



Response to Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee inquiry into:

The Future of Equality and Human Rights in Wales

April 2013

Chwarae Teg exists to promote, support and develop the role of women in the Welsh economy. We do this by raising awareness of the positive contribution women make to economy and society and sensitising Welsh Government strategy and policy to the barriers confronting women who wish to fully participate in the labour market.

We welcome the Community, Equality and Local Government committee's inquiry into equality and human rights in Wales. Women are currently being hard hit by policy decisions made by the UK Government and it is important that agencies and public bodies in Wales take steps to mitigate these impacts as far as possible and support women to deal with the challenges they face. We believe that equality issues should be considered in decision making at all levels and hope that this inquiry will lead to action that will ensure this happens.

Chwarae Teg would like to offer the committee further support and assistance if required to develop recommendations for action that will reduce gender inequality in Wales.

Key points

1. The socio-economic duty should be taken forward as part of the Wales specific duties in the Equality Act 2010. This would help to protect women from the disproportionate impact of public spending cuts.
2. Equality Impact Assessment processes should be improved, learning from EHRC research on Equality Impact Assessing the Welsh Budget. This will help to protect women from disproportionate impacts of service planning and delivery.
3. A committee dedicated to Equality and Human Rights should be set up in the National Assembly for Wales to ensure issues receive the necessary attention.

Detailed response

1. How well the specific public sector equality duties are functioning in Wales

We are very encouraged by the commitment shown by the Welsh Government to the equalities agenda in defining specific public sector duties within the Equality Act 2010. As we know, the success of such legislation requires buy-in from those tasked to deliver it if the measures are to bring about real change. In Wales, there are examples of organisations that are working well within this framework and opportunities for these organisations to share best practice would help to ensure all public bodies deliver well against the specific duties.

Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) are a central part of the process and therefore it is crucial that these are carried out thoroughly. It is positive that WG set an example by equality assessing the budget. An appreciative inquiry was carried out by the Equality and Human Rights Commission on behalf of the Welsh Government to identify issues with the process and how they could be improved. The learning from this could be shared with other public bodies and used to inform the EIA process across the board. The final report from this inquiry can be accessed here:

2. The Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales

We strongly believe that there needs to be an independent body in Wales to monitor and promote Equality and Human Rights in Wales. Changes to the structure of the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales have made a significant difference, reducing the levels of support available to organisations and individuals. The practical monitoring and measuring of the duty in Wales cannot be done without sufficient resources and the cuts to the EHRC in Wales have significantly impacted on their ability to work on this agenda. We believe that further resources should be allocated to the EHRC in Wales to support public bodies to deliver against this duty in the best way possible.

We are very concerned by changes to the EHRC's advice line, particularly due to the removal of a Welsh language service. We recommend that the current service is reviewed to ensure that it is meeting the need in Wales and appropriate steps taken to address any issues arising.

3. The link between poverty and equality and the socio-economic duty

Women are being disproportionately impacted by financial decisions implemented by the UK Government. Fawcett Society research shows that around 74% of welfare cuts made to date have come directly out of women's pockets¹. Women also face greater risk of redundancy through public sector job cuts given that they account for over 2/3 of this workforce. Women's incomes have a direct impact on levels of poverty as they are often the deciding factor of whether a family lives in poverty or not. Women also face greater risk of falling into poverty if they lose their job.

The socio economic duty proposed under the Equality Act 2010 reads as follows:

"An authority to which this section applies must, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard to the

¹ Fawcett Society, *Cutting Women Out* campaign: <http://uat.fawcettsociety.org.uk/cutting-women-out/>

desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.”

The implementation of this duty would protect women from decisions made to public finances, ensuring that equality impacts are considered before decisions are taken.

4. Accountability for equality and human rights legislation in Wales.

We believe that the current oversight arrangements with a named Minister and a Welsh Government directorate are effective. We believe that in addition there should be an Assembly Committee focused only on this agenda to ensure that equality and human rights issues are addressed.

Conclusion

The Welsh Government has made huge strides in advancing the equality and human rights agenda in Wales through the development of public sector duties under the Equality Act 2010 and their commitment to Equality Impact Assessments. Chwarae Teg supports these steps and urges that action continues until social justice in Wales is achieved. Our response to this inquiry recommends three key actions to take forward as next steps. We believe that the socio-economic duty proposed in the initial drafts of the Equality Act 2010 should be introduced to ensure women are not disproportionately impacted by financial decisions in the public sector. We suggest that the Equality Impact Assessment process be strengthened to ensure that consequences of decision making are properly considered. And we believe that a committee dedicated to Equality and Human Rights should be set up in the National Assembly for Wales to ensure that the commitment shown by the Welsh Government to the equalities agenda is shown by the National Assembly for Wales also.

Chwarae Teg would be happy to assist the committee in developing recommendations for action to ensure gender equality in Wales. If further support or information is required, please contact:

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