

Dimensions of persistent inequality in Scotland – A briefing paper

This knowledge exchange programme provides an opportunity to open dialogue between groups representing the equality strands and those working in academia and in policy development. It is motivated by the recognition that one of the main barriers to the effective implementation of national policy is the tendency to misunderstand or subvert it at local level. Similarly, national policy-makers may not fully understand the priorities, pre-conceptions and problems of local activists and 'street level bureaucrats'. This then gives equality groups the opportunity to critically reflect on how equality and human rights legislation has impacted, and what key elements of their own agenda for change are yet to be noticed by national bodies and policy makers.

The Equalities Review, published by the Cabinet Office in 2007, was regarded as helpful in delineating some of the features of persistent inequality in Britain, and in considering what an 'equality scorecard' for monitoring change might look like. However, it was criticised in Scotland for relying too much on English data and in failing to appreciate the different dimensions of inequality north of the Border. For example, the composition of minority ethnic groups in Scotland and England is very different, and sectarianism appears to be far more of a problem in Scotland. Furthermore, the definitions and categories which apply to particular equality strands may differ north and south of the Border.

Whilst there was broad support for the establishment of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, key questions remained with regard to understanding the key concepts and implementing policy effectively in key Scottish institutions. This knowledge exchange initiative will enable us to conduct the activities identified by stakeholders, drawing on the expertise of our already established network, which includes representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The Scottish Government has an important role to play in identifying patterns of persistent inequality in Scotland and the part which public sector organisations may play in interrupting the transmission of inequality across generations. In the High Level Review of Equality Statistics (Scottish Executive, 2007), Scottish government statisticians have undertaken an important task in synthesising evidence from a range of sources on equality and inequality in Scotland. However, it is evident that in relation to some categories data are lacking and there is a need for harmonisation of categories and definitions in other areas. Furthermore, there is a major problem in communicating patterns revealed in high level statistics to public sector stakeholders, so that organisations' equality plans can take account of the bigger picture. This think-tank aims to start the process of filling these gaps. It will be based on presentations from organisations representing the range of different dimensions on enduring inequalities and the lived experience of such groups from their perspectives.

The event aims to deliver more than a chance to listen to representatives from a range of organisations. It also aims to nurture a dialogue that could initiate new ways of thinking around inequality and new partnerships to take the work identified, forward. This event will encourage debate around how persistent inequalities should be and can be identified. This will particularly focus on the intersection between equality strands and poverty. Further the debates will aim to generate what we need to do about persistent inequality in Scotland. It is hoped that the multi-disciplinary and multi-professional delegate list will produce relevant and meaningful insight into inequality, and innovative and effective ideas for how inequalities can be minimized.

Review

The launch of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the demise of the three legacy commissions (EOC, CRE and DRC) and the publication of the *Equalities Review* (Cabinet Office, 2007) have been seen as a new approach to equality. These developments have allowed not only the inclusion and interrogation of new strands, but an examination of how strands intersect to construct inequality. The *Equalities Review* defined equality in terms of freedoms and so echoed the rhetoric of the Human Rights Act (1998) and capabilities:

An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in ways people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish. An equal society recognizes people's different needs, situations and goals and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and be.

Equalities Review (Cabinet Office, 2007: 16)

EHRC's *Review of Equality Statistics* (Walby, Armstrong and Humphreys 2008) aimed to map the equalities landscape across Scotland, Wales and England. In organizing their Review, Walby et al used the ten domains of equality identified in the *Equalities Review* (Cabinet Office, 2007: 18).

- Longevity
- Physical security
- Health
- Education
- Standard of living
- Productive and valued activities
- Individual, family and social life
- Participation, influence and voice
- Identity expression and self-respect
- Legal security

Each dimension was examined according to the extent that each equality strand was visible in statistics published by government departments and bodies; the DRC, EOC and CRE; the office for national statistics; devolved administrations;

policy organizations; academics; organizations such as the European Commission; national surveys. In addition a consultation exercise with these agencies provided further indications of how well each strand was represented within each of the ten domains. The strands that were shown to have the least gaps were sex and age. Despite having legacy commissions, there were notable gaps in information collected on ethnicity and disability. The greatest challenges were found around collecting data on religion/belief and sexual orientation (Walby, 2008). What follows is an abbreviated version of Walby et al's Executive Summary. The questions asked have emerged from our reading of the review, and may provide a basis to begin discussions and debate at our Knowledge Exchange event.

Sex

Statistics relating to sex and gender existed for most of the ten domains. Notably sex was less evident in the physical and legal security domains. For example official crime statistics did not record the sex of a victim of crime, and 'domestic violence' is not recorded as a crime category where gender may be expected to factor. Walby et al (2008) did detect some improvements in the collection of data on women and minorities. Also noted was the new use of the term 'household' rather than 'individual' when describing victims of crime, and this has served to hide gender. Given the quantity of information available on gender, is more still required? Are there aspects of experience that are yet uncharted? Is it time to think about men as well as women? As the pay gap remains and women continue to be under-represented in public office, what is the value of rich data?

Ethnicity/race

The Walby et al review discussed the collection of Census data in England and Wales only. The sixteen categories of race and ethnicity were considered to create problems for statistical analysis due to the small sample sizes generated. Yet obvious problems would occur if the existent categories were aggregated. Further grouping samples from simultaneous years (to generate a sufficiently large sample size) depends upon the same people being represented in each year, and the same questions being asked (and interpreted in the same way). Longevity is difficult to measure as ethnicity does not appear on death certificates. This raises some questions, is aggregation possible? Or are there more pressing arguments for the further disaggregation of categories? Can Scotland be considered outside of these arguments?

Disability

The main issue to emerge from an examination of the relevant data-sets is the way that disability has been defined. Some statistics have emerged from an impairment-based definition of disability, whereas others are based on a political understanding of the social model that defines disability as caused by social and cultural barriers. Any use of material relating to disability then, must first establish how disability has been defined. Is it appropriate for surveys to ignore the social

model definition? Has preoccupation with the definition got in the way of generating useful and needed statistics?

Religion or Belief.

This strand and the following two strands were not supported by a legacy commission and so there is likely to be less data available. Indeed few data sources have routinely recorded religion or belief. There are some problems around collecting data as there is considered to be a distinction between religious identity and practice (Purdam et al, 2007). As with race and ethnicity, some faiths that have smaller congregations in the UK will not be easily represented in data-sets that undergo statistical analysis. Can the collection of data on religion or belief be used to oppress religious/faith groups? Is sectarianism an issue that Scotland needs to view as an equality issue?

Sexual Orientation

This strand was found to have the least information collected on it. The ONS is committed to changing this by developing two programmes: one to examine same-sex cohabitation and civil partnership status, and the other aims to develop questions relating to the sexual identity of a household. Questions on sexual orientation will not be included in the 2011 census, and so it is the only excluded strand. There may be a question on legal civil partnerships however. A major challenge against the recording of this data has emerged from gay, lesbian and bisexual people who have argued that the data could be used to discriminate against them. To what extent does this fear reflect experience? Can the improvements in recognition that could be achieved by the collection of this data, justify the intrusion?

Age

In contrast, age has been fairly well recorded and surveys generally include this information. Problems exist however, in cross-comparisons of data where age has been recorded using different systems (for example, a survey that recorded actual age cannot easily be compared with a survey that categorized age into decades, or another survey that used a different categorical pattern). Similarly other descriptors which imply age (like retired, or school age categories) are not actually straightforward to interpret. Currently age has been interpreted by British policy (and the EHRC) to include adults and older people. Children and young people have been excluded from this. Given that white Scottish boys are currently the most likely to under-achieve in Scottish schools, shouldn't age include this group of people so that the intersection of age and race/ethnicity be examined? Has the inclusion of age benefitted those most likely to engage with social and care services?

Socio-Economic Status (social class)

Socio-economic status is not one of the Equality strands listed in the Equality Act (2006) but has been recognised, alongside poverty as co-existing with inequality. The ONS has recommended that equality statistics also collect data on this

dimension. The 'National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification' (NS-SEC) has attempted to combine occupation, ownership and perceived control within a single measure to approximate the concept of socio-economic status. Missing from this, arguably, is the impact of gender. Further it has been suggested that individuals, rather than households should be measured in order to highlight disadvantage that would otherwise be hidden.

Though Socio-economic status does not appear as an equality strand, social origin does appear in the Scotland Act (1998) alongside the equality strands, arguably stating that Scotland has a legislated interest in the socio-economic causes of disadvantage. To what extent should/could Scottish data be used to lobby for the inclusion of socio-economic status to be included as an equality strand?

Scotland

Devolution and a smaller population make it difficult for Scotland to generate the complexity of data that could exist in the larger sample area of the UK. However, this argument is not sufficiently strong to exclude Scottish data from a UK picture of inequality. The *Equalities Review* (Cabinet Office, 2007) has been criticised for placing a priority on reporting data that emerged from England and Wales and ignoring Scotland. The Scottish Executive publication *High Level Summary of Equality Statistics* (2006) produced something of a base line of knowledge that existed in Scotland. Within the summary it is shown that age and gender data are collected routinely in almost every aspect of life, with ethnicity being collected in the majority of data-sets. Data on disability is less well represented and tends to be confined to health, housing and employment matters. In education information has been collected on the number of children who have Recorded status but this category is not synonymous with disabled children. Religion is recorded less often, necessarily in connection to religious expression but also within lifelong learning data. Sexual orientation has not been recorded in any data-set reported in the summary. Poverty or deprivation in turn, has been recorded in connection with longevity, health and risk behaviours (like drinking, smoking and sexually transmitted disease) and school education. Do we need to generate Scottish data now? Or is it more vital that Scotland exists as a strong voice within UK data-sets?

References.

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Purdam, K., Afkhami, R. Crockett, A. and Olsen, W. (2007) 'Religion in the UK: An overview of equality statistics and evidence gaps' *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 22, 2: 147-68.

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