

Implementing Equal Opportunities - a 30 year case-study

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Summary

Equal opportunities legislation and strategies exist because of prejudice and discrimination – and the discrimination takes many forms. It can be aimed at women, ethnic minorities, religious groups, the unemployed, the elderly and other groups easily stigmatised. It can be passive or virulent¹. It is particularly active in the educational, job and housing markets.

Laws, strategies and mission statements about equal opportunities abound. Less easy to find are descriptions of the experience of attempts to “mainstream”² the values behind the strategies and laws. The Scottish culture offers an interesting combination of egalitarianism and discrimination – and has been trying to root out the latter in a systematic way for the past 30 years.

The West of Scotland was the industrial heartland of the country - and Irish (Catholic) immigrants were attracted there. But the dominant class was protestant – and discriminatory labour and housing markets soon therefore created ghettos and stigmatisation which were only compounded by the post-war “slum clearance” and creation of peripheral housing estates.

This paper is written by the politician who helped design Strathclyde Region's “strategy for combating this discrimination” in 1976 and was responsible for its "Social Strategy" throughout the 1980s³. He left Scotland in 1992 and has, since then, been based wherever his consultancy assignments have taken him. He is now resident in Sofia.

The experience shows the importance of “learning from doing” – and also some of the tension between the language of “equal opportunities” and social inclusion”.

1. A distant beginning

1.1 The Issue

In 1976, the newly established Strathclyde Regional Council (covering half of Scotland, including Glasgow) published its “Strategy for combating multiple deprivation”. This was a direct response to a UK publication called “Born to Fail?” which had drawn attention in 1974 to the way that the housing and labour market combined to create stigmatised areas or ghettos in which crime rates were high; services such as health and schooling inferior; and young people all too easily de-motivated. Access to the job market was difficult when your CV showed that you had attended a school in such an area.

1.2 Europe’ first anti-discrimination strategy

The new Strathclyde Region was determined to show that it could “make a difference” – and designated 45 “areas of multiple deprivation” which were the focus of a special programme and community participation structures. The council stated that the discrimination shown by public bodies and the private sector against those who lived in these areas must end – and that this was at the top of the council’s agenda.

It was the first time in Britain and, indeed, Europe that a government body had developed such a strategy. The document which launched it emphasised that there were no experts in this field – no one at that stage had a clear view of the problem or problems and the causes – let alone how to deal with it. The documents spoke of the long-term nature of the challenge. Twenty-five years was mentioned as the time-scale required to make an impact; and then only if there was proper support from central government⁴.

¹ Leaders such as Hitler and Molosovic can bring the virulent strain out in people when conditions allow it.

² This is the fashionable word now being used for implementation in this field.

³ See the list of articles and papers he had published on this experience in note on author at end of this paper

⁴ Let alone a supportive regional and national economic environment! The government support needed was more of a policy than financial nature eg to assist the community enterprises and community banking ideas which were flourishing by the mid-1980s. It took another 15 years before national government created the proper environment for such developments. See

2. Key Dates

The commitment to deal with this complex problem has remained and indeed quickly extended to other councils in both Scotland and England who used the region's experience to develop policies of their own. Key dates in the UK have been –

- 1982 – when the Council published its first review of the 1976 strategy - “Social Strategy for the Eighties”⁵.
- 1991 – Strathclyde Region publishes “Social Strategy for the Nineties”.
- 1997 - creation of social exclusion unit⁶ in Cabinet Office of the new Labour Government
- 1998 - the new Labour Government invited one of its Scottish Ministers to lead a review of the lessons from such work which could be placed before the new Scottish government (Executive) which took up its powers in 1999 under the new Devolved system of UK government. The Scottish government accepted the recommendations in the Report on Social Exclusion and has put what it calls “social justice” at the heart of its strategy⁷.
- In 2006 the UK Commission for Racial Equality (after 30 years of separate identity) merged with the Disability and Gender Commissions to create an even more powerful UK Commission for Equality and Human Rights

3. The learning curve in Strathclyde Region - 1976-1996

And, Strathclyde Region's policies became both more focussed and wide-ranging as it openly, critically and frequently asked what it was achieving – with its equal opportunities message becoming more obvious. The commitments to **positive discrimination** and **participation** were expressed initially in –

- appointment of 2-3 general community development staff to work in each of the 45 special areas
- establishment of special community structures which had exclusive access to certain budgets⁸

After ten years we recognised that we seemed to be operating two parallel systems – the community-based structures producing innovative work and projects (with uncertain future), on the one hand, and the schools, police stations, social work offices etc where the 100,000 regional staff⁹ operated. The first system was experimental and had the involvement of local citizens and councillors – but, by virtue of these features, was viewed with some scepticism or not hostility by the second system. Those of us involved in the first system were still struggling to understand the wider lessons of the innovative work of our community-based projects. We knew that we were “fire fighting” to a large extent – ie dealing with the symptoms rather than the causes.

3.1 Summary of Social Strategy for 80s;

The experience of the implementation of deprivation strategy was reviewed in 6 major Community Conferences in 1981 leading to a reaffirmation of the council's commitment in 1982 when it published “Social Strategy for the Eighties”. This document made explicit the importance of the regional council working in **income generating** and **confidence-building** programmes through, for example, encouraging the establishment of social enterprise¹⁰ and credit unions. Specially trained Community workers advised on this and also benefits claims¹¹.

⁵ Young (1989)

⁶ which produced various analyses and reports – such as one on social capital. Since June 2006, the unit has been a task force (still inside the Cabinet Office) of 20 civil servants seconded from various key Ministries. It issues annual reports.

⁷ “Social Inclusion – opening the door to a better Scotland” (1999). Later that year an action plan was published - “Social justice – a Scotland where EVERYONE matters” and a Minister for Social Justice appointed. Annual social justice reports have been published.

⁸ By the end of the 1980s, each of the 45 areas had about 10 specially funded projects focused on the priority fields of adult education, youth, elderly, pre-school, etc. These projects had been designed locally and won through a bidding process. After 5-7 years the project (and staffing) was either mainlined or ended.

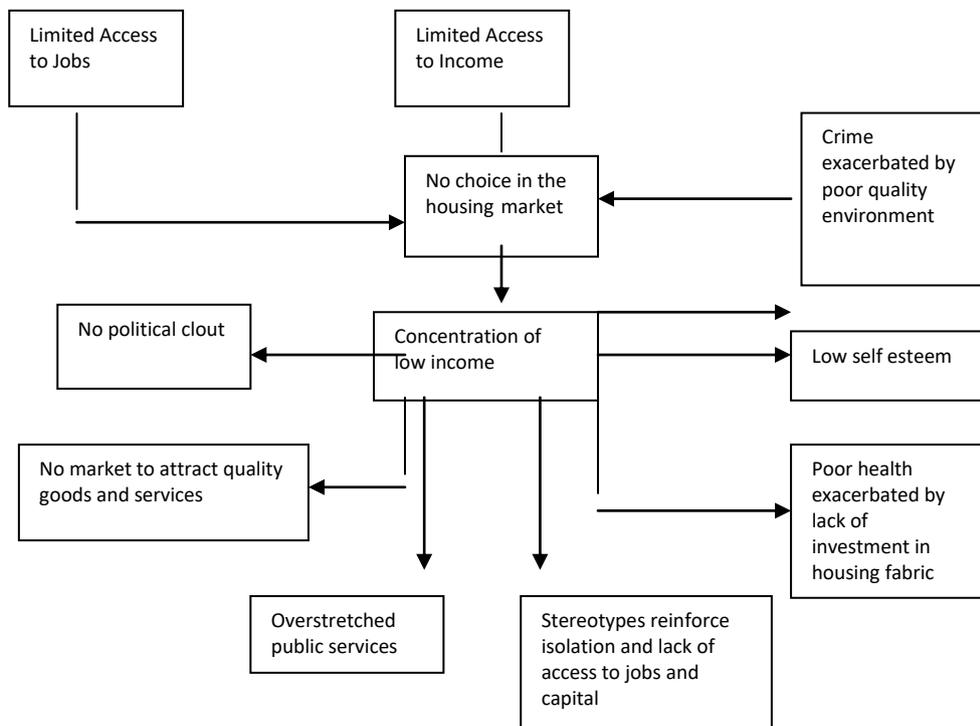
⁹ and a similar number of health and housing staff employed by the 5 Health Boards and 19 District Council within the Region

¹⁰ a special Body – Strathclyde Community Business – was set up to assist and fund such enterprises. It employed about 50 community advisers and disburse the equivalent of about \$20 million each year.

¹¹ each year about \$50 million of additional national benefits were claimed as a result of the special campaigns mounted by the bodies supported by the Council

Strategies and forums were established for the priority fields of **youth; mentally and physically disabled;** and **senior citizens** to ensure their interests were included in policy discussions. A further new priority for families in these areas was the improvement of pre-school services – since it was in the early ages that disadvantage seemed to take root. And, despite the Conservative government in power at the UK level from 1979, the decentralised system of government Scotland had enjoyed since the 1930s allowed good policy cooperation with the Scottish Office.

As a Regional Council we had more political and financial power than any other previous sub-national system of government – but, even so, it was, in fact to be 15 years before the diagram below¹² offered the beginnings of an explanation of the way the various factors interacted with one another.



The 1980s was a very difficult time economically for the industrial heartland of Scotland – with massive job-losses in shipbuilding, textile, steel and coal industries.

I will present at the seminar some lessons some of us felt we had learned at the end of our first decade of work. One quotation I used a lot then was -

- Programmes should be aware of this danger of building up dependencies - and look for ways in which their users can assume responsibility for the programme and themselves.
- One-shot, one-time programmes will have limited affects. While the complaint is often made that the poor are handicapped by a short time-span, they who are more frequently handicapped by the short time-span of public policies as policy attention wanders from one issue to another.
- Organisation is fateful. How programmes are organised affects what happens to those who deal with them. Where programmes are aimed at the short-run, have uncertain funding, high staff turnover and poor planning and organisation, it will be difficult for people to accept or benefit from them.
- People live in communities, in groups, in families. Programmes cannot successfully help them if they are treated as atomistic individuals.
- Ambitious, conflicting programme goals and activities lead to trouble. Most programmes have this problem.
- A programme is what it does; not what it would like to do or was established to do. The distribution of funds and staff time are good indicators of what an organisation actually does rather than what it believes it does or tries to convince others that it does

¹² From Rowntree (1992/3)

3.2 The 1990s

Key elements in the **Region's Social Strategy for the 90s** reviewed the experience of implementing Social Strategy for the 80s and brought **racial discrimination** within its scope. Unfortunately the relative policy autonomy which Scotland had enjoyed in the 1980s declined; Regions were abolished in 1996 and the 26 unitary local authorities which were created suffered a large financial crisis.

4. Summary of tools available to help improve access to jobs, education etc

A new Scottish Government then took up the fight with its social justice agenda from 1999.

The experience at a **UK level of fighting discrimination in the various fields of gender, race, disability** is well captured in the series of reports available on the website of the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights ¹³

The table below tries to classify the various tools which these various strategies have used over this 30 year period¹⁴ – and I will try at the seminar to make comments on the experience of each.

Removing constraints to –	Programme options	Comments
Access to Jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active labour market • Social enterprise • Community business 	
Access to income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above • Welfare rights campaigns • Credit unions • Micro-finance 	
Access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One stop shop • Local offices 	
Access to policy-makers (policy clout)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special consultative structures (area or family-based) • Senior citizen for a • Youth councils and parliaments • Geographically-based electoral systems 	
Access to self-esteem and healthy life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-help • Adult education • Health Promotion • Anti-drug projects 	
Access to life chances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pre-school programmes • youth strategy • positive discrimination in education 	
Access to security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community policing • remote cameras 	
Access to good Role models		

¹³ <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

¹⁴ Drawing also on a very useful recent publication - Learning from experience: lessons in mainstreaming equal opportunities (Scottish Executive 2006) Available www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent

5. Underlying values

It would be wrong to pretend that those fighting for an end to discrimination are all on the same side. I well remember feeling some impatience in the 1980s with the new language of equal opportunities which came from middle-class women with an understandable agenda of getting better jobs – when we were trying in Strathclyde to create better conditions for 300,000 people affected by long-term unemployment, addiction and mental health¹⁵.

Social inclusion is about access to the job market and elements of positive discrimination in sectors such as education for groups who suffer from low income. The gender aspect of equal opportunities is not so much about access to jobs as about access to good jobs and equal pay. It is interesting that the website dealing with these issues for the English system of government uses the language of “equality and diversity” whereas the website of the new Scottish system of government uses the language of social inclusion and justice.

And we equally have to accept that some groups are seen by society as more “deserving” than others. Despite the discrimination from which they undoubtedly suffer, disabled and elderly groups are seen as more deserving than roma and long-term unemployed. It is alleged that the latter are lazy and don’t want to work – and, in countries such as Britain and Denmark, loud questions are being asked about the willingness of some muslims to be integrated into the local society.

6. A “Pincer” strategy

When state bodies have a problem, they tend to issue instructions – either to their staff or (through regulations) to the wider public. One of the early assessment of tools for anti-discrimination policies¹⁶ talked about the preconditions of “understanding and commitment” – that if officials (particularly street-level bureaucrats) were to deal with discrimination they needed a better understanding of the reasons for the discrimination – and to be committed to fight it. But officials have problems understanding that citizens have ideas and are often better placed to produce solutions than the expert. The medical profession, for example, has long underestimated the importance of self-help.

One of the dangers of equal opportunity strategies is that they are implemented by technocrats in a mechanistic way. Equal Opportunities involved profound changes in people’s thinking and behaviour. That will come only from the people themselves. In this field it is the state’s job to create the conditions in which social entrepreneurs will flourish. Creating equal opportunities, therefore, requires a “pincer” strategy – pressure from above and from below.

About Ronald G Young

- 20 years’ public administration experience in Scotland as a senior policy-maker; and academic
- Secretary General of Strathclyde Region 1974-1990 (Europe's largest local authority), he was responsible in for developing and managing an innovative community development strategy to help combat discrimination which has been taken up by the new Scottish government.
- team leader and resident expert for projects in public administration reform in Central and Eastern Europe since 1991 (eg helped set up Civil Service Commission in Azerbaijan in 2004/5 and is personal adviser to its Chairman).
- Presently Team Leader of Phare project in Bulgaria – helping develop training capacity for improved policy implementation
- Extensive experience of developing effective strategies for the public sector
- Teacher of public management on Degree course for 10 years. Hon Professorship of Presidential Academy of State Construction, Tashkent

Relevant Publications of RG Young

"Boosting People's Confidence in Themselves" - chapter in book Long-term Unemployment in Europe - the EC/local dimension ed. K.Dyson (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1989)

Chapter in book - Participation in Urban Renewal in Europe ed Nelissen (International Union of Local Authorities 1985)

"Community Development : its political and administrative challenge" : chapter in Readings in Community Work eds Henderson and Thomas (Allen and Unwin 1981).

¹⁵ In that sense, you could argue that “social inclusion” is a first phase; and societies can expect results from “equal opportunities” only when the access problems have been solved.

¹⁶ INLOV

"A Little Local Inequality": chapter in The Real Divide : poverty and inequality in Scotland edited by Gordon Brown (present British Prime Minister) and Robin Cook – ex-Leader of Parliament (Mainstream 1981)
 "What Sort of Over-Government?": chapter in Red Paper on Scotland ed Gordon Brown (Edinburgh University Publications 1977)
The Search for Democracy – guide to the Scottish system of local government: book (Heatherbank press 1975)
 Six books in the last 4 years on civil service reform, capacity building and training strategy.

ANNEX

Changing attitudes and behaviour

If we wish to change people’s behaviour, we should look at all options – and, where behaviour patterns of non-compliers are strong, we often need to use a battery of tools. What is it that is most likely to make target groups change their behaviour? Simple instructions? Threats? Incentives? Explanations and understanding? Involvement in the decision-making? Moral exhortation? Or a combination?

Many people tell us that the only effective mechanism is that of the command - whether in the form of laws or injunctions from the boss (line 5.2 in the table). Other people would argue that *rational arguments* (eg in training sessions) or *leaders* make a difference – and can inspire those in the organisation to change (points 1 and 2 in the table).

Motives and instruments in the change process

Motivating Factor	Example of instrument	Particular mechanism
1. Understanding	1.1 Training 1.2 Campaigns 1.3 Counting and comparing – producing league tables	Rational persuasion Appeal to common sense Questioning when one’s organisation compares badly
2. Commitment	2.1 Leadership 2.2 Consultation and cooperation 2.3 Training	Legitimisation; inspiration Shared vision Pride in behaving professionally
3. Personal Benefit	3.1 Pay increase and bonus 3.2 Promotion 3.3 Good publicity 3.4 Winning an award	Financial calculation ambition Reputation; Psychological
4. Personal Cost	4.1 Named as poor performer 4.2 Demotion 4.3 “Report cards” on organisations ¹⁷	Psychological (Shame) Monetary Pride
5. Obligation	5.1 Law 5.2 Orders and Action plans 5.3 Family ties	Courts Obedience to Managerial authority Social pressure
6. Peer influence	6.1 peer review 6.2 bribery 6.2 Quality circles	Pressure from colleagues to do behave the same way as them
7. Social influence	7.1 Opinion surveys 7.2 Public demonstrations	Feedback from public about service quality

In the field of European Law, the threat of financial penalties is assumed to be the ultimate sanction – but, in recent years, the European Commission has moved away from a reliance on such crude tools and has been encouraging persuasion (social marketing) and alternative forms of conflict resolution. And governments trying to improve the performance of state bodies have also made increasing use of “league tables”. This involves audit bodies, for example, collecting and publishing comparative information about the performance of individual schools and hospitals in an attempt to persuade senior managers to address the problems of poor performance (1.3 in table). This can also act as a market-type force - bringing the force of public opinion against the organisation (4.3 in table).

¹⁷ “report cards” measuring citizen satisfaction with public services have become popular in many countries – both developing and developed.