# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Publication of the Strengthening and advancing equality and human rights in Wales research report** |
| **DATE**  | **26 August 2021** |
| **BY** | **Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice** |

The strengthening and advancement of equality and human rights has been a central focus of every Welsh Government since the beginning of devolution. This government is more determined than ever in its focus and determination to create a fairer more equal Wales. As a step on that journey, I am pleased to announce the publication today of the [Strengthening and advancing equality and human rights in Wales research report](https://gov.wales/strengthening-and-advancing-equality-and-human-rights-wales). This is a significant piece of research that was commissioned as part of the Welsh Government’s commitment to developing a clear approach in Wales to ensuring equality and human rights are fully considered and protected, particularly in light of our exit from the European Union.

The research, which began in January 2020, has been led by Swansea University, in collaboration with Bangor University, Diverse Cymru and Young Wales. Its aims were to investigate mechanisms to strengthen and advance equality and human rights in Wales, and to make recommendations for legislative, policy, guidance, or other reforms to meet this objective.

COVID-19 brought increased urgency to the need for this work, by bringing into focus the continuing existence of deep-rooted inequalities in our society. These inequalities have been further explored and articulated in powerful reports by the First Ministers’ Socio-economic subgroup of the COVID-19 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Advisory Group and the Disability Equality Forum, amongst others.

COVID-19 also necessitated changes to the original research plan, and the adaptation of some of the main consultation methods to take account of lockdown restrictions. Despite these challenges, the research team were able to carry on with their important work. The result is a wide-ranging report which includes a comprehensive review of existing legislation, policy and guidance, as well as consideration of their alignment and implementation. The research team also considered a large number of stakeholder perspectives and was able to highlight key themes and comments that arose as a result.

As we continue to battle with the realities and the fallout of the pandemic, the Welsh Government’s well-being objectives, set out in our Programme for Government, focus on the areas where action is needed to help us build a stable foundation for the future. This research report points the way in relation to safeguarding and promoting equality and human rights of individuals and communities in Wales and can help inform our future work as we deliver these objectives.

The recommendations in the research will now be considered in greater detail to explore how they might be integrated into ongoing and future work. Some important steps have already been taken in this regard in Wales. Our Programme for Government sets out our commitment to incorporate the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into Welsh law. The report will undoubtedly serve to inform how such incorporations can be best progressed.

Additionally, the commencement of the Socio-economic Duty in Wales in March 2021 provides a key mechanism in supporting Wales’s recovery from the impact of Covid-19 and in ensuring we take important steps to rebuild a fairer and more equal Wales. This report identifies additional options for strengthening this and further equality and human rights in Wales.

Where options for new legislative models may emerge as a result of the research, the Welsh Government will consult on these, including with any public bodies which may be affected by the proposed changes.

Receiving this research represents another important stage in our journey in the vital work of strengthening and advancing equality and human rights in Wales. It will undoubtedly stimulate a good deal of discussion and action, to ensure that we achieve our ambition to forge a distinctly Welsh approach to creating a just and equal society, where people can enjoy and exercise their rights within a stronger, fairer and more equal Wales.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Senedd returns I would be happy to do so.