

**SECTION 75, NORTHERN IRELAND ACT 1998
(THE EQUALITY DUTIES)**

STAFF COMMISSION FOR EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS

**Annual Report
1 April 2007 - 31 March 2008**

June 2008

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Context	2
Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Equality Duties	2
Section 2: Screening	3
Section 3: Equality Impact Assessments	3
Section 4: Training	4
Section 5: Communication	5
Section 6: Data Collection and Analysis	6
Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services	6
Section 8: Complaints	6
Section 9: Consultation and Engagement	6
Section 10: The Good Relations Duty	7
Section 11: Additional Comments	8
Appendix 1 New Disability Duties - Summary Progress Report	11

This information can also be made available, on request, in alternative formats including in large print, on computer disc, by email, in Braille, on audio-cassette and in minority languages to meet the needs of those people who are not fluent in English. The document is also available on the Staff Commission's website at www.staffcom.org.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards (the Staff Commission) completed a formal review of its Equality Scheme in 2006 to evaluate its effectiveness in meeting its statutory duties. Arising from this review an inter-Board/Staff Commission action plan was developed to facilitate the continued implementation of the Scheme in the period leading up to the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority, April 2009.

This Annual Report records the activities undertaken by the Staff Commission in furtherance of its equality obligations. It covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.

Key Developments

- Equality input to the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team (ESAIT) and the Northern Ireland Library Authority Implementation Team (NILAIT), Review of Public Administration, Human Resources Project Work. (Paragraph 11(a) refers).
- Paper drafted on the requirements for ESA and NILA in relation to Part VII of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 with regard to employment monitoring and Article 55 reviews. (Paragraphs 6 and 11(a) refers).
- Questionnaires and Information Pack compiled on an inter-Board/CCMS/Staff Commission basis to facilitate a pilot exercise on the experiences of children and young people with disabilities of the school system. (Paragraph 11(b) refers).
- Major seminar organised under the auspices of the Joint Consultative Forum on the Review of Public Administration. (Paragraph 9 refers).
- On-going EQIAs completed to Stage 4 of the process. (Paragraph 3 refers).

Main Activities Planned

- Review overall equality strategy to help inform the development of:
 - Equality Scheme;
 - Good Relations Strategy; and
 - Disability Action Plan;for the new Education and Skills Authority and the Northern Ireland Library Authority.

INTRODUCTION

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ('the Act') requires public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. The Staff Commission is fully committed to the fulfilment of the Section 75 obligations imposed by the Act and its Equality Scheme approved by the Equality Commission. This Annual Report which records the activities undertaken by the Staff Commission in furtherance of its equality obligations covers the period 1 April 2007 - 31 March 2008.

CONTEXT

Review of Public Administration

On 22 November 2005, following the Review of Public Administration (RPA), Government announced details for the rationalisation and modernisation of the present Local Government, Health Bodies and Education administration structures. The key proposal for Education was the formation of a new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and a new Northern Ireland Library Authority (NILA). Initially it was planned that these bodies would be established by 1 April 2008. This was subsequently changed to 1 April 2009.

The outcomes of the RPA have had a major impact on the Staff Commission's work, with its main priority being to contribute to a number of work teams which have been created to take forward the work on the establishment of ESA and NILA. A report on this work and, in particular, the equality aspects is contained at Section 11.

New Disability Duties

Last year it was reported that because of the exceptional circumstances arising as a result of RPA the Equality Commission had granted an exemption to the Commission from the requirements to produce a disability action plan. The Commission is still subject to the general duty to have due regard to the need to fulfil the above duties when carrying out its functions. Under the terms of this exemption the Commission undertook to implement a programme of work and to submit to the Equality Commission a report on progress made in fulfilling these duties. The Commission's second progress report is contained at Appendix 1 of this document.

SECTION 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Equality Duties

The Chief Executive has a personal responsibility to the Staff Commission, as far as practicable, to ensure that the Commission fully complies with its Equality Scheme. Each member of staff is personally responsible to the Chief Executive for ensuring, as far as practicable, that he/she fully complies with the Scheme. Operational responsibility for the implementation of the Scheme rests with the Staff Commission's Senior Principal Officer (Equality).

The following arrangements have operated during the year:

- objectives and targets relating to the statutory equality duties have been mainstreamed into strategic and business plans and performance targets for relevant staff;
- an inter-Board/Staff Commission partnership arrangement on the implementation of our Equality Schemes has continued;
- progress reports on the implementation of the equality schemes are provided to each meeting of the Commission; and
- equality is a standard item at staff meetings.

SECTION 2: Screening

No new Commission policies were developed during this period.

The Commission in partnership with the Boards, drafted, issued for consultation and analysed feedback on the inter-Board Annual Supplementary Report on the screening of new inter and/or intra Board policies screened during the period April 2006 - March 2007.

SECTION 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

Job Evaluation Schemes

The remaining EQIA on the Commission's timetable is on the 'Implementation of the Job Evaluation Schemes'. It is being conducted on a joint basis with the five Education and Library Boards. During the year the EQIA was issued for consultation. At the time of writing this report a series of consultation events was being organised.

The original timeframe for the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority was such that it was unlikely that the Boards/Staff Commission would have an opportunity to implement the findings of this EQIA. This position is being kept under review.

Registration and Grant Aid Schemes

Assistance has been provided to the Boards on the completion of the inter-Board EQIA 'Registration and Grant Aid Schemes for Local Voluntary Youth Groups'. The publication of this EQIA generated considerable interest with 100+ written responses being received at the pre consultation stage and around 39 during the formal consultation stage. The draft report on the findings of the EQIA is currently being considered by the Boards.

At this stage there are no new EQIAs scheduled to commence during the period April 2008 - March 2009.

SECTION 4: Training

All staff and members have been provided with training to enable their participation in the implementation of the Commission's Equality Scheme.

This year the aim was to ensure that staff remained up to date with the developing equality agenda and that awareness was raised on mainstreaming equality into a change management process. In this context staff attended courses and conferences during the year as follows:

Patricia Weir
Chief Executive

Chief Executives' Forum -
Championing Women Conference - 25 January 2008

Deirdre Vaughn
Senior Principal Officer

Local Government Staff Commission -
Building Capacity for Change - 22 May 2007

Equality Commission -
Roundtable - Promotion of Traveller Issues - 19 June 2007

East Tyrone College -
Skills Beyond Forum - 6 September 2007

Equality Commission -
Consultation on Unified Guide - 10 September 2007

Equality Commission -
Annual Conference - 23 October 2007

Cross Border Education Workshop -
17 January 2008

Equality Commission -
Good Harmonious Working Environment - Roundtable
Event - 26 February 2008

Patricia Murray
Project Officer

Equality Commission -
Developing a Disability Action Plan Seminar - 4 May 2007

Local Government Staff Commission -
Building Capacity for Change - 22 May 2007

Animate -
Research Seminar - Issues facing Migrant Workers and
their Families in Northern Ireland - 19 June 2007

Diversity Works -
Diversity Management Seminar - 21 June 2007

NICEM -
A Shared Future of Race Relations: From Europe to
Northern Ireland - European Integration Policy and
Practice: Principles, Models and Methods - 2 July 2007

Age Concern -
Annual General Meeting - 3 October 2007

National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women
Teachers -
Tackling Prejudice-related Bullying - 20 November 2007

Community Relations Council/University of Ulster -
The Values of Equality, Diversity and Inter-dependence
and the Practice of Good Relations – 17 – 18 January
2008

Grainne McClean
Senior Executive Officer

Employers' Forum on Disability (NI) -
Disability Awareness Seminar - 19 June 2007

Suzanne Briggs
Executive Officer

Employers' Forum on Disability (NI) -
Disability Awareness Seminar - 5 March 2008

Belfast Metropolitan College -
Stage III Sign Language - September 2007 - June 2008

SECTION 5: Communication

Internal

The methods used to communicate progress internally on the implementation of the Staff Commission's Equality Scheme are outlined at Section 1.

External

A range of methods was used to communicate with trade unions, the community and voluntary sector and Section 75 groups. They included:

- progress reports to each meeting of the Joint Negotiating Council and Executive Committee on the implementation of the Boards'/Staff Commission's Equality Schemes;
- Reports on progress to the Joint Consultative Forum and those on our Equality Scheme lists;
- face-to-face contacts through consultation events; and
- information published on the Staff Commission's website.

The impact/success of this approach has been positive. The community/voluntary and trade union sectors have acknowledged that it has allowed them to actively participate in the implementation of our Equality Scheme.

SECTION 6: Data Collection and Analysis

Transfer of Employment Monitoring Data

ESA, when established, will be the largest employer in Northern Ireland. The transfer of employment monitoring data for around 30,000 staff from 12 organisations will require careful planning to enable ESA to complete its annual monitoring return. A paper has been prepared, in consultation with the legacy organisations and the Equality Commission, on the requirements of ESA and NILA under Part VII of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998. (Paragraph 11 refers).

Data Requirements and Data Collection

As part of its IT procurement cycle, NILA organised a series of workshops to develop a Statement of User Requirements (SOUR) for an Integrated Finance and HR/Payroll system. The Commission contributed to the SOUR for the HR system. It highlighted the importance of developing a system capable of collecting employment monitoring data for employees and applicants which would enable NILA to meet its requirements in terms of policy review and analysis under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

SECTION 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

The Commission has in place arrangements to ensure that information is available on request in alternative formats. A member of staff has completed the course British Sign Language Level II - Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People. The recommendations arising from an accessibility audit have been fully implemented.

As a result of outreach work with disability groups, the number of people with disabilities participating in, for example the Joint Consultative Forum, has increased substantially. Requests for information in alternative formats e.g. Braille, have been met, together with other specific requests for assistance.

SECTION 8: Complaints

There were no Section 75 related complaints during the year under review.

SECTION 9: Consultation and Engagement

The Boards/Commission have an agreed strategy in place to facilitate individuals and groups affected by existing or proposed policies to engage in the decision making process. Consultation events were organised on the new Disability Duties, equality impact assessments and the impact of the review of public administration. Two major events are highlighted below.

New Disability Duties

In June 2007 the Staff Commission/Boards organised a consultation event in partnership with Disability Action/Mencap. It was attended by a number of groups representing people with disabilities. Its primary purpose was to have a targeted consultation event on the Staff Commission's/Boards' proposals for implementing the new Disability Duties in advance of a discussion at the JCF. The event was very successful; more information is contained at Appendix 1.

Joint Consultative Forum (JCF)

The Joint Consultative Forum, established by the Boards/Commission in partnership with NICEM, is an important lynchpin in ensuring effective engagement with the community, voluntary and trade union sectors. Indeed, it adds considerable value, due to the diversity of the group, to engagements and consultations. The primary item of business continued to be the implications of the Review of Public Administration on the education sector. For this reason during the year the Joint Consultative Forum organised a major seminar on the Review of Public Administration 'Education'. It took place on 18 October 2007 at Lisburn Civic Centre, attended by sixty participants. The Minister had originally agreed to address the Forum but unfortunately had been unable to attend due to Assembly business. The agenda included an update on the implementation of the Review of Public Administration from an education perspective; discussion on the review of the effectiveness of Section 75 and outworking of the new Disability Duties. A report of the seminar was compiled and circulated to Forum members, the Department of Education, the Equality Commission and the Public Service Commission. It is available on the Staff Commission's website at www.staffcom.org.uk.

SECTION 10: The Good Relations Duty

Good Relations Strategy

The Boards'/Staff Commission's Good Relations Strategy is cited by the Equality Commission as an example of good practice in its Good Relations Guide.

This year, the Commission participated in a Cross Border Education Workshop organised as part of the process for developing the Cross Border Plan for Social Inclusion. Discussions at the Workshop focussed on Cross Border Educational Co-operation in respect of five educational settings, namely:-

- Care and Pre-Primary Level;
- Primary Level;
- Post Primary Level;
- Third Level;
- Learning Disabilities.

There was consensus that the following actions were required to be taken to promote educational inclusion on a cross border basis:-

- Agree Cross Border framework for Qualifications/Equivalencies;
- Establish a Cross Border Network or base to co-ordinate dissemination of resources/best practice;
- Commission, research, audit and evaluation to:
 - a. identify existing assessment and intervention provision which address social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that result in educational under-achievement at both pre-school and primary level;
 - b. establish the needs of excluded groups with regard to educational provisions;
 - c. identify models of best practice;
 - d. identify models of cost effectiveness;
- Co-ordinate and integrate the community/voluntary sector input to educational provision;
- Develop shared measurable outcomes/benefit measure to establish effectiveness of existing educational provision across the five settings;
- Develop a strategy to focus on/tackle educational under-achievement, illiteracy and educational exclusion; and
- Develop and co-ordinate arrangements in relation to child protection/vetting.

The Commission has nominated its Senior Principal Officer (Equality) to participate in the Cross Border Working Group appointed to take forward this initiative.

SECTION 11: Additional Comments

a) Review of Public Administration - Implementation Process

A key objective of the Commission is to contribute to the development of a Human Resource Equality strategy for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and the Northern Ireland Library Authority (NILA)

This work involved:

- a review of current arrangements for the implementation of Section 75, of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 across the education authorities;
- an equality input to the ESA draft HR Principles and Policies document;
- preliminary work to inform an equality impact assessment of the ESA draft HR Principles and Policies document;
- a review of employment equality policies and procedures across the education authorities;
- drafting a paper to examine the requirement of *Part VII of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998*, as amended with regard to employment monitoring and Article 55 reviews and the issues to be considered in the establishment of both ESA and the NILA to enable them to fulfil these legal obligations. This paper was drafted in consultation with the legacy organisations and the Equality Commission;

- an input to the NILA's IT Support Systems Project aimed at specifying the requirement of an Integrated Finance and HR/Payroll system; and
- guidance on the obligations of the HR Implementation Teams in regard to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

b) Experiences of Children and Young People with Disabilities of the Education System

In June 2007, a consultation event was organised in partnership with Disability Action and Mencap by the Staff Commission and the five Boards. The purpose of the event was to discuss the Staff Commission's/Boards' programme of work arising from the new Disability Duties. A recommendation which emerged from this event was that information should be collected from children and young people with disabilities on their experience of the education system. This was considered and it was agreed to move this proposal forward on a partnership basis with the five Boards, CCMS and the Staff Commission.

The aim and objectives of the survey are set out below:-

Aim of the Research:

To gather information from children and young people with disabilities on their experience of the education system.

Objectives:

- to collect information from children and young people with disabilities on their experience of the education system;
- to identify good practice from their experiences within the school system;
- to identify difficulties and challenges children and young people with disabilities may have faced;
- to utilise the information collected to inform policy development.

It was agreed that structured questionnaires would be used to collect information. These would be distributed through the school system. Given the age range and different experiences at the various levels of education, three questionnaires were devised. They targeted:-

- i) pupils at primary level;
- ii) pupils at key stage 3;
- iii) pupils at key stage 4

In addition an information pack was compiled. It included:-

- a) briefing paper explaining the rationale for the survey and the approach being adopted;
- b) standard letters seeking parental consent;
- c) copies of the questionnaires and covering letters for post primary pupils only;
- d) advice for SENCO or nominated person in the school.

Copies of the questionnaires and information pack are obtainable on request from the Staff Commission.

Pilot Exercise

A small number of primary and post primary schools in the controlled and maintained sectors and special schools were invited to participate in the pilot exercise which will involve:-

- a) obtaining parental consent for children with a statement of special educational needs to participate in the pilot exercise in the school concerned;
- b) the issue of the questionnaire to the child/children in the school with a statement of special educational needs;
- c) the offer of assistance to the child/children completing the questionnaire;
- d) completion by the school of the final section of the questionnaire; and
- d) the return of all completed questionnaires to the designated Board/CCMS Officer.

It is anticipated that the first part of the pilot exercise, namely completion of the questionnaires at school level, will be completed by June 2008.

The aim of the pilot exercise is primarily to test the questionnaires and methodology to be used.

It is important to note that any school participating in the pilot exercise will not be asked to be involved in any further exercises.

Benefits/Outcomes

It is anticipated that the survey will enable:-

1. children with disabilities to be given an opportunity to record their experiences at school. Such information will ultimately help inform education policy;
2. schools to obtain an indication of the extent to which children with disabilities feel part of the education system. Feedback will be provided to all participating schools on the outcome of the research;
3. improvements to be made in the collection of data on children with disabilities;
4. the outworking of the vision for education which is "*to educate and develop the young people of Northern Ireland to the highest possible standards, providing equality of access for all*". The information which emerges from the research project will be used to help inform education policy;
5. the Boards/CCMS to demonstrate that through partnership working with schools equality can be mainstreamed.

c) Equality Awareness Training

An equality awareness training session was facilitated for a number of Christian Churches at Church of Ireland House, Belfast. The purpose of the training was to raise awareness of current anti-discrimination legislation, with an emphasis on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

DISABILITY DUTIES

Summary Progress Report

Introduction

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the Act), as amended, public authorities, when carrying out their functions must have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

These legal duties also require public authorities to prepare a disability action plan showing how they propose to fulfil the disability duties in relation to their functions. The five Boards and Staff Commission have been exempted by the Equality Commission from this particular requirement because they will cease to exist on 31 March 2009.

The Boards/Staff Commission have developed an Interim Action Plan which will allow us to implement a programme of work in the lead up to the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority and the Northern Ireland Library Authority.

This interim plan complements work already underway in relation to the implementation of our Equality Schemes and includes measures agreed with the Equality Commission when the exemptions were granted.

A summary progress report outlining the steps taken to implement this programme of work is set out below.

Consultation

A consultation event organised in partnership with Disability Action/Mencap on the interim action plan was held on 12 June 2007. There was widespread support at the meeting for the approach adopted and the content of the plan.

Disability Action, commenting on the interim action plan, stated: "*We commend your interim action plan for its clarity, consensus and for its inclusion of key outcomes*".

Arising from this consultation event, the Boards/Staff Commission undertook to consider conducting a survey to collect information from children and young people with disabilities on their experience of the education system. A research proposal was drafted and endorsed by the five Boards, CCMS and the Staff Commission. During the year an information pack and questionnaires were developed. The information is being piloted in schools in the Belfast, North Eastern and Southern Board areas.

The questionnaires and information pack being used to conduct the pilot survey are available at www.staffcom.org.uk . (Paragraph 11(b) refers).

Interim Action Plan

The key elements of the above plan and progress to date in its implementation are detailed below.

Action Measure 1

Review measures already taken and/ or proposed to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.

Progress

Review conducted, report available at www.staffcom.org.uk.

Main conclusions:

- i) Screening pro forma to be amended to include specific questions on disability equality, pro forma amended and issued May 2007.
- ii) Collect information from young people with disabilities on their experiences of the school system. Pilot exercise commenced May 2008.
- iii) Explore how consultations with young people could be enhanced. To be undertaken.
- iv) Examine the scope for the involvement of people with disabilities in disability awareness training for front line staff. Some such training undertaken.
- v) Consult service users on public access provisions. To be undertaken.

Action Measures 2 and 3

Identify the current public life positions, if any, under the remit of the Boards/Staff Commission.

If such positions exist:-

- i) examine how appointments are made to such public life positions;*
- ii) explore how disabled people could be encouraged to apply for such positions.*

Progress

Public Life Positions

The Boards/Staff Commission are non-departmental public bodies and therefore have a very limited involvement in public life appointments.

The constitution of Boards and Boards of Governors in regard to public appointments is as follows:-

Boards:

The constitution of each Board is determined by article 3(4) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 which provides that the 'Board shall be constituted in accordance with the provision set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 ...'. Schedule 2 provides for 1) the Department of Education to determine the number of Board members, and 2) the constitution of the Board.

The Board members are constituted from a number of prescribed categories:

- i) Council nominees which make up approximately $\frac{2}{5}$ of the total members of the Board;
- ii) Transferor representative members of the Board;
- iii) Representatives of the Trustees of Maintained Schools;
- iv) Persons who represent the services for which the Board is responsible;
- v) Three teachers serving in grant aided schools in the Board's area; and
- vi) Three persons appearing to have an interest in the Public Library Service

The numbers which represent each of the above categories are again prescribed by the legislation. The Board itself has no control over the number of persons appointed to the Board or the categories from which representatives are drawn.

Boards of Governors

Membership of the Boards of Governors is determined by the nature of the school i.e. whether it is controlled or voluntary and whether it is a primary, secondary or grammar school.

The composition of membership of the Board of Governors of controlled schools is set out in Article 10(3) of the 1986 Order. The number of members depends upon the size and type of school i.e. whether it is a controlled primary, secondary or grammar school. The Board of Governors of a controlled primary school will consist of 9, 16 or 24 voting members depending upon the size of the school. Normally where there are 9 voting members appointed to the Board of Governors, of those members:

- a. Four shall be nominated by the transferors and superseded managers of the school or schools;
- b. Two shall be elected by parents of pupils attending the school from amongst the parents of pupils attending the school;
- c. Two shall be appointed by the Area Education and Library Board responsible for the management of the school;
- d. One shall be elected by assistant teachers at the School from amongst Assistant Teachers employed at the school.

Where there are 16 or 24 voting members, members are appointed from the same categories but their numbers are varied as prescribed in Schedule 4.

Historically, in relation to category C, the Boards have appointed Board members.

The Boards have not as yet had sight of the draft legislation for the Education and Skills Authority and therefore are unable to indicate the arrangements proposed for the management of Board of Governors post 1 April 2009.

In summary, the position is that the Boards have no power to appoint members to their own Board and their powers in respect of Boards of Governors are very limited.

The Boards/Staff Commission have concluded that it is inappropriate to develop a good practice guide for consideration by ESA as such guidance already exists under the auspices of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Advisory Panels

Joint Consultative Forum

The Boards/Staff Commission established the above Forum in partnership with NICEM. Its primary purpose is to provide a formal working link between public authorities in the education sector and the community, voluntary and trade union sectors and the statutory equality authorities on the implementation of our Equality Schemes. Membership of this Forum is open to all those individuals/groups listed on the Boards'/Staff Commission's Equality Schemes.

Action - when conducting targeted consultation events in partnership with disability groups, inform consultees about the role and function of the Forum. It is anticipated that this will encourage them and their respective members to participate more fully in its work.

Youth Service Liaison Forum

This is a liaison meeting with no executive powers. Its role is to share information across the youth service and debate issues and help inform DE policy. It is chaired by DE with the secretariat being provided by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. Its membership comprises the DE, Youth Council, five Education and Library Boards and the voluntary youth sector.

Summary

In relation to public life positions, the Boards/Staff Commission, because of their limited role in public appointments, have taken a wide interpretation of this term and have included groups over which they have influence or a direct relationship.

Action Measure 4

Conduct an examination of training and guidance on the promotion of equality for people with disabilities.

Progress

Addressed under measure 1.

Action Measure 5

Organise a joint seminar with Section 75 Groups to:-

- i) explore how public life positions could be made more accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities;*
- ii) examine how to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and*
- iii) identify measures which could be considered for inclusion in the disability action plan for ESA.*

Participation

The officers of the Joint Consultative Forum recommended that, in addition to the new disability duties being considered at the JCF, a separate consultation event should be held with disability groups under the auspices of Disability Action and Mencap.

Consultations on how best to implement the disability duties therefore included:

- partnership event between Boards/Staff Commission, Disability Action and Mencap, June 2007 (notes available at www.staffcom.org.uk)

- written submissions from Mencap; Carers Northern Ireland; Employers' Forum on Disability; Disability Action; Lisburn Access Group
- agenda item at Joint Consultative Forum, October 2007 (notes available at www.staffcom.org.uk)

Summary of Feedback from Consultees

Awareness Raising

- need to raise awareness of disability issues through corporate activities and training;
- training strategy should target teaching and non-teaching (front-line) staff - materials should be designed with and delivered by people with disabilities;
- consider holding an 'involvement' day whereby people with disabilities and their carers can contribute to policy making and raise awareness on the issues affecting them.

Research

- conduct research to identify the distinct experiences and needs of people with a learning disability and the extent of their participation in the education sector;
- if surveying staff regarding disability issues, target all staff to obtain attitudes to disability as well as obtaining feedback on experiences of employment from staff with disabilities;
- collect information on the experience of children and young people of the education system;
- audit research already conducted into children with disabilities being bullied at school, assess findings, consider what further action is required including whether further research is necessary;
- examine the attitudes of teachers to pupils with disabilities, consider the extent to which diversity/inclusion is addressed as part of their initial and in-service training.

Employment

- conduct an examination of routes into employment, criteria and experience required for each post;
- consider the difficulties raised for people with disabilities and/or carers when recruitment is to a 'pool' of staff who may be allocated posts across Northern Ireland.

Equality of Access

- people with learning difficulties do not currently enjoy equal access to, or benefit from, public services - identify the barriers and how they can be overcome;
- ensure the availability of information in a meaningful and fully accessible manner;
- concerns raised about the need for easy to understand signage in buildings and that in new building design it was important to achieve the right balance between attractive buildings and easily accessible.

Consultation

- seek to effectively engage with people with disabilities of all ages and types of disability;
- need to develop an outreach strategy to reach some people with disabilities who may use separate disability specific facilities;
- need to involve carers in consultations, particularly those around the implementation of the disability duties;
- importance of a co-ordinated approach to consultation.

Conclusion

The Boards/Staff Commission, in their final report on the new Disability Duties, will:

- summarise progress made;
- identify conclusions reached; and
- provide a report on the pilot exercise aimed at collecting information from children and young people on their experience of the school system.