

**Report on a Programme of Activities to inform
the Welsh Assembly Government's Single
Equality Scheme –
Executive Summary
March 2008**

Services for life

Executive Summary

Background

1. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) is to implement a Single Equality scheme in 2008 which will support the mainstreaming of Welsh policy for equality, diversity and human rights, making them integral to the way they do business and fully considered from the outset in policy making and implementation.
2. WAG commissioned Tribal to run a programme of engagement activity with stakeholders across the equality strands of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion and belief and sexual orientation, which would inform the Single Equality scheme. This programme took place from October 2007 to February 2008.
3. This programme of engagement events should be considered as part of a developing body of evidence to support the Single Equality Scheme. However, although this programme engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, there are limitations, some of which are highlighted Points 17-21. Most importantly, the survey findings presented should not be taken as representative of the views of the public in Wales generally, or of a representative sample of equality strands in Wales. Those who were engaged were self selected, not randomly selected and due to the small numbers in the survey, particularly the small numbers of certain equality groups, the findings are not statistically robust and therefore should not be interpreted as such.

1 Engagement Events

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 A programme of six engagement events was held in November 2007 across Wales. Events were held in Newport, Swansea, Aberystwyth, Caernarfon, Wrexham and Cardiff.

1.1.2 The events (and the questionnaire) were publicised to 260+ organisations throughout Wales. In total there were 96 people that attended the six engagement events. This consisted of a combination of people attending as individuals plus representatives of organisations.

1.1.3 Each engagement event was restricted to 20 attendees in order to ensure equality and to enable one to one support where required. However, as with the questionnaire, the responses and main points arising were consistent and it can be argued that this would be the case had any further engagement events been held.

1.1.4 Those individuals and organisations who registered for the events but were unable to attend were encouraged to complete the questionnaire.

1.1.5 The six workshops focused on:

- Capturing what life is currently like in Wales across all equality strands and topic areas.
- Capturing any barriers (real and perceived) that participants may experience because of their equality issue.
- Considering what priorities the Welsh Assembly Government need to include in the Single Equalities Scheme.
- Capturing any existing positive practice around this agenda.
- Identifying any potential case study subjects (particularly where this cuts across more than one equality strand / engagement topic) for further development into a suite of eight.

1.2 Summary of engagement events

1.2.1 All of the equality strands were represented at the events: age, disability, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, (including asylum seekers, migrant workers and refugees), religion and belief and sexual orientation.

1.2.2 There were five key themes raised at the events where it was felt improvements were needed. These were around issues of access to services and access of opportunity for all. These were specifically in the areas of carers, childcare, housing, public transport, and raising awareness of diversity.

- 1.2.3 These key themes are summarised and illustrated by examples as follows:

Carers

- 1.2.4 It was felt that improved support needs to be in place to enable carers of all ages to have access of opportunity. With an estimated 90,000 carers of all ages across Wales, attendees called for more to be done to ensure that carers receive more support to enable them to take up opportunities across all aspects of life. Examples of this include raising the awareness of young carers in schools.

Childcare

- 1.2.5 Actions are required for enabling provision of available, good quality and affordable childcare for all. Examples given included concerns over childcare being expensive coupled with the lack of after school clubs. There was also a request that both childcare and training be provided for mothers who wanted or needed to return to work.

Housing

- 1.2.6 It was felt that actions were required for enabling accessible, affordable and sustainable housing for all.

- 1.2.7 An example illustrating this point was that the lack of a minimum design standard for housing has led to a shortage of accessible housing. Attendees felt that the public sector 'right to buy scheme' has also contributed to this shortfall by reducing the number of appropriate homes which could be adapted to better meet needs. More generally, attendees felt that there is an inherent and national lack of affordable housing and that we should be looking closer at the need for sustainable housing.

Public transport

- 1.2.8 There was a lack of confidence in the public transport system which was a subject that attendees discussed at length during several of the engagement events. This applied to transport in both rural and urban areas. In particular there is a perceived need for consistent accessibility, improved availability and affordability. For example, even where one can board an accessible bus there is no guarantee that an accessible bus or dropped kerb at a bus stop will be available for the return journey. Similarly not all taxis are accessible. The cost of fares and scarcity of services on many train and bus routes were also concerns across all equality strands.

Raising awareness of equality issues

- 1.2.9 Raising awareness of diversity and equality issues in order to prevent discrimination. Education around this was felt to be needed in schools, amongst the public and in the workplace.

- 1.2.10 This should be supported by the upholding of legislation that is already in place. There are already a number of laws in place to

help with the equality agenda but some attendees stated that these were not always implemented and upheld. The view was expressed by some attendees that discriminatory practice still occurs, regardless of legislation.

- 1.2.11 Schools were an example given of an area where further diversity education was required. For instance, in schools there is often a lack of information about sexual orientation and unconventional family models. Some schools were also felt to not always recognise where racism, homophobia and ablism had occurred.
- 1.2.12 There is a need to address attitudinal problems (i.e. ignorance and lack of knowledge) which lead to discrimination, for example by providing mandatory education and training in the equality strands.
- 1.2.13 In some engagement events there was a feeling that it would be helpful for WAG to take on board a more cross cutting approach to human rights rather than looking at equalities on a strand basis.
- 1.2.14 The priority is the need to consider the impact of policies before implementation. Attendees felt that all policies needed to be 'equality proofed' in some way and that a broad view is needed to ensure that particular groups / individuals are not disadvantaged by the delivery of any policy / strategy in Wales. There was a strong call from attendees that it is down to the 'experts' to understand the agenda.

Equal access to core services

- 1.2.15 Equal access and opportunity to all core services was an underlying theme, enabling equal access to education and training, health services, and in the workplace. This refers to physical access but also more strategically in terms of access to opportunities and providing a platform for all, including the most disadvantaged within society.