



Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity



CREID BRIEFING 19

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE ON PUBLIC POLICY IN SCOTLAND

PROMOTING BEST PRACTICE IN EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SCOTLAND

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DIMENSIONS OF PERSISTENT INEQUALITY IN SCOTLAND

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Introduction

This briefing paper reports on a “think-tank” event entitled ‘Dimensions of Persistent Inequality in Scotland’ held at the Park Inn Hotel in Glasgow on 17 January 2009. This day was the third of five events in the knowledge exchange programme, *Promoting Best Practice in Equality and Human Rights in Scotland*, led by Professor Nick Watson, University of Glasgow and Professor Sheila Riddell, University of Edinburgh with the support of the Scottish Funding Council.

‘Dimensions of Persistent Inequality in Scotland’ featured six presentations by representatives of advocacy organisations associated with the Equality Act’s (2006) six strands: age; sexual orientation; religion and belief; race; disability and gender. The invited audience of 55 included professionals, national and local government officials, voluntary sector workers, academic researchers and research students working in this area.

The specific aims of the event were to:

- Share knowledge on the topic of persistent inequalities in Scotland, involving a range of bodies including Scottish Government, local authorities, academics and third sector organisations
- Reflect on current policy and to determine what information is required to advance reform to reduce inequalities
- Reflect on the knowledge exchange process and draw lessons for future events
- Produce a briefing with an assessment of the current picture and key issues affecting Scotland.

This briefing paper offers a record of the event. The first section provides an overview of the messages from each of the six presentations. In the second section, we explore the themes generated by the small-group workshops which offered a different kind of knowledge exchange opportunity involving all the speakers and delegates. The paper ends with a discussion the issues raised in the closing plenary and reflections on the day as a whole.

Several colleagues outwith the organising team contributed formally to the event. Dr Vicky Gunn of the University of Glasgow and Prof. Jennifer Harris of the University of Dundee chaired sessions and our discussant, Morag Patrick, Head of Research and Foresight at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, led the closing plenary session.

Presentations

Calum Irving is Director of Stonewall Scotland, an organisation that promotes equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities. His presentation focused on the challenge of tackling discrimination related to sexual orientation, where information is scarce. Stonewall Scotland lobbied for anti-discrimination legislation, as reflected in the Equality Act 2006, and now campaigns for attitudinal and cultural change with a view to improving the lives of the LGBT community. For example, current campaigns focus on hate crime, adoption and fostering rights and homophobic bullying.

Calum noted that Stonewall Scotland, as an organisation, was well aware of the issues faced by the LGBT community, but also admitted that statistics were hard to come by. Reasons cited for this included: under-reporting of hate crime; hidden identities; geographical spread; and low expectations. Cultural barriers exist that restrict openness about LGBT issues, for example gay teachers are discouraged from coming out and challenging homophobia in the work place. More statistical data would be useful, though it is unclear what unpublished data are held by the Government. Perhaps more essential is attitudinal research within and outwith the LGBT communities. In addition, research on how to effect change in the public sector would be helpful, so that organisations like Stonewall Scotland could quickly progress with their agenda and campaigns.

John Swinburne, leader and founder of the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party (SSCUP), highlighted the discrimination and inequalities faced by older people. He stressed that, although statistics on older people are readily available and understood, this knowledge does not lead to action. For example, since 2000, 15,280 pensioners have, according to the Registrar General for Scotland, suffered 'winter related deaths'. John argued that the deaths were directly related to inadequate pension provision and the rising cost of fuel; in short, older people died because they could not afford to heat their homes. These figures have been publicised, yet there seems to be no political mobilisation (outside the activities of the SSCUP) to prevent the same statistics appearing next year. This indicates the problem of older people being reduced to statistics, while the wider public struggles to see through the numbers and understand the level of hardship suffered. There are inequalities within the pension system too for married women, and the value of the additional payment for pensioners over 80 has been set at 25p since 1971. If it had been index-linked, this would now be worth £4.80.

John's presentation highlighted both the vast inequalities faced by older people, and the lack of support and action in challenging these inequalities. He also reflected that many examples of inequality should be taken up by other groups, for example, the problems experienced specifically by older women should be a campaigning issue for women's organisations.

Maureen Sier contribution drew on her work with the Scottish Inter Faith Council and Faith Awareness. Her presentation reflected the diversity of faiths in Scotland, and the inter-faith collaboration which has, for years, been trying to reduce misinformation and misinterpretation of faiths and beliefs. Maureen highlighted some issues which are pertinent, though not exclusive, to Scotland, including sectarianism, anti-semitism and Islamophobia. Underpinning these issues is a lack of 'religious literacy' where people generally have a poor understanding of faiths followed by other communities. She argued that legislation is insufficient to counter the ignorance around faiths. Rather faith-awareness education and training should encourage all children and young people to consider the values and teachings of all major faiths. Educational programmes on inter-faith awareness are likely to minimise the stereotypes that lead to prejudicial language and behaviour.

But the challenges ahead require more than a focus on education. Maureen made powerful arguments for partnership working with statutory bodies such as local authorities, police, fire and rescue and the NHS to promote equality and challenge misinterpretations of faith, or prejudice where it currently exists.

The next presentation was given by **Marsha Scott**, Convenor of Engender, an organisation working towards gender equality in Scotland and Europe. Marsha argued that the inequalities experienced by women are far greater than most realise. For example, women are paid, on average, 30% less than men and this is true in both the private and public sectors. Marsha presented graphic images and headlines that mimicked the covers of popular women's magazines. The headlines highlighted issues such as pay, domestic abuse and violence against women. However, the images used and

the magazine cover layout reinforced the idea that women have become preoccupied with domestic matters, beauty and sex. The point made was that women need to re-engage with the issues that actually dominate their lives and futures.

The presentation also highlighted inequalities associated with the intersection of equality strands, as experienced by disabled women, older women and women from black and ethnic minority (BME) communities.

Etienne D'Aboville, Chief Executive of the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living started his presentation by defining the social model of disability and the independent living movement. He asked delegates to consider not only the inequalities faced by some of the people represented, but the inequalities faced by all disabled people. Using the themes of housing, self directed support, education and training, employment, transport and the political, social and service structure, Etienne highlighted the multiple barriers facing disabled people and restricting their right to an ordinary life.

Within housing, for example, he explained that Scotland needs 230,000 wheelchair accessible homes to accommodate the current number of people who use a wheelchair. Within self-directed support, Etienne reported that Scotland only has 50% of the take-up rate of direct payments compared with England, demonstrating a lack of commitment by the statutory sector perhaps, to inclusive living. This argument also extended to an intersection of strands as it was pointed out that BME disabled people are even less likely to access self directed support.

The presentation also explored how disability intersected with poverty. Disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to have no qualifications which will have a direct impact on future earning power. Perhaps not surprisingly considering the exclusion from educational opportunities, 48% of disabled adults of working age in Scotland are in employment compared to 82% of non-disabled people, again, having direct consequences in terms of having sufficient income. Though this redistribution argument is compelling, Etienne also highlighted the need to consider recognition, and used barriers to political, social and service structures as powerful examples. In particular, barriers to information and advice, restrictive attitudes and a culture of decisions being made for, rather than with or by, disabled people were highlighted as continuing issues.

The final presentation of the morning session was given by **Rami Ousta**, Chief Executive of the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS). He highlighted ideas around how we can learn about and understand the inequalities faced by people represented by all six strands. For example, there was criticism of programmes which engaged only with leaders of communities, rather than the communities themselves. The former limits representation, the latter more easily represents diversity. Again, the former can lead to stereotyping and hierarchical models of authority, the latter to partnership working and providing communities with respect, dignity and an equal voice.

Exploring these issues permits a focus on how legislation impacts on communities and where its impact becomes limited. EU, UK and national policies were not effectively implemented, but were subverted at the local level. This subversion was explained by a culture of reactive, rather than proactive, working, and a preference for short term implementation projects. In order to challenge this, Rami called for long-term strategies, partnerships between academics, the voluntary sector and policy makers and a committed understanding that equality is an ethical, moral and human right.

Many of the themes that emerged here were applicable to the other strands, making this presentation a particularly valuable springboard to the afternoon sessions.

The Workshops

To optimise knowledge exchange, presenters and delegates were assigned to one of three small groups, with a mix of academics, voluntary sector and statutory sector professionals in each, for the two afternoon workshops. Each group was led by a member of the team, with the assistance of a research student scribe. The first group considered the broad question: 'What are we lacking in terms of knowledge and data and how can we collect the information which is currently lacking?' The second group explored the question: 'What are the practical implications of current policy?'

What are we lacking in terms of knowledge and data and how can we collect this information?

Much debate centred on what data should be collected, how it should be collected and who should be responsible for undertaking this task. For example, there was discussion about problems of **agreeing definitions** on which the collection of data at different levels (national and local) would be based. Concern about definitions emerged most clearly in discussions around disability, but also was pertinent to data about older people, BME communities, LGBT communities and communities that share a faith. Some participants felt that many statistics were published without sufficient background information on how the categories had been defined, leading to figures which misrepresented the reality as experienced by the advocacy organisation.

Linked to this argument was a concern that voluntary and public sector bodies were given insufficient **guidance about how to collect data** to ensure its comparability with large scale surveys. Voluntary sector staff were unclear about how their local knowledge could articulate meaningfully with administrative data collected and published by public sector bodies. Some called for higher quality of analysis of statistics, to avoid the danger that the reported data might misrepresent the communities described. Concern emerged about who should take responsibility for collecting data. The Scottish Government statistics were respected, but were seen by some to be fairly difficult to access and limited in scope. Clearly some of the groups represented by the advocacy organisations are better served by official statistics than others: age and gender are easily counted, and the 2001 census included for the first time questions on religion of upbringing and present identification; but questions on sexual orientation are not part of the census.

A second broad theme in the discussions was the **value of statistics**. There was some concern that there was not a strong enough link between the collection of data and its use to correct persistent inequalities. As a result, some communities felt saturated by demands for data and yet they reported that they had seen no improvement in services or associated benefits. There was clearly a tension between the desire to be consulted, and the desire to avoid being inundated with requests for input. If they were to contribute time to consultation and collaboration with Government and local authorities about data collection, organisations needed to be convinced of the value of the exercise and to be shown evidence of stronger links between the collection of data and resultant benefits for service users. Otherwise a great deal of time and effort could be wasted.

Delegates generally felt that data collection had to inform participants about how the collection would ultimately benefit them, and this could alleviate the tensions felt in some communities where fear of disclosure resulted in **under-reporting**. This issue was highlighted by LGBT people failing to disclose because they saw no benefit in doing so, and also felt fearful of discrimination. That fear did not necessarily have a rational basis: some people reported fear of discrimination even if they had not personally experienced it. Voluntary sector organisations that have a clear remit to end inequality may be better placed to contribute to data collection, because they remove the fear element of disclosure. Under-reporting is clearly a significant issue, and delegates, particularly those representing local and health authorities, were clear that accurate reporting was essential, as statistics around the populations of communities impacted on budgets. For example, one delegate representing a local authority reported that they do not collect data on the LGBT community, and because data is not recorded, there is no funding for LGBT groups.

A further theme to emerge in these workshops was around **lost data**. The way in which some local authorities record data means that a person may be recorded according to only one social characteristic, and if that person also belongs to other groups for whom equality is being measured, that information becomes lost. Secondary analysis of the data held by such local authorities therefore automatically presents lower figures of inequality than exist. This may be exacerbated if local authority departments use different systems, or record different elements of a person's identity, so that no full picture of inequalities can be obtained.

Finally all the groups recognised the **need for qualitative data and longitudinal studies to supplement the raw statistical and quantitative data**, so that a richer understanding of communities and the inequalities they face can be derived. This kind of data also allows approaches to equality which cannot easily be informed by comparing quantitative data sets. Such work could facilitate groups working together, both across sectors (e.g. the voluntary and academic sectors) and across strands (e.g. for research that focuses on disabled women). The end to 'silo thinking' reflected the morning's presentations and emerged independently in the workshops. The delegates contributing to one workshop agreed that the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) could support inter-disciplinary, cross-sectional work that offered longitudinal and/or qualitative data. The EHRC could help by supplying funding, but also through lobbying other Scottish funders to prioritize projects that undertake this work.

What are the practical implications of current policy?

Most of the discussion in the second workshop session centred on the creation of a single equalities body, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Some delegates, comparing the EHRC to the former Disability Rights Commission (DRC), felt that a single commission diluted or threatened gains made previously in terms of promoting equality and ending discrimination. In the opinion of one small group, the single approach had not done much to end 'silo thinking' and many delegates reported a hierarchy within the strands, with those linked to a legacy commission being better placed to promote their strand and win funding. One delegate argued that LGBT groups felt misunderstood, misrepresented and likely therefore to suffer in terms of funding. Conversely, another workshop group favoured the comprehensive amalgamation of the strands within a single Commission. This single approach was thought to be particularly beneficial in exploring the intersection between strands and for launching campaigns such as promoting dignity at work. The single Commission was also valued for highlighting how inequality impacted on people over their life course.

It was clear that the EHRC was considered a centrally significant body in terms of how current policy would be implemented. For example, through the public sector equality duties, a shift in discourse had been achieved within the public sector. There were, however, questions raised in the discussions around how much had actually changed at a practical level as a result of the legislation. Some saw the EHRC as a body that could usefully regulate the implementation of such policies, or as an organisation undertaking a utopian remit, with a single focus that could effectively challenge inequality.

Issues and questions emerging from closing plenary

Amongst the issues raised in this session were the similarities in the problems facing the various advocacy organisations as each pursued the cause of its respective equality strand. Delegates also noted the positive impact of recent equalities legislation, which had raised the profile of some groups and made many more people aware of the need to achieve equality. Some delegates felt that the EHRC could be well placed to regulate organisations and to help translate equalities legislation into practical benefits. Others stressed that there was a perceived hierarchy of equality strands. One practical suggestion emerging in the discussion was that organisations within these 'unequal' equality strands might work together in the first instance, and then turn to the Commission for support once they had developed a joint agenda.

Further discussion centred on the extent to which children and young people should be made aware of equality issues at school. There was agreement that if this was well done, then many inequalities could fade away. Others, however, reflected that as long as some groups were still excluded from openly being involved in schools (for example, if teachers fail to feel comfortable declaring themselves as LGBT), changes to the school curriculum would not be sufficient to combat persistent inequalities.

Reflections and future directions

This event achieved its primary aims of creating a space for knowledge exchange. Delegates' evaluation forms reported the event to be useful, meaningful and timely, and called for further events covering these issues in more depth. They valued the fact that all equality strands were reflected in the presentations, but also commented on the consequent time restrictions on each speaker. Several delegates commented on how the event had given them the opportunity to make new contacts which they would follow up in the future.

There is clearly scope for future research and dissemination on persistent inequalities in Scotland. Inter-sectional research is clearly needed, and research that uses partnership working between the sectors would also benefit those represented by any research. Any work that tackles these issues should have a strong drive to disseminate knowledge so that a wide audience can be informed about developments.

Further information

Further information about the project is available from Sheila Riddell, CREID, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8AQ, sheila.riddell@ed.ac.uk.

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