

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

**STAFF COMMISSION FOR EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS**

**Annual Report  
1 April 2008 - 31 March 2009**

**July 2009**

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## 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 (ESA) and Northern Ireland Library Authority. The new library authority, known as 'Libraries NI' was established on 1 April 2009; the establishment of ESA was deferred by the Education Minister to 1 January 2010.

This Annual Report records the activities undertaken by the Staff Commission in furtherance of its equality obligations. It covers the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.

### 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 and Equality Duties Project Work. (Paragraph 11(a) refers).
- Draft policies prepared for consideration by legacy organisations, ESAIT and trade unions on terms and conditions for new recruits, for example Equal Opportunities and Work Life Balance Policies and Procedures. (Paragraphs 6 and 11(a) refer).
- Completed a pilot exercise which involved collecting information from children and young people with disabilities on their experiences of the school system; reviewed the findings of the pilot and developed an on-line survey which was on-going at the year's end (Paragraph 11(b) refers).
- Organised two major seminars under the auspices of the Joint Consultative Forum on the Review of Public Administration and Inequalities in Education. (Paragraph 9 refers).

### Main Activities Planned

- Assist ESAIT in the development of an Equality Scheme and Equality and Disability Action Plan;
- Complete and publish a report on the findings of the Disability Survey;
- Conduct a final review of the Commissions Equality Scheme and Interim Disability Action Plan

## 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 2008 - 31 March 2009.

## 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 new library authority, known as 'Libraries NI' was established on 1 April 2009; the implementation timetable for the establishment of ESA was revised to 1 January 2010.

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

Because of the exceptional circumstances arising as a result of RPA the Equality Commission 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 progress report on this work is contained at Appendix 1.

## 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 2007 - March 2008.

## **SECTION 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)**

### **Job Evaluation Schemes**

The remaining EQIA on the Commission's timetable is the 'Implementation of the Job Evaluation Schemes'. Last year's report indicated that consultation was on-going on this inter-Board EQIA. As a result of issues raised, in the course of this consultation process, it was concluded that the EQIA should be reviewed. The Commission, in consultation with the Boards, drafted a revised EQIA. This was issued for consultation in March 2009.

### **Registration and Grant Aid Schemes**

The Commission, in consultation with the five Boards, drafted and published the results of the five Board equality impact assessment on the "Registration and Grant Aid Scheme for Local Voluntary Youth Groups".

At this stage there are no new EQIAs scheduled to commence during the period April 2009 - December 2010.

## **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**

- Public Health – Women Building Peace Seminar – 19 April 2008
- Equality Commission – Launch of ‘Lets Talk, Let’s Listen Guidance for Public Authorities on consulting and involving Children and Young People’ – 26 June 2008

**Deirdre Vaughn, Senior Principal Officer**

- NICEM – European Integration Policy and Practice: Principles, Models and Methods – 8 May 2008
- Equality Commission NI – Lets Talk Lets Listen – 11 November 2008
- Equality Commission NI Conference – Every Child an Equal Child – 12 November 2008

**Patricia Murray, Project Officer**

- Interaction Institute for Social Change – Facilitative Leadership for Social Change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workshop – 7 April 2008
- Dungannon District Council – Racism: Moving Beyond Denial – 30 April 2008
- Chief Executives’ Forum – Participation Network Seminar – Involving the Young Citizen: better policies, better planning – 25 June 2008
- Employers Forum on Disability – Stress Management Seminar and AGM -9 June 2008
- Equality Commission NI – Stress Management Toolkit – 9 September 2008
- STEP European Conference – Integration: A Process not a Problem – 29 October 2008
- Equality Commission NI Conference – Every Child an Equal Child – 12 November 2008
- Legal Island – Equality Law – 11 March 2009
- Equality Commission for NI – Conference – ‘Bridge the Gap – Improving Access to Employment’ – 3 March 2009

**Grainne McClean, Senior Executive Officer**

- Employers’ Forum on Disability (NI) – Disability Employment Case Law - 11 November 2008
- Legal Island – Essentials of Employment Law – 10 March 2009

## **Suzanne Briggs, Executive Officer**

- Belfast Metropolitan College - Stage 2 Bridging Course British Sign Language - September 2007 - June 2008
- STEPS - Respecting Difference - launch of website – 24 April 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**

#### **Libraries NI**

Employment data for library staff transferred with employees to the new authority, Libraries NI, at the end of March 2009. Employment monitoring data is scheduled to transfer to Libraries NI after the Education and Library Boards have completed their employment monitoring returns to the Equality Commission on staff employed at 1 January 2009.

Libraries NI's first monitoring return to the Equality Commission is likely to be due for submission in May 2010. A paper prepared by the Commission, 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 informed the process adopted.

## **Education and Skills Authority**

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.

The paper drafted by the Commission, 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 was reviewed as a result of the change of date for the establishment of ESA. In Fair Employment terms the 1 January 2010 is a very significant date. It's the date upon which the employment monitoring return on the composition of the workforce is based. The Equality Commission is taking steps to ensure that ESA is specified as at 1 January 2010 to enable it to submit an annual monitoring return for its workforce on that date.

### **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, sign translation 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.

#### **Disability Survey**

A full report of progress on the above survey being carried out as part of the implementation of the Commission's Disability Duties is contained at paragraph 11 (b).

The Commission's Equality Co-ordinator and Project Officer have been fully involved in the roll-out of the initial pilot and in the conduct of the full survey.

This has involved these Officers in briefings at school and Board level to raise awareness of the disability duties and the nature of the survey; engagement with staff from the inter-Board service C2K who operated the on-line survey and on-going communication and updates to the community, voluntary and trade union sectors on the development of the pilot and the outworking of the survey.

### **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 two major seminars on the Review of Public Administration 'Education'. They took place on 13 May 2008 and 12 February 2009 with around 60 representatives of the community, voluntary and trade union sectors attending each event. The main themes discussed were the Review of Public Administration; Inequalities in Education; and Mainstreaming Equality in the ESA and Schools.

Reports on both seminars were compiled and circulated to Forum members, the Department of Education, the Equality Commission and the Public Service Commission. They are available on the Staff Commission's website at [www.staffcom.org.uk](http://www.staffcom.org.uk).

## **SECTION 10: The Good Relations Duty**

### **Promoting a Good and Harmonious Working Environment**

The Commission's Equality co-ordinator represented the Boards/Staff Commission at a roundtable event organised by the Equality Commission to discuss its guidance for employers on 'Promoting a Good and Harmonious Working Environment'. The Equality Co-ordinator also contributed to the revised guidance, published by the Equality Commission in December 2008.

### **Joint Declaration of Protection**

Work is on-going to up-date the Boards'/Staff Commission's Joint Declaration of Protection in the light of the Equality Commission's revised guidance referred to above. The Joint Declaration of Protection is being developed to cover all of the individuals/groups covered by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

## **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 (Libraries NI). This work has involved:-

## Employment Equality

- the drafting of employment equality policies and procedures for consideration by ESAIT and NILAT, for new recruits to be employed by ESA and Libraries NI. The new policies included:
  - i) an Equal Opportunities Policy;
  - ii) Work Life Balance Policies and an Application Form for flexible working arrangements;
  - iii) Job Share and Career Break Schemes;
  - iv) Flexible Working Hours Scheme; and
  - v) an Employment Monitoring Form.

The new policy proposals have been shared with management and the trade unions. It is intended that the information will assist with the development of terms and conditions of service for new staff to be employed as well as identifying harmonisation and protection issues for existing staff.

- the redrafting of the paper developed 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 Libraries NI to enable them to fulfil these legal obligations*'. This paper and its outworking required further review as a result of the change of date for the establishment of ESA.
- on-going advice and assistance to ESA and NILA Implementation Teams as required.

## ESAIT Section 75 Equality Duties Group

During the year, ESAIT established an Equality Duties Group to consider how equality could be mainstreamed into its project work and to assist in the development of an equality strategy for ESA.

The Group has provided advice and guidance on:-

- the ESAIT Equality Screening Process;
- an Equality Template which aims to ensure that equality considerations are built into the process of developing service delivery plans;
- the Equality Commission's Effectiveness Review of Section 75 and its implications for the drafting of an Equality Scheme for ESA.

The Commission also provided input to:-

- the Service Delivery Models being developed by ESAIT in key areas such as "Equality, Rights and Social Inclusion" and "Employment Equality".
- Preliminary work on the development of an Employment Equality and Disability Action Plan and an Equality Scheme for ESA;
- The 'Draft Scheme for Recruitment and Selection of Teaching and Support Staff in Schools' currently being developed by ESAIT.

## **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 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 the Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (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 a special school, in the Belfast, North Eastern and Southern Boards, were invited to participate in the pilot exercise which involved:-

- 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.

The pilot exercise, namely completion of the questionnaires at school level, was conducted during June 2008 and although it was a very busy time of year, 81 responses were received which was a return rate of approximately 80%. These responses were analysed and a Data Overview document was compiled, (Appendix 2 refers).

Arising from the analysis and the feedback received from the schools, amendments were made to each of the three questionnaires. A number of general suggestions were made by schools including the proposal that the survey be made available 'on-line' for pupils to complete and that the survey be conducted at suggested times during the school year.

The special school that participated in the pilot had some concerns about the appropriateness of the questionnaire approach for their pupils and suggested that other mechanisms should be explored to collect information on the experiences of children and young people within special schools.

### *Full Survey*

The feedback received informed the way forward in terms of the full survey. Namely, it was agreed that, in regard to pupils in special schools, a different approach would be explored in consultation with the Disability Groups and Special Schools and that representations be made to C2K regarding the survey being made available on-line. C2K undertook to have the primary school survey available on line by December 2008 and the post primary by February 2009. The Department of Education provided a representative sample of schools targeting approximately 1,000 pupils. The sample was broken down by:-

- Education and Library Board;
- School type – primary/post primary;
- Controlled and maintained schools; and
- Urban and rural schools.

The success of the pilot in terms of the high level of responses was attributed to the personal contact made with schools. This approach was maintained in the full survey with initial contact being made with 166 primary and 49 post primary schools and on-going advice, guidance and support being provided to 142 primary and 32 post primary schools which agreed to participate in the survey.

At the year's end the survey for the primary school sector which commenced in December 2008 closed on 31 March 2009. The survey for the post primary sector which started in February 2009 was due to close on 15 May 2009. At the time of writing this report over 900 hundred completed questionnaires had been received. It is anticipated that a report of the findings will be published by the end of November 2009.

At the Joint Consultative Forum meeting, February 2009 the Staff Commission, Boards and CCMS were commended for their work on this project and asked to explore the possibility of extending the remit to cover all groups of children/young people in the education system.

### **c) Equality Commission's Advisory Groups**

#### **i) Section 75 Standard of Compliance Project**

During 2008, the Equality Commission established the above Advisory Group to assist it by way of review, quality assurance and advice, in the development of an audit based approach which will enable effective, objective and consistent monitoring, assessment and enforcement of public authority compliance with the Section 75 statutory equality duties.

#### **ii) Section 75 Revised Guide**

During 2009, a second group was established to provide an opportunity to discuss substantive thematic policy areas arising from the consultation exercise on the above revised Guide and to develop policy options for consideration by the Equality Commission on key aspects of the Section 75 equality duties.

The Advisory Groups are representative of the Community, Voluntary, Trade Union and Public Sectors. The Commission is representing the education NDPBs on both these Advisory Groups. Work is at an advanced stage in the development of a two tier standard of compliance. In terms of the revised guide, substantial progress has been made on a number of the key policy areas and a paper is being submitted to the May 2009 meeting of the Equality Commission with a number of proposals/options for consideration.

## 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 of the changes to educational administration arising from the Review of Public Administration.

The Boards/Staff Commission developed an Interim Action Plan which has allowed 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. Regular updates on progress have been made available to consultees. At the Joint Consultative Forum the Education and Library Boards, CCMS and the Staff Commission were commended for their work on the disability survey.

During the year an information pack and questionnaires were developed. A pilot exercise was undertaken and at the year's end the full survey was at an advanced stage of implementation. The questionnaires and information pack being used to conduct the survey are available at [www.staffcom.org.uk](http://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](http://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 completed June 2008. Survey on-going. It is anticipated that the findings will be published by the end of November 2009.
- iii) Explore how consultations with young people could be enhanced. To be undertaken as part of the development of an equality strategy for ESA.
- 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 as part of an equality strategy for ESA.

### **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 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.

Outcome – This approach has resulted in a significant increase in the number of people with disabilities/specific needs participating in the Joint Consultative Forum.

### **Youth Service Liaison Forum**

This is a liaison Forum 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](http://www.staffcom.org.uk))
- written submissions from Mencap; Carers Northern Ireland; Employers' Forum on Disability; Disability Action; Lisburn Access Group
- discussed at Joint Consultative Forum, February 2009 (notes available at [www.staffcom.org.uk](http://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 of 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 from children and young people with disabilities on their experience 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 easy access.

### *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 on-line survey aimed at collecting information from children and young people on their experience of the school system.