

GOOD RELATIONS POLICY AND STRATEGY for Education and Library Boards

2006 -2008



CONTEXT

With the publication by OFMDFM of the high level policy documents “A Shared Future” and “The Racial Equality Strategy” government has now tasked public bodies with the role of delivering on their equality responsibilities in a more integrated way. This includes tackling racism and sectarianism as well as delivering on the Statutory Duty implications within Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) which is defined as the ‘Good Relations’ duty.

The demand for a broader, more integrated approach also comes from the fact that Northern Ireland is now a much more diverse society in terms of race, religion, ethnicity and cultural heritage than it was in 1998. Much of that diversity has arisen from the need for local businesses to attract new workers from other countries to fill vacancies in the labour market.

This relatively sudden and steep rate of immigration has provided new challenges for the education system. For example the number of new pupils from other countries attending schools in the Lurgan area alone grew by 686% in one year (2005).

(Source: Hamilton, G. “Audit of BME clients accessing CBHSST services” November 2006).

This Good Relations strategy sets out the framework for responding to these challenges and improving service delivery over the next three years. It also seeks to identify the resources which may be required to achieve those improvements.

On 22 November 2005, the Education Minister announced as part of the Review of Public Administration, that there will be a single Education Authority. The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will become the employing authority for all teaching and other staff employed in grant-aided schools. The ESA will have responsibility for the functions performed currently by the:

- Five Education and Library Boards;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; and
- Regional Training Unit.

It will also have responsibility for the front-line support and related functions undertaken by the:

- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; and
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

It will have responsibility for those functions of the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards that are still required. In this context, the Board's aim is to implement a programme of work which will pave the way for the development of a comprehensive good relations strategy which could be taken forward by the ESA.

POLICY

The Board is committed through its Equality Scheme to the principles of equality of opportunity and good relations. In this context the Board will aim to ensure that the entire community, and particularly black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, can enjoy full and fair access to education, youth and library services and any training, employment or development opportunities provided by the Board. The Board endorses and fully support the principles, aims and objectives of the 'Good Relations Framework - A Shared Future' and the 'Racial Equality Strategy' which have been translated into a two year transitional plan for implementation by the Board.

VISION

The Board shares the vision of:

"The establishment over time of a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere, and where all people are treated impartially. A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence".

'A Shared Future', March 2005

VALUES

The values that inform this policy are those common to good relations work in Northern Ireland and particularly in the work of the Board's Youth Service¹, namely Equity, Diversity and Interdependence. The Good Relations policy is also under-pinned by our commitment to undertaking a human rights approach to all our work as educationalists.

Equity is about ensuring that people have equal access and benefit from, educational services and resources regardless of their ethnic or community background, gender or sexual orientation or whether they have a disability. Equity is not about treating everyone the same, rather is about ensuring that we do not directly or indirectly exclude people and that we positively seek ways of including those who might otherwise feel excluded.

¹ Youth Work 'A Model for Effective practice' 2003 Youth Work Curriculum Development Unit

Diversity encourages respect for and expression of the growing range of identities in Northern Ireland. The Board's community relations work includes improving relations between all communities and not just addressing the traditional Catholic/Protestant divide. It sees difference as enriching our society and organisations through a proper appreciation of different experiences, cultures and perspectives. It is crucial that all who work in the Board provide a positive model in terms of attitudes and responses to difference.

Interdependence recognised and explores ways in which individual paths are intertwined and mutually supportive. It requires the building of robust relationships both within and without the Board in order to develop our understanding of the dynamics of inter-action between individuals and communities. Such an understanding can develop an appreciation of the value of working together on a basis of mutual respect and trust.

SHARED AIMS

The two documents which underpin this strategy are:

- A Shared Future 'Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland' March 2005
- A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2005 - 2010.

The Board recognise that this is an ambitious and challenging programme of work particularly at a time of major organisational change. It does not anticipate that it will be fully implemented within the time frame specified. However progress made will help inform the good relations strategy of the new Authority. The Board has sought to integrate the shared aims of these documents into its action plan. They are:

1. Promotion of good relations and the elimination of racial inequality

The Board will promote equality of opportunity and good relations in all aspects of its work by ensuring that all its services are delivered impartially and effectively. The Board will work to eliminate any form of racism and sectarianism which may be present within its activities or among its staff and members.

2. Equal Protection

The Board will provide equal protection to its staff and service-users by tackling any incident of racial harassment, sectarianism or 'hate crime'. It will also help schools in the context of development plans to address such issues in the school community. It

will also try to develop preventative work to tackle racist, sectarian or other hate crime in the workplace and beyond

3. Equality of Service Provision

The Board will ensure equality of opportunity for minority ethnic people in accessing and benefiting from its services. It will facilitate the development of a shared community where people wish to learn, work and play together. It will shape its policies, practices and work with other individuals and groups including other public sector bodies and the social partners to enable trust and good relations to grow.

4. Participation

The Board will work in partnership with all local agencies, public bodies, schools and others to foster a sense of belonging to an integrated and mutually supportive society in which diversity is valued and welcomed. It will promote civic-mindedness via citizenship education, through personal development and lifelong learning programmes and not just through the curriculum in schools.

5. Dialogue

The Board will support and encourage dialogue, shared learning and mutual understanding of different faiths and cultural backgrounds both long standing within Northern Ireland and recent arrivals to these shores, guided by overarching human rights norms. It will encourage communication, acceptance of difference and trust across Northern Ireland but particularly in areas where communities are living apart.

6. Capacity Building

The Board will encourage understanding of the complexity of our history through the common school curriculum. It will support cultural projects which highlight the complexity and overlapping nature of identities and their global connections which will help people of different faiths and ethnic minority backgrounds to fulfil the Government's aim of a shared future for Northern Ireland. The Board will continue to work with the voluntary and community sector and the social partners to develop anti-sectarian and anti-racist educational support programmes.

The above themes provide the framework for the accompanying action plan which will seek to fulfil the vision outlined earlier in this policy, the vision of a key contributor to positive change and progress in our present society towards a 'shared future': a future that positively embraces all aspects of diversity.

The five Education and Library Boards and the Staff Commission would like to thank all those organisations who helped to develop this policy:

- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Northern Ireland Public Services Alliance
- Association of Northern Ireland Colleges
- Royal National Institute for the Deaf
- Indian Community Centre, Belfast
- National Union Students – Union of Students Ireland
- Belfast Islamic Centre
- North Eastern Education and Library Board
- South Eastern Education and Library Board
- Community Relations Council
- Belfast Education and Library Board
- Western Education and Library Board
- Antrim Welcomes and Advocates Racial Equality – AWARE
- Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum
- Coleraine Multi-Cultural Forum
- Disability Action Northern Ireland
- Southern Education and Library Board
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Office of the First and Deputy First Minister
- Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards

Action Plan April 2006 - March 2008

Shared Aim 1: Promotion of Good Relations

Action	Lead Service/ Department	Timescale	Anticipated Outcome
1.1 Conduct a Good Relations Audit using the requirements of Best Value.	Board's Equality Unit	January 2007 and ongoing	Provision of a systematic framework for mainstreaming good relations.
1.2 Develop a training strategy for all staff to tackle racism and sectarianism and to promote good relations.	Inter-Board	January 2007	Provision of a basis for tackling institutional forms of discrimination.
1.3 Develop a Good Relations Code of Practice.	Inter-Board	February 2007	Development of clear and measurable standards.
1.4 Provide advice and guidance to Board staff on how to incorporate good relations into annual Service Development Plans.	Inter-Board	March 2007	The promotion of Good Relations has been incorporated into Service Development Plans.
1.5 Appoint a good relations champion - a senior officer to co-ordinate the implementation and evaluation of the policy and associated action plans.	Inter-Board	June 2006	Demonstrate commitment of the Boards to promoting Good Relations.

Shared Aim 2: Equal Protection

Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Anticipated Outcome
2.1 Develop a plan to combat racism and sectarianism within Board premises and in service provision.	Board's Equality Unit	December 2006	Provide a safe and supportive environment for staff, individuals and groups to whom services are provided.
2.2 Explore the scope for the introduction of a common system across the education sector to record and monitor details of 'hate incidents' against all 9 Section 75 groupings.	Inter-Sectoral approach – liaise with NIO monitoring system	February 2007	More effective monitoring would facilitate the development of prevention and intervention strategies. Staff will know that they are protected under existing procedures.

Shared Aim 3 : Equality of Service Provision

Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Anticipated Outcome
<p>3.1 Develop strategies to target marginalised and socially excluded groups to ensure equal access to services.</p>	<p>Service Managers</p>	<p>January 2007</p>	<p>Mainstreamed into service development plans.</p>
<p>3.2 Develop opportunities for shared and inter-cultural learning in education, youth and library service provision.</p>	<p>Service Managers</p>	<p>Jan 07 – Jan 08</p>	<p>One new Good Relations initiative developed.</p>
<p>3.3 Identify through the Good Relations Audit and consultation with minority ethnic/different faith groups and groups representing different cultural backgrounds, barriers people have encountered to accessing and enjoying education, library and youth services.</p>	<p>Board's Equality Unit</p>	<p>February 2007</p>	<p>Opportunity to determine what needs to be done and to actively remove or reduce these barriers.</p>
<p>3.4 Explore the scope to review and further develop the current approach to data collection, assessment and monitoring of the good relations duty across the education sector.</p>	<p>Corporate ICT</p>	<p>September 2007</p>	<p>A structured and common approach to data collection and monitoring.</p>
<p>3.5 Examine how a shared community, as envisaged in the Bain Report, can be developed to promote the basis upon which trust and good relations can be nurtured.</p>	<p>Extended Schools Coordinator and ASEO Reshaping the School Estate</p>	<p>January 2007</p>	<p>Education facilities to be used as centres of excellence for nurturing good relations between all communities</p>

Shared Aim 4: Participation			
Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Anticipated Outcome
4.1 Promote civic-mindedness via citizenship education, the JEDI initiative in youth services and other projects which facilitate lifelong learning. Explore, in consultation with the community and voluntary sector, other methods of promoting civic-mindedness.	Youth CR Officer	On-going	Improved understanding and mutual respect between different communities
4.2 Work with and consult with ethnic minority groups to promote integration.	Corporate Services	On-going	Greater community participation in the work of the Board.
4.3 Provide information to local communities about the range of services available from the Board.	Communications Officer	On-going	Increased awareness among BME communities of the work of the Board.
Shared Aim 5: Dialogue			
Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Anticipated Outcome
5.1 Actively promote dialogue to encourage good relations to tackle racism and sectarianism and to promote equality of opportunity e.g. anti-racism and/or anti-sectarianism initiatives.	Board's Equality Unit	On-going	Evidence that Board officers have developed opportunities internally and externally to promote dialogue as a means of reconciling differences within our society.
5.2 Encourage communication, acceptance of difference and trust across Northern Ireland but particularly in areas where communities are living apart.	Board's Equality Unit	On-going	Evidence that Officers participation in wider Good Relations initiatives has been positive and valued.
5.3 Encourage, through dialogue, a greater understanding of the complexity of our history.	CASS Advisers	On-going	Improved understanding and mutual respect between different communities.

