

1 BACKGROUND AND AIMS

This research was commissioned by The Moray Council, MVS0, Moray College, Careers Scotland and other Community Planning partners to explore equalities issues in Moray. It aimed to explore current equalities policy and practice in Moray, identify good practice and help public, voluntary and private sector organisations address equalities issues as employers and service providers. The project was funded by the European Social Fund, Objective 3 and match-funded by The Moray Council. While the key focus was on gender, the project also endeavoured to include other equality areas.

2 METHOD

The research was conducted in three interlinking stages:

- An employers' survey of around 250 organisations from the public, voluntary and private sector with responses from a total of 70 organisations.
- Depth interviews with employers and focus groups/surveys with employees to explore issues identified in the survey.
- Consultations with women, disabled people and minority ethnic groups to identify their experiences of accessing employment and services.

3 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Overall there is a lack of awareness of equality issues throughout the public, private and voluntary sectors. While there are examples of good practice, particularly from services dedicated to supporting particular groups, many organisations are not addressing inequality of access to services in an effective way.

1) Equal Opportunities Policy and Practice

The survey found that while all the six major public sector employers have developed Equal Opportunities Policies, they are often not being translated into effective practice throughout departments.

42% of voluntary sector organisations in the sample reported having equal opportunities policies in place, but here too, the majority were failing to translate these into practice. In many cases policies had been developed by national organisations, whose local offices/branches in Moray had little awareness of their significance and operation.

Within the private sector, even fewer employers (25%) reported having equal opportunities policies in place and some companies appeared nervous about the new legislation and reluctant to engage in dialogue. Others simply do not see the relevance of equalities issues to their businesses.

2) Monitoring

While most large employers kept employment data relating to age and gender, few kept reliable data on ethnicity and disability. Many public sector organisations were still in the process of developing more effective monitoring systems. 35% of voluntary sector organisations and 50% of private companies reported keeping employment data, primarily age and gender. Private companies were usually able to report the numbers of migrant workers they employed.

3) Training

Awareness of the different equalities legislation varied and there is a demand for increased training, support and information to be made available, particularly in relation to age, religion and LGBT issues which are relatively newer areas for employers. Equalities groups expressed the need for increased awareness training at all levels within organisations to enable more responsive and appropriate services.

The consultations found a demand for more training for employment for women, disabled people and young people in Moray along with support to enable the widest access. Training was also felt to be required for people within employment to develop their skills and qualifications in order to progress within their organisations.

4) Family-Friendly Working

All of the six key public sector organisations offered some degree of flexible working and other family-friendly working arrangements, although practice varied widely according to the organisation and nature of the work. 39% of voluntary sector organisations and 44% of private companies reported offering family-friendly working arrangements.

However, apart from flexi-time systems, the majority of family-friendly working arrangements tended to be individually negotiated between an employer and employee, rather than being set out in written policy documents. While the smaller size of organisations in Moray may sometimes enable a less formal approach which can make this effective in some instances, this may also result in unequal access to these arrangements. Some women surveyed were unaware of their right to ask for flexible working and others cited difficulties experienced with particular managers.

Shift patterns and the pressure of increased workloads at particular times of year were perceived by some private sector employers to be a barrier in relation to introducing flexible working practices.

Flexi-time systems currently in operation within the public sector were welcomed by employees but felt to be very limited in the parameters of their operation.

5) Child-Care

Lack of access to affordable and flexible child-care was found to affect parents throughout Moray, particularly women living in rural areas where there are less child-care services and poorer transport links. Women's ability to secure employment and maintain an effective home/work life balance was greatly limited in consequence. Some public sector organisations (e.g. NHS Grampian) had developed some workplace provision. The majority however, provide little assistance and the Childcare Voucher Scheme is not widely available.

6) Service Delivery

Lack of access to information limits people's ability to access essential services. This particularly affects more isolated women and people requiring Translation, Interpretation and Communication Support (TICS) services. At present many public and voluntary sector services are failing to provide the support required to ensure their services are accessible to all. At the time of the survey only two voluntary sector organisations and five public sector departments reported ever having provided any TICS services.

7) Consultation and Involvement

Some women, disabled people and people from minority ethnic communities currently feel that their voices are not being heard in Moray and that their involvement in the planning of services is crucial to enabling improvements to be made. People want to be placed at the heart of services to ensure they are flexible, responsive and address real needs.

8) Gender Equality

A low wage economy, limited employment opportunities, high transport costs and poor transport links combine to make it very difficult for some groups of people in Moray to access employment, particularly women with children living in rural areas who lack the support of partners or other family members. Many women are caught in “the poverty trap” where a lack of flexibility within the benefits system, combined with the factors above, make it extremely difficult to change their circumstances. A lack of visible opportunities and isolation may also affect people’s confidence in some instances and result in low levels of aspiration.

The employers’ survey found that work within Moray still appears to be polarised by gender into traditional areas of employment, although this is changing.

Within public sector employment, there is a glass ceiling for women in operation in Moray that needs to be addressed. Women are more under-represented at managerial levels in the Public Sector in Moray than in many other areas of Scotland. Figures from the Institute of Public Finance show that within The Moray Council, women account for 28% of the top 5% of earners, compared to a national average of 34%. The employers’ survey found that, where data was available, men employed in the public sector in Moray were over three times more likely than women to be employed at a managerial level.

9) Disability Equality

Disabled people are under-represented in employment within the public and private sectors in Moray and are similarly affected by many of the issues affecting women, including lack of opportunities, transport and the low wage economy.

The disability consultation highlighted the need for more disability awareness training within organisations and improved access to information, advocacy and TICS Services. Physical access to buildings and adequate parking also continues to be key issues. There was a perceived need for more locally based, flexible and responsive services and increased training for employment. Most importantly, disabled people wanted to be effectively consulted and actively involved in service development.

10) Race Equality

Minority ethnic people are under-represented in many areas of employment and new migrant workers, arriving to fill labour shortages in some areas of the economy, lack support to ensure that their basic needs are met and they are not subject to exploitation. These needs include basic English language support and access to banking and affordable housing. Some of the findings of the Moray Citizen’s Panel suggest that there may be some tension within communities where there has been a large influx of migrant workers.

Established minority ethnic communities in Moray, such as the Chinese and Pakistani communities, also have language support needs, particularly for their older members and a need for culturally appropriate services.

The Moray Citizen's Panel survey found very mixed levels of awareness of race equality issues. Overall there appeared to be slightly higher than average awareness in Moray regarding what constitutes racist behaviour, but there is also a large minority who do not seem to have considered many of the issues and who are unable to express clear opinions. The concept of a multi-cultural society is not well developed in many parts of Moray, although there are growing numbers of people from minority ethnic communities (particularly Eastern Europe). There are problems of racist bullying in some schools which need to be addressed and under-recording of racist incidents. In a recent study conducted by Educational Services, one in three minority ethnic/multilingual families surveyed, had a child who had experienced racist bullying.

11) Age Equality

There is a perceived lack of opportunities for young people in Moray, particularly in the more rural areas. Existing jobs are predominantly low paid and offer few prospects. There also appears to be few opportunities within the public and voluntary sectors which have predominantly older workforces. The study did not explore the needs of older people in Moray.

12) LGBT Equality

While the study also did not address LGBT issues in depth, there was a general lack of awareness expressed within the surveys and interviews regarding this area of equality, both in terms of knowledge of legislation and some attitudes expressed. Resources and facilities for LGBT people are almost non-existent in Moray and it is an area where there is a great deal of work to be done.

13) Good Practice in Employment

Many examples of good practice were found in Moray, particularly within the public sector. A number of organisations in the public and voluntary sectors had made positive attempts to diversify their workforce by targeting under-represented groups in recruitment campaigns. E.g. Grampian Fire and Rescue Service, Moray Victim Support, Moray College and the WRVS.

NHS Grampian had developed nursery provision and operated a range of family-friendly working practices- annualised hours systems seemed to be particularly well received by employees.

Some private companies, particularly those which had achieved the Investors In People Standard (e.g. Lossie Seafoods) had developed good working practices in a number of areas including the employment of migrant workers. Good quality, affordable accommodation was provided on a non-profit basis along with a range of support.

14) Good Practice in Service Provision

The Moray Council had developed a number of initiatives to enable people to access services including developing Welcome Packs for new migrants, participating in a pilot of the "Happy To Translate" scheme, introducing a home visiting team to assist clients access benefits, funding multi-cultural events and initiating a range of imaginative multi-cultural approaches within schools. The latter included exchange visits to Poland and making links with schools in other countries. Services which provided dedicated support to particular equality groups, such as the Moray Resource Centre, also received particular praise.

