Equality Exchange network Conference report June 2011
Meet the challenge, lead the change
Who we are

The Equality and Human Rights Commission aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights.

Our Equality Exchange network currently has over 130 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.

Why become a member of the network?

Members of the network receive regular mailings to keep them informed about latest developments in equality and human rights issues.

They are invited to attend and take part in regular events and conferences looking at equality and human rights issues.

All network members have the opportunity to meet and share effective practice with other members who are also working in equality.

Equality Exchange network events and conferences

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 network.

More information can be found at: www.equalityhumanrights/wales/equality-exchange-network

Front page (L-R): Rockwool HR Director Wayne Gwilym, EHRC Wales Commissioner Ann Beynon, EHRC National Director for Wales Kate Bennett and Torfaen Council Chief Executive Alison Ward.

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Foreword

This year's Equality Exchange Conference explored the theme of *Meet the challenge, lead the change*. For most network members the big challenge is to keep equality and human rights high on the agenda whilst trying to do more for less.

But within that there are more specific challenges facing us and these are set out in our new publication 'How fair is Wales?'

This publication brings together a wide range of evidence across all aspects of our lives - life and health, education and skills, employment, legal and physical security and power and voice.

The challenges presented by the data cover inequality gaps that we must address if we are to achieve a more equal society.

In focusing the conference on the challenges, and how we can meet them, we are building on the learning from previous years, including how making small, clever changes can tackle entrenched inequalities and how different approaches can be used to make headway on the most persistent problems we face.

At this conference we focused on using evidence to drive change and on developing strategies to get to those people with power, resource and influence engaged in taking forward our agenda.
During the day we heard views from both the private and public sectors about leading change.

Wayne Gwilym, HR Director at Rockwool, and Alison Ward, CEO of Torfaen Council, spoke about how they've engaged with seemingly intractable challenges and how they've turned them round.

Bill Kerry from the Equality Trust spoke about why narrowing the gaps benefits everyone, not just those directly affected.

The workshops gave delegates the opportunity to discuss the inequality gaps they face in their own organisations and steps they can take to lead change.

If you couldn't attend this year's conference you may find it useful to look at the presentations and How fair is Wales? and An anatomy of economic inequality publications on our website.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you and would be delighted if you and your organisation joined the 130 other organisations who are currently members of our vibrant Equality Exchange network.

Ann Beynon, Wales Commissioner
Kate Bennett, National Director for Wales
Five areas of life and applying the evidence

Kate Bennett, the Commission’s National Director for Wales, used data from our two reports, *How fair is Wales? 2011* and the recently launched *An anatomy of economic inequality in Wales* to consider five areas of life.

Life and health

- Men aged between 15 and 44 are four times more likely to commit suicide
- Disabled people are 10 times more likely to have poor health compared to non-disabled people

Kate explained ‘it isn’t always about the NHS’ and added as an example, counselling or youth offending organisations, or youth clubs could be involved to prevent the suicide of young men.

Education and skills

- Boys aged 16-18 are least likely to be in employment or education, while the same applies for women aged over 22
- Young disabled people are the most likely to be outside either employment or education

Kate said the biggest issue affecting people’s lives was the huge gap in education and skills. Over half – 53% of permanent exclusions from school – are individuals on the special educational needs register.

Free school meals may be seen as a great equaliser, but in reality if you receive them, you are two or three times less likely to get five grades A-C in your GCSE’s.

Employment

- Three-quarters of disabled people in Wales and half the Pakistani population don’t have employment
- A wide gender pay gap – women are 19% behind men’s earnings

Kate explained that Wales had a low employment rate, compared to the UK.

She said if you were a disabled person, getting work was difficult, and if you had a job, your earnings would be seven per cent less than other people.
She added that ethnic minority people were less likely to be in work and most likely to be working in a job well below the level of their qualifications.

**Physical security**
- One in four women will experience domestic abuse during their lifetime
- Women are twice as likely as men to experience sexual violence

Kate said hate crime is violence targeted at individuals because of their identity.

Disabled people are four times more likely than others to experience hate crime.

We are learning more about this and how to prevent it through our formal inquiry.

Recent Commission research has shown the least known-about area is Trans-phobic hate crime.

**Power and voice**
- 42% of Welsh Assembly members are women and two are ethnic minority members
- Half of all councillors in Wales are aged over 55, 17% are disabled and only 1% are from an ethnic minority

But Kate stressed to the audience that the solutions might not be found in the most obvious places.
Applying the evidence

Knowing the facts
Knowing the facts is the first stage. To secure change we also need to analyse the facts, understand their implications, find solutions and make the case for change and facilitate new approaches.

Examining the problem
To secure commitment, resources and action problems need to be taken out of the ‘difficult box’ and examined.

Finding effective solutions
We need to move away from measuring the problems to analysing and finding effective solutions – and most importantly – sticking with the agenda when the going gets tough.

Well presented evidence
Our evidence needs to be well presented if we are to:
- Challenge well-intentioned policy
- Challenge leaders
- Swim against the tide of popular opinion

Working together
By working together and finding solutions and sharing ideas, we can amplify our impact and support other Equality Exchange members.
Responding to the challenge in the private sector

Wayne Gwilym is the Human Resources Director for the UK and Ireland business Rockwool, which is a global leading manufacturer of stone wool insulation products.

He emphasised to the conference the vital importance of values to an organisation, not just having them, but actually meaning them and living up to them.

At Rockwool efforts have been made to ensure everyone works to the principles of honesty, efficiency, entrepreneurship, passion and responsibility.

The journey at Rockwool since 2001 has been considerable. Perceived as an organisation with a stereotypical workforce of middle aged, working class white men, the Pencoed plant today is unrecognisable from that of 10 years ago.

Wayne told the audience that to change an organisation you “really have to take people with you”.

He warned that change doesn’t happen quickly, especially if everyone in an organisation has similar backgrounds and characteristics. A diverse organisation is easier to change.

Gender imbalance within manufacturing is a not a surprise, but for Wayne one of the most notable features of the south Wales plant when he started was the dominance of older, white men.

A hundred million pound investment in 2007 created 100 new jobs and gave Rockwool the opportunity to diversify the workforce by targeting its recruitment campaign at women.
Some thought the idea was ‘crazy’ but with Wayne’s **impassioned and persistent conviction** that diverse organisations have the **coping mechanisms, adaptability and agility** to be more profitable, managers eventually ‘got it’.

‘Help us tip the balance’ was the campaign that broke down the barriers and effectively challenged perceptions, enabling the **recruitment of 100 women**.

The company’s **act of faith** completely paid off, generating hundreds of millions worth of revenue, which Wayne is convinced would not have been possible without the **diversification of the workforce**.

The following year the global manufacturing market crashed, and Rockwool was faced with the **challenge** of reducing the workforce.

During this process **two principles remained** centre stage. Firstly, the value of a **diverse workforce** and secondly, **minimising compulsory redundancies**.

Rockwool held onto the **conviction** that when times are tough, organisations have to take the **long term view and do the right thing** - if not, there will be a continual cycle of fire fighting and dealing with short term issues.

Wayne finished his presentation by saying the levers for change that had fuelled Rockwool’s success were **engaging the workforce**, setting **clear and tangible goals** and everyone **knowing their part** in the organisational machine.
Responding to the challenge in the public sector

Alison Ward is Chief Executive of Torfaen County Borough Council and she contributes to and chairs key public sector umbrella organisations in Wales.

Alison began her presentation by highlighting the synergies between the private and public sectors, stating that the themes of values, authenticity and leadership were universal.

In times when budgets are tight and tough decisions need to be made, equality can be placed in the ‘soft issues’ category.

This disguised the fact that equality is one of the most complex and hard to tackle issues with long term outcomes and few quick wins.

In a period of uncertainty, she said it was essential that the principle of equality has to stand at the centre of the entire decision-making arena.

In order to create a shift in perception, Alison said we have to ‘change the culture of power to the power of culture’.

One way to do this is to get people thinking about measuring outcomes that mean real improvements in the quality of life for real people, not mechanical outputs that only mean something to people inside the organisation.

Torfaen Council’s values are ‘fair, supportive and effective’ and chosen by staff, in the same way values were selected at Rockwool and owned by everyone.

Alison explained that if staff believe in fairness as a fundamental principle, they commit to supporting one another in achieving aims, and don’t waste energy in conflict.

Leading by example alongside making strong and well reasoned arguments would persuade others to change.
Influencing skills are key, Alison explained, quoting the basic tenet of Sun Tzu in ‘The Art of War: ‘the art of war is to win without fighting.’

Alison shared her personal experience of being authentically herself while moving up through local government.

Authenticity means sticking up for what you believe in and understanding the boundaries around your values. This helps you in gaining respect from others and respecting yourself.

Knowing yourself forms the backdrop to empathising with others, an important part of championing the position of people discriminated against in our society.

Torfaen Council have used the ‘4E’s’ successfully: ‘Enable, Engage, Exemplify and Encourage’, substituting ‘enable’ with ‘empower’ to create a sense of personal responsibility.

Alison said staff had ‘exemplified’ their values, and even challenged elected members when necessary.

Recognising people and the journey that they and the organisation have made can be enough to create a huge motivational effect.

She concluded there was no ‘silver bullet’ that would deliver the desired outcomes, but that all sustainable change is achieved through small, incremental steps.
Workshop sessions
Delegates had the opportunity to discuss in small groups the challenges they face, focusing particularly on identifying inequality and finding evidence.

Wayne and Alison’s presentations informed workshop discussions, providing examples of where addressing the challenges in How Fair is Wales could make a real, positive difference to an organisation.

Feedback from evaluation forms showed delegates benefited from having the opportunity to discuss these challenges with each other. Delegates particularly value workshop discussions and are keen this should be a substantial part of the conference day.

Delegates across the five workshops highlighted aspects from the morning’s sessions that had the biggest impact on them.

These were:

- Values are more powerful than rules
- Importance of having Equality Champions
- Bringing people with you during times of change
- Benefits of partnership working
- Organisation culture being at the heart of everything
- Importance of getting people to really understand equality issues

Many of these also related to delegates own experiences of inequality within the workplace.
Potential solutions highlighted in workshops were:

**Partnerships**
One theme was the benefit to an organisation of working together to achieve success.

This could mean developing **formal and / or informal partnerships** with other public sector organisations to develop **collaborative approaches** to common problems.

The sharing of experiences and **finding allies** inside or outside your organisation can **lead to positive outcomes** for everyone.

Delegates **committed** themselves to **collaboration and working in partnership**.

**Leadership buy-in**
Another theme was the critical challenge of **gaining leadership buy-in**.

One group spoke about the importance of not only taking problems and **evidence to leaders**, but also **solutions**.

The challenge will be to find out what tools will **influence** your leader, whether it is the **moral argument**, how to reduce budgets in times of austerity or the business case.

**Cultures and Values**
Throughout Wayne Gwilym’s presentation he referred to the importance of an **organisation’s culture and values**, and how this should be at the heart of an organisation.

This particularly resonated well with delegates, an organisation’s culture is fundamental to promoting equality.
Reflections on being the Wales Commissioner

Ann Beynon opened the afternoon session of the conference by reflecting on her experiences as the Wales Commissioner. Ann was appointed to the post 18 months ago. She is also the Wales Director of BT.

Ann recalled the day she spoke at the opening of the Commission in Wales. At the time Ann felt tougher times could lead to equality and human rights slipping down the agenda.

This has not happened and Ann paid tribute to the part played by the Equality Exchange network and to the Welsh Government in keeping equality high on everyone's agenda.

Ann spoke about her personal commitment to promoting human rights in Wales.

Ann said how much she had learnt from working in the private sector.

She summarised this as the need for: clear objectives, clear leadership and clear, well-structured programmes of work that enable the objectives to be achieved. Some private sector businesses are already engaged with the business case for equality and in measuring success.
Ann said **success** for any organisation is achieved by **linking personal values** and behaviours with organisational **aims and objectives**.

Ann welcomed the **dialogue** that is underway with the **private sector on equality** and felt that in Wales we are really good at establishing shared agendas with business.

Turning to the UK Government consultation on the future of the EHRC, Ann noted the driver for this was to refocus the Commission’s remit.

Ann welcomed the reference in the consultation document to a **“strong and distinct presence in Wales”** and the UK Government commitment to consult with the **Welsh Government** on the proposals to ensure they reflect the needs and circumstances of Wales.

Ann spoke about how the **equality agenda has developed differently in Wales**.

She pointed to the new specific equality duties as an example - within the UK these duties are unique to us.

In conclusion Ann spoke about the opportunities and challenges ahead.

**Opportunities** include **increased law-making powers** and challenges include the **inequality gaps** identified in the evidence we have gathered.

To **rise to the challenges** and make the most of the **opportunities** will require an adequately-resourced Commission in Wales working closely with a broad range of partners.
Why equality is better for everyone

Bill Kerry is a co-founder of the Equality Trust, set up as a result of the book The Spirit Level.

The Equality Trust campaigns to gain the widest political and public understanding of the harm caused by inequality.

Evidence in the book shows how large income inequalities in societies damage the social fabric and quality of life for everyone.

Bill told the conference the UK is one of the most unequal of the developed countries in the world.

He showed how countries that perform badly on one health or social indicator will generally perform badly on all of them.

Conversely, Scandinavian countries who tax people a lot and Japan, with narrower income spreads, do better.

From 1990 onwards, inequality in the UK has remained static; suggesting that it is entrenched, no matter which political party is in power.

Bill told delegates if the UK made a small improvement in its level of inequality, we would begin to yield huge benefits in terms of improvements on those health and social problems.

Delegates learnt that early signs of psycho-social risk factors occurred in some workplace studies.

One study showed that people in more junior roles died very much earlier than those in the senior positions.
Bill explained that it was **job stress and people’s sense of control** over their work that made most **difference**.

He added that **income inequality** affects all other forms of prejudice and large differences in material wealth made **status difference** more important and the weight of prejudice heavier.

Crucially, people tended to maintain their **social status** by showing **superiority** to those below, and those **deprived of status** tried to regain it by taking it out on more vulnerable people.

Demonising tabloid headlines are one example said Bill.

He highlighted that in the UK, we struggle to reach the statistic that one in three of us believe most other people can **be trusted**, but in Sweden, it’s closer to two in three people.

He concluded that people there had started to build a society where they view others as **potential friends and collaborators**, rather than threats and rivals.
Network next steps

Using the evidence base to drive change
Delegates considered the inequality gaps presented by the data and how these could be narrowed, focusing on their own organisations.

Using and sharing case studies
Delegates were keen to identify and share case studies as a powerful way to influence change. This would address the business case for equality illustrating the benefits to individuals, organisations and society.

Making the most of the new specific duties for Wales
The new specific duties for Wales will be both a key opportunity for promoting equality and human rights and a challenge for equality and human resource practitioners.

Partnership working across organisations
Building the network and partnership working across boundaries to share effective practice and learn from each other were seen as essential in securing change and making progress on the equality and human rights agenda.
Contact us

The Equality and Human Rights Commission aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights.

This report and more can information be found at: www.equalityhumanrights.com
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