

Senedd Cymru
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion
Gwledig
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd
ETRA - 56
Ymateb gan: Diverse Cymru

Welsh Parliament
Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs
Committee
Priorities for the Sixth Senedd.
Evidence from: Diverse Wales

Priorities for the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

Submission from Diverse Cymru

Respondent's name: Ele Hicks

Respondent's Role: Policy, Engagement and Research Manager

Organisation: Diverse Cymru

Address: 3rd Floor
Alexandra House
307-315 Cowbridge Road East
Cardiff
CF5 1JD

We are writing to provide evidence on the forthcoming strategic priorities for the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, and in particular how the focus of the committee relates to, and can build on commitments to a fair and equal Wales for all.

Diverse Cymru promotes equality for all. We work across all protected characteristics and with other people who experience discrimination and disadvantage, such as carers and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. We believe that we can work together to challenge discrimination in all its forms and create an equitable future for the people of Wales.

We believe that equality and human rights should be at the heart of every decision the Senedd makes affecting Wales. Equality, diversity and inclusion must be a cross-cutting theme, central to all inquiries and work of every Senedd committee and policy area.

We would welcome any opportunity to work with you to build commitments to a fair and equal Wales for all into your policies and work as the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee.

A copy of our Manifesto for 2021 is available, in both English and Welsh, here:

<https://www.diversesecymru.org.uk/a-manifesto-for-a-fair-and-equal-wales-2/>

What do you think the Committee's strategic priorities should be over the next six months?

As we recover from Covid-19 it is vital that all political parties in Wales place equality and human rights front and centre of all legislation, strategies, policies, programmes, and actions. The impact on all different communities and groups in Wales must be monitored and action taken to ensure that we emerge from this crisis stronger and more equal, rather than equality and human rights being detrimentally affected. Older, younger, disabled, and Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic people and women are already disproportionately impacted by higher unemployment and lower wages. The current crisis has deepened and highlighted these inequalities.

A 'one size fits all' approach will not meet the requirements of people with one or more protected characteristics. We need to recognise and act on the voices and experiences of people in Wales, including intersectional issues. Failure to make this fundamental shift in the way we address equality and diversity will leave many people in Wales at risk of discrimination, poverty and injustice.

Legislation, policy and practice must be co-produced with individuals representing the diversity of the Wales across all characteristics to ensure that it respects every individual and advances equality for all. There is significant evidence that legislative compliance is not reflected in people's experiences of barriers to accessing services and in discrimination in Wales. This implementation gap must be closed. Effective monitoring and ensuring that the public are directly involved in continually evaluating the effectiveness of steps taken to advance equality and human rights are vital.

Flexible working practices have positive impacts for many disabled people, women, and carers. Disabled people have been calling for flexible working practices for years, and many have been denied. The current crisis has highlighted what is possible. Flexible working practices must become standard practice in the future for all employees. Support to enter employment and progress in the workplace should be more flexible and encourage positive, innovative solutions through working with employers. We believe that it is vital to examine the possible role of flexible working, shorter working week, and Universal Basic Income on people who experience discrimination and disadvantage as an urgent priority. We are concerned that as Wales reopens we will return to the old normal. This would lose the positive impacts of

working differently for many people and further entrench and deepen existing inequalities and disadvantage.

Additionally it is vital to look at reforming the economy to support localised economies and access to services to reduce the impact of commuting on both the environment and people who experience discrimination and disadvantage in Wales. Accessible and inclusive local economies can support people and improve access to employment and services for people who experience discrimination and disadvantage.

What do you think the Committee's longer term objectives and priorities should be for the term of the sixth Senedd?

We believe that pay gaps must be analysed and addressed by employers, not just in relation to the gender pay gap, but also in relation to the disability and ethnicity pay gaps. Organisations should also regularly review whether there are any pay gaps on other characteristics and take action where these are identified. Support and training needs to be in place to address under-representation in workplaces, including at more senior levels. All employers should have comprehensive equality and diversity training, including all protected characteristics and sub-groups. This should include unconscious bias training. More work needs to be done in respect of equalities for older people in work and for training. Analysing progress in this respect and the measures needed to ensure organisations are addressing pay gaps should be part of the longer term work plan for the committee.

Programmes to address digital exclusion must be provided locally and tailored to the barriers experienced by different groups. Individual support should be easy to access. Digital inclusion and ensuring the digital economy is accessible and inclusive to everyone, whilst also ensuring that offline engagement and services are available and easy to access should also be part of the future priorities for the committee.