



**PUBLIC POLICY, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF
DEVOLUTION**

ESRC funded seminar series

**Seminar 2: Mainstreaming equality and diversity in different national
contexts: implications for policy and practice**

ABSTRACTS



The Experience of a Single Equalities Commission in Northern Ireland (Abstract)

Elizabeth Meehan, Queens University, Belfast

The first thing to say is that the experience of a single equalities commission coincides with the existence in Northern Ireland of combined equality legislation; notably in the form of the Statutory Duty on public authorities in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Section 75) but also expressed in a Single Equality Bill has already gone out for consultation in Northern Ireland – initiated in 2001 by the previously devolved Executive and completed in November 2004 under renewed Direct Rule. Taken together, as they are in this paper, consideration of Northern Ireland's five years (plus) of experience of them is timely because of intentions for institutional and legislative change in Great Britain. There is also an EU dimension to single equality legislation.

In Northern Ireland, there were concerns – as there now are in Great Britain - about both single equality agencies and single equality legislation. This paper outlines the history of reform in Northern Ireland, picks out three of the key questions and makes some provisional conclusions about whether the experience in Northern Ireland has been positive or negative. The three key questions are: the extent to which equality constituencies were involved in the reform process and are so in their implementation; whether or not there is any evidence that one constituency has done better than another out of the changes; and whether the presence of a combined agency and single legislation jeopardizes the possibility of specific measures tailored to the specific circumstances of one of the constituencies. My conclusion is that experience in Northern Ireland has been quite positive.



The Scottish Executive and Equality (Abstract)

Esther Breitenbach, University of Edinburgh

This presentation will outline the development of equality policy machinery in the Scottish Executive, and the development of its Equality Strategy. In 2000 a mainstreaming equality approach was endorsed by the Scottish Executive, and an assessment of progress since then will be given, with particular reference to gender equality. The question is posed as to what have been the main drivers of action on equality issues, and as to whether these have been driven by a mainstreaming approach as such. It is argued that while there have been achievements in putting in place the 'building blocks' of mainstreaming, impacts on key policy areas are harder to discern. It is suggested that the immediate challenges lie in formulating clear policy objectives for different equality groups, and in making clearer the interconnections between the experience and needs of different groups.



“The Absolute Duty”: The Rhetoric and Reality of Mainstreaming Equality in Post-devolution Wales (Abstract)

Paul Chaney, Cardiff University

Equality of opportunity was not a major political priority for successive administrations during the period of administrative devolution (1964-1999) when the government of Wales was shared between Westminster and the Welsh Office, a territorial ministry of the UK government. Despite possessing the potential to exercise considerable influence over key areas of Welsh life such as health and education, official documents record that few civil servants in the Welsh Office had received any equality of opportunity training. This situation changed with the constitutional reforms introduced by the 1997 UK parliament, principally through the creation of the National Assembly for Wales - a directly-elected 60-member legislature. A government document described the shift in political priorities associated with these developments by stating that: ‘devolution in Wales has clearly placed equality of opportunity centre stage’. This is evidenced by the Assembly’s ‘institutional blueprint’; no longer was the promotion of equality of opportunity to depend upon the prevailing political will of politicians. Rather, a unique statutory duty obliged the Assembly Government to promote equality in the exercise all of its functions. From the outset, the Welsh executive stated that its political vision for equalities work was one of: ‘tak[ing] equality of opportunity factors into account in *every policy decision*’; it added, ‘*this mainstreaming approach is fundamental*’. Written on the sixth anniversary of the opening of the Welsh legislature (c. May 2005), this paper develops a new institutionalist perspective, and draws upon original research and the findings of two evaluation reports in order to critically assess the approach to equalities in Welsh public policy. The key aim here is to assess whether the Welsh government’s promise of mainstreaming equality has been realised. Accordingly, attention is focussed on: the legal and institutional context presented by elected devolution, the political vision for the promotion of equality, and the progress made in establishing the institutional prerequisites for mainstreaming equality in public policy. This analysis concludes with an outline of selected examples of Assembly Government policy and legislation. Overall, the present investigation shows that whilst there have been a number of areas of significant progress – they have been accompanied by a series of shortcomings and false-starts. Thus, the Welsh experience parallels many aspects identified in the UN’s 2005 international review of mainstreaming by governments. Accordingly, major challenges remain before the Welsh Assembly Government can claim to have fully achieved its aim of mainstreaming equality into Welsh public policy.



The Nordic Approach to the Promotion of Equality (Abstract)

Tuula Gordon, University of Helsinki

The Nordic countries - including Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – have in many ways distinctive approach to development of the welfare state, gender equality and provision for children. The distinctiveness is a result of a long and complicated joint history, including collaboration, shifting borders as well as past wars. Generally Nordic countries were agricultural, and industrialized relatively late – especially Finland. This has had an impact on ways in which issues such as distribution of resources, settlement between the state, employers and trade unions have been negotiated. The position of women has also marked with similarities, with policies aiming at inclusion of women in the labour market. To make this participation possible, the care and welfare of children needed to be addressed.

There have been differences between the countries too. Finland was one of the last to become industrialised. The pattern of ensuring sufficient workforce for expanding economies has varied somewhat. Whereas in the UK the expanding economy relied on labour from the colonies and women were not encouraged to work outside the home. Sweden opted for a combination of immigrant labour as well as entry of women into the labour market. Finland has had a history of shifting borders particularly in the east. Having lost part of its area to Soviet Union after the Second World War, Finland opted for a closed door option to new migrants. Instead, Finland opened the labour market for women, and the expansion of the economy was dependent on their labour. In this context it was necessary to develop a day care system. Today day care place is guaranteed to children who need it. This right is assigned to the child, not the parents. The development of public daycare system has been crucial for women's participation in the labour market.

Majority of women tend to work full time. Part-time work has become more common through changes in the labour market associated with neo-liberal politics. In other Nordic countries part-time daycare is more common. Considerable gains have been made by women in Finland and other Nordic countries in terms of opportunities for combining work and the family. Yet there are tensions and difficulties as well, and low birth rate and having children is typically postponed.

Such tensions are demonstrated by looking at ways in which young Finnish women talk about becoming or being a woman, and ways in which they imagine their future lives.



Equal Opportunities in Malta: a southern European perspective (Abstract)

Mary Darmanin, University of Malta

This paper is divided into two sections. The first gives a brief account of the current economic and political context, including questions related to Malta's size and population. It then describes the development of social policy and of the welfare state within a historical framework. It reviews the impact of British colonialism on Maltese political parties and trade unions, and the pressure to achieve 'responsible' government, eventually leading to independence. The under-development of a fortress economy, the constraints of colonialism and the impact of the Catholic Church led to a particular set of social policies and discourses. A need based model developed with a parallel 'egalitarian' programme. The male breadwinner model persists to date, however, as does some element of the 'Southern' Catholic charity model regarding disabled persons. The second section reviews the equality mainstreaming discourses and practices emerging post-1987 election of the Nationalist Party (still in office) and from Malta's preparation to join the EU (2004). Malta's new policies reflect its post 1970s republic status within an international equality culture, especially the most recent transfers of EU directives to Maltese policies, as well as the impact of internal demands on the state. It reviews the gender and disability mainstreaming mechanisms, especially the national machinery, such as the National Commission for Person with Disability, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women, and the Employment and Training Corporation and their actions. A number of the strategies developed recently to mainstream gender and disability issues including amending or drafting legislation which reverse past discrimination. Whilst there has been considerable achievement here, as well as in some services, there has been less progress in the enforcement of the legislation, in education implementation and in employment. Unless the context in which the mainstreaming is developed, is stable at economic, political and social levels, it is unlikely that equality can be achieved except for the hyper-protected groups of workers in the public service. The 'Southern' perspective means that considerable effort will be needed to change attitudes and 'domestic' practices, especially regarding childrearing and the work/family balance. Work on masculinities has not even begun. Similarly, years of (mainly Church) portrayal of disabled persons as 'angels' will need to be disarticulated before disabled persons can be an active critical mass in the disability movement.