



Consultation response

Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee: Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Consultation details

Title of consultation: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee: Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Source of consultation: Senedd Cymru

Date: 31 August 2021

For more information please contact

Ruth Coombs

Equality and Human Rights Commission
Block 1, Spur D, Government Buildings, St Agnes Road,

Cardiff, CF14 4YJ

Wales@equalityhumanrights.com

About the Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission ('the Commission') is Great Britain's national equality body and has been awarded an 'A' status as a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) by the United Nations.

Our job is to help make Britain fairer. We do this by safeguarding and enforcing the laws that protect people's rights to fairness, dignity and respect. We use our unique powers to challenge discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect human rights. We work with other organisations and individuals to achieve our aims, but are ready to take tough action against those who abuse the rights of others.

The Commission has been given powers to advise Governments and Parliaments across England, Scotland and Wales on the equality and human rights implications of legislation and policy. We can also publish information or provide advice, on any matter related to equality, diversity and human rights. We are here to offer our expert advice to support the work of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee to ensure equality and human rights considerations are at the heart of the Sixth Senedd.

Consultation Questions

What do you think the Committee's strategic priorities should be over the next six months?

EHRC inquiry into racial inequality in health and social care workplaces

In the autumn the Equality and Human Rights Commission will be publishing our GB inquiry report into racial inequality in health and social care workplaces. The terms of reference can be accessed [here](#).

The report will include recommendations for the Welsh Government and other key stakeholders in Wales and will help inform the Welsh Government's Race Equality Action Plan.

The inquiry focusses on the experiences of ethnic minority people working on the frontline in lower-paid roles particularly during the pandemic. Recommendations will reflect issues ranging from different treatment, awareness of rights, employee voice, low paid insecure employment, lack of data and oversight and structural issues which exist within the health and social care workforces and contribute to the poorer outcomes experienced by ethnic minority workers. The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee may wish to examine the Welsh Government and other's response to the report findings and recommendations and action taken to address the issues identified or conduct its own work in this area.

What do you think the Committee's longer term objectives and priorities should be for the term of the sixth Senedd?

1. The Welsh Government's Economic Resilience & Reconstruction Mission.

The Commission's, "How coronavirus has affected equality and human rights" report shows how the pandemic has laid bare, intensified and deepened existing inequalities.

https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/equality_and_human_rights_commission_how_coronavirus_has_affected_equality_and_human_rights_2020.pdf

Evidence shows a disproportionate impact on some people. In the context of the economic reconstruction strategy for Wales we specifically highlight the unequal impact on ethnic minorities, disabled people, young people, women and people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

As we emerge from this crisis, it is crucial that equality and human rights are at the centre of decision-making so that responses to it are effective.

As we move into recovery and start to rebuild, it will be important for the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee to scrutinise the Welsh Government to ensure priority and focus is placed on delivering key equality outcomes. It will be important to ensure that equality and human rights considerations are at the heart of the Economic Resilience & Reconstruction Mission and that Welsh Government's obligations under the Equality Act, the Socio Economic Duty and Public Sector Equality Duty are met. For example to ensure that in developing and implementing the reconstruction strategy Welsh Government is giving due regard to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

In doing so, Welsh Government will need to carry out and publish timely equality impact assessments in taking this work forward. This might be an area the Committee may wish to include in its programme of scrutiny.

The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee may also wish to scrutinise whether there is a robust cross-government accountability structure and resources for delivery to ensure successful implementation and whether there is an ambitious action plan on equality and human rights to address the very real risk of inequalities deepening and further entrenching the discrimination and disadvantage experienced by many in Wales.

2. Low paid insecure employment

High numbers of people work in low paid insecure employment in Wales. The number of zero hour contracts rose by more than a third in Wales between 2018 - 2019, which equates to 3.4% of people employed in Wales. The New Economics Foundation found that 17% of workers in Wales are employed in low paid, insecure work.

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed a lack of basic employment rights such as sick pay that mean many gig economy workers or people on zero hours contracts have no choice but to continue working. This type of work is predominantly low paid, precarious, with an overrepresentation of young workers, and ethnic minorities.

The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee may wish to prioritise scrutiny of what the Welsh Government and others are doing to address low paid and insecure employment.

3. Remote working and flexible working

Social distancing measures have required many employers to implement flexible working practices in order to survive, and this has demonstrated that it is possible, and beneficial to both employer and employees. Despite the fact that working from home has helped many to improve productivity by giving those working from home greater flexibility, there is a concern that employers will revert to previous inflexible working practices.

The Welsh Government's aim that around 30% of the workforce works remotely on a regular basis is welcome. However, Welsh Government should consider its remote working aim as part of wider flexible working proposals. To fully maximise the momentum in this area that has resulted from significant increases in flexible and remote working since the start of the pandemic, Welsh Government should widely encourage employers to offer flexible working to as many employees as is reasonable practicable to do so.

The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee may wish to examine Welsh Government's progress towards its aim and in doing so to ensure that any disproportionate impacts identified in the EIA when published are mitigated and addressed to ensure that the policy is inclusive and meets the aims of the PSED.

The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee may also wish to explore how the Welsh Government and employers in Wales are promoting flexible working to maintain the momentum gained during the pandemic and avoid any regression to pre pandemic inflexible working practices.

4. Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee's report on Long-term recovery from COVID-19 (March 2021)

This report made a number of recommendations in relation to fair work, the economic contract and recovery for all including: making investments work for everyone, supporting people from ethnic minorities and disabled people through recovery, gender equality in recovery and youth unemployment

The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee may wish to scrutinise Welsh Government's response to the recommendations in this report and to examine the Welsh Government's progress in embedding fair work across the Welsh economy.

Other sources of evidence the Committee may wish to consider

Human Rights Tracker

Our [human rights tracker](#) is one of the world's first online tools for monitoring human rights compliance. It is a searchable online tool to track how well the Welsh and UK Governments are putting its human rights duties into practice and contains all of the most recent recommendations made to the UK by the UN treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). We want the human rights tracker to raise awareness of the UK's human rights duties, to help you monitor how well they are being put into practice, and to support you in holding government to account.

You can use the tracker to:

- Review the progress the Welsh & UK governments have made towards fulfilling their international human rights obligations.
- Search by [UK](#) and [Wales](#) so you can see which government is responsible for implementing the recommendations.
- Find out what the UN has said about a particular human rights issue (such as education, living standards or work) or population group (such as disabled people or children) in the UK.
- Find dedicated pages on each of the UN human rights treaties the UK has agreed to follow, and on the UPR process.

Is Wales Fairer?

[Is Wales Fairer?](#) is the most comprehensive review of how Wales is performing on equality and human rights across all areas of life, including; education, work, living standards, health, justice and security and participation in society.

This is the Welsh supplement to our report on equality and human rights progress in England, Scotland and Wales, [Is Britain Fairer?](#)

We have also recently produced a follow-up “[How Coronavirus has affected equality and human rights](#)” report which summarises evidence to help us understand the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on different groups in society.