

Disability Rights Commission

Learning lessons:
Cross-nation
working across the
DRC – working
effectively across
three nations on
campaigns

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Executive summary

The Learning Narratives project contributes to the broad legacy strategy of the Disability Rights Commission. It considers what the DRC has learnt through its various activities since 2000 and focuses on specific activities or overarching themes where the DRC has had direct involvement.

Each narrative responds to questions such as ‘why did we, the DRC, try to do what we did?’, ‘what worked?’ and ‘what didn’t work and why?’ and draws on a range of data sources, not least of which is the experience and expertise of DRC staff, both past and present.

This narrative aims to explore the reality of cross-nation working in the DRC. It will use as a backdrop a number of campaigns over the past seven years in order to examine the challenges faced in conducting and delivering GB-wide projects across England, Scotland and Wales.

Cross-nation working: key lessons

- It is important to differentiate effectively between ‘cross-nation working’ and ‘devolution’: whilst devolution is a process of government, cross-nation working can be thought of in broader terms and is about how the opportunities and locally-specific aspects of each country can best be exploited and made use of.
- An organisation will need to be clear about language and terminology from the outset, and proactively communicate to all staff a shared understanding. The difference between cross-nation working and devolution is one such example.

- An organisation will need to put in place an organisational design which actively promotes cross-nation working if it is to be successful. This will include policies, practices and general business systems.
- Business planning will need to fully account for cross-nation working and make this an integral part of all processes.
- An organisation which works to a matrix structure is more likely to readily meet the requirements of cross-nation working as teams will be established from different directorates / departments.
- The establishment of working groups, with country-specific representation, is a key strategy in supporting cross-nation working.
- A list of key questions around devolution should be created and communicated to those relevant staff involved in developing GB-wide projects.
- The DRC has found the most successful approach to delivering campaigns is when they are rolled out nationally but with the flexibility for local decision making in terms of the methods used.
- The methods of delivery used for each country will need to align with available resources and staff capacity. This will be a key determinant in agreeing the different strategies.
- Communication is the critical issue in delivering good cross-nation working.
- Good, effective cross-nation working is dependent on robust and transparent decision-making processes, with shared responsibility in all countries.

- There are real benefits in locating the co-ordination of GB-wide activity in the different countries. In other words, responsibility for individual GB-wide projects should be shared between the different countries and this shifts the perceived power dynamic away from one country (or location in a country).
- An organisation will need to find creative and consistent ways of bringing staff from the different countries together face to face as a way of developing relationships and enhancing understanding of mutual respect.
- Cross-nation working will need to be modeled by senior management as the 'ways things are done around here' if it is to become ingrained in an organisation's culture.
- This narrative identifies ten key learning points which will act as either an accelerator or inhibitor towards good cross-nation working.

Introduction

This narrative aims to explore the reality of cross-nation working, drawing on two campaigns in the DRC in order to examine the challenges faced in conducting and delivering GB-wide projects across England, Scotland and Wales. There has been much learning captured from specific examples over the years in which cross-nation working has been both effective and presented significant challenges. Whilst the DRC has a good reputation externally for approaching devolution issues and ensuring that English, Scottish and Welsh perspectives are considered early on in its work, there have been inevitable barriers faced at times that have restricted the effectiveness of communication between the three countries and the wider organisational sensitivity to nation-specific issues.

One of the key dangers to be articulated has been in the potential failure to differentiate effectively between 'cross-nation working' and 'devolution' in this context:

Whilst devolution is a process of government, cross-nation working is about how the opportunities and locally-specific aspects of each country can best be exploited and made use of. There is a danger of viewing cross-nation working in too narrow a way and confining the thinking about the possibilities –
Member of DRC staff, England

The narrative will therefore aim to focus most upon the challenges and achievements with reference to cross-nation working on two nation-wide DRC Campaigns: the Open for All campaign and the Employment campaign. These campaigns provide illustrative examples of projects focusing on non-devolved issues that have been delivered by the DRC nationally, but with opportunities for a tailored and locally-sensitive roll-out across each of the three countries.

Cross-nation working: broad achievements

Before considering the DRC's campaign work across Great Britain, it is worth noting some clear achievements within the DRC that have facilitated the effectiveness of cross-nation working. Overall, the DRC has made huge strides in recognising the importance of cross-nation working from the outset and ensuring adequate consideration of these issues when developing business plans and overarching objectives. This is thought to have gone some way to moving away from the idea that Scotland and Wales are simply 'adjuncts to GB working'. A strong feeling has been expressed amongst staff of a steadily-increasing awareness of devolution issues over recent years, coupled with a wider appreciation of the social, political and economic factors specific to each of the three nations. In reflection of this, a system has been designed to ensure that all project plans are signed-off by the directors of Scotland or Wales before being put into action.

Structural factors

A number of further structural factors have been put in place within the DRC to aid the communication between the three countries and particularly enable the early representation and contribution of Scotland and Wales to national projects. The development of thematic-based working ('Themes'), reflecting the DRC's Strategic Plan, has been an important step in advancing the success of cross-nation working. Overarching thematic groups include representatives from the three countries and aimed to enable the inclusion of Scotland and Wales in projects at an early stage. There have also been monthly meetings of Working Groups for all major projects carried out by the DRC, and project steering groups which

meet six-weekly and aim to take account of different issues across the nations.

Business planning

A number of questions are currently asked across the DRC throughout the business-planning process to develop a better understanding of the impact of a potential project across England, Scotland and Wales and identify country-specific or devolutionary factors. This list of questions has been passed round all project leads and those working on projects or programmes to consider the implications of their work for devolution and the key issues they need to take into account. This list is aimed towards ensuring that everyone across the DRC has a common understanding and awareness of the key questions to ask about devolution issues when they develop GB projects. The list of questions also ensures that colleagues in Scotland and Wales are involved in from the beginning. Questions include the following:

- Are there strategies and practices as part of the project that would require specific GB-wide or country-specific considerations?
- Are there likely to be any indirect consequences of the project on England, Scotland and Wales work?
- Are the key groups the same across GB or are they specific English, Scottish or Welsh organisations or institutions that would need to be approached?

Cross-nation working – from the top down

A further important factor in embedding the importance of cross-nation working is the example of the DRC's Commission and Senior Management team meetings. For example, meetings of Commission were held annually in both Scotland and Wales, and the monthly face-to-face SMT

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meetings rotated around the four main DRC locations as well as visiting other sites. Both of these practices were set in place from day one of the DRC and led the way for both thematic and functional groups to follow suit (as detailed above).

Cross-nation working: a focus on campaigns

A tension has emerged through work on national DRC campaigns in the past few years between balancing the beneficial impact of nationally-branded campaigns with the need for each country to have the flexibility to deliver campaigns using locally effective methods and timescales. The 'DRC model' for cross-nation working has been adopted in response to this tension for those projects – a model in which DRC campaigns have been rolled-out nationally but with individual freedom to adopt the most appropriate methods of delivery. One of the key issues, then, is how this model has appeared to work in practice and what lessons there are to be learnt. As one member of staff has put it:

Whilst this model has been highly effective in allowing Scotland and Wales the freedom they need to run campaigns in the most effective way for their countries, there have been a number of factors which have impacted on the ability of this model to work entirely smoothly. **Member of DRC staff**

Open 4 All

Open 4 All was launched as a GB-wide project by the DRC in October 2003, lasting one year and seeking to raise awareness and understanding of the legal situation on access to the built environment amongst goods and services providers. One of the key achievements of this campaign was that, despite being launched on a national basis, the model of delivery was sufficiently flexible to allow for particular opportunities existing within each country to be taken advantage of.

Open for All: DRC Wales approach

The Welsh approach to delivering Open 4 All was far more 'hands-on', with time and resources dedicated to targeting the most appropriate people in local authorities and encouraging the dissemination of the key messages from there. A series of 'town-trader events' – working with business organisations and the Chamber of Commerce – were organised in order to communicate directly with the target retailers. Whilst thoughts were given to carrying out work with the Wales-wide media based primarily in Cardiff, the decision was made to publicise the campaign at a more local level in order to reach people requiring access to their local store.

The capacity of the Welsh office to engage effectively with local authorities was found to have a strong and positive impact on the effectiveness of this campaign across Wales. Previous work and direct contact with individuals ensured awareness of the campaign spread in advance of the campaign's launch. The approach was summed up by one member of the campaign team in Wales:

It was very easy for us to engage with (all) 22 local authorities in Wales, whereas it was impossible for the DRC to engage in this way in England. We knew this so we took advantage of it and used it to our benefit.

Member of DRC staff, Wales

A further advantage for Open 4 All in Wales was the small size of the team, which meant that campaign activities involved a large proportion of the office at any one time. This was a key strength, since it enabled DRC staff to engage effectively with stakeholders and make the impact of the campaign seem even more significant within the local area. Whilst DRC England had historically organised campaign events specifically themselves, the Wales office also placed emphasis on taking advantage of platforms offered by other organisations in successfully targeting new audiences.

Open for All: DRC Scotland approach

Through analysis of existing attitude and awareness surveys, DRC Scotland knew that it would not be effective for Open 4 All to be a literature-led campaign in Scotland, or to therefore target any literature at the relevant audiences. Instead, the approach taken was to run large-scale national conferences in Edinburgh and Inverness and work directly with Scottish organisations.

DRC Scotland were keen to make the most of local knowledge by using their own extensive contact database, an approach which proved to be highly reliable for contacting individuals, national organisations and disability groups directly. Research was also informative in highlighting the perceived importance for people in Scotland for messages coming from the top of the retail industry. Through exploiting strong existing working relationships, the DRC was able to influence those in positions of power and speak directly to chief executives and boards of directors to get the message across effectively. As one member of DRC Scotland put it:

The reason we did things this way was because we felt we could make the most difference and influence most from getting buy-in through this method of engagement. It was a hands-on approach that would get the best results in Scotland.

Member of DRC staff, Scotland

DRC Scotland was also able to maximise the benefits of the high level of partnership working in Scotland and the close relationships built up over time with a large number of umbrella organisations. These close working relationships – resulting partly from the size of Scotland – have also opened up future opportunities for using small Scottish networks of active participants as a test-bed for trialling elements of campaigns before rolling out on a wider basis.

The Employment campaign

The Employment campaign was approached by England, Scotland and Wales as more of a 'phased activity' than a single publicity campaign. The campaign sought to raise awareness of the DDA and its implications as the abolition of the threshold that excluded employers of less than fifteen employees from being covered by the legislation came into force. Scotland and Wales in particular took very different approaches to delivering this campaign, based on the geographic distribution of businesses and factors specific to each of the countries.

Achievements

The Employment campaign resulted in a number of notable achievements for effective cross-nation working, with clear signs of advancement and learning since work on Open 4 All. Some of these advances are considered below.

Early involvement

Scotland and Wales were well represented on the GB-wide Employment group within the DRC, reflecting an acute awareness of the need to deliver a GB-wide strategy in different ways within each country. Membership on this group enabled representatives from the Scotland and Wales offices to be positively involved at the beginning of the process in shaping the Employment campaign and brainstorming ideas in early meetings. This level of involvement was reflected by the fact that the research commissioned to launch the campaign originated from a representative from the Welsh DRC office.

Appropriate campaign planning

Time was invested by England-based staff at the business-planning stage of the campaign through traveling to Scotland and Wales with the relevant Thematic Heads to discuss country-specific issues and enable a deeper understanding of the issues and events occurring within each country. This enabled a decent level of flexibility to be built into the Employment campaign to allow for Wales in particular prioritising certain pieces of work at different times to England. The business planning stage was also crucial in terms of tackling some key issues, such as the proportion of resources that should be spent on England-specific issues and those on events being run within Scotland and Wales. One staff member commented:

We needed to consider everything at this stage, down to how the Welsh Assembly Government differs from Westminster and what the specific factors in Scotland would be to get a real understanding of that to impact on how the campaign would be delivered.

Member of DRC staff

Steering group

Ensuring that the steering group had the right combination and representation of people from the very beginning was fundamental in terms of ensuring that cross-nation working was effective and sustained throughout the life of the Employment campaign. One key aim of the steering group was to prevent decisions being made in the London office without being effectively communicated across all three counties. With adequate representation from Scotland and Wales there was also the opportunity to ensure clarity up-front about funding, target audiences, communication and tendering processes.

It was crucial to get the right combination of people on the steering group from the very beginning. We needed to identify who the lead was on this project for Scotland and Wales, and be sure that we knew who was making the decisions.

Member of DRC staff

Both Scotland and Wales were given the freedom to take individual approaches to rolling out the Employment campaign within their countries.

The Employment campaign: DRC Scotland approach

Due to the size of Scotland and the prevalence of small and medium-sized businesses, it was decided that the most effective way to engage with employers in Scotland would be face-to-face and on the ground. A number of events were therefore organised, including five business seminars targeted at employers, highlighting the steps that needed to be taken towards becoming a 'good employer'.

The Scotland approach to delivering the employment campaign was also very much affected by research showing that large-scale events were likely to be less effective at engaging with the target audience than smaller events with around 100 people at a time. Data taken from the annual awareness survey showed that 'brief and informative' breakfast and lunchtime seminars for employers in small and medium-sized businesses were likely to be the most effective and attended method for reaching people.

The research and our experience told us that employers in Scotland wanted the DRC to be out in the field engaging with people face-to-face and they required legal advice and sign-posting to the website and relevant publications.

Member of DRC staff, Scotland

Having built up a number of very close and positive working relationships over the years, it was also deemed important to capitalise on the unique position of DRC Scotland in getting buy-in quickly from a range of organisations. Local employers and employees were therefore asked to speak at these events and present real-life case studies of employers showing their prior successes of making easy adjustments for their staff. The outcome of making efforts to reach out in such practical and personal way led to a significant rise in awareness of the DDA over five years – from 32% of businesses being aware of the DDA to 87%.

The Employment campaign: DRC Wales approach

Circumstances and features unique to the Welsh labour market – such as a high proportion of micro-businesses and high levels of inactivity – affected the way in which the Employment campaign was delivered across Wales. A sizable rural economy with a large distribution of people in difficult-to-reach places required particular consideration when trying to engage small businesses and the voluntary sector in the delivery of this campaign.

One of the things we needed to recognise when delivering this campaign was the geography of Wales, with many of the small firms based outside of the big cities – the travelling implications were likely to have a huge impact on attendance at any events. **Member of DRC staff, Wales**

It was therefore decided that, unlike in Scotland, holding showpiece meetings in city centres was not likely to be the most effective way of engaging with small firms and businesses. The approach taken instead was to 'piggy-back' on to the meetings of small firms and train up a network of business advisers to provide support on equalities matters to businesses on a more personal basis. This approach to using intermediaries in reaching out to rural areas was

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highly effective in communicating the key messages of the campaign – reaching over two hundred new businesses in Wales.

There was also effort made to take advantage of unusually good ministerial access, stemming from the small nature of the Government system in Wales. Unfortunately, the opportunities to maximise on the potential to engage Government ministers during the campaign launch were lost due to a delay to the timetabling of campaign materials.

Learning from challenges faced across both campaigns

There have been clear successes with respect to cross-nation working and individual delivery of campaigns across the three countries. However, a number of challenges have faced the DRC that at times have militated against communication and effective collaboration on these campaigns across the three countries. The key question has been the extent to which these challenges were inherent in the way the campaigns were planned or due to other factors that simply impacted on the running of campaigns. Experience from these campaigns says it is a mixture of the two.

A number of issues on the running of the campaigns have been highlighted that suggest there are ten key learning aspects that help can act as either accelerators or inhibitors towards good cross-nation campaign work. These are:

- Developing a GB-wide rather than an England-centric approach
- Ensure good planning and systems across three countries are in place
- Ensuring that planning takes into account capacity of the different offices to deliver
- Ensuring that Scotland and Wales input goes beyond one of just reacting to events
- Making sure the timetable and planning of campaigns or work suits the circumstances of the three countries

- Developing good working relationships across the three countries
- Recognising and building in the understanding of the Individual cultures and circumstances in the different countries
- Enabling flexibility to tailor approaches to the circumstances and needs of the three countries
- Ensuring that campaign materials and slogans work across and are relevant to the three countries
- Building in time for translating materials into relevant languages

England-centric?

There was a perception about a certain level of 'England-centricity', reflected by decisions made without sufficient consultation with the Welsh and Scottish offices. This manifested itself in key areas like the timetabling of campaign launches and awareness of political events and local elections occurring within Scotland and Wales.

There was an issue with the launching of the campaign on a GB-wide basis as we had parliamentary elections in Scotland at the time they wanted to launch it.

England was clearly very aware of the Westminster elections, but ours didn't seem to be taken so seriously. **Member of DRC staff**

The question here is one about whether this was an inherent problem in the campaign or one about appropriate planning and consideration of the position of Scotland and Wales. Part of the difficulty in involving Scotland and Wales effectively throughout campaigns work has been not only a question of how to model a three-nation campaign (often in very tight time scales), but also to take into account capacity issues

within the Scottish and Welsh offices, and therefore enabling responses to requests and queries at short notice alongside other priorities. These issues have been dealt with in different ways in the two campaigns considered here: either greater autonomy in how the campaign was rolled out was developed (Open for All), or a more centralised model was used (Employment campaign). Even in the centralised approach there are difficulties:

It is all very well setting a positive tone and modelling good practice with regards to cross-nation working, but when people are working to a deadline they will need to plough on without having time to properly involve Scotland or Wales... this has been a big problem.

Member of DRC staff, London

Sometimes the London office was keen to engage us early on, but the staff member responsible in our office hasn't been able to respond quickly enough. They have then had to move on and it has seemed that Wales isn't playing ball.

Member of DRC staff, Wales

A further challenge has been how to ensure that staff within the Welsh and Scottish offices have been able to involve themselves in campaign decisions at the earliest point. Where this has not always happened, it has led to a need for consideration as to how to avoid responses and involvement from Scotland and Wales becoming reactions to the decisions and work carried out in England:

There has often been a sense that it is the role of the Welsh staff in these campaigns just to 'Welshify' whatever is produced in England, and that members of Wales DRC don't have big ideas themselves... but we would all sooner be at the table at the start having those conversations, than having to carry out an

exercise in damage control at the end of the process.

Member of DRC staff, England

The tensions above show, however, that there has been a growing recognition of a GB-wide approach to cross-nation working and that the issue was not so much about 'why bother?' but rather 'how do we make it work?'

Timetabling and planning

A significant challenge to effective cross-nation working throughout both of these campaigns was their planning and the intensity of work which emerges from a campaign.

Campaigns nearly always result in a heavy time pressure, forcing those with large workloads to work right up to deadlines to keep to the planned timescale – a factor which appears across all three countries. The key issue, though, has been to find ways of ensuring that the critical issue of time and workloads did not, as a by product, lead to decisions being made which failed to account for issues specific to Scotland and Wales.

There were examples within this campaign when the marketing materials drifted into a level of detail which was only applicable in England. Due to the time pressure and time at which consultation on these materials was carried out, there wasn't adequate time to address these factors.

Member of DRC staff

However much you set up a process, people still think of involving Scotland and Wales as a bolt-on exercise at the last minute – they do the thinking in England and then send the template to the other offices to 'Scotland- and Welsh-ify'. London still often think of consulting Scotland and Wales very much as an after-thought, and we need to move away from this and start planning for it from the beginning. **Member of DRC staff**

Furthermore, as the bulk of the campaigning and communications in the DRC has been linked to the frequent changes in the DDA, there have been added time pressures which had implications for how best to plan campaigning work across the three nations, and how to ensure Scottish and Welsh input and approaches were built in.

To some extent the learning regarding time planning is without doubt campaign specific, but the question does arise as to whether learning from good time planning of campaigns is also likely to be transferable for broader cross-nation working. It is clear that, whilst campaign planning and its intensity can magnify the issue, there are some generalisable lessons which can help shine a spotlight on key pressure points in planning and where good practice in cross nation working can make a difference to outputs. The key learning here is looking to identify early on what the implications of a piece of work for all nations are, and applying that thinking to the different stages of the plans to see if there are any specific implications for any of the three countries.

Relationships and integrating understanding of the circumstances of the three nations

Developing relationships across the three countries is a key factor in delivering effective campaigns, as well as in broader cross nation working. Individual relationships between key staff members play a notable role in affecting the communication flowing between them.

Though a sense of solidarity was often established within the campaign teams across the DRC, there were sometimes feelings from England-based staff of colleagues in the Scottish and Welsh offices running the risk of being too insular and autonomous in their approach to ensuring their own countries were adequately represented. At the same time, staff in Wales and Scotland remained concerned to ensure that what they perceived to be key issues for their countries was adequately part of the agenda.

The level of respect and understanding for the individual pressures and challenges facing each of the DRC's offices was therefore of fundamental importance in enhancing working relationships and collaboration on national projects:

It needs to be an issue of mutual understanding and mutual respect. We needed to appreciate more strongly that cross-nation working was a three-way street and that we could all learn from each other.

Member of DRC staff

Translating campaign materials: language and context

A key challenge to the smooth and effective running of campaigns across the three countries was the need to ensure that materials and slogans are not only relevant to the campaign but also are translatable in each of the three countries. Though this often worked well, there are some examples of difficulties arising from some campaign titles – including 'Education 4 All' and 'Are we taking the Dis?' – which were not as effective once translated into Welsh.

When people think about a slogan for a campaign, they are often not thinking about how this would work in a bilingual context for a campaign... In an ideal world, they would have to have a Welsh speaker at the earliest stage when people were working up ideas for logos in the first place.

Member of DRC staff, Wales

In addition, there is also the need to build in sufficient time for the translation of materials and, where necessary, development and / or amend campaign materials to ensure they are culturally and politically relevant.

It's often not simply a matter of having a report that needs translating, but a report or publication that actually needs rewriting with Wales in mind.

Member of DRC staff, Wales

Conclusion

Overall, the story of cross-nation working and campaigns in DRC is one of solid progress and growing recognition, allied to a need for continual consideration. The case for cross-nation working has been made from the top of the organisation and improvements have been seen and can be traced through succeeding campaigns.

This narrative suggests that the DRC has come a long way from initial efforts to raise the importance of Scottish and Welsh issues towards a more informed GB approach, recognising the opportunities and challenges of working across three countries. Nonetheless there is always more needed to ensure that cross-nation working is seen as the preserve of all staff from across all offices, and continues to move beyond just the Scottish and Welsh offices.

When setting the criteria for anything, these need to be the number one or two questions that are asked – we need to ask ‘as an organisation, how do we best reflect the opportunities and differences in each of the countries to maximise what we are trying to do?’

Member of DRC staff

Devolution is here to stay, and it’s becoming clearer as time goes on and divergence is continuing at a pace and that getting this right is therefore going to be more and more important. Increasingly, if you haven’t thought about Wales and Scotland at an early stage, plans developed in England to campaign around any area of devolved policy making will be almost inoperable in Wales and Scotland. **Member of DRC staff**

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Cross-nation working is a big challenge, but we shouldn't be turned off by that... resources and leadership need to be in place to make it work. **Member of DRC staff**