

Equality Exchange conference report June 2013

A fresh approach to fairness



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Ann Beynon - Introduction to the conference report

In their feedback delegates - and speakers - told us this year's conference provided a really great day of learning, inspiration and working together. Delegates came from a wide variety of organisations and this offered an opportunity to capture and share everyone's best ideas.

We always try to select a theme that's relevant, timely, interesting and cutting edge. This year we invited conference speakers with knowledge and expertise, with new perspectives and fresh ideas. The new Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, Huw Lewis AM, made a keynote speech setting out the Government's equality priorities.

We arranged sessions that enabled delegates to work together on the inequality and socio-economic challenges in Wales, to assist us all to get upstream of problems rather than focusing on crisis management.

Our workshops focussed on sharing successful approaches and outcomes to inspire action more widely.

Reflecting on the day our speakers commented on the powerful sense of common purpose amongst Equality Exchange members.

We hope that this Conference report gives you a flavour of that common purpose and inspires you to join us on the road ahead.



Kate Bennett - Setting the scene

Kate reminded delegates about the EHRC's *How fair is Wales?* publication and the five big equality challenges it identified - reducing health inequalities, closing education, employment and pay gaps, reducing domestic abuse and hate crime and increasing participation in decision-making. Many public sector organisations based their equality objectives on these challenges.

How fair is Wales? showed us that the inequality which dominates the landscape is socio-economic but that this is intertwined with the other kinds of inequality that arise from people's identity. Many people living in poverty also face discrimination or prejudice because of their protected characteristic.

Separate strategies for equality and poverty may have less impact than a single one. It is often the same staff and the same budget trying to address everyone's needs. So why not have a single strategy?

The Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Welsh Government, UK Government and many organisations at the conference submitted evidence to the Silk Commission calling for socio-economic and equality issues to be brought together. The Public Sector Equality Duty model could be a good one to follow.

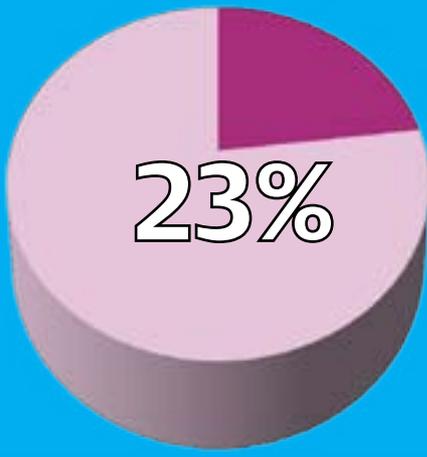
So it is important to look at what the statistics show us about the links and overlaps between socio-economic disadvantage and inequality in Wales.

Kate hoped the data about who is in poverty in Wales showed clearly that if you are primarily working on inequality issues you need to think about the overlap with poverty and if you are primarily working from a poverty perspective you are not getting the whole picture unless you are thinking about equality.

We need to understand what the evidence is telling us about the issues and explain it in a clear and compelling way that clearly demonstrates the need for a new approach.

Once the case for change is accepted we need to identify the most effective interventions. This requires us all to get onto a more preventative agenda - taking action to prevent discrimination and disadvantage.

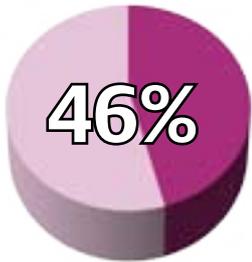




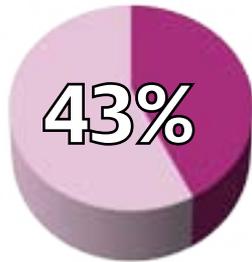
of people live in poverty in Wales



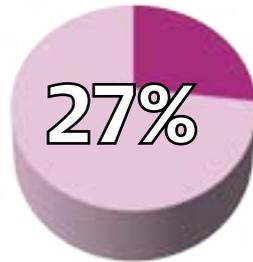
Poverty disproportionately affects some groups



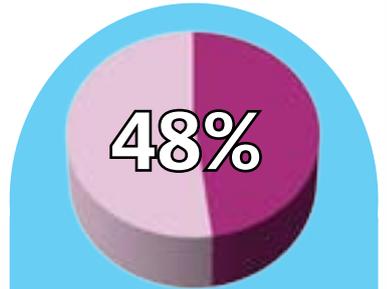
disabled people



ethnic minority people

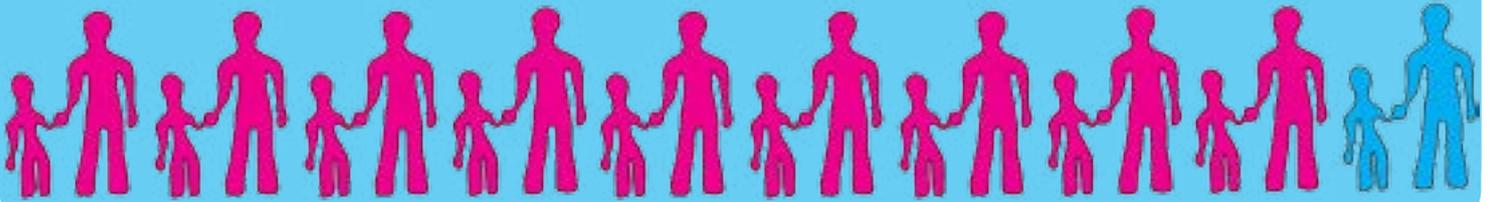


16 - 25 year old people



lone parents

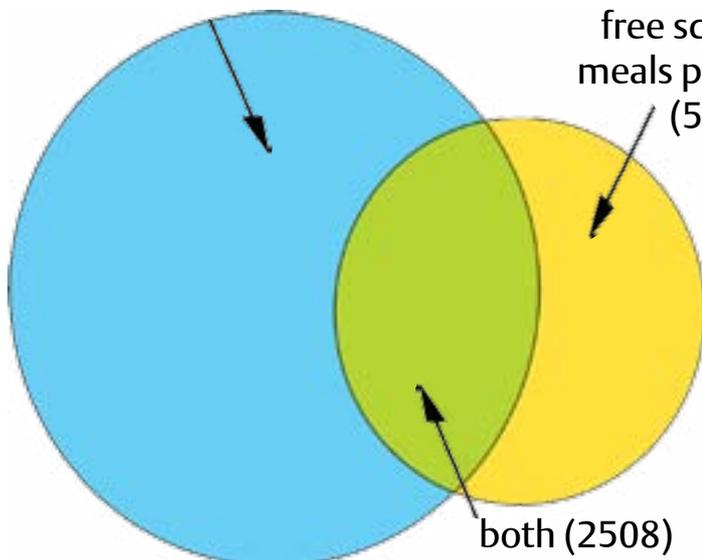
of which 9 in 10 are women



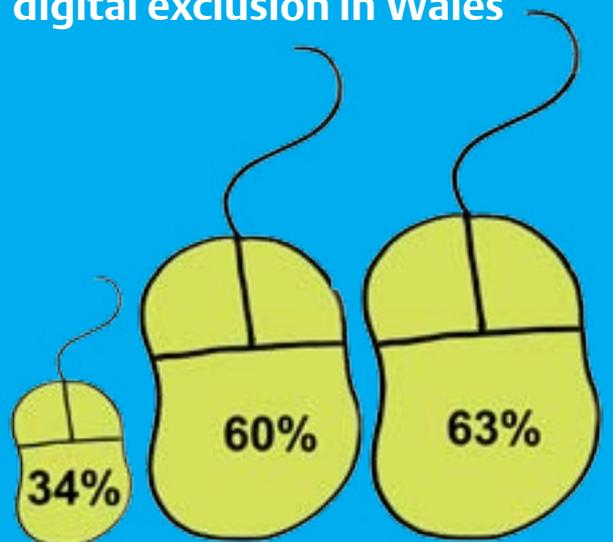
Overlap between SEN and free school meals*

SEN school pupils (7486)

free school meals pupils (5696)



digital exclusion in Wales



Whole of Wales

disabled people

pensioners

* Data from one Welsh local authority

Huw Lewis AM - New opportunities

Huw Lewis AM, Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, is the first Minister in any UK Government to have responsibility for both equality and tackling poverty, as well as children, digital inclusion and sustainable development.

Huw highlighted the close relationship between poverty and inequalities faced by people with characteristics protected under the 2010 Equality Act. Particular groups are more likely to be living in poverty, including lone parents who are predominantly women, disabled people and families with disabled children as well as certain ethnic minority groups.

Linked to the greater likelihood of living in poverty, some groups have disproportionately low educational attainment. This includes black and African and Bangladeshi pupils as well as white boys from lower socio-economic groups. White working class boys are also represented disproportionately in those permanently excluded from school as are pupils with Special Educational Needs. In fact 54% of those excluded have Special Educational Needs.

Partly as a consequence of low educational attainment and or exclusion, certain groups are more likely to be not in education, employment or training. This includes disabled and some ethnic minority young people.

Huw spoke about the importance of introducing a socio-economic duty, working together with the equality duties, to tackle these inequalities:

‘The Welsh Government wants to retain the (Equality Act 2010) Socio-economic Duty in order to make a meaningful difference to the lives of our citizens and communities. I made the position clear to the UK Government in a recent letter to Helen Grant where I stated I wanted the Duty retained for Wales with the power to commence the Duty devolved to us.

We want the power commenced in Wales regardless of what UK Government plans are. I want the message to go out that this is the expressed, democratic, settled will of the Welsh people.

The services that the Duty will impact upon are almost entirely devolved as it is. So there is no contradiction, and should be no problem, for the UK Government in recognising that the Duty is our business and we wish to get on with it – implementing and imposing that Duty on our public devolved organisations.

I believe that, given the clear links between socio-economic inequalities and those associated with particular protected characteristics, the PSED and the Socio-economic Duty together will reinforce and support each other. That’s the kind of context we want to work in.’



Anna Coote - The wisdom of prevention

‘Standing at the bank of a fast flowing river you see bodies of people who have fallen in. You haul them out but they keep coming so that you and others helping are exhausted. Then someone says ‘hang on, why are these people falling in?’ So we go upstream, find out what’s going on and stop that happening. That’s prevention.’

Anna Coote, Head of Policy at the new economics foundation used this metaphor to introduce her report ‘The Wisdom of Prevention’.

Anna asked delegates to consider what gains this approach could offer to everyone involved in tackling inequality. How could delegates improve lives, safeguard future generations and avoid wasting resources in our day-to-day work on equality and socio-economic disadvantage?

To illustrate the approach Anna described how fitting out homes to make them more energy efficient creates jobs, reduces carbon emissions and saves people money on their energy bills.

It is upstream interventions that reduce the probability of risk in the first place. Midstream is all about mitigating the effects of harm that has already occurred. Downstream is about coping with the consequences of harm and minimising impact - and it is resource intensive.

Anna explained that you need to operate at all three levels at once. If you don’t tackle the underlying causes of harm, the other interventions will have little or no lasting effect as the things that caused the problem continue to happen.

However, very little prevention actually takes place. Even now when resources are very tight and demands on services that support people are great, it is essential to move mainstream public services on to a more efficient preventative agenda.

Anna encouraged delegates to remember what a powerful force the Equality Exchange network is in tackling inequality and poverty. She set network members some challenges:

First, think about the underlying causes of inequality and identify how to get further upstream.

Second, be bold enough to take action even when the full picture isn’t available. Trust in personal stories. Be confident to do something because it is right.

Third, spread the word, get more people thinking about preventing inequality and ‘change the climate of opinion’.



Peter Matthews - People, places and inequalities

‘Because we presume certain characteristics of deprived neighbourhoods, we don’t acknowledge and respond to the diversity of people’s experiences in those neighbourhoods.’

Dr Peter Matthews from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh is a co-author of *Hard to Reach or Easy to Ignore?* His research, based on Scottish evidence, challenges assumptions about the link between poverty, places and inequality.

Peter drew our attention to the images we have in our minds of typical deprived neighbourhoods, saying these are ‘attached to stigma and problematic attitudes to places, making us think these neighbourhoods need help’.

Peter described common assumptions made about deprived neighbourhoods:

- That all or most people living in poverty live in deprived areas

- That there is something about a deprived neighbourhood itself, that it is so bad it makes you poor
- That the neighbourhood just needs a bit of help. If they try harder, ‘pull their socks up’ they’ll get out of poverty

Peter challenged these assumptions. Scottish data shows 70% of people in poverty do not live in the 15% most deprived areas that have been the focus of poverty initiatives in Scotland.

In Scotland, and in Wales, an anti-poverty strategy that only focuses on deprived neighbourhoods misses out the majority of people living in poverty.

To improve individual outcomes we need to focus on protected characteristics of people living in poverty rather than deprived neighbourhoods.

Peter questioned the view that some groups need to ‘try harder’ by describing the barriers disabled people face in accessing employment.

Delegates were left with a number of challenges:

- To find out what percentage of people in poverty in Wales live in the areas benefitting from Welsh Government poverty initiatives
- To understand more about the overlaps between poverty and inequality in our local areas
- To get a balance between approaches that promote equality across Wales and initiatives targetted on the most deprived neighbourhoods.



Workshops - Finding successful approaches

Delegates worked together in small groups to think about instances in their organisation where some success had been achieved in improving access to services for people with a protected characteristic and / or for people living in poverty. Delegates provided over 80 examples of successful approaches.

Most examples are mid-stream initiatives so we are on our way!



- The Probation Service realised that lone parents were struggling to attend weekly intervention meetings. When a crèche was provided attendance went up and the chance of being sent back to prison reduced.
- Gwalia Housing tailored dementia services. A purpose built 'circular' home ensures residents don't get lost. Memory boxes are built outside rooms and specific dementia qualifications for staff have been introduced.
- Diverse Cymru set up a direct payments banking service for benefits and payments to personal assistants. 517 disabled people now use the service.
- In Powys IT skills training was given to older people in retirement schemes to address digital exclusion.
- United Welsh Housing Association targeted recruitment and training to help NEETS into employment as part of its contract to build new homes .
- Children in Wales set up a rights network for young people to teach them to become peer advocates.
- Bro Taf Health Board employed a nurse specifically to support homeless people.
- Vale of Glamorgan County Council runs women only swimming sessions.



- Conwy County Council has a separate register for disabled homeless people which enables matching with adapted housing much more quickly.

- Gypsy Traveller children have carved a bench which is outside A&E at a Hywel Dda Hospital to break down barriers and promote use of health services.



- Hywel Dda LHB set up a bilingual breast feeding group so Welsh speaking new mums could communicate in their preferred language.
- Flintshire Council increased the number of ethnic minority children using play schemes.
- South Wales Police is using positive action to recruit from the Somali community.
- DVLA changed driving licence application guidance to support transgender customers.
- Wales and West Housing used monitoring forms to understand their customers better.
- Public Health Wales' carried out a health improvement review that included an equality focus.
- Swansea Council adapted their equality impact assessments to include social exclusion and poverty.
- Members of the transgender community trained local leisure staff in Swansea to increase staff knowledge and confidence.
- Swansea University set up an academy of inclusive learning to increase numbers of disadvantaged students.



Karen Dugate - The difference a duty makes

‘The culture of housing associations has been one that embraces equality and diversity to meet the needs of our tenants and communities. The public sector equality duty has enabled us to focus our energy on strengthening the relationships that exist to ensure we can meet needs more effectively - and support public service providers who require our assistance to engage with the people living in our houses so that they can deliver better services.’

Karen Dugate Chief Executive of Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association, and an EHRC Wales Committee member, spoke about the Public Sector Equality Duty and the impact it has had on her work.

Karen explained that work done as a result of the duty had never felt burdensome or bureaucratic. The duty is a positive tool that has helped to achieve better outcomes for tenants. Karen thought it had also helped to identify people who aren't accessing services they need.

As a result of the duty Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association has a greater involvement in the multi-diversity forum, particularly working with health, the local authority, and community safety to bring the voices of people together and share experiences to improve services. Karen spoke about the duty leading to greater levels of trust and increased feedback in terms of complaints and compliments. It is now an organisation, and a partnership, that has the knowledge and information to signpost people.

A further outcome of the duty is increased access to its offices for disabled people, those whose first language is not English or Welsh, and for people with mental health conditions or lack of transport.

Many tenants living in Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association houses have lower incomes and lower educational attainment. They experience health inequalities, and social and cultural isolation.

Karen said ‘I feel very passionately that promoting equality, community cohesion, and tackling socio-economic inequality, should be drawn together. This should be the golden thread that goes through all government policy at a national and local level. If we can pull it together it will enable us all to make more robust decisions and improve people's lives.’



Panel session - Achieving better outcomes

Karen Dugate, was joined by David Thomas, Equality and Welsh Language Officer at Caerphilly County Borough Council and Shirley Davies, an executive director at RCT Homes in a panel session.

Getting upstream in tackling inequality

David spoke about the importance of engaging with young people, explaining that in Caerphilly they've mapped police and schools data on hate crime and bullying issues with their most significantly deprived wards and found an almost exact match.

Shirley talked about an initiative in Rhondda Cynon Taff to tackle illiteracy. Staff have started reading groups with children but the real benefit of this programme has been encouraging parents and extended families to come along too. The schools are now having regular contact with parents they had not seen before.

Swansea Council noticed a lack of school readiness in some three year olds, so it is trying to focus money and resources to try to get 'upstream' to save money on benefits, police, probation, prisons and mental health services in 15 or 20 years time.

Leadership

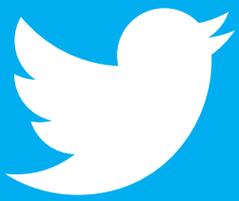
The panel agreed one of the most important factors in achieving outcomes from both the public sector equality duties, and a possible socio economic duty, is exceptional leadership. This is necessary to create the right culture in organisations, where people see the duties as strengthening, adding value and improving their work rather than as something extra to do that has to be 'ticked off the list'.

Outcomes rather than process

The panel felt that outcomes need to be developed in partnership with others. These should focus more on sharing what is effective and telling stories of successful equality outcomes so that others can learn from it. This requires a shift away from 'counting beans' to telling stories about initiatives that achieve greater impact for partner organisations.

Partner organisations could and should include those not legally covered by the equality duties but who wish to use the duties to drive public service improvement, such as the Welsh police services.





Tweets from the conference #freshapproach



Huw Lewis @WG_CommunityMin

In Llandrindod Wells to give keynote speech at Equality & Human Rights Commission's annual conference: Fresh Approach to Fairness.



DataUnit @DataUnitWales

Really good turnout @EHRC conf & lots of interest on the stand from @wefowales, @cardiffmet, @cardiffuni & Cwm Taf CHC #freshapproach



Peter Matthews @urbaneprofessor

Wales really has a strong and distinct agenda :-) #freshapproach



Aled Edwards @alededwardscym

@HuwLewis setting out very clearly how different the Welsh Government's approach to the poor is to that of the UK Government #freshapproach



James Parkin @JamesParkin2010

Huw Lewis AM today emphasised the Welsh Government's desire to implement the public sector 'Socio-Economic Duty' in Wales #freshapproach



Julie Nicholas @JulieNCIH

@HuwLewis 'Partnership working key to delivery of equality & anti-poverty. Impact will b historic 4 Wales. Lets get on with it!' #freshapproach



Vincent James @vincentxjames

Excellent and thought provoking presentation from Anna Coote of the New Economics Foundation. Less need to rescue upstream #freshapproach



Jane Slowey CEO @Jane_FoyerFed

'70% of people experiencing poverty do NOT live in most deprived neighbourhoods' #freshapproach" via @JulieNCIH via @urbaneprofessor



amanda oliver @AmandaTPASCymru

Some excellent discussions in the workshops and at lunch about poverty, inequality and projects in wales to overcome them



DataUnit @DataUnitWales

@EHRC conf & there are workshop discussions around the clear need for data and evidence to support change #freshapproach #InfoBase



Julie Nicholas @JulieNCIH

Public sector equality duty is raising the bar in Wales for everyone. Now that's an example of a good outcome ;-) #freshapproach



Peter Matthews @urbaneprofessor

Amazing stories of large Welsh housing associations doing fantastic work around community development & poverty alleviation #freshapproach



Julie Nicholas @JulieNCIH

@MerthyrHousing on diversity of their community work; heritage & regeneration, tackle domestic abuse, food banks #welshHousing #freshapproach



amanda oliver @AmandaTPASCymru

Final round up on the panel before home time. Its been a great conference & lots to think about on my journey back to cardiff. Well done!

About the Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission aims to protect, enforce and promote equality and promote and monitor human rights.

About the network

Our Equality Exchange currently has over 140 members. It is a forum dedicated to the exchange of ideas and advice for employers, service providers, trainers and consultants committed to achieving equality in the workplace and in service provision.

Regular mailings keep members informed about latest developments in equality and human rights issues. Regular events and conferences look at equality and human rights issues.

Events take place three times a year and are regional; we organise the same format for north Wales, south Wales and mid / west Wales. Venues change each time as network members host these. Our annual conference usually takes place in mid Wales and is a chance for the network to meet and hear speakers, participate in workshops and exchange information.

Contact us

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www.equalityhumanrights.com/wales/equality-exchange-network

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