

# MINUTES OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM FOR THE EDUCATION SECTOR HELD IN ARMAGH TEACHERS' CENTRE AND LIBRARY HEADQUARTERS, ON THURSDAY, 26 MAY 2005

## Present:

### Community & Voluntary Sector

Ms Tansy Hutchinson	NICEM (Joint Chair)
Mrs Terry Deehan	NICEM
Rev. Ian Ellis	Church of Ireland
Mr Daniel Holder	Animate Project
Mr Joe Lenaghan	National Consultative Committee on Racism & Interculturalism (NCCRI)
Dr David McConnell	Age Concern
Ms Hazel Murphy	N C C R I
Mr David Simpson	Save the Children

### Trade Unions

Mr Mike Graves	Ulster Teachers' Union
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### Equality Authorities

Ms Brenda Campbell	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Mr Ron Keegan	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Ms Joan McAllister	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

### Public Authorities

Mr John Curran	Inter-Board Services Manager (Joint Chair)
Mr Alf Armstrong	Equality and Human Rights Officer, N E E L B
Mrs Anne Bennett	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
Mr Jeff Brown	Department of Education
Mr David Gibson	Department of Education
Mr David Guilfoyle	Director, Youth Council
Mr Terry Heron	Chief Finance Officer, S E L B
Mrs Sharon Lawlor	Department of Education
Ms Helen Leith	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Mrs Linda McGowan	Equalities Manager, B E L B
Mrs Maura Murphy	Equalities Manager, S E L B
Mrs H Osborn	Chief Librarian, W E L B
Mr Arthur Rainey	Chief Administrative Officer, W E L B
Mrs Caroline Stewart	Senior Legal Advisor, Education & Library Boards' Solicitors
Mr Nathan Todd	Senior Education Officer, B E L B
Ms Deirdre Vaughn	Senior Principal Officer, Staff Commission (Secretary)
Mrs Mary Yarr	Languages Advisor, S E L B

## 1. Welcome and Introduction

Tansy Hutchinson (Joint Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum (the Forum). She briefly explained that the Forum provided an opportunity for the community, voluntary, trade unions and education sectors to work in partnership and said that the timings of Forum meetings, one in May and one in September, was to enable consultees to be appraised of the public authorities' Annual Progress Report on the implementation of their Statutory Duties.

## **2. Opening Address**

John Curran (Joint Chair) said that Mrs Moira Alexander had asked him to convey her sincere apologies that she was unable to attend the Forum meeting as she, together with the other Board Chairs and Chief Executives had been invited to meet the new Minister of Education that afternoon. John referred to Dame Joan Harbison's comments at the inaugural meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum when she endorsed this collaborative initiative and commended the value of the 'joined up' approach and authorities consulting in advance of writing policies. He said that *the public authorities* were ready and receptive to members' views and receptive to the consultation process which although was not always an easy process was essential to listen to the people we provide services for.

## **3. Minutes of the meetings held on 30 September 2004 and 22 March 2005**

On a proposal from Helen Leith and seconded by Mike Graves the minutes of the meetings held on 30 September 2004 and 22 March 2005 were agreed as an accurate record.

## **4. Department of Education's 'Equality Scheme - Revised Policy Screening and Timetable' - Consultation document**

Tansy Hutchinson welcomed Sharon Lawlor, Head of the Department of Education's Equality Unit and Jeff Brown and invited them to present to the meeting the Department's Equality Scheme and Revised Policy Screening Timetable.

Jeff explained that progress on the implementation of their Equality Scheme was good overall. However, progress in the completion of equality impact assessments was slow. He said that a large number of EQIAs (30), had been timetabled and this of itself had raised questions about the initial screening process and whether it had been sufficiently robust. A re-screen exercise had been undertaken and the consultation documents issued in March 2005 detailed the conclusions of that exercise. It had reduced the number of policies for EQIA from 30 to 12, 14 in total given that two were currently underway.

He encouraged consultee groups to respond to the consultation document and confirmed that late submissions would be accepted. He said that the next stage of the process would be to analyse the responses received, meet with his colleagues in the Department of Education and confirm the new revised timetable.

In response to a query Sharon confirmed that they would consult on each policy being developed and/or 'screened in' and would decide on the best type of consultation i.e. possibly the use of focus groups. Sharon then invited questions from the floor. The following issues were raised:-

- a number of the consultee groups questioned why a major policy decision had been taken before a policy had been consulted on, namely the new funding arrangements for English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Sharon explained that there were three elements to the funding arrangements:

Firstly, money which goes to the Boards' centrally held resource allocation to schools, the main funding of which goes to pay for EAL support provided by the Boards. She said that the

Department did not want the Boards to cut this money as the numbers wishing to avail of this service had increased by 33% and was likely to keep increasing;

Secondly, in addition the Department had earmarked executive funds of £420,000 which goes to the Boards. She said that the Department realised that this money needed to be increased and said that a bid would be made for this;

Thirdly, the Common Funding Formula (CFF) which replaces the different funding arrangements and said that no reduction had been made to this money.

Sharon said that the decision to look at funding of EAL services had been brought about because of overspend problems. She said that she had written to the Boards on the 14 April 2005 asking that Section 75 duties be considered in any proposed changes to services and in particular in relation to decisions on EAL services. She reported that the Boards had responded to her letter but had not addressed the issue of the cuts in the EAL service, however, she said that one Board had later written to say that it was cutting EAL services by £144,000. She pointed out that the Department had not reduced the funding and the £864 per pupil was seen as supplementary money. She advised consultees that there was an Overspend Advisory Team which she had written to indicating that equality considerations had to be addressed by the Boards when taking decisions on service delivery.

She referred to the PricewaterhouseCoopers research on EAL services in Boards which the Department had commissioned and said that this was only one information source. She said that the Department hoped to set up focus groups to help develop the EAL policy. Sharon said that there were a number of inaccuracies in the research document however, she confirmed that it would be published in due course.

Terry Herron (Chief Finance Officer - SELB) said that he disagreed with what the Department had said in relation to funding and questioned if it was correct to say that EAL money included in the CFF was additional money. Terry said that he had never seen this written down. He said that the money was a transfer from centrally allocated resource money to school and that the £864 per pupil had transferred from previously centrally held resources to schools. He pointed out that previously the Boards had provided teachers for EAL but with the introduction of the new CFF this would no longer be the case. Boards would hold some funding at the centre to deal with pupils arriving after the census date, however, from 1 April 2005 schools have delegated budget funding to provide teaching for EAL.

John Curran said that there was clearly a difference of viewpoint and that it was of paramount importance to clarify the position.

- Joe Leneghan (NCCRI) said that it was his understanding that in relation to the EQIA of the CFF adverse impact had been found in regard to racial groups and reference was made to the EAL service as a consequence. He enquired what arrangements were being made to monitor the CFF funding and revise the policy if unanticipated adverse impact was found.

Jeff Brown said that he was aware that the Department did intend to monitor the CFF and that a review was planned.

Following detailed discussion in which consultee groups asked that the Department of Education's formulation of a draft EAL policy be allocated a high priority the following action was agreed:

- a) that the Department and the Boards would meet as a matter of urgency to clarify the position in regard to funding. Sharon Lawlor undertook to take this request back to the Department and Terry Heron undertook to act as the contact for the Boards.
- b) a meeting would be held with affected groups thereafter to clarify and discuss arrangements for EAL support.
- c) that this item be kept on the Forum's agenda and that the Steering Group be used as a mechanism to follow up on progress.

Discussion took place on the Department's consultation strategy for its revised policy screening and timetable. The Secretary reported that she had received an email in regard to this matter. In it Mairead McCafferty, CoSO, stated that the dissemination of information/document is not consultation. The Department indicated that it had issued the document to 500 consultees, publicly advertised its availability and placed it on the website. Whilst it had not set up separate consultation meetings it would be happy to facilitate meetings if consultees so wished, however, it was pointed out that different consultation methods would be used for different policies and they were satisfied this was appropriate..

## **5. Cuts in Public Expenditure Impact on Service Delivery**

John Curran explained that the Boards were at final draft stage in the preparation of a consultation paper in respect of the Boards' Resource Allocation Plans for the period April 2005 – March 2006. He said that Part I of the paper provided background information in respect of the Department funded part of the budget (90% of the Boards' total grant funding); the spending on schools and on central services in support of school; and summarised the current position in regard the 2005/06 financial year. A report on the findings of the screening exercise was included as Part II.

It was agreed that the consultation paper be issued as soon as practical with a footnote added at the section dealing with EAL to indicate that there was a difference of viewpoint between the Boards and the Department in relation to funding provision and that the Boards and the Department would meet to clarify the position.

It was noted that the paper would be available on the Southern Education and Library Board's website at [www.selb.org](http://www.selb.org).

The Secretary asked consultees for their support in responding to the document as quickly as possible. Due to the nature of the document, the tight timeframe within which decisions had to be made, the normal two month consultation period had to be reduced. She said that contact would be made with umbrella groups to arrange consultation meetings and asked for their co-operation.

David McConnell (Age Concern) enquired whether the Department had considered the equality implications in the funding allocation provided to the Boards. It was noted that the Department was allocated money from the Northern Ireland Block Grant and that this was the responsibility of the Treasury.

Daniel Holder (Animate Project) raised the issue of how NISRA assessed the increase in population by using G P registration and said that this system was ineffective and unreliable and he pointed out that Boards in rural areas were being 'short changed'.

Tansy Hutchinson said that the community and voluntary sector had ongoing concerns with regard to the Northern Ireland Block Grant in that the policy had not been equality impact assessed. She said that when the issue had been raised with Department of Finance and Personnel they were told that each Department, when putting in a Departmental bid, was expected to consider equality obligations. She said that she believed that this went back to how the Department of Education considered the equality impact of its decision making process in relation to the allocation of resources and said that at some point equality considerations should have been identified in terms of the resource allocations. Tansy then asked if this was an issue that the Forum could raise - how Section 75 was compiled with.

David Guilfoyle (Chief Executive - Youth Council for Northern Ireland) said that he wished to raise an issue which had a definite impact on young people in Northern Ireland which was 'Executive Programme Funds'. This funding was due to cease next year. He said that excellent work supporting voluntary groups was being done but he was fearful that their funds would cease and asked the Forum to raise this issue so that the work of the various projects would not grind to a halt. He stressed the need for voluntary organisations to get as much notice as possible of funding in order that their staff would not have to be put on protective notice which was frequently the case.

Following discussion it was agreed that the Steering Group would take this issue on board.

## **6. Section 75, Northern Ireland Act, 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Progress Report**

The Department of Education, five Education and Library Boards, CCEA, CCMS, Youth Council and the Staff Commission all provided a broad overview on the implementation of their equality schemes for the period April 2004 - March 2005.

Members noted that their Annual Reports would be submitted to the Equality Commission by the 31 July 2005 and thereafter would be available on each authority's website.

It was agreed that the information provided would be used to update the Overview Paper on the implementation of Education Authorities' Equality Schemes. This paper is available on the Staff Commission's website at [www.staffcom.org.uk](http://www.staffcom.org.uk).

## **7. Report of the Steering Group**

The Secretary provided the following report on the Steering Group's Programme of work:-

### **Quarterly Updates**

To date three quarterly updates have been issued providing information on the various Joint Consultative Forum and Steering Group agenda items. Feedback on the updates has been positive.

### **Review Religious Education**

The Department of Education has been asked to move forward the EQIA scheduled for 2005/06 on the 'Revised Religious Education and Core Syllabus'. Issues raised by the Jewish Community are being pursued by the Steering Group e.g. availability of examinations in Jewish Religious Education.

Tansy Hutchinson raised the issue of the teaching of different languages within the school syllabus (Arabic, Urdu, Hebrew etc.) and the availability of GCSE examinations for children in Northern Ireland.

It was agreed that this issue would be followed up by the Steering Group.

### **Role of “Informal” Accredited Education within the System**

A meeting has taken place between the Women’s Support Network and the Association of NI Colleges to discuss the above matter. A major review is on-going of the Women’s Sector to consider what the future infra structure should be. A key question for the sector is how to release funding for education support services and training provided outside the national qualification route but which provides considerable benefit to the further and higher education sectors.

Patricia Haren (Women’s Support Network) had agreed to report back to the Steering Group on progress made.

### **Anti Bullying Strategy**

A number of Section 75 groups have requested clarification on whether policies in schools to combat bullying specifically refer to the equality categories. Information to be provided at the next meeting.

### **School Meals Service**

Special dietary requirements on ethnic or medical grounds are accommodated through the School Meals Service provided that these needs are made known to the Principal/School. The development of a user friendly leaflet in various languages is being explored to inform parents of the notification arrangements for specific dietary requirements to be met.

### **Research Report**

The Steering Group is seeking to track the progress being made in the implementation of the research reports:

- Count Me In
- Shout

Sharon Lawlor, Department of Education reported that Department officials had recently met to discuss the appointment of a taskforce which was one of the recommendations contained in the Short Report.

The Secretary reported that all Forum documentation was available on the Staff Commission’s website at [www.staffcom.org.uk](http://www.staffcom.org.uk).

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum was scheduled to take place on Thursday 13 October 2005 at the Ulidia Resource Centre, Ormeau Road, Belfast at 2.00 p.m.