

Committee on Equality of Opportunity**MINUTES****Date:** 9 December 1999**Time:** 9.30 am**Venue:** Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building**Attendance: Members**

Jane Hutt (Chair)	Vale of Glamorgan
Christine Chapman	Cynon Valley
Glyn Davies	Mid & West Wales
Richard Edwards	Preseli Pembrokeshire
Edwina Hart	Gower
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend
Gareth Jones	Conwy
Helen Mary Jones	Llanelli
David Melding	South Wales Central
Janet Ryder	North Wales
Kirsty Williams	Brecon & Radnor

Advisers to the Committee

Teresa Rees	Equal Opportunities Commissioner for Wales
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Kate Bennett Equal Opportunities Commission

Howard John Disability Wales

Judith Jones Commission for Racial Equality

Officials

Kate Cassidy Public Administration, Equality and Public Appointments Division
Charles Willie

Andrew George Clerk

Julie Bragg Deputy Clerk

Agenda Item 1: Chair's Report

Paper: EOC-05-99(p.1)

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the last meeting of the Committee before the Christmas recess. In introducing her report, she drew particular attention to two issues:

- the meeting she had held with the Welsh Refugee Council on 25 November to discuss immigration and asylum issues. A person with experience of these issues was being seconded to the Equality Policy Unit;
- the Commission for Racial Equality's Leadership Challenge review which had taken place on 7 December. The Permanent Secretary had spoken at the event about the Assembly's involvement in the initiative. The Chair asked the Secretariat to circulate his text to members. She also said that she planned to write to the Chairs of all the NHS Trusts and Health Authorities in Wales to encourage them to become involved. Papers from the recent briefing session on social inclusion would be circulated to members of the Committee.

1.2 It was suggested that a report on local authority activities relating to immigration and asylum would be useful at the next meeting. This should reflect where asylum seekers were expected to be accommodated. The latest indication from the Home Office was that around 300 asylum seekers would be arriving in Wales between February and March 2000, mainly in areas where there was already an appropriate ethnic community.

1.3 At the last meeting a point had been raised about the number of black and ethnic minority security guards who were employed directly by the National Assembly and those who were on duty at night and on weekends. No criticism of the company employing the out-of-hours staff had been intended. Officials had found that there was little differential in terms of pay between the two groups. In view of the low number of black and ethnic minority applicants to work for the Assembly, it was felt that a more proactive approach could be taken to encourage more applications.

1.4 A letter from the organisers of the Global Cultural Diversity Congress had been circulated to Members providing clarification of a number of points which had been raised at the last Committee meeting. Charles Willie reported that an Assembly official had now been assigned to work on the Congress until

March. George Craig, Assembly Senior Director, would soon be seeking the Committee's views about sponsoring a workshop at the event. Concern was again raised about a member of the Chinese Government making a keynote speech at the Congress, particularly in the light of events during the Chinese Premier's recent visit to London. The Chair undertook to feed back this concern to George Craig and the organisers and to offer the services of Disability Wales to advise on accessible venues for the event.

Agenda item 2: Progress Report on Work Programme

2.1 Officials reported that all 55 interviews with Heads of Divisions had now taken place and that they had also spoken to Group Directors. They were now working on the analysis of the interviews so that Groups could prepare reports to Assembly Secretaries and then Committees.

Agenda Item 3: Equality Awareness Raising for Assembly Members

Paper: EOC-05-99(p.2)

3.1 Charles Willie introduced this paper which set out proposals for promoting equality awareness amongst AMs, and to ensure that equality training was a pre-requisite for all those who were involved in public appointments. He reported that officials were preparing a basic questionnaire about Assembly Members' availability and their past experience and knowledge of equality issues so that training could be targeted effectively. He hoped to circulate it before the Christmas recess. Discussions had already taken place with prospective training providers.

3.2 Members welcomed the proposals. They were anxious for the training to commence as soon as possible particularly in relation to the public appointments process because a number of posts were up for re-appointment in the New Year. It was felt that the Assembly could set an example to other organisations by undertaking this exercise and that it might be appropriate for the awareness raising sessions for Members to be held in party groups. However, sessions for public appointments panel members would be cross party and would also involve relevant officials. The quality of the trainers would be very important and care should be taken in choosing them.

3.3 The Chair reported that a briefing session had recently been held for the independent advisers on public appointments involving Race Equality First and officials. The event had been well received and it was important to get this part of the training in place quickly. She proposed that further seminars could focus on specific topics such as the Disability Discrimination Act. Other issues could be identified in responses to the questionnaire.

3.4 In discussion, members considered a proposal to hold an Equality Awareness Week, mostly associated with the Committee's annual report to the Assembly. The possibility of a tie-in with the launch of the Disability Rights Commission or International Women's Day in March was also raised. The Week could include an all-Members' awareness session and could also encompass feedback on the Assembly's progress in implementing the recommendations of the Macpherson Report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The latter had been discussed at a previous meeting and a meeting of the Committee's Working Party was being arranged.

Agenda Item 4: The Pay Gap - Presentation by Teresa Rees, Equal Opportunities Commissioner for Wales and Kate Bennett, Director Wales, Equal Opportunities Commission

4.1 The presentation focussed on the pay gap between men and women. This remained a particular problem in Wales 30 years after the Equal Pay Act came

into force with women's hourly earnings being only 84% of men's. Almost half the women in Wales earn less than £250 pounds per week while only a quarter of men earn below this threshold. Conversely half the men in Wales earn more than £350 a week but only a quarter of women workers come into this category. In terms of the minimum wage, 1.8% of men earn less than £3.50 per hour, whilst the figure for women is 3.8% for full time workers and 15.4% for part time workers. These statistics had long term effects on the economy as a whole:

- Social justice - Women should be fairly and equally rewarded for their work;
- Tackling poverty and self-provision - Women earn half as much as men over their working lifetime and their earnings are spent disproportionately on children and the family. Increasing women's pay would increase the level of provision for children and reduce the need for state assistance, such as free school meals;
- Competitiveness – the evidence was that businesses which paid women fairly were also more competitive.

4.2 There were various causes of unequal pay. It was rare for the pay gap to exist because of direct discrimination nowadays, but pay systems in themselves could be unwittingly discriminatory. The Equal Opportunities Commission had published a Code of Practice on pay to help employers tackle this. The status of part-time work and the need to balance work and home could also contribute to unequal pay and the Employment Relations Act had introduced measures to begin to address these issues. The glass ceiling was also prevalent in Wales, particularly in banking and teaching. Job segregation remained a significant factor in determining pay levels. Earlier this year the Commission had published a report, 'Different but Equal', which showed that, although girls consistently did better academically than boys they were emerging with lower qualifications. Girls were still entering stereotypical jobs which helped to perpetuate the cycle of low pay for women.

4.3 The Equal Opportunities Commission was undertaking a number of initiatives to help to break this cycle:

- focussing on the gender gap by advocating pay reviews within organisations and highlighting the results;
- making employers aware of the Code of Practice on pay;
- making equal pay the focus of the Spring conference of the Wales Equality Exchange; and,
- participating in a UK-wide task force on the discriminatory elements of pay systems.

4.4 The Commission thought that the Assembly should conduct an audit of its own pay arrangements in the first instance. They would also like the Assembly to encourage its Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs) to undertake similar audits and make them a mandatory feature of contracts with suppliers. The Assembly could also help by challenging stereotypes in education and encouraging girls to have higher aspirations. The Commission stressed the need for a strategic approach to childcare provision to achieve equal coverage across Wales. The European Structural Funds also provided an opportunity to mainstream equality into projects and the organisations who would be bidding for funds. Teresa Rees had recently participated in a Downing Street seminar on 'Women in the New Economy' and she felt it would be particularly useful for a similar event to focus on the Welsh economy.

4.5 In a wide-ranging discussion, it was felt that a number of factors were crucial in achieving equal pay. It was important to get the early messages right. Focussing on education, even as early as nursery level, and particularly on placing boys and girls in non-traditional work experience was felt to be beneficial. Boys were more likely than girls to participate in modern apprenticeships and so enter employment at a higher level. Another education issue was the low achievement of both boys and girls in less prosperous areas. These considerations should be fed back to the two education subject committees. The Chair asked officials to produce a paper about pay arrangements for the National Assembly and ASPBs, together with the issue of contract compliance.

Agenda item 5: The Amsterdam Treaty

5.1 The Chair informed members that this paper had been provided for information even though the position in the European Commission regarding the Amsterdam Treaty was not yet clear. It was hoped to arrange a fuller presentation in the New Year. Despite the fact that neither European negotiations nor equality issues were devolved matters, it was considered important by the UK Government to have a Welsh perspective.

5.2 It was agreed to invite the European Commissioner on Employment and Social Affairs, Mrs Anna Diamantopoulou, to meet the Committee to discuss the Treaty and to show her how the Committee's action plan was being put into practice. It was also recognised that Wales had distinctive opportunities to mainstream equality because of the European Structural Funds and the fact that Section 107 of the Government of Wales Act meant that the provisions of the Human Rights Act already apply to the Assembly.

Agenda item 6: The Legal Position of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies

6.1 The Chair invited Charles Willie to give a flavour of the issues involved in the Committee's scrutiny of ASPBs. A paper and full discussion was planned for the New Year. He explained that each ASPB had a different legal framework governing its relationship with the National Assembly. This meant that Section 120 of the Government of Wales Act would apply differently and therefore there was no single definitive way to ensure ASPBs considered and applied equality practices. The Assembly had the power of direction over some bodies but not over others. However, all ASPBs were subject to five-yearly Financial Management and Performance Reviews which could be used to examine equality. It might also be appropriate to consider equality when Subject Committees and ASs examined ASPB's Corporate Plans and to send them 'Dear Chief Executive' letters setting out what is expected of them. Until more specific legal advice was available, he suggested that these formal documents and reviews should contain an equality dimension setting out a practical framework on which to take action.

6.2 Members agreed that these proposed interim actions provided an appropriate way forward. It was important to influence the equality agenda of ASPBs as many of their actions, such as awarding grants for projects, have extensive and long lasting effects on communities. It was also suggested that equality could be emphasised in the choice of candidates to fill public appointments as their influence would permeate the organisation. Specific concerns were raised about black and ethnic minority considerations in the NHS and the curriculum. Judith Jones of the CRE reported on the recent Leadership Challenge Conference which highlighted the lack of NHS involvement in the initiative. She also raised concerns about recent developments in the NHS in relation to an appointment of an ethnic minority worker for the Service. The Chair considered her proposal to write to NHS Chief Executives about the Leadership Challenge was relevant here. She proposed to write to ACCAC to raise the curriculum issues which had been highlighted.

Agenda item 7: Beijing Plus Five: 2000 - Presentation by Julie Ashdown, Women's Unit, Cabinet Office

7.1 Julie Ashdown outlined the UK's contribution to the United Nation's Beijing Plus Five conference in New York in June, 2000. The event would focus on the UN's Platform for Action on women which had identified 12 critical areas for concern ranging from 'Women and Poverty' to 'Women and armed conflict'. The breadth of these areas reflected the disparate experiences and living conditions for women in the world-wide membership of the UN.

7.2 There was a prolonged and complicated consultation process to feed views and experiences into the final document which would go to the conference. The UK view, which for non-governmental organisations would be compiled by the UK-wide Women's National Commission and presented to the Women's Unit, would be submitted for inclusion in a document being produced by the European Union. Audrey Jones of the Welsh Women's National Coalition had

recently been appointed to the UK Women's National Commission. The final document would be presented to the conference by Portugal as they would hold the European Presidency at the time.

7.3 The UK delegation would be led by the Minister for Women, Baroness Jay, with representatives of the Women's Unit and other government departments. It was not clear at this stage who would represent the Assembly but there was still time for the distinctive nature of Welsh women's issues to be included in the consultation process. The Women's Unit felt that the Assembly's Equality Audit was a particularly strong candidate for inclusion in the UK's final submission.

7.4 Members expressed concern at the possibility that Wales might be represented by only one civil servant. Whilst it was accepted that only the Portuguese representative and Baroness Jay would actually speak at the conference, Members recognised that much business could be achieved in the margins of the event and Wales did have a specific agenda which was separate to the UK one. It was agreed that the level of Welsh involvement should be reconsidered, especially since it was felt that Wales had achieved greater advancements in equality than other parts of the UK.

Agenda item 8: Minutes of the previous meeting

Paper: EOC-04-99(min)

8.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

8.2 The Chair invited the Finance Secretary to inform the Committee about a meeting which she had held with the architects of the new Assembly building and Howard John on 2 December. The Finance Secretary expressed her appreciation for the hard work which Disability Wales had put into their submission on access to the architects. This had resulted in substantial changes being made to the original designs. The revised plans would now be shared with party leaders and Disability Wales would be involved in further discussions. The widest possible consultation on the plans would then take place. If further changes were considered necessary, they would be accommodated.

8.3 The meeting closed at 12.35pm.