



Advancing Equality - the report, recordings and outputs from the 2021vSRP Session on 8th March 2021

Session curated by [Sleeping Giants Community Interest Company](#) and chaired by **Grace Cardozo**, Managing Director, Sleeping Giants.

Not everyone has the same opportunity to participate in decisions about their communities. Different factors including poverty and social exclusion, belonging to a protected characteristic group or having caring responsibilities can give rise to barriers to participation. These barriers are frequently compounded by living in a rural or island community.

In late 2020, the Scottish Government commissioned a [preliminary exploration](#) into the intersection of inclusive participation and rurality with findings published in February 2021.

The Advancing Equality session was specifically designed to build on the Government's preliminary exploration, adding to a growing body of knowledge and proposing action that will help rural communities to operate on a more inclusive basis; ensuring seldom heard voices are included, respected, and valued.

The session was attended by 99 individuals including **Joseph Ritchie** and **Emma McCallum** from the Scottish Government Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS).

Summary of Presentations

Grace Cardozo set the context of the debate by presenting [Arnstein's Ladder of Participation](#). The ladder is a tool to assess how much power is given to citizens when important decisions are being made. It has eight rungs ranging from the lowest – '*manipulation*' - followed by '*therapy*', '*informing*', '*consulting*', '*placation/involving*', '*collaborating*', '*delegation*' and the highest level of participation – '*citizen control*'. Grace invited delegates to indicate where rural communities-of-place are situated on the ladder in relation to power over local decisions. The majority of delegates situated communities-of-place on the '*consulting*' rung. Rural communities-of-interest, such as communities with protected characteristics were, at worse, '*not engaged at all*' or, at best, were situated on on the '*informing*' rung.

Storyteller, writer and Travellers' rights activist **Jess Smith** offered a historical and personal perspective on the impact of racism on Traveller communities:

- Across Scotland there are around 29 residential sites for Travellers, mostly in rural areas. These fall within the responsibility of local councils who charge disproportionately high rents for the land and services. There is little constructive communication between the local authority and site residents. This could easily be resolved if officials met people on their own terms - 'at ground level' – rather than resorting to business-as-usual online surveys and inaccessible consultation events.
- In rural communities discriminatory attitudes towards Travellers are deeply ingrained despite their contribution to Scottish culture and the economy. All the way back to AD850, Travellers, referred to as Cairds, enjoyed great status due to their metalworking, tannery and storytelling skills. 'Caird' simply means 's/he of the craft.' The surname Sinclair is derived from *Clann-na-ceairde* or 'children of the craft'. The rise of current-day Christian norms in society resulted in many groups, including Travellers, being persecuted and vilified. The history of the Traveller community, similar to the history of other oppressed minority groups is not taught in schools, not is it celebrated by wider society.
- **Learning a true history in school or in other settings** is an important part of understanding the root causes of discriminatory attitudes and of challenging such attitudes within ourselves and others. It is, however, equally important to **create opportunities in the 'here and now' for people to come together**, build mutual understanding, learn from each other and contribute to a shared community vision.
- **Advancing equality is not about putting groups such as Travellers in 'protected characteristics' boxes – it is about recognising and valuing their culture and their contribution to Scottish society.** Travellers are not just an equality group. They are an indigenous culture and like the Gaelic language, this culture should be safeguarded and celebrated.

Jess was followed by **Ian Buchanan**, Access, Training & Engagement Manager from [Disability Equality Scotland](#). The Equality Act defines 'disability' as a physical or mental condition which has a long-term and substantial impact on a persons life.

- Despite the existence of [32 Access Panels](#), volunteer-led expert groups supported by Disability Equality Scotland which provide guidance and advice on accessible transport and public buildings, there is negligible engagement of disabled people in the design of the rural lived environment, especially in the design of transport. Panels are frequently consulted after major decisions have been made or their expertise at the inception stage is not taken on board.
- Transport underpins everything. Disabled people feel like they are trapped by transport decisions made in the central belt by people who have no idea how these will impact on remote and island communities.
- Lochaber Access Panel worked with bus manufacturers to design an accessible bus for the Highlands which is now only being used in the central belt. A complete kick in the teeth.
- Oban Access Panel surveyed the railway line and out of the 19 stations, 13 were inaccessible. Almost nothing is being done to rectify this.
- Issues stem from legislation dating back to the mid-1990s. In 2010, the Equality Act was touted as a landmark piece of legislation in the advancement of civil rights for disabled people. Yet transport companies continue to refer to the now-defunct Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). People are still look for training on 'how to make their organisation DDA-compliant.'
- We need to collectively **update transport legislation** so that transport operators cannot hide behind decades-old pieces of legislation and we need to **involve disabled people in the design of infrastructure projects from the very outset** as part of the planning process.

The third presentation looked at the experiences of LGBTI people living in rural areas and was delivered by **Scott Cuthbertson** and **Eleanor Sanders White** from the [Equality Network](#).

The Equality Network has links to LGBTI groups in every part of Scotland from Shetland to Dumfries and Galloway. It recently published [Further Out: The Scottish LGBTI Rural Equality Report](#) which drew on a large-scale survey and qualitative data collected over a series of 16 events in rural and island communities. Findings included:

- 62% of research participants believe that LGBTI people outside of Scotland's big cities face more inequality than those who live within.
- 51% of LGBTI people living in rural areas have personally experienced prejudice or discrimination for being LGBTI. Of those, 81% had experienced LGBTI+ phobic comments and attitudes and 55% experienced verbal abuse. One in ten had experienced physical assault.
- Spatial isolation and social inequality (discrimination, lack of inclusive spaces, lack of anonymity, lack of access to services) leads directly to minority stress and poor wellbeing and mental health.

Social spaces being welcoming and safe for LGBTI community members was a big theme of the research with over half of respondents feeling the need to travel to urban areas in order to find an LGBTI-friendly venue or event. In response, the Equality Network is working with the Scottish Government to pilot an **LGBTI Rural Visibility Project** which includes a kitemark and training on inclusive practice for rural businesses and services.

Discussion Points

At its heart, advancing equality involves actively listening to people, understanding their views holistically, not trying to pigeonhole or stereotype, celebrating diversity and using this diversity as a strength when planning community futures. After decades of government strategy and legislation, it is shameful that equality in participation is still something minority groups, including those with protected characteristics, have to fight for in Scotland albeit with a growing number of allies.

Breakout room discussions centred around addressing the **personal and societal barriers** people face to participation including experience of poverty and disadvantage, minority stress compounded by lack of visibility within your community, the prevalence of active discrimination (not being given jobs/volunteering roles/places at university/the right kind of service to meet your needs), and the lack of inclusive and safe spaces for people to meet and build connections. Suggested actions included:

- More capacity building and support for protected characteristic group volunteers and activists, raising awareness of how decision-making works and how best to engage (at a local and national level) etc, addressing volunteer fatigue etc.
- Rural leadership programme for people from protected characteristic groups
- Introduce LGBTI Rural Visibility Mark and replicate model for other equality groups
- More opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to come together, connect with each other and learn from each other (building long term conversations and relationships)
- More training / education for people in rural communities about the needs, issues, culture, history etc. of people from protected characteristic groups and support on how to be an ally
- Creating a database of rural equality organisations and groups

The ability to attract funding for rural equalities work is hampered by the lack of up-to-date **demographic data** on people with protected characteristics living in rural and island Scotland. The 2011 data does not reflect the diversity of Scotland's rural population today. The 2022 Census will go some way towards addressing this gap but considering the enormity of societal changes that take place in a single decade (look

at the potential impact of Brexit), there is a need to undertake population monitoring on a more regular basis.

Authentic research into the experience of minority groups in rural and island Scotland is insubstantial. Many of the most influential analytical projects – like Further Out – are initiated and driven by lived experience experts in the third sector. There should be a **consultative approach to identifying rural equalities research priorities** involving expert third sector organisations. There should also be commitment to allocating the Scottish Government’s Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Research Strategy budget to a combination of academic institutions and third sector organisations delivering front-line action research projects. This approach will ensure more inclusive and meaningful engagement with communities of interest and address structural inequalities that can be perpetuated by the analysis of findings through rigid analytical frameworks.

One of the first steps after the Scottish Government’s preliminary exploration, which gathered the views of second-tier organisations around barriers to inclusive participation, is to develop a methodology for gathering grassroots views on the issues.

Beyond commissioning research, there is a need to address **organisational and legislative inequalities** impacting on minority groups’ participation. What public bodies refer to as ‘consultation’ is frequently a tokenistic exercise. Tokenism becomes **active exploitation** when experts-by-experience are expected to volunteer their time so that public bodies can tick a box. Mitigating action includes:

- Updating transport legislation to stop transport companies, ignorant of the 2010 Equality Act, still referencing the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Public bodies investing resources into developing meaningful approaches to co-production and devolving power to hard-to-reach communities. This could be considered as an additional 0.2% to the [1% Framework Agreement](#) commitment for participatory budgeting.
- Enforcing an amendment to planning legislation making it a statutory requirement that Access Panels are consulted during the pre-application process and that their response is given weight as a significant material consideration.
- Valuing and paying for the contribution of Access Panels and other experts-by-experience groups to statutory consultations.
- Reviewing practice around Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs), making it mandatory that public bodies undertake meaningful consultation as part of the EQIA process. Some public authorities – Perth & Kinross Council were mentioned – have put in place effective mechanisms and others could learn from these.
- Using a range of mechanisms to address the lack of representation of protected characteristic groups on governance bodies, from local councils to Community Councils, and on delivery bodies from Joint Integration Boards to community anchor organisations.

Every action, whether research, organisational capacity building or legislative changes, must be based on awareness of **intersectionality** and the promotion of intersectional co-operation at local and national levels. This is a major challenge even for professionals in the equalities sector – we struggle to see the intersections between different equality groups and between equality groups and geographic communities. Two recommendations were put forward to build intersectional capacity:

- At a local level, fund a demonstration project which adds capacity (staff and consultancy) to Access Panels wishing to explore the potential of attracting a wider constituency of members and allies.

- At national level, but linked to the grass-roots, set up a Rural Intersectional Equality Forum modelled on the very successful National Rural Mental Health Forum in order to provide a platform for information sharing and collaboration across equality themes.

There is a debate to be had around the intersection of rurality and equalities. To what extent is rurality itself a specific equality characteristic like poverty or island residence? How do you measure rural inequality when national data sets like the **index of multiple deprivation** are blunt instruments in a rural and island context? To what extent could rurality be considered an aggravating factor or a protective factor when addressing inequality? Questions perhaps for the Forum to debate!

Summary recommendations

The summary recommendations is available as separate document.

Documents and initiatives mentioned during session:

- The Scottish Government's preliminary exploration: [Inclusive Participation in Rural Scotland: A research report](#)
- [Article 12](#) young Travellers' project has some fantastic resources for community development and there is further information in the [Scottish Travellers Education Programme](#) website. STEP is a national knowledge exchange centre supporting equitable access to education for mobile communities
- Scotland's Strategy for Improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers can be found [here](#).
- The Equality Network's Report [Further Out: The Scottish LGBTI Rural Equality Report](#)