



PCS DWP Group Equality Matters

February 2016

Equality Newsletter for DWP Group Members

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News from the DWP
Group Equality Advisory
Committees

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8 March 2016



February 2016

Introduction

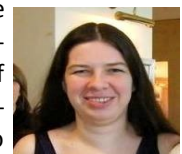


Hi members. My name is Annette Rochester and I am the DWP Group Equality Officer. This is the first issue of the DWP Equality newsletter. We hope to cover DWP issues and campaigns relevant to equality matters and updates from the four group equality committees: Group Women's Advisory Committee (GWAC); Group Black Members Committee (GBMC); Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Committee (LGBTC); the overarching Group Equality Committee (GEQC) and regional equality officers. I've been an equality officer for some years now but, still feel I have a lot to learn in many areas, so thank goodness the structure is there for the committees to advise and inform. In turn, I raise issues with the Group Executive Committee. The Equality committees may tell you of the many faux pas I've made during this time but, I think a willingness to listen and learn goes a long way to helping us understand and take forward various issues to make work life better for our diverse membership. However, we still have a long way to go in being a union representative of its membership in terms of activism. And we still have a long way to go to ensure that the DWP creates a level playing field for members.

The DWP Equality Information Employee data (July 2015) still shows BME and Disabled staff are more likely to be subjected to disciplinary procedures, more likely to figure in grievances and be dismissed and less likely to be promoted (this also applies to women). We also earn less (pay gaps ranging from 1.28% less if disabled to 4.91% if BME). There are a variety of reasons for this, including the failure to secure promotion. Some disadvantaged groups are more likely to receive a lower performance marking. The vast majority of women and BME staff figure in the lower grades from AA – EO. I know many of BME, Disabled staff and women who left in the last VES exercise, some citing the failure to progress and lack of recognition. We will await the annual report (due July 2016) to see how it has impacted the diversity of our workforce.

GWAC news

The GWAC discussed the increasing difficulties that many women are experiencing obtaining part year contracts and changes in working patterns. Committee members raised the issue of women in various parts of the department being incorrectly advised that they would only gain promotion if they would change to full time or different hours. This led to many women simply not applying for posts. Partly as a result of this the GEC issued advice to branches with regards to the rights of part time workers.



The committee also raised concerns with regards to the change in special leave for carers policy. Some areas have been refusing Special Leave for Carers if the member has any live warnings including Attendance Management warnings. PCS are waiting on advice from the Legal department as to whether these decisions are considered discriminatory. International Women's Day will be Tuesday, 8 March. This year's theme is 'Pledge for Parity'. Please see the PCS Website for events in your area and let us know how it is celebrated in your places of work. **Liz McGachey**

**DWP Group
Celebrates
LGBT History
Month:
Religion, Belief
and Philosophy**

The next day people were talking about it but, not in terms of how informative it was. No, they were gossiping about anyone they thought might be gay



**Bridget
Corcoran .
LGBT and
Equality Com-
mittee**

I joined the then DHSS in January 1983 as a Clerical Assistant. I was quickly promoted to Local Officer level 2 and went to work in the benefits office, calculating and making payments of benefits. Everything was done by hand and using calculators. We had no computers and would often spend many hours looking for a case. There was very little relating to equalities and certainly nothing about LGBT issues. I was only 19 and was not out, either at home or in the workplace. Don't forget this was in the early years of the AIDS crisis, when it was thought you could become infected by sitting on the same toilet seat or

A brief history of my time

sharing a mug ! I remember the Tombstone programme on TV. The next day people were talking about it but not in terms of how informative it was. No, they were gossiping about anyone they thought might be gay and that they would be keeping well away from them. Unlike today this was quite allowable, after all everyone knew what a gay man or lesbian looked like.

There were no policies about how to behave with LGB people and there would be none for a good few years. The predecessor of PCS, the CSPA, was also not particularly helpful. There were no equality groups and

certainly no safe forums to discuss issues. I kept very much to myself and tended to avoid social interaction with people I worked with. Eventually I formed a relationship, my first boyfriend, but we were very careful. I never spoke about him at work for fear of outing myself. I never mentioned him at home other than as a mate. As time went on I became more active in the union and began to help organise events. At these events, often with other unions, I began to discover a wider group of LGB people (in the 1980's Trans people were never mentioned)

(or what the department felt like in the 1980's)

I saw how other unions were starting to take up the mantle of equality, working with groups such as the THT and Stonewall to push the agenda forward. I left the department in 1989 to go to university. I remember even today my first day in Freshers' week.

There was a stall for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender group. This

was the first time I had seen these words in huge letters in a public arena being proclaimed with pride. I spoke to the woman on the stall and quickly joined. From then on there was no looking back. I attended Pride events, volunteered to drive the mini bus when we went to gay clubs in other towns

and came out to my parents at last. My formative years in the department had left their mark and this was something I never wanted to happen again. I will continue to stand up for all equalities wherever I am and will continue to be vocal wherever I see inequality.

Stephen Finch LGBT Committee

LGBT committee news

LGBT History Month runs throughout February. The advisory committee discussed this year's theme - *'Religion, Belief and Non-belief' (or Philosophy)*. Members of the committee pressed DTUS to again raise the issues surrounding LGBT awareness believing mandatory learning a requirement for all staff. A working group was agreed to estab-

lish the content, time and arrangements for a monthly telekit for reps and members, to discuss LGBT workplace issues. A Trans training course constructed and facilitated by a committee member entitled 'All you wanted to know about Trans but are afraid to Ask' may be available on request. **B. Corcoran**

Feedback

We welcome feedback and suggestions for future editions or matters for the equality committees to discuss.

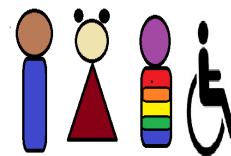
Please direct enquiries and feedback

FAO Annette Rochester at
Leeds@pcs.org.uk

Equality Advisory Committee

Members are experiencing on-going difficulties in securing reasonable adjustments with disabled staff being asked to work outside mobility. A discussion was had on how the GEQC could work with other committees. It was felt that the other committees should liaise with the GEQC and work collaborate on areas of work and issues that affect several equality strands to prevent duplication and improve efficiency. It was reported that in some parts of the DWP, part timers and disabled staff are experiencing difficulties accessing training and this is impacting development. Issues were also raised with regards to Access to Work transfers (new guidance has recently been issued).

Members of staff who require Assisted Software are still experiencing compatibility issues leaving them unable to do their jobs and increasing stress levels, leading to disabled members being at further disadvantage. This has been raised with the employer by the GEC .



GBMC NEWS



The GBMC discussed and noted the Performance Diversity data (BB/03/16). The Talent Action Plan highlights the accountability of Civil Service heads to address the variance in performance between Ethnic Majority and Ethnic Minority staff.

The GBMC again voiced concerns that this may be due to unconscious bias and believe that e-learning is not conducive to this type of training. The Departmental Trade Union side have continued the push for facilitated training. Time off during religious festivals is still problematic. Vipin Dattani (Eastern region) discussed his active BM network. They

will be holding a 2 day event from 3 to 4 March 2016 for which they have secured official time. The Committee discussed steps to take forward including: Promoting the DWP group Black Members network and promoting the completion of the DWP survey with regards to BME performance and development. **Baljit Johal**

I became a Rep in order to help people fight for their rights and defend those who cannot defend themselves.

Regional Equality Officers News

The Regional Equality Officers (REOs), meet twice annually and will next meet 16 March 2016. The REOs are an important part of the Inclusion Strategy and provide valuable insights into happenings in the branches

in their regions. We hope that by keeping regular meetings, that we can share good practice and ascertain whether an issue is regional or more widespread. Performance Diversity data is now available at district level and Branch

Equality Officers should ask District Managers for this information and raise any concerns escalating any unresolved issues with the Regional Equality Officer.

