

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE EOC 08-02(p9)

Date: 12 December 2002
Time: 9.00am
Venue: Committee Rooms 3 and 4
Title: Gender Balance and Ethnicity Balance on Task and Finish Groups

Gender Balance and Ethnicity Balance on Task and Finish Groups

Purpose

1. To inform the Committee of current arrangements for establishing Task and Finish groups; give what information we have on the current gender and ethnicity balance; and look at a suggested model of best practice.

Summary

2. On the basis of the latest information available, the Assembly currently has 79 task and finish groups with the membership made up of 67% male and 33% female (no data is collected on other equality balances). This paper sets out the current arrangements for appointing members to these groups so that Committee members can consider what action might be taken, if any, to improve the balance.

What are Task and Finish Groups?

3. Task and finish groups are ad hoc advisory groups set up to perform a particular task, report and then disband. Their work is short term and usually of a very specific and focussed nature. A high degree of knowledge and expertise is therefore required of the Membership if they are to be able to contribute effectively and produce worthwhile results in a limited timescale. Membership can be drawn from a wide range of interests reflecting the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to inclusive policy making and consultation. Due to their short-term nature they do not fall under the generally accepted classification of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs).

Current Practice

4. In the majority of cases membership of task and finish groups is achieved through nomination by stakeholder organisations rather than the appointment of individuals by Ministers. It is the organisations represented on the Groups that decide who, based on their abilities, experience and qualities, best meets the needs of the body in question. They have a

common interest in ensuring that the group functions effectively and fulfils its remit. Nominations are endorsed by the appropriate Assembly Minister. Where appointments are made directly by a Minister, and although task and finish groups are not regarded as ASPBs and therefore fall outside the remit of the Commissioner's Code on Public Appointments, they are made in accordance with the spirit of the Code ensuring that the underlying principles of a fair, open and transparent appointments process are applied.

Application of Nolan Principles

5. Where appointments are made by Assembly Ministers, we have confirmed that Nolan Principles are adhered to. No explicit guidance is given to organisations steering them towards Nolan in making their selection decisions. That said, however, the very nature of task and finish groups requires of their members a high degree of knowledge, expertise and experience. Those requirements fit with the principles of Nolan that appointments to public bodies should be governed by the overriding principle of selection on merit and the selection of individuals who, through their abilities, experience and qualities, match the needs of the bodies in question. In addition, in order to address the requirement for the process to be transparent and fully documented, divisions involved in setting up these groups are advised to prepare a written 'constitution' which should include the terms of reference for the group; when it will report and to whom; and how members will be selected. Formal guidance on arrangements for establishing task and finish groups will be prepared which could include a requirement to consider the equality balance of the group if that is thought desirable.

Gender and Ethnicity Balance

6. The latest information we have about the gender balance on task and finish groups is based on data collected in April this year and is set out below:

Number of groups: 79

Total number of members: 1437, of which

Male: 961 (67%)

Female: 476 (33%)

7. No data has been collected centrally relating to ethnicity or other equality balances. We will address this when we next update our records.

Objective One Partnerships

8. In considering the issue of gender balance it has been suggested that the Objective One

partnerships may offer a model of good practice in seeking to achieve a more even balance. Task and finish groups are ad hoc groups established as the need arises dealing with a single, specific issue within the full range of the Assembly's responsibilities. Members serve only until their task is complete. They may not readily compare with the Objective One Partnerships which are standing bodies set up to assist in providing a strategic approach to programme implementation and whose members may serve for up to four years. However, we have looked at the arrangements for appointing members to the Partnership Boards to see whether there are any lessons that can be learnt.

9. Partnership Guidance states that members are chosen according to the experience and expertise of the individuals concerned. They will normally be nominated by an organisation in their sector but in accepting a place on the board they are expected to put the wider economic interests of the local partnership area before sectoral or other narrower interests. The guidance goes on to state that "there should be an approximate gender balance amongst members of the board. [All local partnerships have reached a position where each gender is represented by a minimum of 25% of the members. The PMC (Programme Monitoring Committee) has agreed that this figure should rise to 40%]." In order to ensure that they can observe the requirement on gender balance the guidance says that all partnerships should have a process for reviewing their membership and that membership should be reviewed each year.

10. There are some similarities therefore with the arrangements for appointing members to task and finish groups. For example in the principle that members should be chosen according to their experience and expertise so that they are able to represent the views of, and communicate with, the constituency they represent. However, positive action to achieve a gender balance on Partnership boards is actively promoted.

11. Taking the figures outlined in para 6 above it would appear that task and finish group membership overall exceeds the minimum currently required of the Objective One partnerships. Where we can learn from the Partnership Guidance is in the action being taken to encourage those putting forward nominations to consider the issue of gender balance. This is something we could consider taking on board in establishing future groups. (It should be recognised however that action such as this could result in an individual being proposed on the basis of their gender rather than qualities and experience which are considered to be paramount in the case of task and finish groups).

Action

12. Members are invited to note the position and comment.

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