

**MINUTES OF THE PRELIMINARY MEETING OF THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM FOR THE EDUCATION SECTOR HELD IN THE BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD ON THURSDAY 1 APRIL AT 2.00p.m.**

**Present:**

Mrs Bernadette Best	Action Mental Health
Dr David McConnell	Age Concern
Ms Ilana Zablow	Age Concern
Ms Angela Watson	Carers' Northern Ireland
Ms Kathryn Stevenson	Children's Law Centre
Mr David Russell	Community Relations Council
Dr Paschal McKeown	MENCAP
Ms Felice Kiel	NICEM
Ms Tansy Hutchinson	NICEM
Ms Anne Moore	NICVA
Ms Rebecca Dudley	N I Women's Aid Federation
Rev. Stanley Stewart	Presbyterian Church – Education Board
Mr James Knox	Rainbow Project
Ms Josie Halpern-Finerty	Rainbow Project
Dr Katy Radford	Save the Children
Mr Paul Yam	Wah Hip Chinese Community
Ms Steph Robinson	Wah Hip Chinese Community
Ms May McCann	Women's Support Network
Mr Denis Palmer	Youthnet
Mr Tony Carlin	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Mr Martin Murphy	N I Public Service Alliance
Mr Mike Graves	Ulster Teachers' Union
Ms Pamela Dooley	UNISON
Mr Brian Ferguson	UNISON
Ms Ann Donnelly	UNISON
Ms Liz Wells	Department of Education
Mr John Curran	Inter-Board Central Management Support Unit
Mr David Cargo	Chief Executive, B E L B
Ms Linda McGowan	Equality Unit Manager, B E L B
Mr Alf Armstong	Equality and Human Rights Officer, N E E L B
Mr John Shivers	Education Officer (Special), S E E L B
Mrs Maura Murphy	Equalities Manager, S E L B
Mrs Helen Osborn	Chief Librarian, W E L B
Mr Arthur Rainey	Chief Administrative Officer, W E L B
Mrs Patricia Weir	Chief Executive, Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards
Ms Deirdre Vaughn	Senior Principal Officer - Equality, Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards
Mr Stephen Walsh	Head of Personnel, CCMS
Mr David Guilfoyle	Director, Youth Council for Northern Ireland
Ms Lisa Johnson	CCEA

**Apologies:**

Ms Gabrielle Fitzpatrick-McCrickard	Employers' Forum on Disability
Ms Sonia Anderson	East Belfast Community Development Agency
Mr Terry McMackin	NICIE
Mrs Patricia Bray	Disability Action

## **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Ms Linda McGowan, Equality Unit Manager, welcomed everyone to the Belfast Education and Library Board and explained the administrative arrangements for the meeting.

The Joint Chairs explained that informal meetings had been held with public authorities in the education sector and non-governmental organisations to discuss experiences of consultation to date and to establish the level of support for a joint consultative forum. The proposal had been positively received.

As a result of this preliminary work, it had been agreed that this initial meeting would be used to gain a better understanding of our respective roles and an insight into some of the issues which consultees felt should form part of the “mainstreaming” agenda.

## **2. The Story So Far – Deirdre Vaughn, Senior Principal Officer, Staff Commission**

Deirdre is a Trainer on the NICEM/CEJI transnational project aimed at mainstreaming equality and diversity into policy and practice (Appendix 1 refers). She explained that the project had been conducted on a public authority/Non-Government Organisation partnership basis and was being piloted in education authorities in Belfast and education and health authorities in Berlin. Deirdre outlined the methodology adopted, the training programme and the proposal for the establishment of the Joint Consultative Forum which had emerged organically from Day 3 of the training. She explained that whilst the training was for managers in public authorities a session was planned for staff/members of NGOs. Anyone interested in attending should advise any of the Trainers at the conclusion of the meeting.

## **3. NGO Presentations**

### **(i) Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities – Tansy Hutchinson, Policy Officer**

Tansy welcomed the decision to establish a Joint Consultative Forum and in particular the efforts made to target those “directly affected” by the policies of the education sector. She emphasised the importance of the education sector in the promotion of equality of opportunity in our society.

In her presentation, Tansy provided:

- an introduction to NICEM;
- emphasised the need for particular measures to enable engagement;
- encouraged the education sector to consider how consultation/policy formulation and mainstreaming equality could be adopted to meet the needs of those who were most excluded in society; and
- outlined the principles of good consultation techniques (Appendix 2 refers).

Tansy also emphasised the importance of recognising the diversity which existed within each of the nine categories. For example, ethnic minorities had considerable diversity within their own communities which resulted in different needs and issues emerging.

## **(ii) Youthnet – Denis Palmer, Director**

Denis explained that Youthnet is a strategic network of Voluntary Youth Organisation. It is an umbrella body which has over 70 members working with a diverse range of young people and vary in size, structure and capacity (Appendix 3 refers). He went on to speak about the JEDI (Joined in Equity Diversity and Inter-dependence) initiative. A process which sought to mainstream these principles into youth service work. Youthnet with other partners in the Youth Sector had taken forward the initiative which was now being implemented in its totality across the Sector.

Denis briefly outlined the 'Shout' project, research which had been commissioned by Department of Education into the needs of young people in Northern Ireland who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgendered (LGBT). Denis welcomed the Department of Education's funding of this research which was conducted by Youthnet. He highlighted some of the key findings from the research:

- 65% of respondents had experienced verbal abuse;
- 44% of respondents had been bullied in school because of their sexual orientation;
- 2.9% of respondents had attempted suicide;
- 26% of respondents had self harmed;
- 15% of respondents had dropped out of school because of their sexual orientation.

Denis expressed disappointment that to date the boards had not formally responded to the research.

In terms of the involvement of young people Denis suggested that the education authorities need to:

- make more serious attempts to engage with young people;
- reflect on the good practice elsewhere e.g. involvement of young people in the recent appointment of a Commissioner for Children and Young People;
- produce more user friendly documents; and
- be more aware of a young person's right to discover themselves without bullying, abuse etc.

Denis urged the education authorities to consider the research and its findings and to reflect on the issues raised.

At this stage of the meeting the following issues were raised:

- an inability to access Boards' websites' because of a blanket block an access where the word 'sex' is used;
- problems of bullying in schools because of a pupil's race, sexual orientation etc.;
- the need for clear comprehensive policies and procedures to deal with harassment and bullying in schools and in employment;
- the need for Equality Awareness training for teachers;
- the need to ensure issues around citizenship and equality are properly addressed through the curriculum.

#### **4. Education Authority Presentation – John Curran, Inter-Board Services Manager (Education and Library Boards)**

John Curran observed that one of the underlying themes which had emerged so far was that of 'fear'. We all had a tendency to fear what we don't understand. The most effective remedies to fear were awareness and understanding. He felt that at the heart of Section 75 was the need to have respect for ourselves and each other. John stated that he believed Section 75 gave us an excellent opportunity to listen and engage with other people and to build positive working relationships between the Boards and the NGOs. He felt that the establishment of the Forum was a fantastic opportunity for us to achieve a higher level of understanding of each other and to try and reach out to each other and map out how we can mainstream equality into all aspects of our work. He highlighted the pivotal role of the Department of Education in this process in that it was the body which funded the education sector and provided strategic leadership. He said that legislation was often necessary to bring about change but was a poor instrument for changing people, instead what we all needed was a willingness to empower and enable change. John circulated a paper on what the Boards do:

- for children and young people;
- for schools;
- for library users;
- through partners etc.

(Appendix 4 refers).

At this stage of the meeting the following issues were raised:

- the need to consider the Youthnet research as a Child Protection issue;
- the importance of the law in terms of bringing about change and providing a springboard for public authorities/NGOs and trade unions to work together;
- the scope to involve older people in provision of the youth and education services; and
- the need for careful consideration of child protection issues in the context of bullying and harassment, in particular, peer abuse.

#### **5. Way Forward**

The draft terms of reference were considered. It was suggested that they should be amended to provide for two meetings of the Forum per annum. The terms of reference were agreed as:-

That the Forum will meet twice per annum (late May and September) following the publication of the public authorities' Annual Reports to the Equality Commission on the implementation of the Equality Schemes. Further meetings may be called to discuss specific issues. The Forum will provide a formal working link between public authorities in the education sector and the community and voluntary and trade union sectors and statutory equality authorities namely, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Community Relations Council and the Human Rights Commission.

It was agreed that Deirdre Vaugh should act as Secretary until officers were appointed at the first meeting of the Forum scheduled for 30 September 2004. Members were encouraged to identify suggested agenda items for future meetings and notify the Acting Secretary of same on the pro forma contained in their pack.

**6. Closing Remarks – David Cargo, Chief Executive, Belfast Education and Library Boards**

David, speaking on behalf of the Chief Executives, confirmed the Boards/Staff Commission's commitment to the establishment of the Forum. He emphasised that Section 75 of the Act was an important milestone in the journey toward greater participation in the policy making process by those affected by the policies. He indicated that consultation had to be about participation, we need to become better at listening to each other. David said that "the highest form of consultation is shared action" and that was what we (the education sector) were committed to, that we needed to talk, listen and act together. The acid test for Section 75 he said, was that in ten years time it would be no longer required.

## THE STORY SO FAR

### NICEM<sup>1</sup>/CEJI Anti Discrimination and Diversity in Action

The overarching aim of this project is to help create organisational cultures within public authorities that tackle discrimination and promote diversity and to:

*“Mainstream equality and diversity into policy and practice through positive community relations and participation with the aims of assisting public authorities to eliminate discrimination and provide culturally sensitive, equitable, caring and quality services.”*

*Vision Statement, October 2001*

This project has been developed by the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) and the European Jewish Information Centre (CEJI). One of the primary aims of it is to facilitate the establishment of a European framework for best practice in keeping with the EU Article 13 Directives. As a means of achieving this aim the project has focused on the development and delivery of a training programme on anti-discrimination and diversity issues specifically designed for public authorities. The training programme has been piloted in two European cities – Belfast (education sector public authorities) and Berlin (education and health sector public authorities).

#### Training Programme

Education sector public authorities and voluntary sector organisations representing Section 75 constituents have combined their efforts and commitment to implement the vision and principles of the project in Belfast. The partnership has included consultation with all of the partners through a series of focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

#### Training Overview –

Six training sessions were delivered as follows:-

<b>Education Authorities</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Facilitators</b>
Belfast Board	15/16 May, & 3 July 2003	Ms Felice Kiel, NICEM Ms Deirdre Vaugh, Staff Commission
Staff Commission/ Youth Council/ Council for Catholic Maintained Schools	4/5 & 25 June 2003	Ms May McCann, Women’s Support Network Ms Deirdre Vaugh Staff Commission
Department of Education/Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education	17/18 & 24 June 2003	Ms Felice Kiel, NICEM Ms Deirdre Vaugh, Staff Commission

<sup>1</sup> Centre European Juif D’Information/Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

Education & Library Boards/Department of Education	27/28 Nov. & 16 Dec. 2003	Ms Felice Kiel, NICEM Ms Deirdre Vaugh, Staff Commission
Education & Library Boards/Council for Catholic Maintained Schools/Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education	29/30 Jan. & 12 Feb. 2004	Ms Felice Kiel, NICEM Mrs Linda McGowan, BELB Ms Deirdre Vaugh Staff Commission
Education & Library Boards/Belfast Board/Department of Education	25/26 March, 7 April 2004	Ms Felice Kiel, NICEM Mrs Linda McGowan, BELB

Participants were senior and middle managers and represented a cross section of departments within each of the identified public authorities. As indicated above the training was co-facilitated by trainers from both public authorities and voluntary sector organisations. This was particularly well received by the participants as it gave them the opportunity to experience different approaches and perspectives and was very much in keeping with the partnership ethos of the programme.

### ***Training Materials and Methodology***

The programme's structure includes information, interactive activities, case studies, individual reflection and small and large group discussions. The training methodology is based on a learner centre approach, building on the experiences, skills and knowledge of the participants and rooted in the principles of inter-cultural learning.

Activities were designed to stimulate active participation, discussion and reflective thinking. The training sessions addressed issues and situations relevant to Belfast education sector public authorities. Sectarianism, racism and attitudes towards "race", ethnicity and sexual orientation were particular areas of focus. The participants were given information about UK and European legislation and equality legislation specific to Northern Ireland.

Concepts of diversity, equality, discrimination, multiple discrimination and anti-discrimination were examined in detail in order to give the participants an opportunity to exchange views and perceptions and to reflect on the meanings of these concepts in the context of their professional roles and responsibilities.

Each participant was given a participant's workbook and a participant's information booklet containing fact sheets, theoretical input, information about legislation and a glossary of terms.

### ***Evaluation Feedback***

Evaluation of the sessions was conducted through evaluation exercises, evaluation forms and group discussions.

Feedback from the participants was very positive. The general consensus was that the training sessions were stimulating, informative, useful and well facilitated. Participants found the emphasis on interactive and experiential learning conducive to an open and stimulating exchange of ideas.

Although many of the participants had previously attended equality training sessions, they felt that because the Diversity and Anti-discrimination in Action programme went beyond the examination of existing legislation, they were able to gain a greater awareness and deeper understanding of issues linked to multiple discrimination, equality and diversity. As a result, they felt better equipped to deal with these issues in the context of their roles and responsibilities as managers.

### ***European Roundtable for Public Authorities, Brussels, 7-8 June 2004***

The Boards/Staff Commission will input to this event which has been organised to explore the effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of the models developed in Belfast and Berlin. A parallel aim of the project is to produce a training manual which can be used by local authorities across Europe to develop their own programmes adapted to the local situation and needs.

### **Joint Consultative Forum**

One of the key issues to emerge from all of the action planning exercises on Day 3 of the training programme; and from the focus group meetings with the community/voluntary sector was the need to improve consultative arrangements between the education and community/voluntary sectors.

As a first step, focus group meetings were held with the education sector, namely the Department of Education, Education and Library Boards, Staff Commission, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Youth Council and Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and with the community and voluntary sector. These meetings were used to discuss experiences of consultation to date and to establish the level of support for such a forum. They were also used to consider the terms of reference/expectations for such a forum to discuss how to ensure the forum is representative, to consider how best to communicate with groups who did not attend the meetings and to explore how to develop and implement a programme of work.

As a result of this preliminary work, it was agreed that the initial meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum should be used to gain a better understanding of our respective roles and an insight into some of the issues which consultees believe should form part of the 'mainstreaming' agenda. It will also be used to establish structures for the forum to identify agenda items for future meetings.