



Comisiwn
Cydraddoldeb a
Hawliau Dynol

Equality and
Human Rights
Commission

**No challenge too big,
no solution too small**

**Equality exchange
conference report**

June 2010

The Equality and Human Rights Commission aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between all people and promote and protect human rights, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society.

The Equality Exchange is a network that promotes the exchange of effective and innovative employment practice for employers, trainers and consultants committed to achieving equality in the workplace. The network has over 60 members and meets regularly to share good practice and to learn from each other. We welcome new members so if you would like to join or want more information please contact us.

Contact Us

Telephone: 02920 447710

Textphone: 02920 447713

wales@equalityhumanrights.com

Wales Helpline

Telephone: 0845 604 8810

Textphone: 0845 604 8820

waleshelpline@equalityhumanrights.com

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How can small steps make a big difference?

For this year's Equality Exchange conference we chose the theme of **No challenge too big, no solution too small**. Our publication 'Rising to the Challenge' looked at the ways in which public authorities in Wales have engaged with the public sector equality duties so far. What we found time and again from the people we spoke to was that the initiatives organisations took to meet the duties always began with one small step, often in one equality area and found it had a big impact. Once they had taken this small step they were able to extend it to other areas.

We also built on the themes of the previous two years conferences. In 2008 we were joined by Sallie Glickman from the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board who told us that every journey begins by taking a small step. In 2009 we focused on having the confidence to make changes that are really going to make the difference.

There is a huge challenge currently facing us all in the public sector – the large scale cuts to budgets and the pressure to deliver more for less. We wanted to use the conference to think of small clever ways to ensure the equality gains which we have fought hard to make are not lost in these difficult times.



Our speakers challenged and inspired us to think about the small solutions that can tackle the big challenges we are facing.

Teresa Rees set out the shocking findings of the National Equality Panel report and its implications for action that we need to take in Wales. Irwin Turbitt introduced the idea of 'wicked problems' and shared the small steps we can take to become leaders capable of tackling these issues. Michael Cashman shared his personal insights into what has driven the huge changes that have happened for gay and lesbian people over the past 50 years.

The workshops gave delegates the opportunity to discuss the public sector cuts in more detail and the small, clever interventions which might help avoid adverse impact on equality groups. Delegates enthused and inspired each other with examples of good practice.

If you were unable to attend the conference and would like to see the filmed presentations from the day please contact us. We hope this report inspires you to identify the steps you can personally take in tackling the big challenges you face.

Ann Beynon, Wales Commissioner
Kate Bennett, National Director for Wales



National Equality Panel – Small steps to close the inequality gulf

Professor Teresa Rees

Professor Teresa Rees is Pro Vice Chancellor for Research at Cardiff University and attended the conference to share some insights with us from her work with the National Equality Panel. This was set up to identify areas of greatest inequality in the UK. Teresa introduced the report and gave us a flavour of the shocking findings which the data revealed:

- There is a much higher number of people in Wales with no qualifications whatsoever than in the rest of the UK. This is very significant as the report reveals that there is a direct relationship between the number of qualifications you have and how well off you are. Education is hugely important if you are not to be deprived.
- The amount of money you have as a parent, will directly affect the school readiness of your child at age 3, the more money you have the more school ready your children will be.
- One area which might not immediately spring to mind as an equality issue is green spaces. However, the report revealed that access to a green space for people living in urban areas is vital to their health and well being.
- White Christian children are much more likely to end up gaining qualifications than white children with no religion. The report also found that Indian, Hindu and Sikh children are likely to be more successful than Indian Muslims. Muslim children and adults experience very high levels of poverty and inequality.
- Disabled people are worse off now than they were 30 years ago whatever the level of qualifications they have.



These are just a taste of the statistics which the report revealed. What is also very important to note is that the report has shown that economic advantage and disadvantage reinforce themselves across the life cycle and on to the next generation.

“Class is reproducing people with the same position in terms of access to education, equality, to wealth, to decent wages...”

Teresa suggested that in organisations it is not always a policy which makes a difference, but the level of transparency. The solution really lies in the difficult area of values and behaviours. Teresa introduced to some ideas for tackling inequality which have been adopted in other countries including Norway where there are almost no cases of ADHD because children don't go to school until they are 7 years old. Before this time they are in a state system but they are being taught to play, be with each other and how to be good citizens.

In Iceland – Reykjavik – authorities made equality their main manifesto commitment as they realised everything they were doing was clearing up after inequality – homelessness, unemployment, dealing with criminal behaviour. They realised if they spent more resources on promoting equality a lot of these problems would disappear.

In Sweden where transparency and statistics are seen to be the key everyone knows the data and facts so it is harder to pretend inequalities are not happening.

Teresa felt strongly that one of the things we could do as employers is to think more carefully about contract compliance and who we use as suppliers. Teresa felt that this was an idea which has been around for a long time but is something which could make a big difference. Organisations selling their services to the public sector will build equality into their businesses because their survival depends on it.

Teresa ended her session by turning her focus to Wales and the small steps we can take here to tackle the issues. Teresa was keen to encourage delegates to use the statistics from the report to inform work, but not to become paralysed by them. One important step would be a specific Welsh version of the National Equality Panel report. Delegates agreed that this would be very welcome.

No challenge too big, no solution too small

Irwin Turbitt

Irwin Turbitt is a Senior Fellow at Warwick University and spends much of his time assisting senior public managers to create greater public value. Irwin introduced the idea of big challenges as ‘wicked problems’ these are the problems to which there is no right or wrong solution. They are novel or intractable and they are problems which we cope with rather than solve.

Irwin used the example of domestic violence as a ‘wicked problem’. Domestic violence is complex rather than complicated – it is never static – you solve one problem and another one appears, the problems are embedded together, they have no boundaries.

Irwin suggested that in order to tackle these wicked problems it is leadership which is needed rather than management:

“All of you can choose to exercise leadership. It is a choice. That’s not something you can be mandated or required to do. You can be required to act in a post as a leader and use the authority the post has. You can’t be mandated to use leadership as a choice.”

Irwin describes the kind of behaviour which we need to adopt in order to tackle wicked problems as adaptive leadership. Irwin explained the theory of adaptive leadership in the following terms:

1. Leadership is separate from authority. People only have authority over you when you give it to them. It is often difficult for people who are not in authority, but who are exercising leadership, to recognise that they are doing what they are doing because they have chosen to not because they have been told to.



2. Look in the Mirror. Irwin talked about ‘they’ people. ‘They’ always stop you doing things. When you hear the ‘they’ talk go to the mirror. Leadership starts in the mirror. The only behaviour which you can choose or change is your own behaviour. If you keep repeating behaviour that does not work, why blame someone else?
3. Get on the balcony. The balcony gives you a different perspective. In our working lives we are busy dancing on the dance floor and it can be hard to see what is happening. You can only make a judgement on how the dance is going based on the bit of the dance floor you can see and assume that the same thing is going on all across the dance floor. The more quickly you can move between the dance floor and the balcony, the more effective you become.
4. Identify the adaptive challenge. Irwin explained this as the gap between what people say and what they do. This is the gap in which we need to work. An organisation might say that they care deeply about an equality issue because they have publications and policies and leaflets, but this is not reflected in the work they actually do.
5. Maintain the attention. This is a big challenge in tough times. In times when there is money equality and diversity teams can be given a budget to do the work. Now, in tough times, we need to give the work back to people. With wicked problems there is no one expert who can do the work and fix the issue. You may know what the problem is but you need to get your voice heard by people in positions of authority. We must be prepared to work together. Shared experience of taking one action that works means that people have the confidence to do more things together.
6. Dancing with the ugly dancers. Sometimes, to make the best progress on an agenda we need to find the person we are least likely to want to dance with. We are all socially attuned to dance with the people who see the world in the same way we do and this is sometimes necessary. But often it is the ugly dancers, the people we are less likely to approach that can best help to make things happen. It is from the balcony that we can spot them more easily.

“Wicked problems require trial and error – make a thousand small steps everyday and reflect from the balcony on them. 500 of these will be failures, but that is 500 successes and a thousand learning opportunities...”

Public sector cuts, the big challenge for us all

Workshop sessions

Our workshops gave delegates the opportunity to work together in small groups to consider the huge challenge facing us all at the current time:

“How can we use small clever interventions to resist adverse impact of the public sector cuts across all equality groups in terms of both employment and services?”

Delegates used the ideas and thinking from the morning’s presentations to inform their discussions on the small steps and influencing approaches which might be most useful to them in the cuts environment and noted their own personal small steps which they would carry out when they get back to their own organisations. Outcomes from workshops included three key areas for future work and three ways of progressing our agenda:

Three key areas for future work:

1. **Evidence** Delegates identified that evidence is crucial in order to make good decisions. Good evidence is already available and we need to make use of it wherever possible. Case studies and personal stories are a compelling and powerful way to really seek engagement from people you are trying to influence. The members of the network can learn from each other’s stories too.

“Sharing best practice, figures, stats and evaluation.”

2. **Equality Impact Assessment** Delegates felt certain that it would be impossible to avoid cuts happening and therefore even more important to ensure that equality impact assessments were carried out for all decisions made. Equality officers felt that they could be a good resource to chief executives to help them carry out equality impact assessments. Delegates fed back that it is vital to never assume, always ask, and always check what the difference is going to be. There was a call to the Commission to take a lead in ensuring this is done at the highest level. Equality Impact assessments need to be jargon free, simple and easy and straightforward to use so that there are no excuses not to carry them out.

“Give / prepare guidance for my senior management team on equality impact assessment.”

3. **Procurement** Delegates agreed with Teresa Rees, that procurement is taking on an even more important role, especially when there is a higher likelihood that services might be contracted to be delivered by the private or voluntary sector.

“Try to target procurement and also ask CEO to equality impact assess any planned cuts”

Ways of progressing the work:

1. **Get to the decision makers** Every opportunity needs to be seized and we need to take people with us. The ugly dancing which Irwin talked about in his presentation resonated with delegates. It is vital to set out the business case for why decision makers should take a different approach than they might of first thought.

“times are rough, we really need to work together with senior managers to help them through these enormous challenges.”

2. **Work in partnership** Local partnerships are needed across public sector organisations and in geographical areas but also making sure that they extend to voluntary organisations.

“Engage with all partners affected by the change.”

3. **Synchronicity** Delegates felt that it is really important to think about when you do something and who you do it with, in order to have the biggest impact possible.

“Strictly strategic dancing”

Overall delegates identified a number of difference steps that could be taken in response to the cuts. We need to remain, confident, flexible and collaborative.

“We can work towards equality and preventing disproportionate impact of cuts in local and national partnerships using equality impact assessments and procurement tools, business case and personal stories combined with the public sector duties”



From the Closet to the Limelight

Michael Cashman

We opened the afternoon session with a filmed interview between Kate Bennett and Michael Cashman MEP. Michael gave his own personal insights about how a series of very small steps and actions over a long period of time can build together to generate huge and positive changes. Michael talked with passion about the significance of the fight against section 28 which brought together the gay community and the heterosexual communities. Michael also talked of the importance of brave individuals coming out and making significant contributions during the 1980s in particular when there was huge fear around HIV and Aids. These things, together with the legal changes which Michael had been involved with and witnessed during his life, and the larger scale campaigns to raise awareness over the years, have provided the backdrop for his life as an actor, campaigner, politician and gay man. Michael felt that change had been driven by a combination of brave individuals, legal measures, media profile and broad, inclusive campaigning.

In response to the film Derek Walker and Alison Parken, both former Directors of Stonewall Cymru, gave their own views of some of Michael's recollections and perspective. Derek was reminded by the film of the first televised gay kiss on Eastenders and his happiness at the time that there was a positive role model that he could relate to which hadn't existed before.

Alison's reflections took us back to the power of the personal story. She reflected that as equality practitioners we are well versed in the arguments for the business case for equality and using the right language, but that we must not forget the impact that hearing someone's personal passion for an issue can bring.

The debate then opened out to the wider conference and delegates talked about other passionate, brave individuals who have moved equality agendas on – Rosa Parks and the Civil rights movement in America and Victoria Scott the daughter of a previous Minister for disabled people who stood up against her father, were just two of the people mentioned.

Alison interpreted this as a need for activism, a need to work together to achieve gains, in the same way that Michael described happening around section 28 and the catalyst that it proved to be. We must also remember not to take the gains we have made for granted as we can't assume they will always be there. Sometimes progress we make in an area slides or slips. The example Derek used to illustrate this was in gender equality where we have less female political representation in the Assembly now than we did a few years ago and urged us all not to become complacent and assume just because changes have occurred they will always be there.

Discussion moved on and attention was turned once again to the impact of the public sector cuts and the importance, during difficult times, not to have one area of equality or protected group fighting against another for resources but to always work together in the best way that we can. Delegates were also inspired by what Michael described as 'gains which were made in the 'opposition years'. Delegates commented that parallel exists - times are tough, but there are still opportunities for change to happen. We need to be clever with making our arguments, particularly economic ones. When we are being asked to make cuts and savings we need to measure whether the cost of removing or reducing a service will far outweigh the short term saving of cutting it. We need to be clever to secure the best outcome



Next steps

The following next steps were identified during the conference as areas we need to work together to build on over the coming year:

Commitment to building the Network – Delegates called upon the Commission to continue to build and develop the network. They felt it was even more important, during difficult and challenging times that the network continues in order to build the community of practice.

Sharing effective practice – This is even more important in the tough economic times in which we are working. When we are being asked to deliver more for less we need to be identifying ways to work together and learn from each other to ensure we are delivering the best possible outcomes for equality groups. The networking opportunities offered by the network are an invaluable way of sharing these ideas and practices.

Equality Act – The Equality Act offers an opportunity. We have the Act and now we need to ensure that we are focused on its implementation to ensure that it is taken seriously amongst leaders and its potential fulfilled. Delegates are keen for further information from the Commission and are looking forward to the codes and guidance.

Kate Bennett, National Director for Wales, reflected on the next steps for the network:

“In the difficult times in which we are all working, it is vital that we follow Irwin’s advice about giving the work back, to make sure that everyone in our organisations understands that equality is a part of their job and that we will not be able to solve issues of inequality by relying entirely on one equality officer. When financial decisions are being made we need to ensure that everyone’s viewpoint is heard and that proposals are assessed and all options considered. We need to be clever in finding ways to show how ideas developed in the equality sphere can be used to assist decision making and priority setting more widely. In order to really get our messages out simple, clear, compelling language and stories need to be used.”