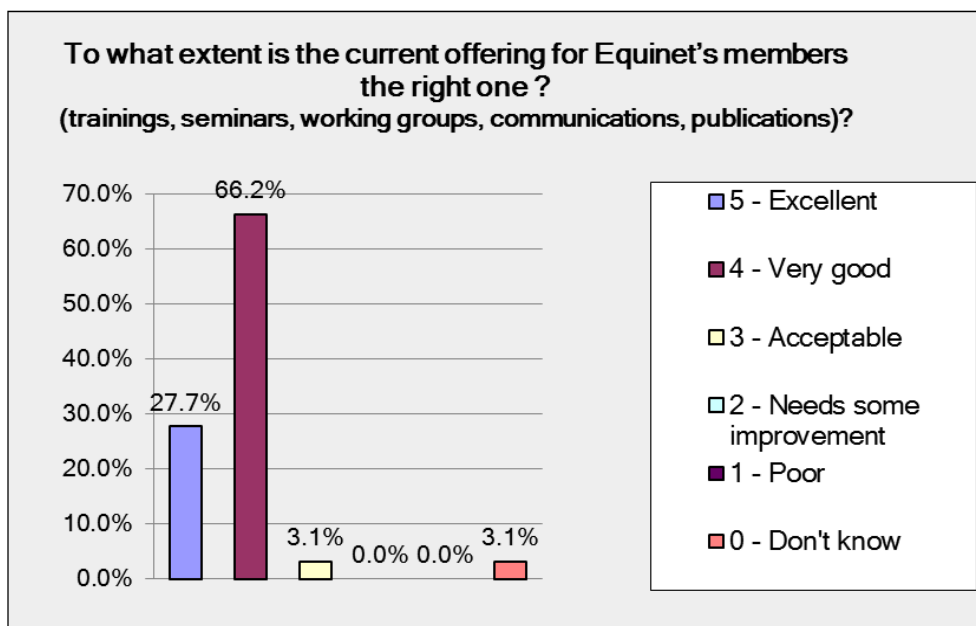
REPORT OF EXTERNAL TECHNICAL EVALUATION OF 2013 ACTIVITIES FOR EQUINET

Item	Volume
Reports published	8
Promotional materials issued	14
Unique website hits per month	1398
Training and other learning events	13
Average attendance at the training and learning events	27
Communications events	3
Participation in the Communications events	79
Gender balance at learning and communication events (women: men)	83:17
Meetings of the five Working Groups	10
Average number of participants at each WG	20
Board meetings planned and held	5 ²
Size of Secretariat (permanent employees)	6
Expenditure in 2013	€944k
Daily cost of running Equinet	€2,586

² One board meeting (January 2013) was cancelled due to poor weather conditions.

To what extent is the current offering for Equinet’s members the right one (trainings, seminars, working groups, communications, publications)?

Statistical scores



Survey remarks to the follow-on question: How could the needs of Equinet’s highly diverse membership be met better in the future?

The 30 comments can be illustrated under the following five headings.

- More segmentation:
 - More tailored trainings with a smaller number of participants
 - Special meetings for the heads of EBs
 - The challenge is not so much the EBs that mostly have peer support and skills or knowledge development, but for those EBs who don’t primarily have those needs – how do you address that?
 - Support with specific technical issues, eg strategic litigation
 - Regional subgroups, especially ones that can incorporate some of the local cultural dimensions of equality work in that area, eg the Baltic states
 - Focus on the specific challenges of each EB
 - Focus more on some of the very practical aspects of the work
 - Differentiate by level of training
- Better planning:
 - Strong involvement of members in the planning process for our activities, especially events
 - To achieve further refinement in our offering, we need some detailed reflection and planning

- Develop ideas through detailed one-to-one conversations with members according to their needs
- Address the needs and problems of members to develop new plans
- More thematic workshops
- Use questionnaires to help with the planning process
- Stronger communications:
 - More communication about the outcomes, achievements and results of EBs
 - More communications, eg reports, on the achievements of the EU in our area
 - Have workshops focussed on our promotional role as EBs
- Logistics/access:
 - Need more notice of the forthcoming events
 - Use virtual meeting more
 - More translations of Equinet's materials into additional languages
- Stay as it is:
 - The added value is that we meet and can inspire each other, with the option that each of us can draw on help from the other
 - The present offering is fine and complete
 - We should handle all members in the same way

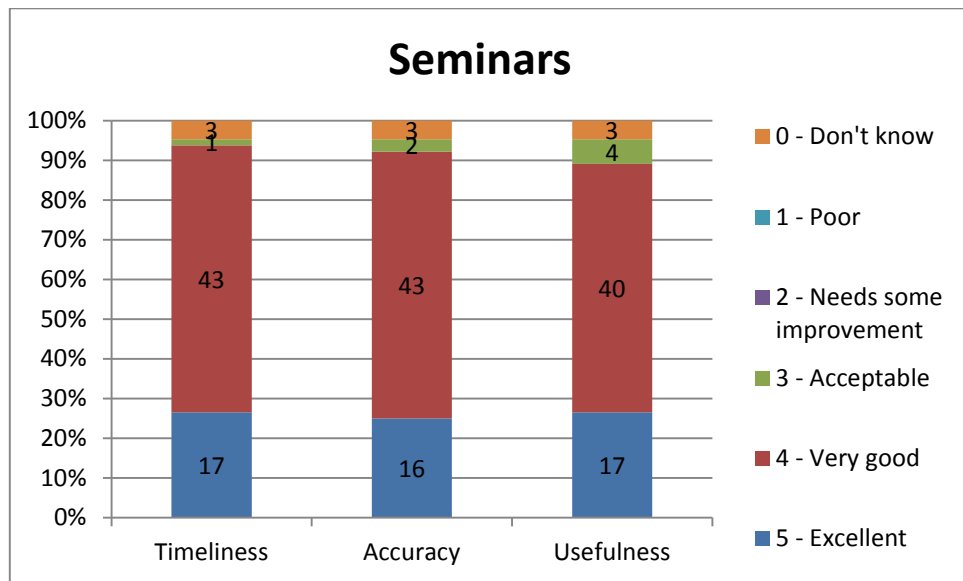
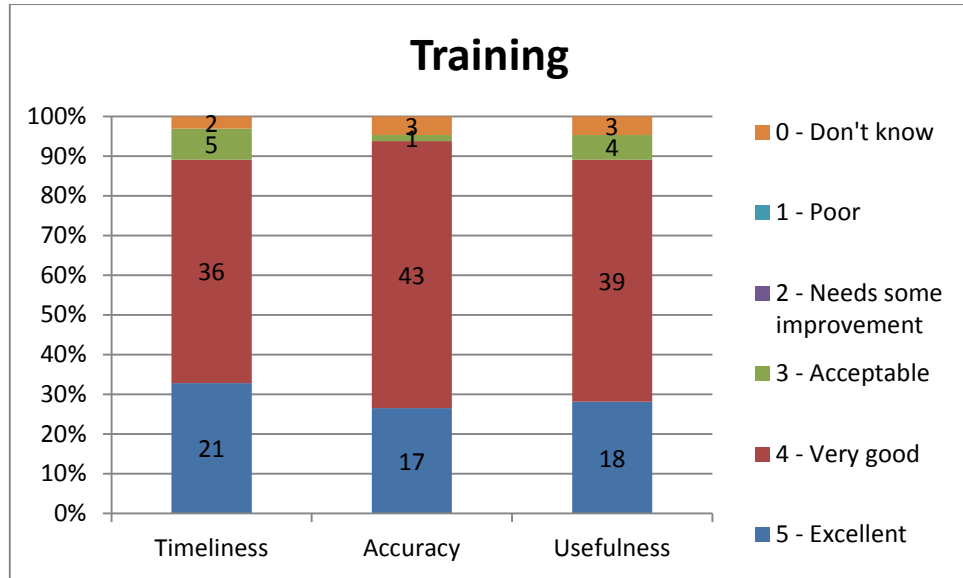
Interview comments

- **Overall:**
 - Our offering to members covers the ground well and we all benefit from that.
 - Our events, reports and other activities just get better and better and help build, as a consequence, stronger and stronger relationships between members, a precious asset, arguably the most precious asset of the network as we can just call on one another for help when we need it.
 - We have the opportunity this year to reflect on this question through the strategic planning exercise, but the offering does seem about right.
 - The key issue is how to deal with diverse membership needs within the limits of our budget levels. There is a danger of overstretch if we segment more our offerings, but there is a danger of not meeting needs well if we don't segment and differentiate.
 - EBs are struggling and our services need to evolve to meet the new needs, so we mustn't assume the existing programme will just roll forward into the strategic plan.
 - A more sensitive approach to service delivery will come from a deeper interaction with our members to understand really well and even better what they need to equip them for the future.
 - A significant gap in our reach, in my view, is creating events and other services that address the concerns and interests of the senior people in the larger agencies.
- **Training/events:**
 - Our training is very good.

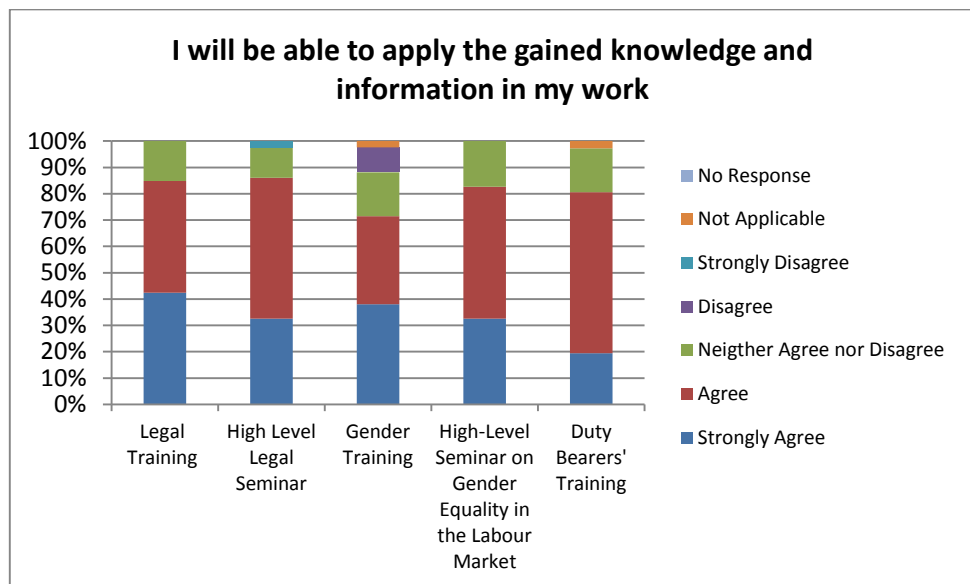
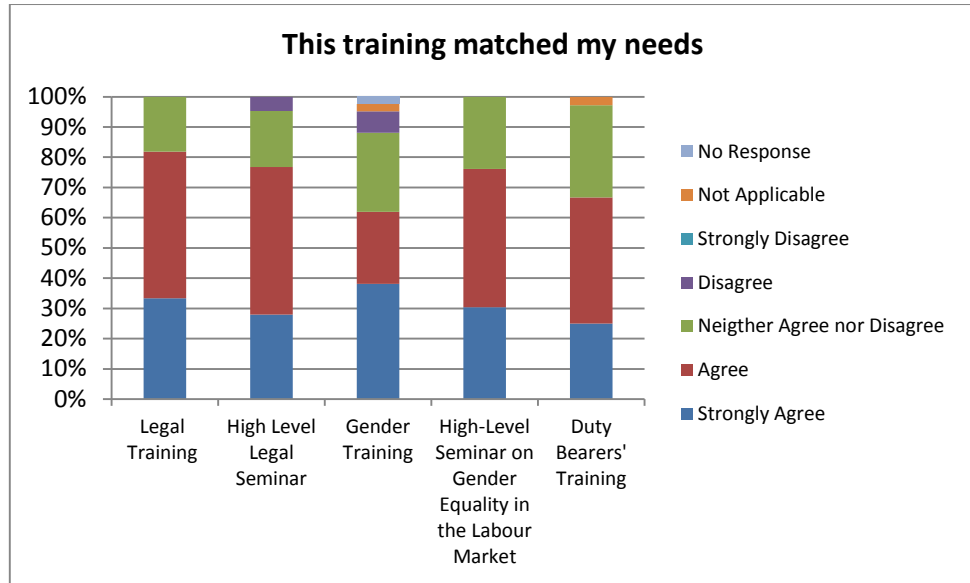
- A differentiated approach to, say, training implies more small-scale learning events, but we should retain, say, two large-scale events each year.
- We must not exclude or imply that members be excluded from any of our events, even when differentiated in the future.
- We could enhance the impact of our offerings by developing stronger partnerships with the equality bodies that do have particular expertise in certain areas that others lack to facilitate experience sharing more.
- Changing our offering to meet needs better potentially has big implications and we probably need to stage any changeover.
- An additional means of support and heightened learning could be a programme of secondments between EBs to facilitate increasing expertise in specific areas, eg Roma.
- **Reports:**
 - Our publications are good
 - The Age Discrimination and LGBTI reports were very well received.
 - The burden on the office of producing the reports is too high. The key point should be how do we create most change, not how do we publish more reports: it's important not to confuse means with outcome.
 - There is scope for improvement in our reports, to make them have greater impact by shortening them, providing executive summaries and generally making them more accessible and 'user-friendly'.
 - Our reports are too long and take too much time to produce without a clear sense of who the target audience is for each one. What is our intelligence on who reads our reports? We could separate the long narrative report and also offer shorter key issues papers.
- **Working Groups:**
 - Our working groups are very important
 - Participation is a little too passive.

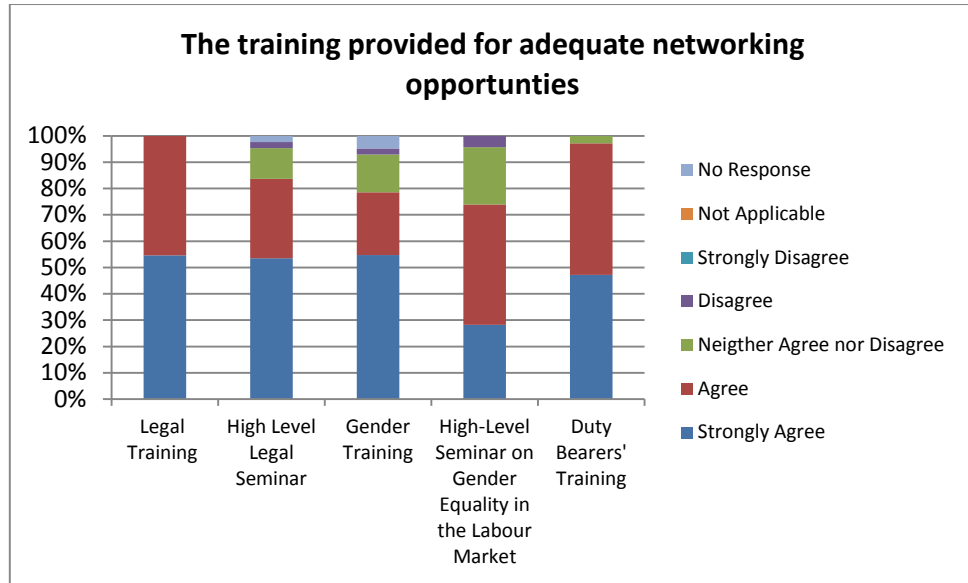
The European Commission, as funder, likes to define work quality in terms of its timeliness, the accuracy with which it is executed and how useful the work was. Taking each of the work areas listed, what is your view of their timeliness, accuracy and usefulness, i.e. their quality and impact?

Statistical scores

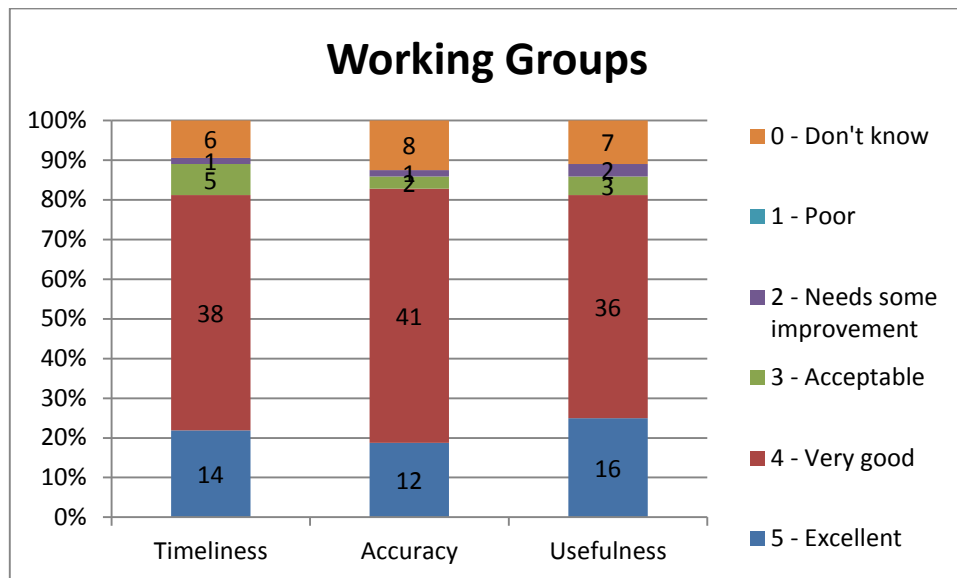


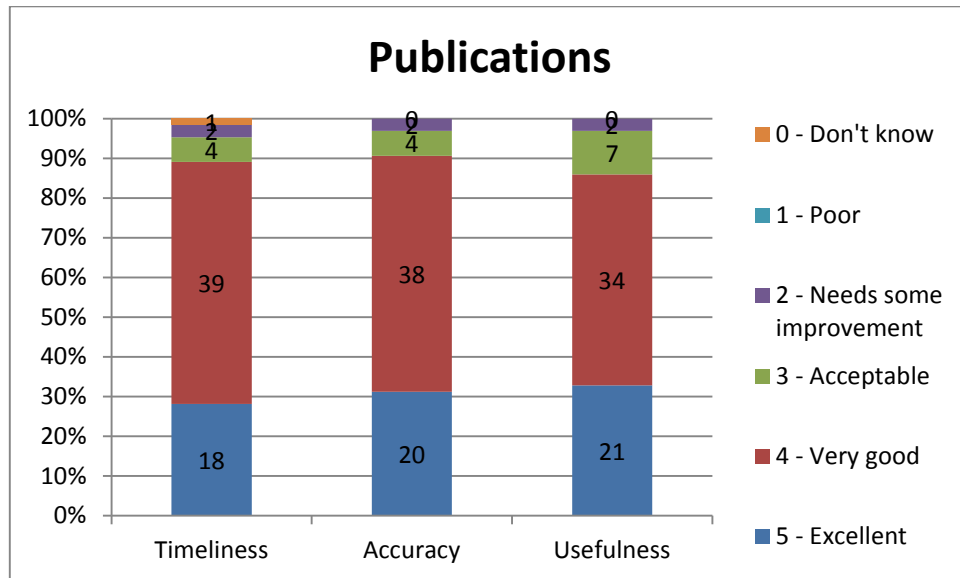
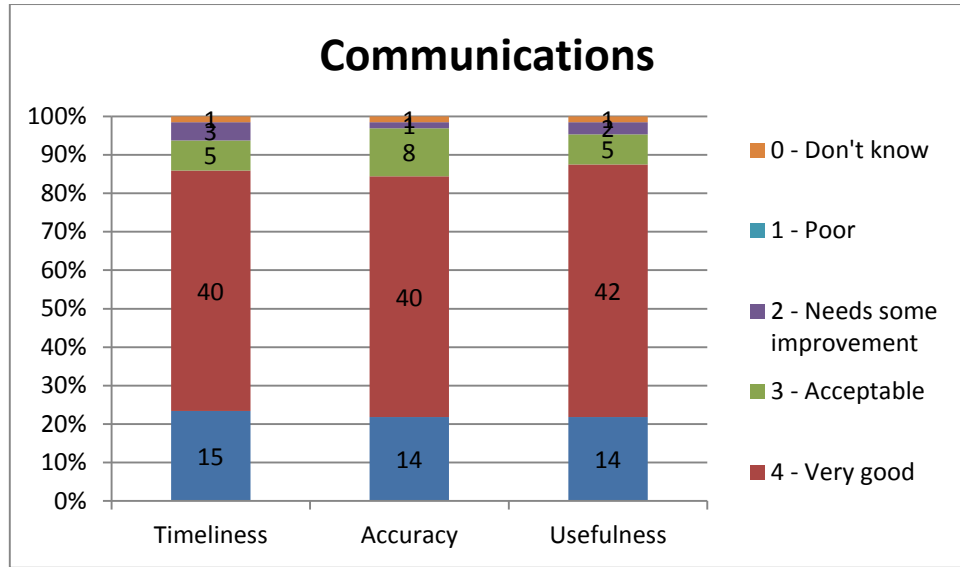
These scores broadly accord with Equinet’s own post-event evaluation data. Taking three of the questions from the participants’ evaluation sheets for the training and evaluations, a positive picture emerges:





Returning to the survey, and to the other major activities of Equinet, the following graphs illustrate the results for working groups, communications and publications.

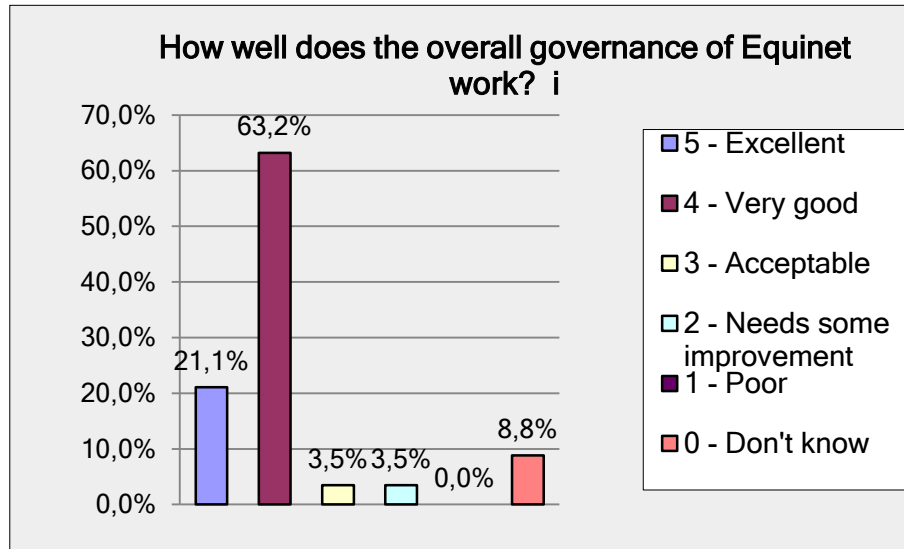




Equinet from an Organisational Standpoint

How well is Equinet governed?

Statistical scores



Survey remarks to the follow-up question: what could improve Equinet's governance in the future?

There were just 10 responses to this question and they grouped under three headings.

- Involvement of members:
 - Competence and quality of EBs as members of Equinet
 - The new strategic plan provides an opportunity to strengthen the input of members
 - More involvement of members in the decision-making process
 - More involvement of the more senior staff in EBs
- Fine as it is:
 - It seems to work very well
- Practical matters:
 - Mailing list of board members
 - More communication about the work of the Executive Board

Interview comments

- Our governance works well, by both the board and the members through the AGM.
- The board (old and new) gives confidence; it works in a harmonious way and is much more functional than many boards.
- Our governance has been tested 'under fire' in this last year and found to be effective, as we supported the managed of the funding crisis well.

- The approach is highly inclusive, participative, so you have your chance to say what you want.
- Our board is pretty conflict free and this isn't a sign of disengagement but a sign of harmony
- Things are well organised and arrangement are flexible.
- We are supported well to do our job by the executive and board/Secretariat relationships are very positive.
- The change from 7-9 members was the right one and works well.
- We have just had contested elections and that was great to see.
- The interface between the board, AGM/members and the secretariat is very good – sets the right tone. However, we need to think a little more about delegation and empowerment of the Secretariat by the Board in particular.
- I think the board should be more visible in the years ahead.
- Perhaps the board has been a little too operational. For example, should it review each publication? This may in part to do with the skills and interests of board members. Need a little investment in board development to move things up a little so that we can work more strategically.
- The engagement levels of some members is quite low and we need to think of ways of engaging them more, particularly in key events, as well as at the board itself. Perhaps there should be an agenda item on how to engage the disengaged and provide a little accountability by doing so.
- Participation tends to be higher amongst the more established members.
- Perhaps there are a few things that board members would like differently? Perhaps this should be discussed?
- New board members are still finding their way.
- It is important to get the new board working well as a team.
- The new board needs to spend more time on strategy.
- A strong strategy needs to be built on a stronger understanding of other key actors than we seem to have at present.
- Essential that the board spends sufficient time getting its collective 'head' round all the issues. The curiosity to do this is there but board members need to understand their role and spend time on this.
- There are some skill gaps on the board, such as understanding of each other and what each member brings, strategic planning skills, awareness of governance itself. Perhaps a skills analysis is required to see where the strengths are and where there may be any gaps. Could be argued that this exercise is a pre-requisite to creating an effective strategy.

Observation of the Executive Board

The evaluator attended the first half of the meeting of the Executive Board on 28th January 2014, both to present preliminary findings of the evaluation and to observe the board meeting as part of the evaluation process.

This was also the first meeting of the Executive Board following the 2013 AGM in which a new Chair and several new Board Members/Directors had been elected in contested elections. This meeting therefore was the first meeting of a new board team.

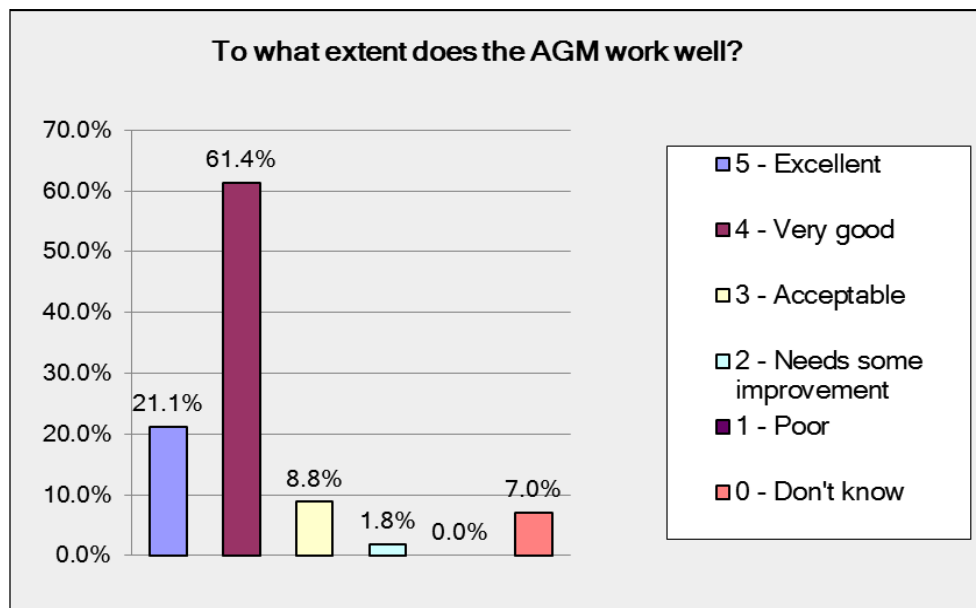
Reports in the data above from which a congenial yet business-like approach to meetings can be inferred are certainly accurate in the observation of this consultant.



A full agenda was nevertheless adhered to and time was kept well, without any sense of a forced pace. Inclusivity was encouraged throughout and there appeared to be a sense in which strong view could at times be expressed, welcomed and contained in the meeting space in a healthy and respectful manner. While strong views were expressed, there was little sense of conflict and every sign that, as a team, the board was entering the early stage of team development, the so-called ‘forming’ stage³ or perhaps in this case, given some member continuity, ‘re-forming’ stage. If this is the case, then future meetings may see greater engagement and therefore some open or masked signs of ‘storming’ and so on. If this is the case, it should be welcomed as a way of deepening working relationships and strengthening the capacity of the board as a team to perform more to its potential.

To what extent does the AGM work well?

Statistical scores



Survey remarks to the follow-on question: in what way, if any, do the current arrangements need to change or evolve?

There were nine comments to this question and they can be summarised in the following way.

- Role of the AGM:
 - The AGM should play a greater role in the formation of strategy
 - A good way to share members' needs and expectations for the period ahead
 - Still need to work on the balance between the business matters of the AGM and the policy or strategic elements

³ After Tuckman's well-known analysis of the development of a team: forming, storming, norming, performing and reforming. None should be seen as bad, but some are perhaps more enjoyable than others!

- Participation in the AGM:
 - We need to attract more people from the top of their organisations at least once a year and the AGM is the ideal opportunity (3 comments)
 - Funding should cover the cost of two members of each agency to help both the senior and operational people participate
 - The level of engagement of participants should be higher and we need to think of ways of doing this
- Practical matters associated with the AGM:
 - The AGM should be funded by Equinet to encourage greater participation

Interview comments

- The AGMs are great, because we attract a large number of people to tackle the key decisions we need to make.
- There is always a good atmosphere; it feels friendly and collaborative.
- The AGM works well, although perhaps some discussions are a little compressed.
- Our discussions on the Annual Work Plan are useful, but I don't know if we are able to give full financial scrutiny at the AGM in the way that I think we perhaps should.
- By their nature, AGMs are either tedious when things are working well, or dramatic when they are not. Also, by their rather ritual nature, they are not effective places to make decisions. Nevertheless, they are necessary and we have to keep thinking of ways of making them as engaging as possible.
- We have to balance the dull but necessary items with interesting items that people enjoy and find valuable. Not sure this balance is quite right yet.
- We need more time on key discussion items – a little more plenary input perhaps?
- The AGM needs to be more active/interactive.
- Some of us are new to the AGMs and other meetings and need to find our way.
- We don't attract the senior people from the larger EBs to our AGMs in a way that I think we should. We need to think of ways to that will enable their attendance, for example, by the participation of high profile figures, such as the Commissioner.
- Commitment levels could be a little higher from amongst members. This may in part be a lack of understanding of their role at the AGM, but equally, it could be that they lack the resources in their organisations to enable fuller engagement.

Equinet's own evaluation of the AGM

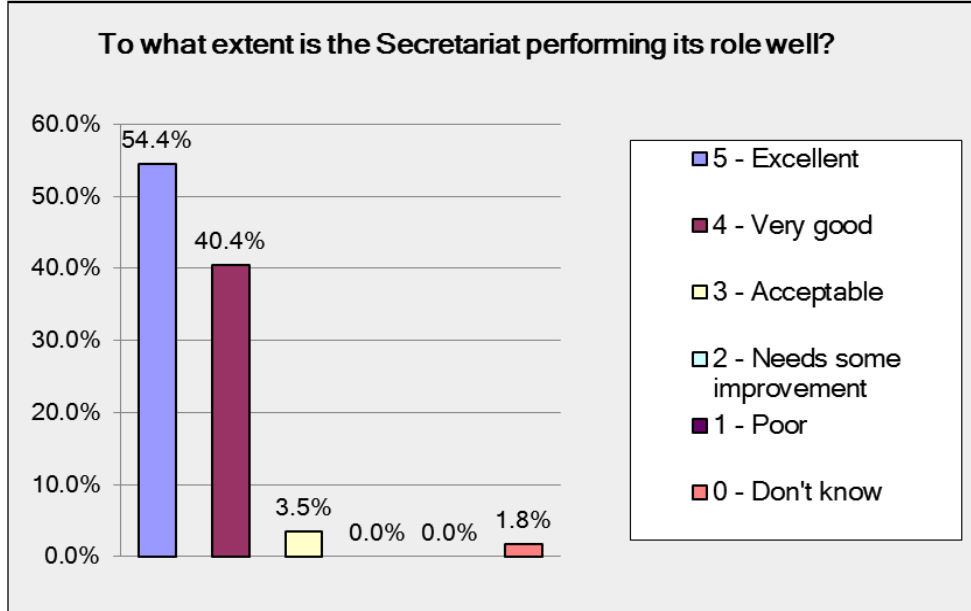
Equinet's own analysis of the AGM, prepared and presented to the Executive Board, indicated a high level of satisfaction with 88% rating the meeting as either Excellent or Very good and only 6% as 'good'. There were no scores of bad or very bad. Participants observed a number of positive features of the AGM and no written observations of weakness were made.

Within the detailed scores, one can notice a variation between, say the scores on board election transparency (81% Strongly agreed with the statement) and the slightly more muted scores on the launch of the paper on Indicators for EBs or the session on EU priorities, which, while still strong have more 'agrees' than

‘strongly agrees’. This is not a sign of weakness necessarily but a mild difference that may merit tracking.

To what extent is the Secretariat performing its role well?

Statistical scores



Survey remarks to the follow-on question: what are the next steps in its development and how could the Secretariat improve in the future?

There were 12 comments and each could be considered under the following headings.

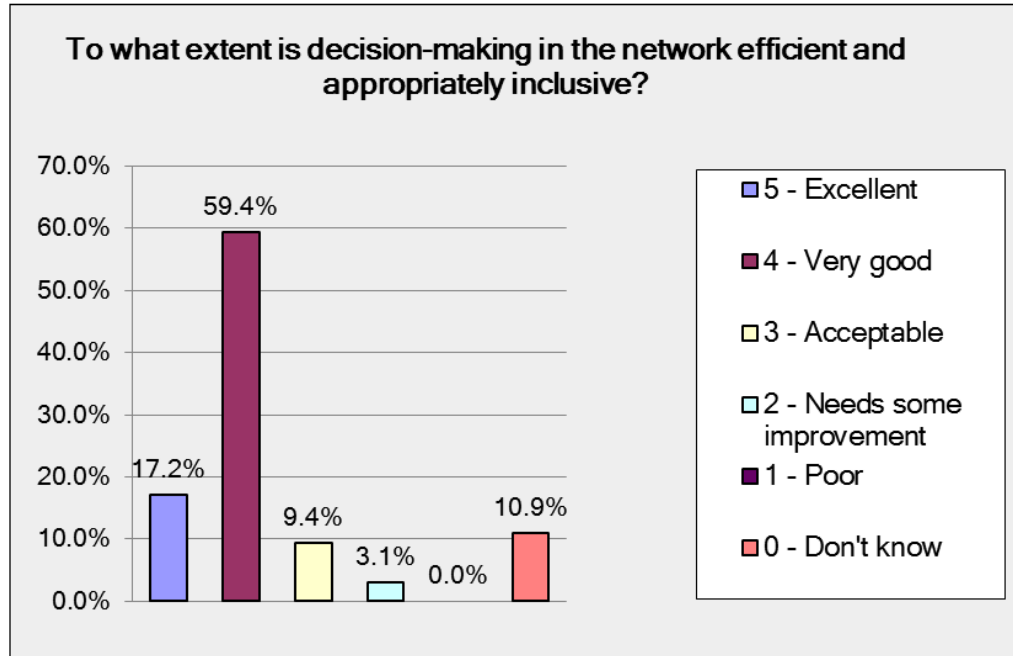
- Performance of the Secretariat in its role:
 - It's fine as it is – just keep it up
 - Very professional and competent
 - We are lucky to have such a brilliant staff
 - Could do with a little more help with the logistics for my working group
- The role of the Secretariat:
 - Clarify roles
 - Needs to 'dare' to reinvent itself, partly to stay fresh
- The size of the Secretariat:
 - Need to expand the numbers of staff (6)
 - With network growth, you need staff growth
- Staff development:
 - We need to keep an eye on retention and succession
 - We need to think more about staff development to aid retention

Interview comments

- The Secretariat is the best thing about Equinet! They are competent, but careful, looking deeply into the issues and supporting members very well.
- The tone and pace set by the Secretariat is just right and a hard thing to do well.
- They are really valued for what they do.
- They are always really well prepared and understand their role in a network.
- Their offices have a great working environment and are a great place to meet in.
- We need to devise ways of delegating more to the secretariat. Empowerment is the next step for us.
- Greater role definition and a more formal organisational structure within the Secretariat is needed and will enable the ability to get away from too much attention to the small details and focus more on what really adds value.
- The style of paying very close attention to detail is valued and reflects a sensitivity to members' interests, something that is important.
- We must stay in close cooperation with the Commission – the development of the recent work plan was rushed because we were not fully in tune with their needs.
- The key issue for us is holding on to the Secretariat – high turnover would be a major risk for us.
- They do not have sufficient people to do all that needs to be done, especially following the inclusion of Gender into the brief of Equinet.
- The size of the secretariat has not kept pace with the growth of the membership.
- I wonder about secondments between the Secretariat and EBs as a way of developing skills and experience of both parties.
- In the case of the Secretariat, secondments would help them develop their experience of the issues on the ground.
- While very collegial, the management style appears to tend a little towards micro-management and may lack sufficient role clarity. The work on staff regulations will help this to some extent.
- The challenge for us is that we lack a contingency plan in case of changes in funding or political direction that lead to changes in emphasis towards our issue. This is something we need to work on.

To what extent is decision making in the Network efficient and appropriately inclusive?

Statistical scores



Survey remarks to the follow-up question: what could be possible improvements or changes, if any, in the decision-making process?

There were 12 comments and they could be grouped as follows.

- Effective planning:
 - The current methods of consulting to make decisions are working well
 - Don't stick rigidly to a yearly planning cycle, but consider a mixed approach in which there are activities that may take more (or less) than one year, eg primary research, which would take longer than one year
 - The new strategic plan offers the right opportunity to plan thoroughly and include members in the process
- Strong participation:
 - Involve the heads of EBs during the year
 - Involve EBs more in the agreement of training and seminar plans
 - EBs' input to decisions can be constrained by the capacity of EB staff to respond

- The right pace:
 - We need a faster pace
- It's fine as it is:
 - The decision making process works well as it is

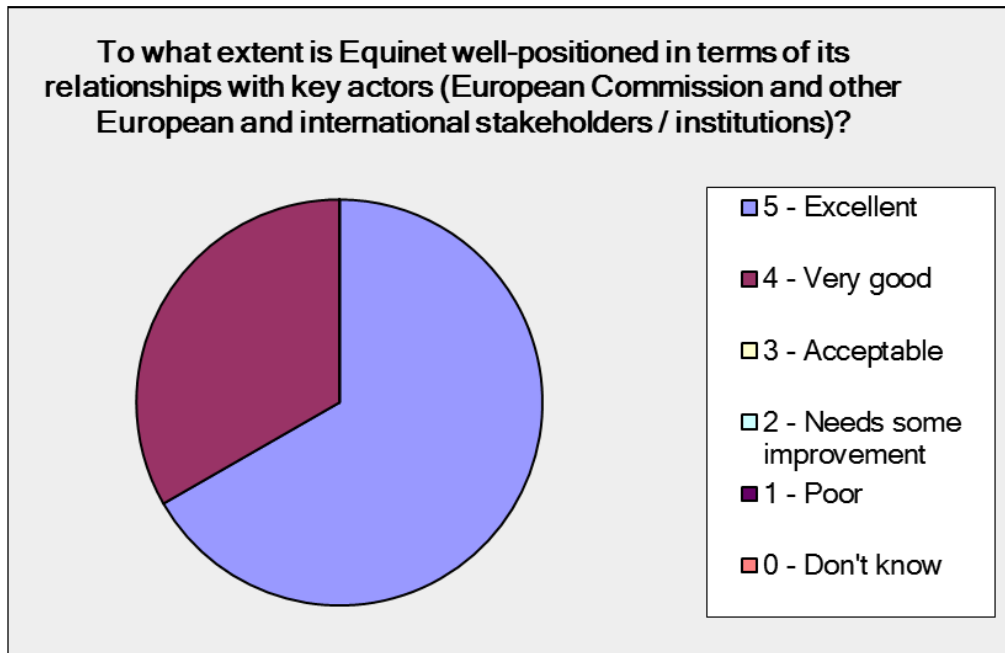
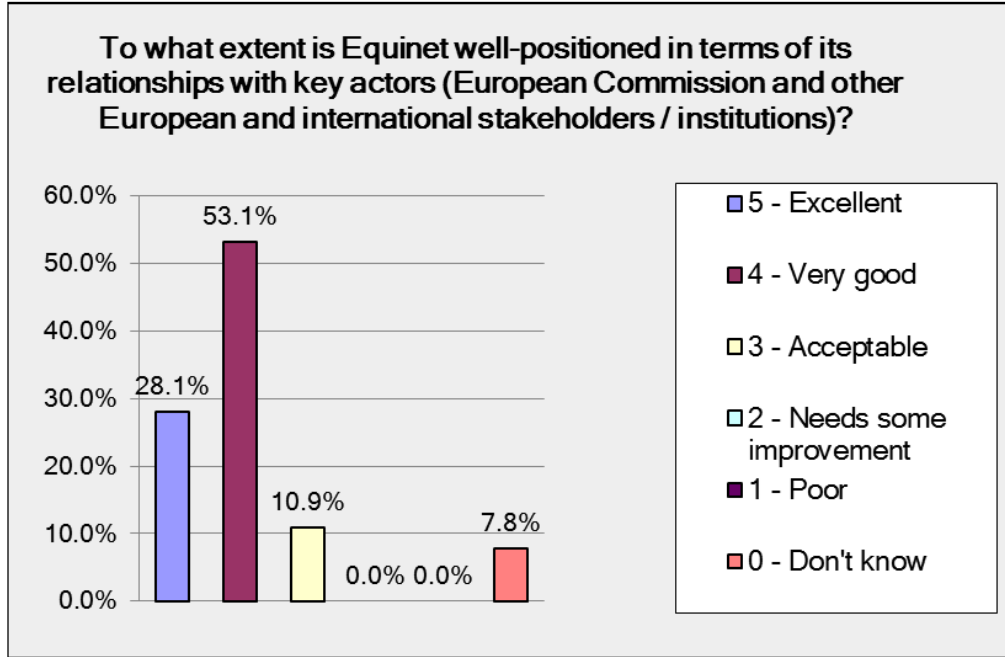
Interview comments

- Decision-making is effective and its effectiveness is based on sound listening between Secretariat and members – the network needs to know itself.
- Decision-making works well because our engagement with stakeholders is managed well.
- The decision-making processes are flexible and we can respond effectively when urgent matters arise, eg by email.
- It works well due to high levels of engagement between members and between the membership and the secretariat.
- While the style is consensual, which feels good and is in fact good, the question about where authority lies in the decision-making process comes to mind and the answer is not entirely clear.
- The decision-making style has changed over the years: it is now less 'clubby' and more inclusive and the staff work hard to address the needs of all parties.
- The board advisor's role is very helpful to support some of the key substantive decisions.
- We make good use of questionnaires to gauge people's views on the key questions
- Our unusual status perhaps fosters a tension in respect of decision-making. We are an independent international not-for-profit organisation / NGO (AISBL), not mandated by statute; however, our members and our funding are all from public sources and our mentality is a public service one. Such a tension may play out in terms of our understanding of our strategic freedom: we are freer to act than we perhaps want to be, or understand how to be.
- Our freedom to act is constrained considerably through the influence of the European Commission.
- A larger, more diverse membership demands a slightly more evolved and nuanced approach to decision-making; we have to keep all the members with us.
- Decision-making may be slightly more based around positioning and personality than around the balance of arguments in relation to the issues in hand. While this works, it begs the question about whether another, better way may be possible, which may involve a more robust approach to considering the issues, leading to a little more (constructive) conflict.
- We need to engage the heads of EBs more in the decision-making processes.

Equinet from the Standpoint of its Profile

To what extent is Equinet well-positioned in terms of its relationships with key actors (European Commission and other European and international stakeholders / institutions)?

Statistical Scores



Survey remarks to the follow-up question: what are the next steps in terms of its engagement with key external stakeholders?

There were 18 responses to this question and they can be represented in the following way.

- A stronger strategic focus:
 - If we are really clear what we want to achieve we can pursue that
- Strengthen existing relationships:
 - Strengthen cooperation with other networks in our field, eg FRA, the European Ombudsman, Council of Europe and ENNHRI
 - The delivery of our unique mandate is dependent upon key external relationships
 - Keep really close to the Commission
 - Get closer to the EU-level NGOs in our field
 - More joint sessions
 - To strengthen these relationships, you need more staff
- Re-profile:
 - Following the election, Equinet will need to renew relationships with EU and international organisations to promote good equality and human rights practice
 - Work with key national level actors, in cooperation with the national EB (2)
- It's fine as it is:
 - We are well positioned with the actors we need to be positioned with
 - We have the relationships we need, but this needs greater EU-level support

Interview comments

- Remarkably strong, especially when you reflect that it is not truly a representative body, but by giving voice to the experience of its members, it secures a strong position without falling into the trap of being a lobby organisation. But getting the balance right is a real challenge, and, as social Europe becomes more and more under threat, Equinet needs to keep its position constantly under close review.
- This role is performed very well, but the constraint is staff capacity.
- It makes a difference to have a staff member who specialises in this aspect of the work, which is done better and better.
- Good relationships with the Commission especially, and also with the Fundamental Rights Agency, for whom Equinet is a respected partner. But these are still first steps in a process of deeper engagement.

- Perhaps need stronger relationships with EP, particularly in relation to topics that connect with MEPs' concerns
- Equinet could be more influential, especially at national level.
- Our practical experience base is our strength and we underplay this strength slightly; we have much more to give to a wider range of institutions.
- While very good, our reports should have a wider readership to gain greater influence from our experience.
- The idea of standards for equality bodies is relevant here and Equinet's contribution vital, but it has to carefully define its contribution to facilitate Commission ownership of the issue.
- The critical issue for us to gain more influence is to pick the right topics on which to speak. This has to be a collaborative process with the membership and the Secretariat, and the members must remain aligned.
- There is a danger for us in being seen as a lobbyist or political body by other key actors. We need more board discussion on our stance in this respect. It's OK to pursue certain specific policy issues but not to act politically.
- Our profile could be enhanced by a strong presence of board members at key external meetings
- One sensitive subject that we'll have to steer our way round is that NHRIs are applying for funds directly from the Commission. This presents a little more competition and could result in friction, if we are not careful.

4. Analysis

Introduction

As will be apparent later, it makes sense, when presenting the conclusions, to change the order in which the data for the four topics were presented in the previous section.

Equinet as a Service-Provider

The responses to the question as to the extent to which the current offering of services and activities is the right one was a resounding 'yes'. Going forward, interviewees suggested that the next strategic planning round was a critical opportunity to reflect on how services could be to some extent differentiated better to meet the needs of both a larger membership and a highly heterogeneous membership. Meanwhile, the scores on each service offering were very high⁴, again alongside some hints as to a future with some fine-tuning:

⁴ They never dip below 70% of respondents feeling that a particular service or an aspect of service is Excellent or Good. There is however, one exception in the case of particular training seminar programmes in which the training on Gender dipped at points below 70%, touching 60% on one measure. While this may deserve reflection, it remains a high score, alongside other very high scores.

- More smaller, targeted training events and seminars and fewer all-member events
- Fewer, more impactful reports aimed at a wider range of audiences
- More engaged Working Groups
- A slightly more outward orientation of communications

Since the scores are overall very high indeed, it must first be said that Equinet is doing the right things in the right way as a provider of services to its members. So, the question really is: what next? ‘Tweaking’ or ‘refinement’ would appear to be the appropriate response. But from the hints above, another inference may perhaps also be drawn. What would be needed to take the service to the next level, for the majority of scores to be ‘excellent’ or exemplary? Is there a potential risk, however, slight, of resting on laurels?

Questions such as this lead to the thought about how published reports are prepared and presented, how learning events are segmented and how communications are made rather more impactful. Such a thought would represent not such much a tweaking things, but a process re-engineering what and how things are done for the future.

This is a point that the final section of this report will address again, but at this stage, the point is: if the goal is excellence, getting there may require more than refinement but may be part of a significant reassessment.

Strategic Impact on EBs

This survey did not examine in detail the extent to which Equinet’s second strategic objective was delivered: ‘Enhance the strategic capacity of the equality bodies’. While this may have been an oversight, one may nevertheless infer from the data that this objective has been delivered, at least to some extent, in terms of the overall impact of valued and impactful services that respondent to our survey rate highly. However, there is some evidence that organisational impact at a ‘strategic’ level may not yet have been delivered, in view of calls for more input to sustain agencies under threat, of concerns around independence, of calls for ways to involve higher level people more and so on. This may be a question that the next strategic planning process seeks to examine.

Equinet’s Profile and Policy Impact

Reflecting on Equinet’s positioning with regard to external actors, the general view was that this was very high, and it is noteworthy that external respondents took a much more positive view than the view of members in our survey. Success in this area seems to be attributed to Equinet’s clear sense of focus and clarity of purpose.

However, there was, at the same time, a sense that Equinet ‘punches below its weight (classification)’ to draw from a boxing analogy, i.e. that Equinet appears a little too quiet to some respondents at least, who feel that it has more to say and could say it with more impact if it chose to. Certainly there are hints that deeper engagement both with the usual agencies (from amongst the key external actors) would be beneficial, but also engagement with a broader range of actors too. There was recognition too in the data that this has to be done carefully and it will be important

for Equinet to choose with care the issues upon which it wishes to speak more publically, if it chooses to raise its profile.

The point here perhaps is not so much the question of raising profile, but of seeking in new ways to have more profound impact on the policy process at the EU and, indirectly, via members, at the national level as well. For some, this role extends to intervention at the national level, although this is surely a minority view. This is not, it should be said, input outside of Equinet's mandate or experience base; to the contrary, it is finding ways of influencing existing audiences in smarter ways and of reaching new, but important audiences in new ways. In other words it may be less about the message, but the means by which the message is communicated, including the confidence with which it is asserted. It is in this way that Equinet will 'punch' at or above its weight in its chosen policy arenas. Finally, it may also be a question not just of style, but also of topic selection, in that it is a matter of taking the view of the needs of the audience more in the selection a small number of the most impactful topics. It is thus not so much telling Equinet's or its members' story; rather it is engaging to a greater extent in the stories of its policy environment, always of course, from the basis of its experience.

Equinet as an Organisation

Governance

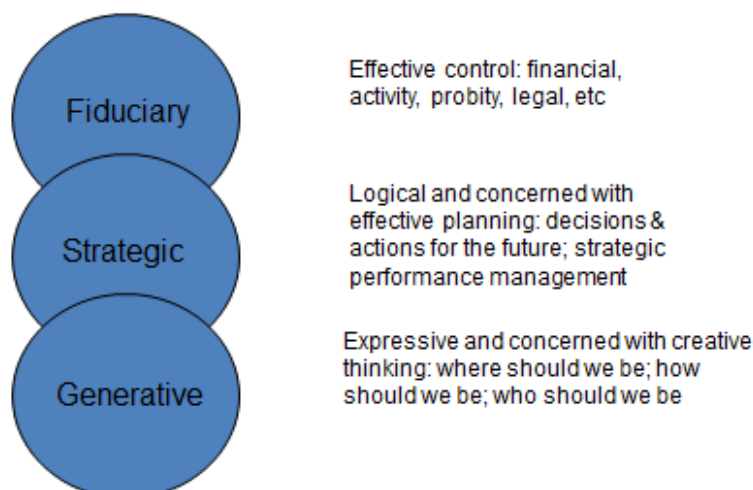
Firstly, in relation to governance, there is a high level of confidence by all members in the governance organs and their performance, suggesting that they do indeed ensure the organisation is well directed and accountable to its members and key stakeholders. Further, there are comments that, in the light of the funding challenges of 2013, the Board in particular was tested and performed well under pressure. Much of this is attributed to the high quality of the relationships between board members and between the board and the Secretariat. The fact that recent elections were both strongly contested, but at the same time very harmonious, was considered a further sign of a healthy governance environment.

For the future, the suggestions that were made include the board's orientation, making a greater input on the strategic front, with a simultaneously lower level of contribution to what some consider as operational considerations. Further, some respondents invite the board not only to 'raise its game' but also to raise its profile amongst key external actors and amongst the membership, while considering a gradually increased level of delegated authority (with support) to the Secretariat. Perceived barriers to such a change include possible gaps in necessary skills on the current board, a lack of a strong understanding of governance by members who have not previously acted in such a capacity and variable commitment levels in practice amongst board members.

It may be that some formal induction of new board members as to their role and responsibilities may help support speedier integration of the new board team. In addition, perhaps greater consciousness of the different mode of how a board works could support the process of ensuring that the board remains focussed at the right level, ever drawing the Secretariat up, rather than controlling it in a downwards direction. The Chair is certainly keen to support a more enabling approach and consideration by the new board of the work, for example, of governance thinkers

such as Chait and Ryan⁵ may help. A brief illustration of their three modes of board behaviour may be a useful point from which to start. The key is maintaining the right balance between them.

New Model – three Modes of Governance Behaviour



AGM

The AGM is seen positively by respondents and while a necessary part of organisational life, it is at the same time not seen as the most valued of the various events available to members. Efforts to combine activities and sessions that are seen as interesting and relevant, while fulfilling necessary statutory responsibilities, are welcomed and could, some suggest, be further developed. But overall, the AGM is seen to perform its necessary job well. The challenge for the future is to see how it can involve more, it is suggested, the senior people from the larger agencies: what would be needed to draw such a segment of the audience to take a more active part in the debates?

Decision-making

Asked about the effectiveness of the decision-making processes, respondents gave enthusiastic support to the notion that they were indeed effective and inclusive.

⁵ *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* Chait, Richard, Ryan William, Taylor Barbara E. (BoardSource, 2005)
https://www.boardsource.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?Action=Add&ObjectKeyFrom=1A83491A-9853-4C87-86A4-F7D95601C2E2&WebCode=ProdDetailAdd&DoNotSave=yes&ParentObject=CentralizedOrderEntry&ParentDataObject=Invoice%20Detail&ivd_formkey=69202792-63d7-4ba2-bf4e-a0da41270555&ivd_cst_key=&ivd_prc_prd_key=F1A03B3F-D1AF-4561-82EB-345FE79BC230

Reflections included the nature of the consensual style of decision-making, but such an observation should not be taken to betoken a lack of active engagement. On the contrary, engagement levels in all decision-making processes were reported as high. For the future, with a larger and more diverse membership, consideration may need to be given to how the decision-making process can be even more sensitive to the question of member diversity.

Secretariat

Finally, in response to the questions about the performance of the Secretariat in performing its role, the highest of all scores were given, indicating the highest levels of confidence in the staff team. Indeed, one comment was that the Secretariat was the ‘best thing’ (amongst many good things!) about the Network. Indications of this high esteem are to be found in comments about the tone that is set by the staff team, not least their sensitive understanding of their role as supporters and facilitators of a network and the need, as a result, always to carry the network with them in any initiative. Thus, a clear and sensitive understanding of their role and their professional execution of that role in a friendly, welcoming and transparent way is a style that members notice and appreciate.

For the future, notes of concern were expressed about Secretariat capacity to do all that a larger network required and the need for more staff in due course. Related to this point, there was concern that, over time, staff turnover may compromise current levels of performance and consideration needs to be given now to career development opportunities, for example, via job enrichment (i.e. greater delegated authority, new projects, etc) as well as secondments, perhaps to member agencies and other opportunities.

Equinet from a strategic standpoint

Overall

Respondents confirm that Equinet’s purpose and objectives are indeed the right ones, with interview comments suggesting that the current strategy is sound and, due to the highly inclusive way in which it was developed, enjoys high levels of support. There is a hint too that the next strategy should provide a little more focus in terms of the objectives, but that the overall purpose and objectives should remain as they are. Finally, there are some reflections about the desirability of a higher profile during the next strategic plan period.

Towards a SWOT

When interviewees were asked to reflect on Equinet’s SWOT, their comments focussed much more on the organisation’s strengths than its weaknesses, a signal of a highly positive regard towards the network overall.

One can develop the feedback, from both the question on SWOT in the interviews, and from other sources of data in the survey, and infer from those sources a new SWOT that captures the key issues of Equinet’s current strategic position, at least in terms of its internal strengths and weaknesses and its external opportunities and threats.



So, the question for Equinet is how does it retain its strengths, undermine or contain its weaknesses, while developing the capacity to seize the opportunities and mitigate the risks from the threats as far as possible?

Financial Health and Growth

Seizing the opportunities implies either growth or choosing not to do some things. The latter could be a tough moment in the forthcoming planning process, while the former may require additional revenue.

The question of financial sustainability was the one that drew the most concern in the survey; indeed, it was the only question that drew concern overall, according to the quantitative data. Interview respondents tended to nuance this overall assessment somewhat, with notes of caution around changing the overall funding model and only (if at all) going for additional sources of Commission funding, if the grounds to do so are very solid indeed. Such a position may be sustainable as long as Commission policy and funding levels remain broadly the way they are, but there are one or two suggestions about what the contingency plan is if they do not. Not having a contingency plan is a weakness and there is a further risk that an organisation that may not grow could stagnate. Equinet is far from stagnant at the moment, but the risk of complacency, as some have mentioned, remains a possibility.

In this context the reluctance to consider actively other sources of public funding that could build impact seems unusual.

Key strategic issues as Equinet goes into the Strategic Planning Round

There is plenty of data on the strategic challenges that Equinet faces as it enters its next strategic planning round, but, in summary, they may be summarised as four big question topics:

1. How exactly do we meet better the more diverse needs of our membership, building skills and knowledge amongst different types of staff, while making a strategic impact on their organisation's capacity? What are the implications for consultation, decision-making, delivery and cost of the answers to this question?
2. How do we make more impact on key external audiences, from the basis of our experience and via our events, our communications and, also, our publications? In particular, in relation to our publications, what is the next stage of their development as vehicles not only to inform, but also to influence the policy formation process? And what are the implications of these questions for how we work with our external stakeholders, how we choose our topics, how we involve our members and also for delivery and cost?
3. What financial strategy do we need to develop that will enable us to retain our core public service identity and values, while enabling us a) to do more of what we think is important and b) invest in doing what we do now even better (eg segmentation, more impactful reports, staff capacity, etc)?
4. What can we do as a network to both enhance the reputations of our members, but also and vitally to defend their role and viability in an adverse and dynamic political climate in relation to equality across the Union?

Tough thinking on each of these questions may provide the broad direction Equinet needs upon which to base its next strategic plan.

4. Final Reflections: Towards Equinet 2.0?

Status Quo Max?

The received wisdom is that when things are working well, you keep them that way. Why risk a model that works? So, one outcome from the forthcoming strategic planning round would not be status quo, because some change is required, but perhaps a 'status quo max', in which the existing approaches are gently developed or fine-tuned.

Equinet 2.0?

But such an outcome might miss the opportunity to take a more rigorous approach to considering an Equinet 2.0, a review if not re-write of the 'base-code' of the organisation, an organisation that is working extremely well and can therefore afford to consider the consequences of the data in this report from a position of strength.

This report shows that taking a fundamental review of service delivery to meet member needs better, of how policy impact is achieved and of how the organisation is resourced to do that, either needs more money or that in doing some things better, it must focus on fewer things to stay within its resources. This is a fundamental and strategic dilemma that touches on some strongly held beliefs within the organisation. It is a dilemma that is central to the next strategic review and one that may also fruitful to explore in depth.

Equinet 2.0: do less better or grow?



In this light of this evaluation, it seems likely that a) change is necessary to meet the changing and more diverse needs of a larger membership and the demands of a more challenging external environment and b) that to do that well adds to complexity and eventually to cost. It follows that the current financial model, itself under some challenge in the data from this evaluation, may need reconsideration.

The outcome would then be Equinet 2.0: slightly larger, more externally engaged, with a slightly broader funding base, doing similar things in quite new ways that meet member needs better and achieves even higher ratings in the future. Equinet 2.0 may look more like a joined-up sector than a network of similar organisations.

This evaluation urges consideration of Equinet 2.0 as the better way of building upon the strong foundations of Equinet 1.0.

5. Appendix

Survey Questions

The online survey and the individual interviews followed a similar format. Here are the survey questions:

1. To what extent are Equinet's overall purpose and objectives the rights ones? (1-5 scale). What do you think is the most important strategic issue that the next strategic plan (from 2015) should address? (Narrative)
2. To what extent is the current offering for Equinet's members the right one (trainings, seminars, working groups, communications, publications)? (1-5 scale) How could the needs of Equinet's highly diverse membership be met better in the future? (Narrative)

3. The Commission, as 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 the work areas you have listed in the table, what is your view of their timeliness, accuracy and usefulness, i.e. their quality and impact? (Score 1-5, where 1= poor and 5 = excellent, against each of the three dimensions listed)

Service offering	Timeliness	Accuracy	Usefulness
1. Trainings			
2. Seminars			
3. Working groups			
4. Communications			
5. Publications			

4. How well does the overall governance of Equinet work? (1-5 scale) What would most help take Equinet's governance forward over the next two years?
5. To what extent is Equinet financially self-sustaining? (1-5 scale) What needs to be done in the coming year to promote a stronger financial position? (Narrative)
6. To what extent is the Secretariat performing its role well? (1-5 scale) What are the next steps in its development over the next two years?
7. To what extent is decision-making in the network efficient and appropriately inclusive? (1-5 scale) What, if anything, should change? (Narrative)
8. To what extent does the AGM work well? (1-5 scale) In what way, if any, do the current arrangements need to change? (Narrative)
9. To what extent do Equinet's relationships with key actors (European Commission and other European and international institutions) position it well? (1-5 scale) What are the next steps in terms of its engagement with key external stakeholders? (Narrative)
10. Overall, how successful do you see Equinet is in delivering its mission? (1-5 scale) What would be the one thing it should do to take it to the next level? (Narrative)