

## New Disability Duties

Disability Action and Mencap, in partnership with the five Education and Library Boards/Staff Commission held a consultation event to discuss the new Disability Duties aimed at:

- ▶ promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- ▶ encouraging the participation of disabled people in public life.

The main purpose of this event was to discuss a programme of work aimed at promoting disability equality. A report of the consultation event is available on the Staff Commission's website at [www.staffcom.org.uk](http://www.staffcom.org.uk). In addition to their proposed programme of work the Boards/Staff Commission and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools undertook to work with disability groups in the collection of information on the experience of children and young people with disabilities of the education system.

More information on this work will be available at the next meeting. In the interim if you or any of your members wish to participate in this research please contact:

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## Information Update

### Diploma in Professional Development - Inclusive Education

A new course is available on-line. The Diploma is specifically aimed at assisting teachers to manage the increasing range of pupil needs in mainstream classrooms.

Professor Tony Gallagher, Head of the School of Education at Queen's University said *"The overall aim of the Diploma is to build the capacity of teachers and other professionals to respond effectively to the diverse educational needs of all pupils, including those with special and additional needs"*.

## Joint Consultative Forum

Education Sector

## Quarterly Update

August 2007

### Minister for Education to Address the Joint Consultative Forum

Minister for Education Caítriona Ruane, MLA will address the next meeting of the Forum which has been arranged for **Thursday, 18 October 2007 at Lisburn Civic Centre, Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn**. The Minister has been invited to outline for us her vision of the equality agenda for education. The papers for this meeting will be issued at the end of September.

### Review of Public Administration (RPA)

Education Minister Caítriona Ruane has said she is determined to press ahead with reform of the administration of education.

She was speaking following a meeting of the Executive Committee on 19 July 2007, where she presented her plans for the Review of Public Administration (RPA) for education. The Executive has agreed with her proposal to establish the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and have it operational by April 2009 at the latest. Staff, functions, assets and liabilities will be transferred from the Boards and the other education organisations to the ESA at that time.

The Minister said *"It is essential that change starts now so that there is a smooth coming together of all the organisations and standards are maintained. I will be leading this transformation personally, ensuring that we involve the key people at all times"*.

In order to ensure that the Department of Education meets its duties/obligations under Section 75 Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, an assessment of the proposals in the first Bill (which will establish ESA by April 2009) will be carried out in the coming months, as part of an ongoing programme of equality impact assessment as key milestones are reached.

### Education and Skills Authority (ESA) Implementation Team

The ESA website is now operational at [www.esani.org.uk](http://www.esani.org.uk). It provides easy access to the on-going programme of work of ESA and all the latest news on its work. The Minister has asked Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive Designate, working with Will Haire, Permanent Secretary and other colleagues in the Department of Education, to develop and lead a convergence programme which will bring together services delivered by the current education organisations

John Curran (Inter-Board Services Manager) currently Joint Chair of the Forum has been appointed Human Resources Project Manager to the ESA Implementation Team. Congratulations to John on his appointment. We are pleased that John will remain with us, at least in the short-term, as Joint Chair of the Forum. Since our last meeting we've had to say farewell to Tansy Hutchinson who has taken up a post in Brussels.

### Leadership Changes: Au revoir from Tansy

"Many of you will probably have heard that I have left NICEM to work for an EU anti-racist organisation in Brussels. Dr Paschal McKeown, Policy and Information Officer, Mencap, has, I am very glad to say, agreed to step in as interim Co-Chair to ensure that the Forum doesn't lose any momentum at this crucial time with the RPA.

I wanted to write a note to you all to say thank you for making the Education Joint Consultative Forum the success that it is and to offer some thoughts. I've been Joint Chair, along with John, since the Forum

began, developing out of a partnership project between the voluntary/community sector and the statutory education authorities. I feel strongly that this is the biggest strength of the Forum and it is clear to me that the ethos of equality and partnership has been central to all the work. This, to me, is what implementing Section 75 (including Good Relations) needs; building fruitful and strong relationships on the basis of equal respect, redressing power imbalances in the process. This is not to say there have not been challenges, but a real relationship of trust has developed allowing open and equal dialogue. A good example of this was when the Boards came to a steering group meeting at the height of the financial crisis and told us what was *actually* happening. No dressing it up. No fudging the issue. No more relying on rumour and patchy, sensationalist media for the information we needed to engage effectively. There is a reason that Section 75 requires consultees to be provided with all the relevant data: Information imbalances = power imbalances.

The Review of Public Administration means that there is a real danger of the Forum becoming lost in the, frankly messy, process of re-organisation, I feel that it is vitally important that the Forum remains, and becomes a key part of the new arrangements.

I am going to take an enormous amount from my experience of co-chairing the JCF. John has been a fantastic person to work with, and I want to thank everyone at the Staff Commission (especially Deirdre and Patricia Murray) for their hard work, and for always making sure I got a cup of tea! I'll miss you all".



**Tansy Hutchinson**

Tansy made a huge contribution to the building up of the Forum, her skills in the challenging role of Joint Chair were superb. Through her firm and even handed approach, her insight into education policy and experience in the voluntary sector she often challenged speakers to think outside the box. Many thanks to Tansy for her work on behalf of the Joint Consultative Forum.