

# Rural Development Sub-committee

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## Paper from Chwarae Teg in relation to the inquiry into poverty and deprivation in rural Wales

Rural poverty is not just about economic poverty but multiple deprivations; aside from the 7 identified kinds of deprivation according to WIMB 2005 (income, employment, health, education, housing, access to services and environment) there are the issues of social poverty, rural isolation and the digital divide.

51% of the working population are women, 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 2006 - EOC)

The single biggest obstacle to equality of opportunity remains childcare and increasingly the need to care for an ageing population. And as women more often than not play the role of primary carer, the effects of caring have a greater impact on them. Lack of good quality and accessible caring facilities for either children or an older person has an effect on the ability of an individual to access the employment opportunities available to them.

The ratio of childcare demand to available places is higher in rural areas, which exacerbates the problem.

There has been a policy of decentralisation by the public sector in recent years however; lack of transport (public and private) often limits the opportunities this creates. Chwarae Teg's research Women's Role in the Welsh Workforce (2002) found that employed women were the most likely to have access to a car (85%) compared with 80% of women in training, 67% of women in the home and only 40% of unemployed women. However, lone parents were less likely to have access to private transport (50%).

This research also found that the Travel to Work areas with the highest rates of female unemployment were Holyhead, Llangefni, Amlwch, Porthmadoc and Ffestiniog.

For the past 6 years Chwarae Teg has been (in partnership) with the Welsh Assembly Government running a Work Life Balance (WLB) initiative to develop models of good practice to promote WLB and Flexible Working (FW). The aim of the initiative has been to promote FW in as broad a way as possible with both large and small organisations.

This was facilitated through a range of successful activities:

Chairing a Strategy Group comprising WAG, ChT, ACAS, Wales TUC, the former ELWa and WDA

Supporting 141 SMEs via a Challenge Fund

Supporting 7 large public sector employers (19,000 employees) via pilot projects with 3 local authorities (Bridgend CBC, Wrexham CBC, Neat Port Talbot CBC) 2 ASPBs (Countryside Council for Wales, ELWa) and 3 Further and Higher Education Institutes (Trinity College, Carmarthen, Cardiff University)

Developing a WLB in Wales website to disseminate information and best practice

Hosting the Better Balance. Better Business Conference March 2007

Establishing 3 Networks ,North, South & West Wales - 110 employers reached in total

In excess of 45,000 employees across Public, Private & third sectors have increased knowledge of and access to flexible working and work life balance initiatives

135 employers trained in flexible working and work life balance initiatives

Wales profile raised in UK and European arena in this area of work

Accredited WLB Training for managers

There are many examples of what organisations have achieved, there are a few attached for information.

The drivers for change in this agenda remain for all businesses:

Economic and social trends

Demographic factors

Pay increasingly not the top priority

Recruitment and retention of a skilled and talented labour force

The need for business to remain productive in an increasingly global and competitive economy

Inflexibility as a barrier to participation in the labour force

Long hours culture in some sectors and amongst some individuals

The need to cut congestion and carbon omissions

Increasing property and rental prices on office accommodation

With ever changing legislation, businesses are encouraged to look beyond compliance, which does not provide innovative tools for actual change, towards critical assessment of the potential a creative WLB approach has, and how it can be utilised as a positive tool in the business, and workforce planning process. Evidence suggests that key business benefits include:

Improved productivity - BT introduced flexible working for 80% of its staff in 2001, since this date they have seen an increase in productivity by 20%

Reduced sickness absence - CBI estimates the cost of absenteeism as £13bn (2005): Unison found that introducing flexible working practices reduced sickness absence from 12% to 2%

Improved recruitment and retention - according to recent research by the British Chambers of Commerce, 60% of employers reported some or a significant improvement in staff retention following the introduction of flexible working or flexible leave arrangements (Work & Life: How business is striking the right balance, BCC, 2007)

For rural businesses facing youth migration this agenda could be key in recruiting and retaining talented individuals.

With the cost of living being much higher in rural areas, putting additional pressures on limited incomes, this agenda could facilitate transport cost reduction as well as cutting congestion and carbon omissions.

The WLB/FW agenda could be part of the solution to addressing access to employment particularly through home/remote working in rural areas; of course there may be an issue in some areas concerning accessibility to broadband. However, larger employers should be able to overcome this and facilitate initiatives enabling them to employ people who live in areas where they would traditionally have been unable to access such employment - thus supporting the Making the Connections and Beecham's Delivering Better Public Services agendas.

For smaller businesses it may not be so easy, although it is not impossible to introduce similar initiatives. We are currently in discussion with WEFO about a project which will assist SMEs in facilitating remote working for their employees.

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 from across the Principality and in ensuring that those economically inactive are able to access employment wherever their location.

Hayley Dunne  
Business Development Manager  
Chwarae Teg  
April 2008

Attachments:

Case Study - Countryside Council for Wales (Annex A)  
Case Study - Tai Esgyn (Annex B)

## **Annex A**

### **Organisation name:**

Countryside Council for Wales

### **Organisation profile:**

CCW is the Government's statutory adviser on sustaining natural beauty, wildlife and the opportunity for outdoor enjoyment in Wales and its inshore waters. It is also the national wildlife conservation authority. CCW staff are predominantly specialists who are enthusiastic about their work on a personal level, which has led to a long hours culture and a perceived workloads problem.

### **What they did and why - business drivers**

#### **Objectives over the 3 year period were:**

##### **Year 1:**

Collect the information and Advertise Services to staff.

## **Year 2:**

Expand range of services.

Have smooth system for promulgating information.

Have statistical information being used.

## **Year 3:**

Raising awareness of proposed equal treatment, legislation and of cost and benefits to promoting flexible working.

### **Words from e.g. CE, Director or other appropriate person and / or a quote to support the business case**

"Our approach requires staff to think about their request and the impact on service, rather than placing the onus on the manager who may have to sometimes make the difficult decision of 'who gets what'. The manager's only concern should be that service is covered. Staff felt this 'collective bargaining' approach is much fairer and it provides a successful basis for projects and results in enhanced teamwork and communication."

### **WLB outcomes for the employee(s) and for the business**

We have promoted a culture where staff are valued for the work they produce and how the service is covered, rather than where they are at any particular time. This involves trust. By promoting this way of working, and trusting staff to deliver the service in a way that also assists them to find their WLB leads to empowerment; with empowerment comes increased loyalty to CCW, increased motivation and increased productivity.

## **Summary**

### **The WLB issue**

Wider understanding amongst all staff of what is available

Employer of choice

Culture Change

Retention/Recruitment

Morale

Sickness/absence

### **The WLB Solution:**

Removal of core hours with self-rostering implemented

Extension of the working day to promote staggered working and extended opening hours

Term-Time Working

Purchase of Additional Leave

Phased Return from Maternity leave

Compressed Working

Designated Home Worker

Ad-hoc Working from Home

## **Annex B**

### **Flexible Working/Work Balance Life Case Study**

#### **Organisation name**

Tai Esgyn

#### **Organisation profile**

A registered charity based in Swansea with 30 years experience employing 19 people. Tai Esgyn provides a range of support and

accommodation services to people with mental health difficulties within Swansea and Neath Port Talbot.

### **What they did and why - business drivers**

Tai Esgyn work in a very high pressured environment with clients who cannot always be supported during the usual 9-5 working day. As a consequence, the charity wanted to investigate alternative ways of working to address:

1. Productivity
2. Meeting client needs

The charity undertook a staff survey to determine views of staff and how they thought the business needs could be met and/or improved through alternative ways of working.

### **Words from e.g. CEO, Director or other appropriate person and / or a quote to support the business case**

Comments from the Corporate Services Manager:

"As a small organisation it is important that we retain our staff to ensure continuity of service to our clients. As such, we ensure that staff have a good balance between work and life. We wanted to review the initiatives we already offered and to consider others that could address the issues we had identified"

### **FW/WLB outcomes for the employee(s) and for the business**

Following the staff survey, a focus group concentrated on how the suggested alternative ways of working would impact on the business and in drawing up an Action Plan for implementation.

#### **Outcomes for the employee:**

Access to Childcare Voucher scheme to help make childcare more affordable

Flexibility of working hours

Access to compressed working hours

Ability to work from home

#### **Outcomes for the employer:**

Financial savings on NI contributions through implementation of Childcare Voucher scheme

Improved productivity

Reduced absenteeism

Improved customer service

#### **Summary:**

##### **The FW/WLB issue:**

Productivity

Meeting client needs

##### **The FW/WLB Solution:**

Review existing initiatives

Staff involvement

Introduction of Childcare Voucher scheme

Introduction of Flexible working hours

Introduction of Compressed working hours

Introduction of Home-working