

MINUTES OF THE FOURTH MEETING OF THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM FOR THE EDUCATION SECTOR HELD IN ANTRIM BOARD CENTRE, ON WEDNESDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2005

Present:

Community & Voluntary Sector

Ms Tansy Hutchinson	NICEM (Joint Chair)
Ms Terry Deegan	NICEM
Ms Siobhan McKeating	Women's Support Network
Ms Rosemary Rainey	Women's Forum Northern Ireland
Mr David Simpson	Save the Children
Mr P A Maglochlain	N I Gay Rights Association
Ms Anne Marie O'Kane	Disability Action
Dr Paschal McKeown	MENCAP
Ms Paula McIlwaine	N I Council for Integrated Education

Trade Unions

Ms Carol Adair	Association of Educational Psychologists
Mr Sean Maguire	Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts
Mr Seamus Searson	NASUWT

Equality Authorities

Ms Brenda Campbell	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Ms Grainne Long	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Public Authorities

Mr John Curran	Inter-Board Services Manager (Joint Chair)
Ms Helen Leith	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Mrs Linda McGowan	Equalities Manager, B E L B
Mr Robin Harper	Chief Administrative Officer, N E E L B
Mr Nicky McBride	Assistant Senior Education Officer, S E E & L B
Mr Terry Heron	Chief Finance Officer, S E & L B
Ms Deirdre Vaughn	Senior Principal Officer, Staff Commission (Secretary)
Ms Anne Perry	CCEA
Mr Alf Armstrong	Equalities and Human Rights Officer, N E E L B
Ms Catriona Campbell	Queen's University, Belfast
Ms Sharon Lawlor	Department of Education

Welcome and Introduction

Mr Robin Harper, Chief Administrative Officer – N E E & L B, welcomed everyone to the Antrim Board Centre and said that groups such as the Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) would help the education sector in its commitment to equality of opportunity and he wished the Forum success in its endeavours.

The Joint Chairs also welcomed members to the meeting.

- 1. Apologies**
The list of apologies was noted.
- 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2005**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on the 26 May 2005 were agreed.
- 2.2 On a point of clarification regarding whether action was required by the Forum in relation to the third line of the fourth paragraph on page 4 in which CoSO had stated 'that the dissemination of information is not consultation' it was noted that the Forum was there to identify issues and share information and was not a vehicle to resolve issues, this was a matter for the individual parties to follow up.

3. Five Year Review

- 3.1 Tansy drew attention to the requirement for Public Authorities covered by Section 75 to conduct a 5 year review of their Equality Schemes and she asked Deirdre to provide members with an up date on the Boards/Staff Commission's review.
- 3.2 Deirdre informed members that the Boards/Staff Commission had met to consider the Equality Commission's guidance on the 5 year review which had recently been issued. She said that a programme of work had been set in place to enable the Boards/Staff Commission to prepare a core document which Boards could tailor to their individual needs before submission to the Equality Commission. She explained that due to the tight timeframe the Boards/Staff Commission felt that this was the best way to proceed.

Deirdre stated that a further meeting had been arranged to consider a first draft which would provide an overview of the key areas of the Boards/Staff Commission's equality schemes. She said that the draft would outline what had been achieved during the 5 years, address what still needed to be done, what the challenges were and how they had been overcome. Deirdre then referred to the Equality Commission's reporting template and said that this would be completed as an appendix. She said that she wished to ask members how they saw the role of the Forum in relation to the review to enable more collaboration between the education bodies and to prevent overloading the community and voluntary sector and ensure the effectiveness of the review.

Deirdre also reported that the Boards/Staff Commission were in the process of developing two questionnaires, one for consultees who had not engaged to seek their views on the reasons why and asking whether they wished to remain on our consultee list.

The second questionnaire would be circulated to consultees who had engaged with the Boards/Staff Commission to thank them for their help and to elicit information from them on their experience of working with us. She said that due to the tight timeframe the Boards/Staff Commission would make the core document available to consultees to facilitate feedback.

Deirdre suggested that if the community and voluntary sector were agreeable that a date be scheduled in January to collaborately get together to discuss the draft and any issues which emerged.

It was noted that even if a public authority did not have to complete its report until May/June they could participate in the event to inform the review process.

- 3.3 Paschal McKeown (MENCAP) agreed that this was a sensible approach and suggested that contact be made with those affected by the policies.

- 3.4** Grainne Long (Equality Commission) reported that the Equality Commission was presently hosting a series of events for public authorities in relation to the 5 year review and that concerns had been raised in relation to the fact that the Equality Commission's guidance had not been published until October. She pointed out that it was a statutory requirement that public authorities submit their five year reviews by the set date, however she said that over the next few weeks she would be contacting public authorities whose review date was before the 12 April to discuss the practicalities of allowing some flexibility in terms of the submission of the template.
- 3.5** Following discussion it was agreed to use the Forum as a mechanism to enable collaboration on the review. It was also agreed that the officers would contact members with a view to holding an event during January 2006.

4. Presentations by Education and Library Boards

4.1 Sharing of Services.

4.1.1 John Curran (Joint Chair) reported that the Boards shared a wide range of services such as:-

- Regional Training Unit
- Legal Service
- Inter-Board Services Unit
- Negotiating machinery for non-teaching staff
- Negotiating machinery for teaching staff
- Student Support
- ELFNI
- Payroll system common to all Boards
- Finance system common to all Boards
- Manhattan Project – five Board estate management project

He said that the sharing of services was driven by the Boards' financial difficulties and that the Belfast and South Eastern Boards and the Western and Southern Boards were working collaboratively in a number of areas. He indicated that while there were a number of views on how best to take forward further collaboration it was expected that over the next few months greater clarification on the way forward, post the Review announcement, would be available.

John said that he had had discussions with the Deputy Permanent Secretary who had said that there would be radical changes in education in Northern Ireland. John said that it was envisaged that the new Education Authority would have a budget of around £1.3 billion and approximately 80,000 staff and said that the legislation for education would require to be redrafted

4.1.2 Tansy highlighted that the Review of Public Administration (RPA) had been carried out without an EQIA being conducted, however, she pointed out that under the Department's Equality Scheme the redrafting of legislation would mean policy change and she asked the representatives from the Equality Commission if the Equality Commission had a view in relation to how Section 75 would be applied.

4.1.3 Grainne said that the Equality Commission was currently holding internal discussions in relation to what its role was in terms of the RPA process and would be looking in the medium term to provide guidance.

4.1.4 Following discussion it was agreed that a senior official from the Department should be invited to the next meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum to discuss the implications of the Review for the education sector.

4.2 **Boards' Current Financial State and Projected Financial Position**

4.2.1 Terry Heron (Chief Finance Officer – SELB) provided the Forum with a brief overview of the Boards' current financial state and projected financial position. He emphasised that although the presentation was based on the Southern Boards' figures the situation was similar across the five Boards.

In his presentation he explained the importance of consultees responding to the Northern Ireland Draft Priorities and Budget consultation for 2006 – 08 the closing date for which was the 5 December 2005. He also highlighted the following key points and said that he was interested to obtain views on high priority areas:-

- The real increase for libraries in the Southern Board area and its impact
- Indicative D E budgets 2006/07
- Like for like increase for SELB schools
- Real increase for SELB schools
- Like for like increase for SELB services for schools
- Real increase for services for schools
- High priority areas
- The breakdown of ELB services for schools

He highlighted that the Department had provided some earmarked funding for special education and said that he would expect that Boards would receive some additional funding for SENDO.

In summarising the position Terry said that on top of the £30m cuts imposed on school services in the current financial year, based on the indicative budgets figures, cuts in school and library services would be required in 2006/07.

4.2.2 Sharon Lawlor (Department of Education) indicated that approximately 63% of children who were statemented were now in mainstream education.

4.2.3 Terry said that the Southern Board had the highest percentage of statemented children in mainstream schools. He highlighted the problems for teachers who may have to manage three/four classroom assistants. He said that teachers would prefer that rather than being given a new classroom assistant for each statemented child that additional hours be given to their classroom assistant. He said that this would provide a fairer service at less cost.

4.2.4 Tansy thanked Terry for his extremely useful presentation, she pointed out that she did not feel it was the community and voluntary sector's role to put forward suggestions where cuts should be made and she urged the Boards to ensure that where cuts did happen that they did not hit the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in society.

5. **Anti-Bullying Policies in Schools**

5.1 **Department of Education Research into Nature and Extent of Bullying in Northern Ireland Schools – Presentation by Gerry McAlleavy (University of Ulster)**

5.1.1 Gerry provided an overview of the research on bullying in schools conducted in 2002 and said that the current research into the nature and extent of bullying in Northern Ireland

schools replicated the earlier research with a number of changes. In his presentation Gerry said that the Department had asked that the research pay particular attention to the Section 75 categories and he provided information on:-

- Definitions of bullying
- Types of bullying
- Forms of bullying
- Where bullying takes place
- Participant's role in the research
- Methodology of the research

5.2 Anti-Bullying Forum's Initial Three Year Strategy - Presentation by David Simpson (Save the Children)

5.2.1 David outlined for members the background to the formation of the Anti-Bullying Forum, its vision and mission statement. He also provided information on:-

- The Forum's membership
- its overall aims
- Its key strategy elements for 2005 - 06 and 2006 - 08

He emphasised that work would be carried out by organisations on an individual basis and that this work would be helped and co-ordinated by the existence of the Forum.

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

- If any situations had come to light whereby teachers were found to condone or collude in the bullying of children because of the child's disability, race or sexual orientation;
- Situations where teachers were hostile to children because of the child's perceived sexual orientation;
- Evidence of teachers being hostile to children from the travelling community;
- The importance of schools having anti-bullying policies which covered all equality categories and was inclusive;
- The research conducted in 2002 had shown a number of female teachers being bullied by other staff in the school;
- Attitudes of school governors who have a certain say in the ethos of the school and teachers' careers;
- Link between homophobia and suicides among young children

It was noted that teachers would not be covered under the current research and that it was intended that the research would be used by a number of Departments within the Department of Education.

On a point of information Helen Leith (CCMS) undertook to ascertain information from the Education Advisers in CCMS on the religious education module which dealt with harassment and bullying.

5.2.2 Tansy thanked Gerry and David for their excellent presentations.

6. Revision of Religious Education Core Syllabus

6.1 Tansy reported that the Department had indicated at the last Steering Group meeting that consultations on the above EQIA would commence in the near future and she asked Sharon to provide an update for members.

6.2 Sharon reported that the twelve week consultation process would commence in January 2006. She said that this would include an online 'child friendly' format which would involve NICCY and also a questionnaire survey which was currently being finalised.

6.3 Tansy thanked Sharon for the update.

7. Report from the Steering Group

7.1 Deirdre reported that to date five quarterly updates had been sent to Forum members providing an update on:-

- The Boards' Resource Allocation Plans for 2005/2006
- Boards' Shared Services and the Impact on Falling Pupil Numbers
- Department of Education's Revised Policy Screening and Timetable
- Anti-Bullying Strategy
- English as an Additional Language

7.2 With regard to English as an Additional Language Sharon indicated that a further £150,000 would be going to Boards towards services in schools and said that the Department was directly consulting teachers in the five Board areas and would be issuing a tender document seeking to employ an organisation to assist it in the consultation process in consulting parents and children from ethnic minorities.

Local People Global Faiths – Sikhs, Jews and Hindus in Northern Ireland

7.3 Tansy drew attention to a new publication designed for Key Stage 3 Religious Education students. She said it was the first of a pair of textbooks designed to introduce young people to some of the major world religions and their presence in Northern Ireland.

8. Other Relevant Business

8.1 Tansy said that she had been asked by Anne Moore (NICVA) to raise the following two questions:-

- What progress has been made in relation to the Department's screening decisions and if there was any feedback on the results of the consultation exercise.

Sharon indicated that due to severe resource problems it was unlikely that the timetable would be available much before Christmas. She said that notification of its availability would be placed in the press and on the website and contact would be made directly with consultees who had responded to the earlier consultation.

- Have there been any developments in relation to the new admission arrangements for post primary schools?

Sharon undertook to provide an update on the new admission arrangements through Deirdre.

8.2 Research into Identifying Best Practice in Promoting Equality in Schools

8.2.1 Tansy invited Catriona Campbell to provide an overview of the research project which she was involved in on the mainstreaming of equality objectives in schools in Northern Ireland.

8.2.2 Catriona said that the National Foundation for Educational Research Centre (NFER) at Queens had been commissioned by the Equality Commission to undertake a research project to identify a range of workable and realisable options to further equality in schools in Northern Ireland. She said that there were two parts to the research. The first was a mapping exercise to look at best practice in promoting equality in schools and the second was to undertake a public consultation exercise to get views on the best ways to mainstream equality in schools. Catriona indicated that further information was available on the website at www.qub.ac.uk/nfer/research_project_outlines/project_outline_ecni.htm

8.2.3 Deirdre undertook to highlight the research project in the next quarterly update.

This concluded the business.