

Executive Summary

Key messages of this research

- Equal Opportunities Policies need to be '*mainstreamed*' and written policies given priority or prominence. Many organisations are failing to do this.
- Equal opportunities are not alive and well in a number of kitchens across Wales. The continuing domination of kitchens by men is a mark of resistance to change.
- The issue of equal opportunities for women has not yet percolated into domestic social patterns and women with paid jobs are still burdened with the invisible work of running the home.
- The benefits of equal opportunities legislation relate to:
 1. improved efficiency
 2. increased diversity of job applicants
 3. widening of employment opportunities
 4. acceptance of change amongst staff and
 5. retention

Such benefits will encourage the fullest application of equal opportunities approaches.

- Individual firms need to address the issues of unsocial hours by introducing genuinely family friendly policies especially if they are seeking improvements in retention, efficiency, choice and positive response to change.
- Attention needs to be given to positive action policy in the tourism workplace in order to eliminate or counteract the continuing segmentation of men and women along departmental lines.

Introduction

This research project was commissioned by the Tourism Training Forum For Wales (TTFW) and has been funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). TTFW was established in 1998 as the principal organisation in Wales to guide business and human resource development in the tourism industry. The issues raised in this project contribute to the promotion of good practice as the TTFW continues to engage the tourism industry in Wales. (See <http://www.wales-tourist-board.gov.uk>)

The ESF aims both to create and protect jobs and this includes developing employability and human resources. Mainstreaming equal opportunities policy is a clear objective of ESF and this means ensuring there is no discrimination and proactively dealing with barriers to participation and success. The conclusions of this research identify lessons to be learned and also promote good practice in support of the ESF function. (See <http://www.esfnews.org.uk/equalopps/index.shtml>)

Tourism accounts for some 7% of GDP in Wales. Tourism spending by overnight and day visitors in 2001 contributed in excess of £2 billion directly to the Welsh economy according to the Wales Tourist Board. (See <http://www.wta.org.uk>) Small independent operators dominate the industry, which supports directly and indirectly up to 100,000 jobs within the Welsh economy. This represents over 10% of the workforce. Such figures indicate the importance of the industry and tourism needs to fulfil its potential as the one industry, which can bring sustained economic growth to all corners of Wales. (See <http://www.wta.org.uk>)

This study aimed at exploring equality of opportunity for men and women in the tourism workplace by focusing on core workers in hotels and visitor attractions. North-west Wales (Anglesey, Conwy and Gwynedd) and South-east Wales (Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouth, Newport Rhondda Cynon Taff, Torfaen and the Vale of Glamorgan) were used as two distinct areas for study. Both areas are heavily reliant on tourism although the emphasis is different in each. South-east Wales has a larger population concentrated to some extent in the cities of Cardiff and Newport - business and incentive travel is extremely important and there is a growing emphasis on event tourism. In contrast, tourism in North-west Wales has a more rural base or is centred in smaller towns and coastal resorts, which attract holidaymakers.

Research Aims

Employees in core jobs who regard their work as a career rather than seasonal work were chosen as the research focus for this study. The perceptions of equality of opportunity, for example in relation to promotion prospects and maternity leave, by these core staff are important in determining longer-term attitudes towards employment in the industry and are critical to the future of the tourism industry in Wales. Hotels and visitor attractions of various sizes were chosen in order to tap into a broad variety of experience.

The definition of a 'core' job within the tourism workplace is not straightforward and initial investigations sought to establish some limits and boundaries concerning this issue. Having

established the industry's definition of core jobs, the research aims to paint a limited but necessary profile of the core workforce. Core jobs are non-seasonal, full-time jobs regarded by the employer as permanent. They might be termed as '*proper*' jobs.

The investigation goes on to record the presence or absence of equal opportunities policies at organisational level. It indicates whether such policies exist in written form and assesses how effectively they are monitored. Firms may have good reasons for not having formal written equal opportunities policies and may be able to justify their absence but others may be wrongly neglecting the subject. The existence and effective monitoring of written policies should provide evidence of how seriously the matter of mainstreaming equal opportunities is being taken. An exploration of employees' and firms' general attitudes towards equality of opportunity is undertaken to seek reasons for the presence or absence of written policies.

Gender bias in promotion and career advancement is investigated and some consideration is also given to possible biases in relation to marital status and promotion. If men or women, married or single employees are subject to discrimination because of issues relating to commitment and dedication, then overt or covert methods of discrimination need to be assessed. Methods of recruitment are examined and an investigation is made to gain insight into attitudes towards 'positive action policy' to determine whether employees have understood the concept sufficiently to be able to support it. Positive action policy aims to redress staff imbalances already present in the workplace.

Sexist attitudes towards core jobs are investigated, as is the issue of gender stereotyping, in order to discover whether employees exhibit gender bias in the workplace. If present, the biased perceptions of employees may serve to perpetuate discrimination in work and may form a barrier to firms as they attempt to apply equal opportunities policy. Sexist attitudes towards men and women as both colleagues and bosses are also studied for similar reasons. An attempt is made to establish whether gender-related prejudice is causing problems between men and women in work. Assessing the extent to which difficulties are arising may reveal them to be dysfunctional and this will have practical implications for the industry.

Maternity leave and the issue of fairness towards women returnees are given particular attention. It may be that firms have overcome the problems associated with maternity leave but if overt or covert barriers exist then they need to be named and uncovered. The literature review revealed that '*invisible*' work at home still provided women with an extra burden sometimes referred to as the '*double burden*'. Thus the difficulty of balancing responsibilities between home and work is also examined to establish whether women are still subject to this '*double burden*'. This is particularly important because of the large number of women working in the tourism workplace.

Enquiry is made into specific situations in which, for reasons related to gender, men or women feel uncomfortable in the work place. Given the general nature of this question it aimed at uncovering problem hotspots or at the opening up some wider issues. Consideration is also given as to whether equal opportunity for women affects the efficiency of firms and also the extent to which men or women challenge equal opportunities policies. There may some resistance to equal opportunities for women for reasons relating to

organisational efficiency and some understanding of the justifications given for this resistance is considered essential.

Methodology

An initial telephone survey was used to determine the industry's views about what constituted a core worker. There were some difficulties in constructing a sample frame from the originally intended sources but telephone directories were used as a database from which to extract a sample from the alphabetical listings. The sample of 36 firms (i.e. 20%) was extracted from 182 South-east Wales hotels by contacting every fifth firm in the alphabetical listing. Out of 60 hotels listed in North-west Wales 17 (28%) were contacted. The North-west Wales percentage was larger because hotels were fewer in number and the selection was purposeful, rather than random, to obtain a wide geographical spread in this relatively sparsely populated area. This should improve reliability of the results. Visitor attractions in both areas were made up of diverse types of organisations and so all of the firms listed in the telephone directories were contacted. There were 15 in North-west Wales and 19 in South-east Wales. Views of owners, managers and personnel officers were sought concerning core jobs, recruitment and responsibilities for recruitment.

Job vacancy databases were obtained from the Intelligence Unit of Companies House and these relate to job advertisements in employment agencies throughout Wales. The databases proved to be very large and changes in definitions applied in October 2001 caused major difficulties in defining the desired occupational classifications over the specified period of time. It was hoped to isolate core jobs without too much difficulty but the task proved rather too ambitious. The data should be useful if the research is continued in future. Information about rates of job turnover down to a departmental level, pay rates and even sexist terminology in advertisements could be extracted.

The main research investigation utilised firstly a quantitative technique in the form of a postal survey involving distributing 200 questionnaires. Secondly, running alongside the survey a qualitative approach was used involving 40 semi-structured in-depth interviews. It was envisaged that the summer season would not be the most advantageous from the point of view of receiving survey replies and this proved to be the case. As expected it was necessary to supplement the survey data by adding quantitative data from the semi-structured interviews.

Thus the same questions were put to all survey and interview respondents except where new lines of enquiry opened up during the interview process. In this case new avenues were explored in depth. The additional use of a survey questionnaire gave the study the advantage of being hard, objective and reliable, maximising internal validity and so producing repeatable results. By adding a quantitative element to the research this research aims to allow the results to be applied to the wider Welsh population.

The in-depth findings arising from the qualitative, ethnographic approach were used to assess gender equality as it manifests itself in contemporary society, in its local settings within the participating firms. Guarantees of anonymity were essential. The method

aimed at identifying cultural patterns, and their consequences and effects on men and women. The qualitative element also aimed at discriminating between symptoms revealed by the quantitative approach so accessing underlying causes of difficulty at root level. Organisations and individual departments showed unique characteristics and the qualitative methods allowed the researcher to probe particular issues as they arose.

Major Findings

It became clear from the telephone survey that some sections of the industry regarded particular jobs as core, while others did not. The size of each firm was a significant factor in this matter. Terminology also varied somewhat between various organisations.

Results from the questionnaire survey indicate that Equal Opportunities Policies have not generally been '*mainstreamed*' and so written policies are not given priority or prominence in a significant number of workplaces. There is a lack of willingness on the part of staff to complain and firms are often given the benefit of the doubt on equal opportunities issues.

Evidence of promotion being related to gender did appear. This was sometimes related to positive action and promoting gender balance but sometimes had occurred for less commendable reasons. Promotions were sometimes being declined out of personal choice rather than as a result of anything present in the firm's attitude. Women expressed confidence about promotion at least as much as men, though there was some general frustration about speed of and opportunity for promotion in the industry.

Chefs' work and the male culture common in kitchens are sources of difficulty. Mens' dominance and power in the kitchen is not really being threatened by the promotion of equal opportunities. There is some evidence of the problem of '*assimilation*', described by Meyerson and Fletcher (2000), where female members of staff are treated like, and are expected to behave like, men in the kitchen. The kitchen environment is said to be daunting and frightening to some women. The '*small wins*' approach (See Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000, which advocates persistent attrition of male dominance, is absent. Results show continuing segmentation of men and women along departmental lines in these highly departmentalised organisations. Resistance to equality of opportunity from older and more experienced people of both sexes is still a problem but it proves difficult to pinpoint.

These results showed that many respondents felt the industry required staff to work unsocial hours and was not family friendly. Split shifts and heavy seasonal workloads are particular problems for men and women with young families because of the commitment to irregular hours, which do not fit well with school times and the normal family routine. Men and women both felt disadvantaged. The results of this research also provide evidence that segmentation continues on the domestic scene and that segmentation as a whole continues to be stubbornly rigid.

There is evidence that women were successful in making the step out of personnel work into general management. Younger women are joining management training programmes and their confidence and expectations are high.

Women are more likely to be the subject of gender stereotyping although this is not necessarily negative. Women seem to have to fight harder even when they get choice and opportunity, and respond by communicating more with each other, supporting each other and also through emotional expression. In North-west Wales, women were more often regarded as better bosses while the reverse is true in South-east Wales where women were regarded as more understanding and men more informal and uncomplicated.

Where equal opportunities legislation is seen as improving efficiency it seems to have a positive effect on retention as well as assisting with overcoming resistance to change. It also seems to be helpful in promoting synergy, where men and women. The concept that having a wider choice of candidates will result in getting the best person for the job may also be having a positive effect.

It appears that employer and employee attitudes towards equal opportunities have become rather static in the main with some cases of improvement and sadly even some deterioration reported particularly in South-east Wales. Negative attitudes are still being reported, though some believe that the negativity was now overcome. More feel that the equal opportunities issue has gone too far than those who think that it needs to go further. Despite this tendency the problems of differential pay, male resistance and women being denied opportunity, are still considered as live issues. Education seems to have assisted as young people have entered the industry with an attitude of applying equal opportunities for all.

At present many families need both parents to work for financial reasons but the burden of running the home, termed '*invisible*' work, still seems to fall upon the woman. Equal opportunities legislation has not affected this issue. The '*double burden*' of women running the home whilst in full-time work is evident in Wales. Managers and female operational staff reported that split shifts and unsocial patterns of working seem to make it difficult for women and these factors mean there is less likelihood of return to operational work after maternity leave. Evidence showed that South-east Wales had greater problems regarding family friendly policies though there was considerable evidence of firms exercising flexibility. The involvement of women at managerial level seems to have a positive influence on maternity policy except where it is overridden by the organisational culture.

Positive action policy is misunderstood by many and needs to be carefully considered and convincingly explained if it is to win adherents. Positive action policy is designed to eliminate existing inequalities affecting women in working life and to promote a better balance between the sexes in employment. This involves eliminating or counteracting prejudicial effects arising out of traditional divisions of roles in society between men and women. It also involves encouraging the participation of women in occupations where they are at present under-represented. Such action may take the form of a job advertisement for a vacancy in a male dominated kitchen reading, "*Chef wanted; men and women welcome to apply.*"

Conclusions

It is satisfying that women express confidence relating to promotion but this should be seen in conjunction with a lack of willingness on the part of staff to complain in situations where barriers may be preventing equal opportunity. Employees are also often giving firms the benefit of the doubt on equal opportunities issues. It is perhaps lamentable that Equal Opportunities Policies have not generally been '*mainstreamed*' and so written policies are not given priority or prominence in a significant number of workplaces. Evident good practice has not always been formalised and this runs the risk of potentially undermining future staff and managers as they try to apply equal opportunities without the support of a formal policy developed from organisational experience.

The continuing domination of some departments by men or women is a mark of resistance to change. The hotel kitchen is sometimes a clear example of this problem and needs further investigation to analyse the difficulty and pinpoint the underlying cause. Naming the problem is normally a major step towards overcoming resistance. Equal opportunities is not alive and well in a number of kitchens across Wales.

It is interesting to note that while the confidence and expectations of women are high in the workplace segmentation continues on the domestic scene and is stubbornly rigid. Equal opportunities have not yet percolated into domestic social patterns and it will be interesting to see if this continues over the long term or whether education inspires change.

There seems to be some merit in the assertion that equal opportunities legislation for women has made significant gains and should now concentrate on consolidating these gains by applying what already exists through various practical approaches in order to overcome negative attitudes. There are still some live issues that need to be addressed through education and that will take time to spread through the industry. Those who have supported and promoted equal opportunities legislation will be gratified to note that some respondents see significant wider improvements related to the legal framework. These improvements relate to efficiency, increased diversity of applicants, widening of employment opportunities, retention and acceptance of change amongst staff. Such benefits will encourage the fullest application of equal opportunities approaches.

Despite the large number of women working in the tourism workplace, unsocial hours are still making it difficult for women to return after maternity leave in some cases. Employees sometimes regard family friendly policies as merely cosmetic. Individual firms may wish to address this issue especially if they are seeking improvements in retention, efficiency, choice and positive response to change.

Positive action policy is an important means by which employment imbalances can be addressed but persistent negative attitudes make it clear that the argument has not yet been won through education. Some action needs to be taken on this issue in order to improve employees' perception of this contentious subject.