Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru | Wales Environment Link

# WEL Diversity Action Plan

July 2021

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## Introduction

Movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #BlackinNature and #CharitySoWhite have galvanised environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to consider some serious questions over the last two years in particular.

Key questions include:

- Why is our sector so lacking in ethnic diversity?
- Why have our existing policies not resulted in increased diversity across many of the protected characteristics in recruitment or volunteering?
- Are our organisations doing enough to encourage participation in environmental work and volunteering from disabled people?

- Are we involving staff, volunteers and supporters with other protected characteristics in ways that really encourage them to join the environmental movement?

WEL members recognise that poor environmental outcomes affect minoritized groups the most. This means that we have a responsibility to involve them better as well as needing their support to tackle environmental problems. We need to understand ourselves better as an organisation, and as a network, and to proactively identify and remove barriers to participation for all communities.

This Diversity Action Plan is an important step on our journey to become a more inclusive organisation and network. This document focuses on the changes we need to make. It does not cover all the issues and background. It is an action plan. We have addressed actions for WEL itself in one section below and actions for the WEL network in another section below. It will remain a live document and will be annually reviewed and updated to ensure actions are taken forward.

## WEL Organisational Governance

**Staff policies and HR**

We will review all our policies and practices through the lens of how they affect different people and communities. This review will include looking at the language we use. Some of the other key actions will be undertaken are:

- develop and adopt an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy specifically and reflect this in our other policies and processes;
- develop an Equality Impact Assessment process and use this process to review our policies and practices regularly;
- review our flexible working and leave arrangements as a priority in terms of ensuring they work for different communities and people; and
- review our staff training and development policies and practices to ensure we provide tailored support for all diverse staff and volunteers.

**Staff Recruitment**

We are reviewing our processes and practices for recruitment.

Some of the key actions we will be undertaking are:

- revise our equality monitoring form to both ensure it is up to date and appropriate and encourages people to complete it;
- analyse data from every staff, volunteer, and Board recruitment process to identify under-represented groups and undertake targeted positive action to address this under-representation;
- revise our application form to make it clearer and simpler to complete;
- review and revise all our job descriptions and person specifications to ensure they are welcoming, accessible and inclusive; and
- promote our opportunities through community groups representing people with one or more protected characteristics and other communities who experience disadvantage.

**Board Recruitment**

WEL's Board of Trustees is largely recruited from our member organisations. Our constitution allows us to co-opt up to two external Trustees (Trustees that do not work or volunteer for a member organisation) in order to bring in necessary expertise that may be lacking.

WEL's current Board has five members, with two vacancies left. Four out of five of our Board members are female and all are white. All members of the Board are over 40 years of age. Whilst in the last 10 years WEL has maintained a gender balanced or (as the current situation shows) a female dominated board, we have identified two current key areas where it is lacking in diversity: representation from minoritized ethnic groups and representation from younger age-groups.

Whilst we could expect to recruit a Board member under 30 years of age from our membership, recent calls to the membership welcoming applications from younger members of the network have not borne fruit. Recruitment of minoritized ethnic board members is likely to be difficult if we do not advertise the opportunity beyond the WEL membership as our members' staff and volunteers are predominantly White Welsh or British.

WEL would like to improve overall diversity on its Board of Trustees. In particular, we would like to encourage participation from younger age groups (below 30) and

minoritized ethnic groups because these groups have been identified as current key gaps on our Board. However, we are aware that there are other groups that we would like to encourage to join our Board and we will also take steps to identify these groups.

We already have plenty of experience amongst our current Board members. We need new ways of thinking in order to ensure that our governance, policies and approaches encourage participation in the network from more diverse communities and younger people. By this we mean that there are no unnecessary barriers within our recruitment processes and that our policies protect staff and volunteers from discrimination and make them feel valued and included. We also want our advocacy and campaign messages to reach a wider audience and encourage greater participation from diverse communities in environmental work and campaigning.

**WEL communications and website**

WEL communicates its policy and advocacy messages through the creation of policy statements, briefings, consultation responses, Senedd Committee evidence, blogs, Twitter and our website. Most of our content, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, was created and distributed electronically, via email, Twitter and our website.

In March 2021 WEL upgraded its website from a Drupal content management system to a more user-friendly, modern WordPress site, giving us the ability to include a blog area. The new site uses larger fonts and more white spaces and images. However, we are aware there is still some work to do to make this compliant with current accessibility standards, so this is one area that we will develop. For our new website we have tried to represent different communities who have participated in the work of our members using images on our website. We are proud to have images by a disabled professional wildlife photographer on our website. We aim to increase the content by and for diverse people and communities through building relationships with those communities.

Many of the papers we produce are technical and focused at a political or civil servant audience. However, we are increasingly writing short, easy to read briefs that have the dual purpose of informing politicians about an issue quickly and allowing members of the public to get to grips with an issue that they might not have a

technical understanding of. Through recent diversity training we have made some adjustments to the Word templates we use to make this more accessible, but we still have more work to do in this area. We aim to review the templates for papers to see how they can be improved and made more accessible to all. We also aim to provide Plain English training for our staff and members of the network to improve our accessible writing skills.

We recognise that our Twitter following, and communities that are aware of our organisation or visit our website are mainly limited to traditional, white, middle class supporters of environmental NGOs. We would like to undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise to understand which groups we could reach out to and engage in our communications work by following them on Twitter or inviting them to do a guest blog for our website, or indeed hosting a WEL member blog on their own site.

**IT and communications training**

We have discovered that Microsoft 365 applications, and other applications that we use such as Zoom, contain a wealth of accessibility functionality that we are not fully aware of. We will provide staff with training on these tools to maximise the functionality of our IT applications in improving accessibility.

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the WEL Network

**Information sharing and best practice**

WEL will support a member-led Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group to allow members to share experiences and information, and learn from each other. This group could be held monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly, depending on member capacity to engage. The group could:

- monitor and ensure implementation of WEL's Diversity Action Plan;
- invite regular speakers on aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion;
- share information about their own programmes and projects;
- help identify ongoing training and development needs for the network; and
- work with equality, diversity and inclusion groups within Wildlife and Countryside Link, Scottish Environment Link and Northern Ireland Environment Link.

**Training**

We are aware that there are ongoing training and development needs across the network. Organisations are at different stages of progress in improving equality, diversity and inclusion, but all recognise that continuous development and improvement is required. Equality, diversity and inclusion requires an ongoing programme of training, development, peer to peer learning and information exchange. The WEL network is well placed to support its members in this journey.

WEL will set up an equality, diversity and inclusion section on its Basecamp platform, and also an equality, diversity and inclusion egroup, for sharing information about training opportunities. There are many reasonably priced training opportunities available, which WEL can signpost members to.

Where possible, WEL will also seek funding that can be used to support members to access relevant training opportunities. We would like to make this an annual commitment, but it will depend on the availability of funds for this purpose.

**Building relationships with communities**

WEL aims to build relationships with diverse communities, sharing the experience and knowledge of our staff and members, and building opportunities to learn from other communities too. This is a long-term process and will take many years to develop. As an early project, WEL is developing a proposal to forge links between two different sections of the charitable sector, for mutual benefit, through developing a 'buddy' relationship between WEL and a recently formally set up, but very proactive and energised network, passionately working towards inclusion and equality for people who have Down syndrome (the National Down Syndrome Policy Group).

WEL staff would respond to requests for ideas and guidance from the National Down Syndrome Policy Group, with regard to various aspects of running a successful policy network and engaging with Government to positively impact on development of policy and legislation in the UK.

Ideas and advice offered could include matters relating to:

- Internal communication mechanisms
- Efficient and effective processes for agreeing joint documents

- Membership agreements and protocols
- Internal policies and practice
- Working with Government to improve policy and legislation
- Devolved working
- Tips on providing secretariat for a Cross Party Group

In return, organisations involved in the National Down Syndrome Policy Group could put WEL member organisations in touch with groups local to their conservation sites / activities, with the aim of encouraging the Down Syndrome community to engage in new outdoor experiences, take part in volunteering activities and perhaps consider employment opportunities in the sector.

## Summary Actions and Milestones

Below are the high-level actions and milestones that WEL will achieve over the next 12 months. Our detailed actions will be recorded in an Excel spreadsheet, which will be a live document to track our progress over the next few years.

| Action | Milestones | Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| Review and update recruitment processes and forms | September 2021 | A wider range of communities is enabled, supported, and encouraged to apply for our jobs. |
| Set up an Equality, diversity and inclusion Working Group to support member learning | Establish by September 2021 and meet every 1 - 3 month(s). The frequency of meetings will be decided at the first meeting of the group. | WEL members have peer learning spaces in which to continue to learn more about how to improve equality, diversity and inclusion within their organisations. |
| Co-develop a “network buddies” proposal with | From September 2021 | Make links and build relationships with wider communities. |

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| the Down Syndrome Policy Group | | |
| Review and update WEL templates for policy papers to improve accessibility | By October 2021 | Ensure that formats for WEL papers are as accessible to and inclusive of all readers as possible. |
| Develop an Equality Impact Assessment process and use this process to review our policies and practices regularly | October 2021 | Ensure existing and future WEL policies and practices promote equality, diversity and inclusion |
| Identify reasonably priced equality, diversity and inclusion training options to signpost for WEL members | By October 2021 | Enable ongoing equality, diversity and inclusion training for WEL members in the event of not being able to secure ongoing funding for this. |
| Develop and adopt an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and reflect this in our other policies and processes | November 2021 | Ensure that WEL's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion is understood by staff, volunteers and trustees and that this underpins our other policies. |
| Review staff handbook policies with an equality, diversity and inclusion lens, including flexible working and training and development policies. | To start in November 2021 | All staff policies to promote an equal, diverse and inclusive workplace taking full account of different people's circumstances and requirements |
| Review WEL website accessibility and identify | By December 2021 | Ensure a high standard of accessibility for our website. |

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| changes required for accessibility improvement | | |
| Recruit Board members from more diverse backgrounds. | By March 2022 | Ensure a wider range of views are reflected in WEL's governance processes and structures. |
| Identify and apply for further training funding for WEL members. | Include in most 2021/22 funding bids<br>Clear training budget to be identified by April 2022 | To enable all WEL members to access the equality, diversity and inclusion training they need to continue to improve their organisations, outreach and engagement and staff skills. |