

Equality of Opportunity Committee

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Wales TUC

Update on the Close the Pay Gap Campaign

Introduction

The Wales TUC is the voice of Wales at work. With around 50 affiliated trade unions the Wales TUC represents nearly half a million workers.

The Wales TUC was established in 1974. It is an integral part of the TUC and was set up to ensure that the role of the TUC is effectively undertaken in Wales. The Wales TUC seeks to work with and make representations to other organisations at an all-Wales level. A major role is to co-ordinate the trade union approach to the Welsh Assembly Government and ensure that the interests of Wales' trade unionists are properly represented in the whole range of Assembly decision making.

The Wales TUC is pleased to have been invited to make both a written submission and to give an oral update to the Committee. This paper presents an outline written report of the actions carried out by the Wales TUC on behalf of the campaign partners in relation to the Close the Pay Gap campaign.

Background

Close the Pay Gap is a joint campaign operated in partnership between the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Wales TUC.

During autumn 2008 the Minister for Social Justice, Brian Gibbons AM agreed funding for a fourth phase of the Close the Pay Campaign.

The following initiatives have been supported during the current phase of Close the Pay Gap:

Business Benefits Research

Equal Pay Conference

Employer - Trade union seminars and fringe events.

The Wales TUC took the lead in organising the employer - trade union events, the fringe events at the Welsh political party conferences, commissioning a new logo and new exhibition stands for the campaign. Wales TUC staff worked closely with WAG and EHRC colleagues to deliver the business benefits research and the Equal Pay Conference, which was reported on to the Equality of Opportunity Committee in March 2009.

1. Employer - trade union events

A series of practical employer and trade union events aimed at human resources, equality practitioners and trade union negotiators took place across Wales. Around 20 delegates attended a North Wales seminar and 25 delegates attended a similar seminar in South Wales. A West Wales seminar was scheduled but was cancelled due to insufficient numbers and delegates were encouraged to attend the South Wales event in Cardiff.

The purpose was to address several aspects of equal pay. Namely:

to update employers and trade unions on the implications of the latest legal situation following recent high-profile case law;

to discuss the role of trade union equality reps as well as to explain any likely equal pay measures envisaged in the Equality Bill; and

to highlight equal pay solutions, including the Neath Port Talbot experience.

Evaluation forms from the events demonstrated overwhelmingly that the events achieved their set objectives. A good mixture of union and employer representatives attended and several organisations sent representatives from both the employer and union side.

2. Fringe events at the party political conferences

Wales TUC organised fringe events at each of the four Welsh political party fringe events during March and April. The purpose of these fringe events was to engage with party representatives on equal pay and to strengthen the cross-party support for action on equal pay that exists in Wales. We targeted councillors and leading figures within each party.

Speakers at each fringe meeting varied with a Wales TUC and EHRC representative at each event, alongside a leading politician from each of the political parties to speak or chair the fringe and be advocates for equal pay within their own party.

3. Logo and stands

Wales TUC commissioned a new logo for the campaign, as the existing logo was out of date following the establishment of the EHRC. Wales TUC also commissioned two pull-up stands and one larger exhibition stand.

4. Further progress

In producing this report the Wales TUC consulted union officers about the impact of the recession on negotiations concerning equal pay. The general view is that negotiating on single status agreements has become more difficult, as have attempts to achieve reasonable settlements.

There is no indication of resources within larger unions being redirected away from the equal pay agenda, in fact more time and resources need to be committed to equal pay work "due to the lack of co-operation by employers in meeting their legal requirements to pay the debt owed to these workers."

Both current and forecast budget settlements in local and national government has had an impact on service delivery levels, particularly in certain areas of predominantly female work causing "direct job loss, externalisation and reduction in hours/earnings levels". The projected public sector pay cuts are likely to leave highly inadequate funding to address equal pay differentials that have been identified. This is also leading to measures such as attempts to remove allowances on equal pay grounds, which are more likely to be connected to efficiency savings across the board.

There are multiple proceedings at the Cardiff Employment Tribunal on behalf of approximately 16,000 GMB/Unison members, and we estimate the potential for at least 30,000 cases. PCS has lodged Equal Pay claims relating to one organisation. Unite has approximately 70 claims across Wales. Thompsons state 20,000 claims lodged in total for Wales.

Conclusion

While the campaign has moved things forward and the case for equal pay has been made repeatedly, progress is still frustratingly slow. It is disappointing that vast resources are being put into legal negotiations by both employers and unions, which if directed at tackling the pay gap itself would reap far more benefits in the long run. The Wales TUC believes that in order to progress further, it is important to rejuvenate the partnership with the EHRC and WAG on equal pay, especially in light of the anticipated Equal Pay Duty for Wales.