



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Equalities and Human Rights Committee

Human Rights and the Scottish Parliament inquiry

Inverness Human Rights Focus Group 20 April 2018

Immigration status

- How can people with a pending immigration status can access their human rights, especially related to mental health?
- How can people find out whether they are covered by human rights legislation when they are in the process of applying to settle in the UK?

Mental Health

- Human rights are seen as remote and abstract but they only really mean anything in personal stories and circumstances.
- experience of accessing mental health services but getting a very impersonal reaction. Culture within large organisations should be challenged. Many agreed this was a priority.
- police have improved in how they deal with people – with mental health among staff especially. Suggestion the police were ahead of other public services in this regard.

Accessibility in remote areas

- difficulty of accessing services in remote and rural areas.

Third Sector

- Third sector have to take up a lot of the services/responsibility, from CAB for example.
- Voluntary services having to give advice, sometimes legal advice.
- The third sector can be an effective leader – eg Stonewall Top Employers List. Public bodies follow their lead.

Legal Services

- Difficult and expensive to access legal services. Causes people to give up on accessing legal services.
- Third sector taking on statutory services allows public services to be retracted, especially in children's services.
- The Scottish Parliament should lead by example and take human rights-based approach.

Local Authorities and other Public Bodies

- The ability to scrutinise funding for Human Rights policies, at a local level, is needed.
- NHS/Local Authorities struggle to meet their own Human Rights objectives, as they're not fully funded. New policies are created before existing ones have the chance to become effective. For example, the NHS needs more time resource to be able to integrate Human Rights issues.
- There is a business case for taking a Human Rights-led approach. A lot of organisations don't have knowledge of equalities and human rights. Attitude that if everyone accessed their rights it would cost organisations money. This applies even to organisations who are involved in equalities/health/social work. Duties under some of those areas being neglected. Existing duties should be reinforced.
- Politicians need to lead and set an example. There's a lack of strategy from the top in public bodies in dealing with Human Rights issues and a lack of training for staff. Also true of large businesses and corporations.
- Tools that are available for organisations are not being utilised.
- There is a feeling that many Human Rights policies are tick-box exercises.
- Staff in big organisations need to have resources and attitude to be able to implement Human Rights in their work. If they are pushed and under pressure it's more difficult to do so. Human Rights priorities maybe seen as not essential or as expendable.
- Local Authorities have difficulty in implementing Human Rights policies. Local Authorities treat Human Rights very differently, due to social and cultural factors, among other things. The question of how to equalise Human Rights approaches across Scotland was raised and whether Scottish Government should audit local authorities.
- Lived experience should be key in training and developing policies.
- Challenges within organisations of people resisting speaking out about lack of support in equalities and human rights.
- Suggestion that more direct action is required – if an organisation doesn't change there should be penalties. The role of trade unions was discussed – they should/should be able to hold organisations to account on human rights.

Health Services

- NHS Highland – Learning disability policy created but never implemented.
- People seen as clients/customers instead of people, makes it more difficult to connect issues between different agencies/different issues. A person can be seen as various separate ‘issues’ rather than a person with various needs who needs to access various agencies.

Public Engagement

- How do we make human rights accessible to the general public? How do we communicate rights effectively to the public?
- Rights in schools or prisons for example. How to spread knowledge of how people access relevant rights in different institutions?
 - One participant brought up the Holocaust Memorial Trust – many organisations have human rights information and guidance but under a different or more specific name – Holocaust Trust have good resources on hate speech for example but it may not be the first organisation you would look for.
- socio-economic disadvantage should be a protected characteristic. Human rights issues can’t be separated from poverty in socio-economic deprived circumstances.
- New policies and consultations instead of effective implementation of existing human rights policies. This wastes money while budgets being cut.
- The welfare system as a whole needs to integrate human rights more effectively.