

Assembly Commission - Strategic Equality Plan 2012-2016. Consultation Responses

Throughout October and November 2011, the Equality Team held a consultation exercise to involve Assembly staff, Assembly Members, Assembly Members' staff, contracted staff and the public in the development of our Strategic Equality Plan.

The feedback outlined below is the result of this consultation exercise. Some of the points raised are already part of our work, some will not be reasonable or possible to undertake while others will be taken forward as actions. Feedback covers Assembly Business, Communications, Front of House and Estates.

Public Engagement

Knowledge and awareness

- There was a lot of feedback from the public about a general lack of awareness of the role of the Assembly, the work of Members and the different tiers of democracy in Wales (MPs, the Welsh Government, the National Assembly and local councils).
- Many people were also unsure of the difference between the Welsh Government and the Assembly, with some stating that the Assembly's positioning statement did little to clarify the situation as a further explanation was needed.
- People were uncertain how AMs could offer help and support. There were concerns about the visibility of AMs and the need for surgeries to be held at more convenient times, i.e. on Saturdays.
- Many people were unaware that they have five elected representatives in the Assembly and some people stated that they were less likely to engage with regional members.
- People suggested that the way to increase engagement is through increased education and outreach work.
- It was suggested that the Assembly promotes its work, giving examples of success of how the Assembly can make a difference.
- Some feedback from women's groups suggested that there is a misconception that politics is a male, white environment.
- The Assembly should better promote what we do in terms of equality, both internally and externally

Accessible estates

- Many people suggested the need for a new access audit on our estate to ensure access issues are considered.

- Guidance to assist AMs in making their offices more accessible should be better promoted
- People highlighted the following access issues with the Senedd:
 - Signage – each group that we spoke to highlighted the need for signage outside of the Senedd outlining what the building is, the location of the entrance and what services and facilities are available
 - Need to better promote the location of the drop-off point for visitors.
 - There needs to be more signage around the Bay to direct people to the Senedd and Pierhead
 - The route of the ramp to the entrance is not clear
 - The entrance is dark and provides problems for people with visual impairments
 - The large ‘steps’ outside the Senedd are dangerous
 - The steel discs in the steps do not provide sufficient contrast for people visually impairments
 - The glass bridge is difficult for people with visual impairments and vertigo
 - There was mixed feedback about our Security staff. Some saw security and police as officious, intimidating and off-putting for visitors. Other praised the welcome they received and how friendly and approachable staff are, especially staff who used British Sign Language (BSL) to welcome guests.
 - The viewing screens in the galleries are too small and no provision is made for wheelchair users (i.e. no screen on an extendable arm)
 - The loop system needs to be well maintained as it was suggested that it does not always work across the estate.
 - The Senedd building as a whole was considered confusing – which areas are open to the public?
 - Are evacuation chairs available for disabled visitors? Also, how do people with hearing impairments know if the fire alarm is triggered?
 - The building was considered cold by visitors
 - Doors to the rear of the main level should be automated or held open to improve access to the toilets
 - The efficiency of the raising platform in the Senedd was a concern

Visits / Tours

- Tours should be better promoted to the public as should the Assembly as a place to visit.
- Promote the availability of tours in other languages, including BSL
- Information should be available to visitors in a range of alternative formats and community languages
- It was suggested that travel costs to the bay should be subsidised for underprivileged groups
- There should be more visitor information and signage around Cardiff Bay to attract visitors
- Information on how to get to the Assembly should be promoted- bus routes, train etc - as well as promoting what facilities are available
- The Senedd should be made more engaging and interactive. The Assembly should think creatively about what people can do once they get through the door.

Information

- Basic, introductory information about the Assembly should be available in a range of alternative formats (Braille, Easy read, large print, video, audio) and community languages, including BSL and Farsi.
- Maybe a central access fund could be established for staff to use when providing information in a different format or language.
- There was a lot feedback about how much more engaging the education brand is compared to the 'corporate' brand. People are far more likely to pick up a document in this brand.
- There were a number of accessibility issues with the brand, including:
 - The use of white text on light colour background not providing enough contrast
 - Font size on publications is often too small
 - The use of text over an image
 - The dash to distinguish between Welsh and English was deemed insufficient, confusing and off-putting. Publishing in tilt and turn was considered to be more accessible
- The importance of plain, accessible language, without dumbing down the message was highlighted in each of the focus groups and some of the written submissions. Issues involved the use of acronyms, jargon and formal language. Authors should bear in mind the readability of the text and the fact that large numbers of adults have a very young reading age.
- What do people want to know? There should be one, accessible public document outlining the following: introduction to the Assembly and

AM, the difference between the Government and the Assembly, how to be involved (petitions, visits [how to get here and facilities], outreach, consultations), single point of contact.

- This one document should be available in a range of community locations used by the public such as libraries, AM's offices, community centres, Citizen's Advice, surgeries, post offices.
- Information should be available at the entrance to the Senedd so that people can find out about the Assembly before going through security.

The use of media

- There is considered to be an over-reliance on the website for communicating and engaging with the public.
- The Assembly should make greater use of social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter) to communicate with people. Some groups, such as trans people, connect through social media as opposed to representative organisations.
- The Assembly should make greater use of local, targeted media to promote visits to the area, consultations etc – local radio, local newspapers (the community news section is free), newsletters and e-bulletins (housing associations, community organisations, charities, and councils all have newsletters).
- Could use more creative methods of marketing – i.e. use vinyl stickers on buses, bus stops, in shops, libraries etc. to promote one central contact number for the Assembly.

The Assembly's website

- The new website is more accessible and easier to navigate
- It could be worth the Assembly creating a blog for people to record their experience of working with or visiting the Assembly
- It should be made easier to find a publication without having to know the title of the document
- There should be more videos introducing the Assembly and these should be more upfront on the website for people with lower levels of literacy
- There should be more information available in BSL videos
- Under contacting the Assembly, there should be a live chat section where people can communicate with the Booking line without phoning. This would be more accessible for deaf people
- There should be more opportunity to provide feedback on the Assembly, AMs, our services and facilities- "what are your thoughts?"

Outreach Team

- There was some general feedback from those that were already engaged with the Outreach team on the high quality of their work
- There was, however, a lack of awareness amongst some respondents, both internal and external, about the work of the Outreach team
- The team should build relationships with groups across each of the equality protected characteristics, using existing groups such as County Voluntary Councils, to promote engagement
- Continue to give presentations and be guest speakers for events, conferences, meetings and groups, ie charities, housing associations, community groups, People's First, various workplaces etc
- It is useful for community groups to have a single point of contact
- The team should use social media, local contacts and local media to promote where they will be
- The former Presiding Officer's tour of Wales was seen as a success in promoting the work of the Assembly and should be repeated
- AMs should promote outreach, visits and events. This could be done via their website or email signatures.
- Outreach should be mainstreamed throughout the work of the Assembly where groups have an interest or can add value- i.e. consultations, impact assessments, events etc
- There is a role for Outreach in promoting integration, bringing different groups together to share cultures, promote equality and foster good relations (as per our duty under the Equality Act 2010)
- The Assembly should work with AMs for more "meet and greet" events with diverse groups, including, for example, holding local Question Time events.

Events

- For both Events and Outreach planning there was considered to be a disconnect with North Wales
- The Assembly should use events to meet our general duty under the Equality Act 2010 - eliminate discrimination, promote equality and foster good relations
- The Assembly should better promote internally and externally the events work that we do in relation to equality
- The Assembly should better promote the Senedd and Pierhead as venues for events, exhibitions and meetings
- Invitations to events from external bodies are often not accessible. Can the Assembly provide accessibility guidance to organisations holding events on our estate?

- There are a number of events which the Assembly could attend / celebrate – i.e. Ramadan, Eid, Interfaith Week, Chinese New Year, Rhyd week, International Mela, Deaf Awareness, North Wales Mardi Gras. When we celebrate such events, we should not just be focussed on Cardiff – i.e. Black History Month or International Women’s Day events in North and Mid Wales
- The Assembly should better promote open events, especially where BSL is available. Such promotion can be undertaken via contacts in third sector organisations
- There needs to be more seating available for events as some people are unable to stand for very long
- The acoustics in the Senedd are not good for events, and the loop system can be ineffective for large events
- The Pierhead should be promoted as a more accessible conference / event space
- The Assembly should target events and outreach to specific groups
- Rather than having large AM-sponsored events in the Senedd / Pierhead, could the Assembly have a day a week where smaller organisations can have information stands? Smaller organisations do not necessarily know about the Assembly as a venue or the need for an AM sponsor.
- Financial support should be given to attendees to help them to attend events

Assembly Business

- Is there scope for plenary meetings to have live BSL / subtitles?
- Committees should be held in accessible venues across Wales to increase engagement
- The Assembly should have a programme of consultation events to enable people to plan their attendance / participation
- Community groups, individuals and charities etc should have email updates of what consultations are taking place
- There is a lack of public awareness about consultations
- Online consultations and petitions can create barriers for some people – has the e-petitions process been equality impact assessed?
- People who contribute to consultations would like a follow-up so that they know the outcomes
- Financial support should be given to consultation attendees
- Guidance should be developed on how to support diverse witnesses
- Consultation engagement events should be held across Wales at convenient times.
- There should be a central contact database to ensure consistency

Mentoring

- The Step Up Cymru Mentoring Scheme was considered a great success and a fantastic way of engaging people in the work of the Assembly. This should be repeated.

The Assembly as an Employer

Training

- Awareness training for staff should be held which encompasses information across the protected characteristics. Awareness-raising around trans, religious, disability (including non-visible disabilities) and deaf issues were highlighted.
- Equality training should have specific reference to the legal responsibilities around the Equality Act 2010 for individuals and the organisation.
- Targeted training for different service areas should be given. For example, customer service training should encompass equality issues to train front line staff to be more aware of their impact on visitors coming to the Assembly. Front line staff should be trained to communicate with deaf people, including learning British Sign Language.
- A glossary of terminology should be more widely publicised for staff to use.
- Factsheets should be circulated to remind staff of their equality responsibilities.
- Annual equality refresher training should be provided to keep staff informed of developments.
- Staff networks should have an involvement in training and partnerships could be made with local organisations to give additional information to staff.
- A combination of online training and classroom sessions will reach more staff members and have more of an impact.
- Line management training must be specifically tailored to encompass equality issues including supporting diverse staff and tackling unacceptable behaviour.
- The Management Development Programme should have equality embedded into each course.
- Staff should have the means to anonymously report incidents or complaints they wish to make in relation to bullying and harassment.
- Staff that have undertaken coaching and mentoring training as well as members of the Equality Steering Group may be able to help to disseminate equality information to their colleagues.

- Staff networks should be publicised further to staff.
- Staff in North Wales should have the same access to all training as those in South Wales.

Policies and Information

- On-going awareness campaigns need to be conducted by HR to draw attention to their policies. Maternity/co-parental leave, flexible working, absence management and dignity at work policies were highlighted.
- There should be consistency in the application of policies across the organisation and across grades
- HR policies should be better promoted and easier to follow to enable people to access them. Plain language should be used too.
- Support and policy guidance should be available relating to mental health issues.
- The Assembly should regularly publish statistics which demonstrate the constitution of our workforce.
- There should be an 'equality champion' within each service area to keep their colleagues aware of equality news and matters.

Recruitment and Advertising

- The Assembly's commitment to diversity should be related clearly in our job adverts.
- Recruitment policies should encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply for posts within the Assembly.
- Work placements and apprenticeships for people from under-represented groups should be offered on a regular basis.
- Staff across the Assembly should have equality of opportunity in accessing training and jobs.
- A clear strategy should be developed to improve the diversity of the organisation and to dispel myths which may prevent people from applying to work here.
- Staff sitting on interview panels should have equality awareness embedded into their training for the role.

Events

- Equality Month should be repeated to give staff an opportunity to ask questions and gain information relating to equality issues.
- Staff should be encouraged to attend equality events at the Assembly and in the community.

Other points

- Cross-departmental working on equality initiatives should take place to share responsibilities across teams.
- Branded information should be accessible and written in plain English/Welsh.
- There were positive comments about the support offered by Health and Safety, HR and Equality teams and the work undertaken by the Equality team in promoting equality and raising awareness.

Supporting Assembly Members and Support Staff

Training

- An equality handbook should be given to Support Staff alongside the AMSS handbook when they commence employment.
- A glossary of terminology should be circulated.
- An online training tool should be implemented that is accessible by staff based in both Cardiff Bay and the constituency offices.
- Additional training should be given to office managers and encouragement to attend led through the party groups.
- Factsheets with key information on equality issues relating to their roles and responsibilities should be available for AM support staff. This should include information on how to access different services such as BSL translation.
- Training should outline key principles and discussions around what is acceptable.
- AMs should undergo equality training.

Support for AMs as employers

- Provide information to AMs outlining their legal responsibilities as a small employer in relation to equality. This should include ensuring accessibility to their offices for all constituents and staff.
- A checklist guide should be created to ensure locations selected for surgeries are accessible.
- A key person, perhaps in each party, could play a role in guiding AMs through their responsibilities.

Support for AM Support Staff

- A reporting procedure to allow support staff to raise issues should be put in place. Current arrangement with Members' Business Support is problematic as support staff are secondarily supported by MBS after AMs themselves.

- Access to Work information for support staff to be provided to ensure staff access all the support they are entitled to. This may extend to ensuring services such as palantypists are available for group meetings.
- Support staff based in constituency offices should be able to access the same level of support as staff based in Cardiff Bay.

Support for Assembly Members in their political roles

- Provide funding to help AMs to engage with diverse constituents.
- Inform AMs of training courses and encourage them to attend.
- Carry out an individual training needs analysis for each AM to identify areas where they require training.
- Continue to provide equality briefings for AMs and Committees.
- It was questioned whether there is a role for the Equality Team in shaping the agenda of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee.

Staff Networks

- Networks need to be more widely publicised to support staff, perhaps through an introductory email.

Monitoring

- Survey AM support staff to find out the constitution of the staff.
- Ask support staff whether they require additional support to do their jobs.

Build Links with Community Organisations

- Age Cymru highlighted potential involvement with their Older Minority Ethnic Network as a way of helping AMs to better understand its members.
- Equality and Human Rights Commission Exchange Network, Welsh Local Government Association and NHS Centre for Equality and Human Rights were also identified as good places to link with people across Wales.

Internships

- Support staff queried the fairness of unpaid internships. AMs need to be made more aware of the rules surrounding their employment status.

Embedding Equality within the Assembly

Performance Management and Development Reporting (PMDR)

- Equality objectives should be built into the PMDR process.

Consideration of Specific Requirements

- The provision of alternative formats should be proportionate and reasonable

Embedding Equality within Teams

- Equality targets should be explicit and worked into team plans to ensure all staff understand them and work towards achieving them.
- Equality leads within service areas should have more strategic guidance to maintain a consistent approach across the organisation.
- The Equality Steering Group is a great way to share information across the organisation and should meet more regularly.