

# Enterprise Innovation and Networks Committee

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**Date: Thursday 5 October 2006**

**Venue: Committee Room 2, Senedd, Cardiff Bay**

**Title: Review of Economic Inactivity: Chwarae Teg**

In terms of a short progress update on wider issues around Care and economic participation, Chwarae Teg's role is very much focusing on the economic impacts of Care - i.e. the lack of provision of child/ other care as a barrier to employment. In particular, that carers (the majority who are women) continue to be unable to participate as fully as they might in the labour market because of caring responsibilities.

On entry into employment men and women have virtually identical earnings but this changes as women and men progress up the career ladder. The single biggest obstacle to equality of opportunity remains childcare and increasingly the need to care for an ageing population. And women more often not play the role of primary carer.

45% of all women who provide unpaid care for adults for more than 50 hours a week are in full time employment and 55% are in part-time employment. (Facts about Women & Men in Wales 2005 – EOC)

Unpaid care is currently carried out by 340,000 people in Wales. Women make up the majority of adult carers in Wales (Cytgord report, 2006)

As such the value of these unpaid carers when assessing the economy are often not taken into account – the unpaid caring work done by parents and carers in the UK is worth an estimated £277 billion. This is set to continue as people are living longer which puts additional pressures on society - therefore many families swap their child caring responsibilities for caring for elderly relatives; this has impacts on pension as there can be gaps in employment for many women as a result of caring responsibilities; it also has impacts for career opportunities as again, carers have to take time out from work to undertake a caring role and therefore miss out on career opportunities, or take part-time work in the lower end job sectors - all this has a social impact as well as a significant impact on economic growth.

One of the primary actions that has come out of the recommendations of the scoping study undertaken by ChwaraeTeg (Making the Case for Care) which was reported on at the 2004 Committee included the establishment of a Work Life Balance initiative to develop models of good practice/work with employers to promote WLB.

Chwarae Teg is funded by DELLS to undertake this work and the project currently runs until 2008.

From 2000 the Welsh Assembly Government has led the development of Work Life Balance in Wales with the aim of promoting flexible working in as broad a way as possible with both large and small organisations. The aim is to embrace all employees including those with caring responsibilities.

This is facilitated through Chwarae Teg who has managed a range of successful activities:

- Chairing a Strategy Group comprising Welsh Assembly Government, Chwarae Teg, ACAS, Wales TUC, the former ELWa and WDA
- Supporting 141 SMEs via a Challenge Fund
- Supporting 7 public sector employers (19,000 employees) via a Pilot Project with 3 Local Authorities (Bridgend CBC, Wrexham CBC, Neath Port Talbot CBC), 2 ASPBs (Countryside Council Wales, ELWa) and 2 Further and Higher Education institutions (Trinity College Carmarthen, Cardiff University)
- Developing a WLB in Wales website to disseminate information and best practice

These activities plus current work with Welsh businesses continue to demonstrate that Work Life Balance assists employers with:

- The recruitment and retention of staff
- Increasing staff morale, confidence and loyalty
- Reducing stress, absenteeism and staff turnover
- Creating a valued workforce
- Becoming an employer of choice

Examples from the WLB pilot project – Wrexham CBC:

- Recruitment, retention and sickness absence turnover in Social Services stands at 7.1% compared to a national rate for Social Services of 14.1% (Social Services Workforce Survey 2003, Employer's Organisation)
- Across all pilot projects, turnover has reduced from an already relatively healthy 7.6% (compared to local government as a whole's 13.5%) to 4.1% in the calendar year 2004
- In the same period, sickness/absence across all the pilot projects has reduced from 5.23% (in Year 1) to 4.4% for the most recent 12 months' period (calendar year 2004)

And provides employees with:

- Time to strike a better balance with life outside work including caring responsibilities
- Greater control of their working lives
- Improved self-esteem health concentration and confidence
- Greater responsibility and a sense of ownership

Best practice developed from these activities includes:

- 'One size' flexibility does not fit all, the process of introducing, operating and implementing

work life balance has to suit the business

- Extension of 'Right to Request Flexible Working' to all employees

Flexible working options can include:

- Flexible starting and finishing times
- Compressed working hours
- Annualised working hours
- Job sharing or part-time working
- Homeworking or teleworking
- Term-time or part year working
- Career / employment breaks

From April 2007, The Work and Families Act 2006 which came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> October, extends the rights of employees in this area and refusal to consider flexible working could result in the breach of the Sex Discrimination Act, which is applicable to everyone, male and female, regardless of how small an enterprise is. But Chwarae Teg is keen that this Act should not be seen as merely an exercise in compliance but as an opportunity for businesses of all sizes and across all sectors to modernise and reform working patterns and reap the business benefits as demonstrated above.

Chwarae Teg is now delivering on phase 2 of the WLB project, working closely with local authorities, other public sector agencies and the private sector to raise awareness of flexible working through the provision of information, further case studies and a range of activities.

Early next year Chwarae Teg is planning a major UK conference in Cardiff entitled "Better Balance Better Business". The conference aims to bring together UK thought leaders in the fields of business, organisational change, flexible working and work-life balance. Powerful case studies alongside interactive discussions will help employers to redefine 'work-life balance,' in the context of business advantage. It will demonstrate innovative and practical ways of transforming an organisation's culture, showing how better balance can help harness the true potential of the workforce and boost the bottom line.

In an increasingly competitive economy, it is vital that Wales takes the lead in the development and retention of a skilled, flexible and diverse workforce. An inclusive and flexible approach to working patterns can make a significant contribution to achieving that goal.

**Chwarae Teg**  
**30 September 2006**