

3. Anti Bullying Strategy

A number of Section 75 groups have requested clarification on whether policies in schools to combat bullying specifically refer to the nine equality categories. Information to be provided at the next meeting.

4. School Meals Service

Dietary requirements on ethnic or medical grounds are accommodated provided that the needs are made known to the Principal/school. The development of a user friendly leaflet in various languages is being explored to inform parents of the notification arrangements for specific dietary requirements to be met.

5. Research Report

The Steering Group is seeking to track the progress being made in the implementation of the research reports:

- ➔ Count Me In
- ➔ Shout

All Forum documentation is on the Staff Commission's website at www.staffcom.org.uk.

Turnout

The attendance of the community/voluntary sector organisations was down at this meeting. Please let us know what we can do to make it easier for you to participate in this Forum.

CHANGE OF DATE FOR NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 13 October 2005 at Ulidia Resource Centre, Ormeau Road, Belfast at 2.00 p.m.

Unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstances this date no longer suits.

Consultation is on-going to agree an alternative date. You will be notified as soon as possible.

Joint
Consultative
Forum

Education Sector

Quarterly Update

Joint Consultative Forum Meeting

Armagh Teachers' Centre

26 May 2005

"Ready for and receptive to your views"

opening remarks of John Curran, Joint Chair

Department of Education's Revised Policy Screening and Timetable

Jeff Brown, Equality and Human Resources Unit, Department of Education outlined the reasons for the review, the mechanism adopted, the outcomes and the Department of Education's proposed way forward.

He explained that progress on the implementation of their Equality Scheme was good overall. However, progress in the completion of equality impact assessments was slow. A large number of EQIAs (30), had been timetabled and this of itself raised questions about the initial screening process and whether it had been sufficiently robust. A re-screen exercise had been undertaken and the consultation documents issued in March 2005 detailed the conclusions of that exercise. It reduced the number of policies for EQIA from 30 to 12, 14 in total given that two were currently underway.

The closing date for comments is 6 June 2005, all consultee groups were encouraged to submit their views to the Department as part of the consultation process. Consultees raised a number of concerns with the Department. The next phase of the process would be to analyse the feedback received, review decisions and confirm the new EQIA timetable.

Note - Please note that the closing date for comments has been extended to 29 July 2005.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

A number of consultee groups questioned why a major policy decision had been taken before the policy had been consulted upon, namely new funding arrangements for EAL. Sharon Lawlor, Head of Equality and Human Rights at the Department of Education explained the funding arrangements. The information presented by Sharon was disputed by the Boards.

It became apparent that there was a difference of viewpoint between the Boards and the Department of Education in relation to the funding of this provision. It was agreed that the Department of Education and the Boards would meet to clarify the position.

There was, however, consensus that the matter was of paramount importance. It was agreed that:

- a) the Department of Education and the Boards would meet as a matter of urgency to clarify the position; and
- b) a meeting would be held with affected groups thereafter to clarify and discuss the arrangements for EAL support.

Consultee groups asked that the Department's formulation of a draft EAL policy be allocated a high priority.

Funding of Education Services: Impact on Service Delivery

John Curran advised that the Chief Executives and Chairs of all five Boards had been invited to meet the Minister of Education that afternoon

He explained that Boards are at final draft stage in the preparation of a consultation paper. Part 1 provides background information in respect of the Department funded part of the budget (90% of the Boards' total grant funding); the spending on schools and on central services in support of schools and summarises the current position in regard to the 2005/06 financial year. A report on the findings of the screening exercise is included as Part II of the document.

It was agreed that the consultation paper be issued as soon as practical with a footnote added at the section dealing with EAL. The document is available on the SELB website at www.selb.org. Boards asked for consultees co-operation in providing a swift response to the consultation document.

It was agreed that in accordance with established practice consultation events would be organised in co operation and/or partnership with affected groups.

The consultation co-ordinators for this screening exercise are:

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Section 75, Northern Ireland Act 1998, 5th Annual Progress Report

The Department of Education, five Education and Library Boards, CCEA, CCMS, Youth Council and the Staff Commission all provided a broad overview of the implementation of their equality schemes for the period April 2004 - March 2005. Reports will be submitted to the Equality Commission and thereafter posted on each authority's website.

Programme of work of the Steering Group includes:

1. Review Religious Education

The Department of Education has been asked to move forward the EQIA scheduled for 2005/06 on the 'Revised Religious Education and Core Syllabus'. Issues raised by the Jewish Community are being pursued by the Steering Group e.g. availability of examinations in Jewish R.E.

2. Role of "Informal" Accredited Education/Training within the System

A meeting has taken place between the Women's Support Network and the Association of N I Colleges to discuss the above matter. A major review is on-going of the Women's sector to consider what the future infra structure should be. A key question for the sector is how to release funding for education support services and training provided outside the national qualification route but which provides considerable benefit to the further and higher education sectors.