

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]; [Sutton, Rob](#); [Burns, Anna](#); [Douglass, Caroline](#); [Lawton, Nicola](#); [Marks, Kate](#); [Rawlinson, Lee](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]; [Hunt, Lucy](#); [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: SEEN Network
Date: 14 November 2022 07:59:00
Attachments: [image002.png](#)

Good Morning All

[REDACTED] post how now been reopened.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>

Sent: 11 November 2022 17:17

To: Sutton, Rob <rob.sutton@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Burns, Anna <anna.burns@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Douglass, Caroline <caroline.douglass@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Lawton, Nicola <nicola.lawton@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Marks, Kate <Kate.Marks@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Rawlinson, Lee <lee.rawlinson@environment-agency.gov.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Hunt, Lucy <lucy.hunt@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@defra.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: SEEN Network

Hi all

[REDACTED] post in All Company is now live [REDACTED] (pasted below for ease) and comments will be reopened on [REDACTED] post (and disabled on [REDACTED]) when [REDACTED] get a moment to do so

Thanks

[REDACTED]

Posted in [All Company](#)

BN

Seen by 19

Colleagues,

In Defra we are committed to creating and maintaining a diverse and inclusive working environment for all our staff that is fair, respectful and professional. This includes valuing difference and diversity of thought.

This week there was announcement on Yammer about the formation of a new cross government network called Sex Equality & Equity Network (SEEN). The stated aim of the network is to encourage a diversity of voices and open and respectful dialogue and tolerance between those with differing beliefs and experiences. As members of public and civil service organisations, we must promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and we recognise the right of all employees who share a protected characteristic to form networks.

I recognise there is a wider discussion in society about gender beliefs, with

fundamentally different views held. As such, a subsequent conversation on Yammer was paused to allow review and moderation of the tone and content of some posts against the standards of behaviour we expect.

In all Defra organisations, there is no place for harassment, bullying or hatred and thus we expect our employees to show humanity, care and respect for each other in the workplace and to express their beliefs in an appropriate, respectful, and lawful manner, that is consistent with Defra's values and the Yammer Usage Policy. We will not tolerate bullying or harassment of our trans and non-binary colleagues, and neither will we tolerate bullying and harassment of colleagues who share gender critical beliefs. Both have a right to hold and express their belief in an appropriate and respectful manner. We all need to work together and respect differences of belief (that are protected in law), support open and respectful dialogue, listen to each other, and understand each other's perspectives and learn from one another's lived experience.

We are now reopening the thread, but I would remind everyone that all communications between colleagues must be respectful, professional and appropriate for the workplace and are consistent with the Defra's values and the Yammer Usage Policy.

Finally, I want to remind all colleagues of the support available across our Defra Group, through EAP, our network of GoTo people and Fair Treatment Ambassadors, and of course, each other. If colleagues experience or are concerned about the nature of any behaviours expressed across any of our workplace platforms, you can report these via the Yammer content team or via your organisational dispute resolution policies.

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 10 November 2022 12:13

To: Sutton, Rob <rob.sutton@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Burns, Anna <anna.burns@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Douglass, Caroline <caroline.douglass@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Lawton, Nicola <nicola.lawton@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Marks, Kate <Kate.Marks@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Rawlinson, Lee <lee.rawlinson@environment-agency.gov.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; Hunt, Lucy <lucy.hunt@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@defra.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@defra.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>

Subject: RE: SEEN Network

Hi all

Following on from Anna and Rob's emails to EDT (below), I want to give you sight of latest developments in this very complex and rapidly moving situation, ahead of our 3.30pm meeting today (ccing [REDACTED], Lucy and [REDACTED] for awareness)

James had a meeting (coincidentally) with Lee and LGBT+ Network committee this morning and was briefed ahead of this, including the attached lines to take and covering note from [REDACTED] - sets out the Defra position. [REDACTED]'s note of the meeting is attached

Yammer moderation – latest

- Original SEEN [REDACTED] was made with comments turned off (they took advice of HR on content, timing and approach to try and be as respectful/sensitive as possible)
- [REDACTED] made a [REDACTED] in response which included a sort of call to action against SEEN and in support of trans colleagues. This became a virtual space where many expressed distress about SEEN.

The post generated a large response which the new pilot moderation group (led by HR, with [REDACTED] and myself for EA) monitored closely and took legal advice on. Unfortunately by yesterday afternoon a number of comments had been made on the thread which contravene various codes of practice/ respect at work guidance for Defra group employers (eg name calling). This caused distress to SEEN members (including [REDACTED] who made a comment on the thread in response) – see attached email thread ‘Yammer post’

- The moderation group therefore took the difficult decision to turn off comments on the thread (with option to reopen them later) and a note posted to say ‘This conversation is being paused whilst comments are moderated against relevant codes of conduct.’ Late yesterday the team began to remove those individual comments which contravened policy. Emails were sent to the commenters’ line managers, cc-ing them, to explain this decision. This has in turn created strong response. I have attached two emails which [REDACTED] received. She has subsequently sent holding replies (see attached). [REDACTED] (HR EDI) will now follow up with each line manager (8 so far, including some EA) to further explain the rationale and address any concerns.
- [REDACTED] is reviewing a draft statement which will be posted on Yammer imminently, likely as a stand-alone in All Company
- Moderation group will meet again Friday morning (and today if needed). We will weigh up whether or not to reopen comments on the thread and discuss any other issues arising.

Yammer/ internal comms principles for all Defra group staff

- EA version of draft principles created by HR and reviewed by James are being fast-tracked. Latest attached

‘Fostering good relations’

- My team had an initial meeting with BitC yesterday who are now engaged in planning a facilitated session between network leads and sponsors (SEEN, LGBT+ and Gender Equality/ Women’s) to foster mutual understanding and ‘turn down the temperature’. We have had early indications that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are both keen to participate. Next steps are for BitC to draft an agenda and identify dates (14 Dec suggested); to set up initial meetings between BitC consultants and each Network (lead + sponsor or other support they wish to bring in)

Corporate support of SEEN <https://seen-network.uk/>

- Cabinet Office Inclusive Practice team have been involved in the establishment of the network and as such we will support it as we do other diversity networks.
- [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and I met with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] on Monday (7 Nov) and learned the following:
 - Three co-chairs are [REDACTED] (Natural England, [REDACTED] (Department of Levelling Up), and [REDACTED] (BEIS). They have allocated other key roles to other members of the Steering Group, including [REDACTED] (EA) and approximately 12 others.
 - They have liaised with Cabinet Office team to ensure the Network is properly established within current guidelines. Following the meeting they shared their Constitution and Objectives (which Cabinet Office advised them on), in confidence with myself, [REDACTED] and Kate Marks
 - [REDACTED] was at pains to describe the Network’s desire to avoid being insensitive to other protected groups, especially vulnerable individuals, and welcomed our advice on this. She was keen to say the Network intend to guard against hate and noted those with gender critical beliefs are ‘a broad church with fringes our network

would not want to associate with'. She was very open to listening to colleagues fear, anger etc and keen to counter misinformation about the Network in hopes of allaying some of the fears

- Kate Marks has agreed to arrange an initial meeting with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], who confirmed that within Cabinet Office governance they have aligned SEEN under 'faith and belief' protected characteristic. Kate is awaiting an update from [REDACTED] (ExCo gender champion) before proceeding
- [REDACTED] described the Network's next steps as clarifying steering group roles and responsibilities, and the n working to formulate their 'mission and timeframes' – ie priority actions they hope to progress. From separate conversations with [REDACTED] I expect this could include requests for review of relevant policies, data collection approaches and Stonewall membership – but this remains to be seen. We would handle these as we do requests from any network – establishing where to prioritise and join up with other EDI-related workstreams, seeking HR/ Legal advice and best practice, consulting across all Networks etc.
- [REDACTED] and I have offered a further meeting to discuss existing support arrangements for our other diversity networks (of which some others are cross-Defra or cross-government), which [REDACTED] was keen to arrange asap

FOIs

- A number of live FOIs are requiring significant resource to address
 - [REDACTED] received 9 Nov - re creation of SEEN (deadline 8 Dec)- requester [REDACTED] whatdotheyknow.com
 - [REDACTED] received 20 Sept – re Stonewall spend 2021-22 (deadline was 18 Oct) – requester [REDACTED]
 - [REDACTED] received 13 Sept- re Stonewall WEI submissions and advice received from Stonewall 2020/21/22 (deadline was 12 Oct) – requester [REDACTED]
 - [REDACTED] received 5 May and subsequently amended - re Stonewall WEI submissions and advice received from Stonewall 2018-22 (deadline was 16 June; interim response with 2021 submission sent 21 Sept) – requester [REDACTED]

In addition to the wellbeing impacts on staff on all sides of the issues and those leading our Networks, the situation has been very challenging and pressured for those leading our organisational response in HR, Knowledge Management, my team etc- as well as yourselves. I welcome your ongoing advice and support.

From: Sutton, Rob <rob.sutton@environment-agency.gov.uk>

Sent: 10 November 2022 10:36

To: Burns, Anna <anna.burns@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Bevan, James <James.Bevan@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Douglass, Caroline <caroline.douglass@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Curtin, John <john.curtin@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Hunt, Lucy <lucy.hunt@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Leyland, John <john.leyland@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; Lawton, Nicola <nicola.lawton@environment-agency.gov.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>

Subject: RE: SEEN Network

Thanks Anna – this is helpful as is the attached briefing note.

As we all know, this is incredibly tricky. Showing respect (for all parties) is obviously key to this (a view shared by everyone). The difficulty is that emotions are running so deep and high and any comment being made is causing upset. Even if on the surface that comment may appear innocuous. Therefore, this makes moderating discussion and comments is difficult as the interpretation of what is respectful is subjective.

We need to find a way through this and hopefully today's discussion will help. Clearly, this is a wider issue and it would be good to understand how other organisations are dealing with this. I will pick this up with [REDACTED] and the EDI team – who I am sure will have some insight.

Rob

Rob Sutton

Deputy Director – People and Change

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(PA: [REDACTED] [@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk) tel: [REDACTED])

From: Burns, Anna <anna.burns@environment-agency.gov.uk>

Sent: 10 November 2022 10:05

To: Bevan, James <James.Bevan@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Douglass, Caroline <caroline.douglass@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Curtin, John <john.curtin@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Hunt, Lucy <lucy.hunt@environment-agency.gov.uk>; Leyland, John <john.leyland@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; Lawton, Nicola <nicola.lawton@environment-agency.gov.uk>

Cc: Sutton, Rob <rob.sutton@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>; [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] <[\[REDACTED\]@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@environment-agency.gov.uk)>

Subject: SEEN Network

Hi Team

I have received some calls from a couple of Directors about the creation of the SEEN network and the strong views and responses this has generated on Yammer. I thought it was worth just giving you a quick update to ensure that you are all sighted and make colleagues aware of the following:

1. Nicky is overseeing our approach and has arranged a meeting this afternoon to review the current issues and agree any action as needed.
2. The EDI team has been working closely with the EA representatives on the new DEFRA network and other networks to support colleagues to respect individual views and manage difference thoughtfully and sensitively.
3. The current plan has actions in place around moderation of comments on Yammer channels, mediation and support for individuals and media and comms handling.
4. James is aware and [REDACTED] is keeping him updated.
5. I attach some lines to take that have been developed by DEFRA and I expect one of the key outcomes of our meeting this afternoon will be to share an update and agreed lines to take with our own EM community so they are aware and can support as needed.
6. As background I attach the media handling.

I hope that is helpful and will support you to support your Directors in advance of further communications

Anna

Issue: A new civil service wide staff network called [Sex Equality and Equity Network \(SEEN\)](#) has been established. The network aims to promote and support sex equality

and equity between men and women in the workplace. The network say their focus is “on challenging sex discrimination and upholding rights and protections that relate to sex”.

The network holds the protected belief (covered by the protected characteristic of religion and belief in the Equality Act 2010) that biological sex is binary and immutable. Some members of Environment Agency staff are founding members of the network and plan to publish an item on the Defra Yammer channel to publicise the network during w/c 7 November.

Media handling: The staff network has already been launched and we have not seen any media pick up. Although it is possible this could enter the public domain and attract some media interest, particularly in outlets such as the Daily Mail or trade press like Civil Service World. Overall, this would be a Cabinet Office lead as the network is civil service wide and they would handle queries reactively. If we receive any approaches on the network which are not specific about the EA we will direct to the Cabinet Office in the first instance.

It is unlikely the EA would feature in media coverage as potential coverage would like discuss the network as a whole and potentially link it to ministerial and government positions on related issues. However, if any coverage does pick up on EA involvement we have prepared the below reactive lines. These lines make clear that the EA is committed to creating an inclusive workplace. The lines also explain factually that the staff network has been recognised by the Cabinet Office and is civil service wide, rather than just in the EA.

Separately, Defra group and EA internal comms are aware and are working on internal comms handling.

Are you content with this media handling approach?

Background information:

- The wellbeing of all staff is a top priority for the Environment Agency.
- The EA is a public service, place based organisation so it is crucial we are an inclusive organisation and representative of the communities we serve.
- We are working to promote inclusion for all staff and to tackle discrimination through a range of actions – including mandatory Respect at Work training for all employees, refreshed grievance, dispute and resolution policies, and ongoing collaboration with our diversity networks.
- The cross-government Sex Equality and Equity Network (SEEN) is recognised by the Cabinet Office and is open to staff across government, including staff at the Environment Agency.

If needed:

- As part of our commitment to being an inclusive employer, we will seek to ensure all staff feel supported and respected in the workplace. Our staff have the right to free speech and expression of belief and where there is disagreement we will support staff to talk to each and be respectful of each other, of difference and of differing views.

If you are not

Anna Burns

Deputy Director Governance and Engagement

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Pronouns: [REDACTED] ([why is this here?](#))



[REDACTED]

✉: anna.burns@environment-agency.gov.uk

PA: [REDACTED]