

## **COMMITTEE ON EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY EOC 02-02(p3)**

**Date:** Wednesday 6 March 2002  
**Time:** 9.30am  
**Venue:** Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building  
**Title:** Diversity Action Plan for Public Appointments.

### **Modernising Public Service in Wales**

The National Assembly's Diversity Action Plan for Public Appointments.

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this paper is for the Committee to consider and comment on the draft Diversity Action Plan for Public Appointments.

### **Summary**

2. The draft Diversity Action Plan is attached at **Annex A** and a summary of actions is attached at **Annex B**.

3. This is a dynamic Plan. The initial work (from April 2002) is to establish where we are now and to engage the participation of partners. Once that has been achieved, we will be in a position to refine the Plan with more quantitative measures and timescales.

### **Action for the Committee**

4. To provide the Chair with comments on the Plan.

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## **Modernising Public Service in Wales**

The National Assembly's Diversity Action Plan for Public Appointments.

**..encouraging diversity among applicants, modernising boards and enhancing diversity in service delivery.**

### **Introduction**

The Equality of Opportunity Committee has been working for some time towards increasing diversity in public appointments. The Committee's own 'Report for the National Assembly for Wales Equal Opportunities Committee on Public Appointments to Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies' and the subsequent consultation on that report raised a range of issues which needed to be taken forward. The recent study commissioned on motivation pointed the way towards further steps.

Last July, the Chair of the Committee assured the Assembly in Plenary that all this work would be brought together into a Diversity Action Plan, under the supervision of Professor Teresa Rees.

Although we have preparatory work to draw on, the task ahead is not to be under-estimated. We are aiming to challenge perceptions and to change a culture, as well as customs and practice surrounding the appointments process: we need to aspire to progressive change and should not necessarily expect immediate results.

### **Remit**

"A programme of action designed to achieve applications for public appointments which are broadly representative of the Welsh population, particularly in respect of race, gender and disability; and which enable appointments to be made so that public bodies reflect the communities they serve".

### **Approach**

The plan is entitled 'Modernising Public Service in Wales' in order to pick up this challenge in a forward thinking way. We need to ensure that the diversity of candidates coming forward for public service matches that of the communities served by public bodies. However, we also need to ensure that when they are appointed, members and Chairs are able to take up their roles in modern, progressive boards which embrace equality and diversity in all aspects of their work.

This agenda is not just about diversity but about a wider goal of modernising public service. The challenge isn't simply to get a more diverse range of people into public appointments, but to enable Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies to deliver appropriate services to the diverse population we have in Wales. Modernising their approach will help boards to work together better, to be more open and to improve decision making. We need to build the capacity of all boards and promote the evolution of a modern public service in Wales.

We are engaged in a long-term strategic approach to cultural and procedural change. The Plan aims to lay foundations and build capacity. It would be easy to throw money at what appear to be quick wins and achieve nothing. For example, we could feel we have made great progress if we manage to corral a group of suitable candidates from the disabled community onto boards of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs), but the Assembly's commitment to equality goes further than this. If the culture itself is unwelcoming and does not genuinely provide equal opportunities for those on the board and promote equal opportunities in its work, the long term effect could be counter-productive.

We need to take a strategic approach, not re-inventing the wheel but using the best advice available and ensuring we are putting our energies and resources to best effect. While Public Appointments Unit will be taking the lead in many activities, we will also crucially be acting as a catalyst, asking others to work with us in partnership. These parties have not been approached in advance of the agreement of this plan, but we are confident that they will support this agenda.

The plan extends the remit in its definition of 'diversity'. Again, planning for the future, it takes into account the implications of the recent European anti-discrimination legislation <sup>1</sup> and considers diversity in terms of sex, race and ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation and religious and political beliefs. We also need to consider diversity in terms of urban and rural and Welsh speaking communities.

The plan also emphasises the modern resource of the internet. This is an increasingly important communication tool and one in which a modern public service needs to invest and from which it should learn to benefit.

### **Action Plan for 2002-2003**

In the first year of this plan we need to move forward three key action points:

1. We need to establish the **baseline**, to be clear about where we are now,
2. We need to **build capacity**, to engage partners who are committed to the same equality agenda (from equality organisations, the voluntary sector, the local government sector, trade union sector etc.) to work alongside us.
3. We need to build in **evaluation** and monitoring tools to measure our progress.

In taking forward these actions, we will focus on:

- a. **Assembly** – the resources available to the Assembly in this task, including officials, Independent Assessors, external contacts, a candidate database, website and key documents.
- b. **Boards** – recognising that current chairs and members of boards have a stake and a vital role to play in this work.
- c. **Candidates** – These are the people we aim to reach. We need to attract a diverse range of suitable candidates and to offer them a rewarding and challenging experience working with us as public appointees, as well as supporting them with information, awareness and training.

A programme of action for 2003-2004 will be drawn up early in 2003 in the light of what we have learned. Details of the Action Plan for 2002-2003, expressed in terms of the above action points and areas of focus, are set out in **Annex B**.

## **Funding**

Subject to agreement of the detail of this Plan, funding of £80,000 has provisionally been made available for its implementation in 2002-2003. It is anticipated that this level of funding will be a baseline for future years.

## **Lindsay Hollies**

Public Appointments Unit

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<sup>1</sup> Whereas the UK Government already has legislation covering discrimination on the grounds of sex, race and disability, the new European Race and Employment Directives cover discrimination in employment on the new grounds of age, religion and sexual orientation, which commits EU member states to introduce legislation. The UK Government will introduce legislation relating to discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief and sexual orientation by December 2003 and on age by December

2006.