

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Review of the initial teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland

December 2013

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 We welcome a review of initial teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland and highlight the need for the Department to meet the requirements of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding equality of opportunity and good relations.
- 1.2 In broad terms, we reiterate our views on the desirability of increased sharing of education and our concerns that the education of teachers has been separate.
- 1.3 We consider that sharing in education must impact meaningfully and substantively on every participant and at all stages of educational provision – including tertiary levels. The Commission is mindful that, in 2013, teacher training in Northern Ireland represents the sole segregated area in the provision of third-level education in Northern Ireland.
- 1.4 In 2008 one of the Commission’s four key proposals for embedding equality and good relations in education was *‘developing equality and good relations elements to the training programmes provided for student teachers, existing teachers, heads and governors’*.
- 1.5 In 2010, we called for the need for *‘greater sharing and collaboration between teacher training colleges’*. In 2011 we highlighted, inter alia, the importance of addressing wider issues linked to sharing in education – including teacher training and the teacher’s exception¹ under the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO).

¹ In 2008, the Commission reiterated our call for “early consideration to be given to the question of urging the removal of the exemption at all levels”

- 1.6 The Commission considers it vital that equality of opportunity and good relations are central to the structures and content of initial teacher education.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission)² welcomes Department for Employment and Learning's review of the initial teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland and the focus on developing a world class system of initial teacher education in Northern Ireland which also enhances and improves sharing and integration within the sector.
- 2.2 We note the Minister's May 2013 statement³ to the Northern Ireland Assembly that *'to best achieve longer term improvements in educational outcomes, it is important that Northern Ireland has a system of teacher education that is both financially stable and is sufficiently flexible to address the needs of an increasingly shared society'*. We welcome the Minister's statement that teacher education *'must reflect our vision that children are educated through a system which is open, inclusive and shared.'*
- 2.3 We also note the Minister's position that *'all qualified teachers should be recruited only on the merit principle and should be capable of teaching in any environment'*. We note that he welcomes amendment by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) of the requirements in relation to the Certificate in Religious Education and refers to *'wider liberalisation of the circumstances where the certificate is required, or indeed the removal of the teacher exemption from fair employment law'*.
- 2.4 Further to the September 2013 appointment of a panel of education experts to examine the case for the reform of teacher education provision in Northern Ireland, we welcome the opportunity to provide advance information to inform the considerations of the panel.

² See annex 1 for the role and remit of the Equality Commission

³ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-12-13/21-May-2013/#1> NIA 21 May 2013

- 2.5 We understand that, as part of the second stage of the study of the Teacher Education Infrastructure in Northern Ireland (which will set out options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education), initial views are being sought to inform consideration of the structures that would be necessary to create a world class system of initial teacher education in Northern Ireland which also enhances and improves sharing and integration within the sector.
- 2.6 The Commission has three overarching objectives in relation to equality and education which are:
- every child has equality of access to a quality educational experience;
 - every child is given the opportunity to reach his or her full potential;
 - the ethos of every school promotes the inclusion and participation of all children⁴.
- 2.7 We are committed to using our full range of powers across equality and anti discrimination statutes *‘to ensure that all children and young people in Northern Ireland have the opportunity to flourish and succeed to the best of their abilities’*.⁵
- 2.8 We therefore take this opportunity to reiterate the need for the Department to meet the requirements of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding equality of opportunity and good relations. The Department will also be aware of the commitments set out in its equality scheme and of the inequalities identified in its audit of inequalities.
- 2.9 Inequalities exist in society for many reasons. As well as discriminatory practices there can be barriers to equality from attitudes, from lack of educational or training opportunities or attainments, from social deprivation or because of personal economic circumstances. It is imperative to work to remove

⁴ ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention, pages 5 and 6. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECkeyinequalities.pdf>

⁵ Ibid - ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child

inequalities, changing society so everyone enjoys justice and dignity and has equal opportunity to reach their full potential⁶.

- 2.10 The Panel and the Department should approach the review with an equality perspective to ensure good decisions and, ultimately, service delivery. Meeting the requirements of the Department's equality scheme, including screening, will assist the Department in this review.
- 2.11 The focus of the Commission's consideration in this submission is on the impact that a system of teacher training can have on equality of opportunity and good relations. In general, it is neither the Commission's intent nor remit to advocate a specific *model* or models of initial teacher training, but rather to indicate the broad equality and good relations goals that we would expect a *system* to deliver.
- 2.12 In broad terms, the Commission has expressed its views previously on the desirability of increased sharing of education in Northern Ireland and its concerns about the impact of separate education. While we have expressed concern that the education of teachers has also been separate we have also recognised and supported the many worthwhile efforts being made to introduce school students to colleagues from other traditions.
- 2.13 The views set out below reflect the Commission's positions to date on the importance of shared education generally and, more specifically, on the issue of teacher training.

3 Shared Education

- 3.1 We consider that our broader views on shared education also have applicability with regards to the specific issue of teacher training, and so set out some key points below.
- 3.2 The Equality Commission has long advocated support for a shared system of education in Northern Ireland. In the Commission's (November 2008) publication "Every Child an Equal Child: An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in

⁶ ECNI, DFP (2008), Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement.
<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECNIPublicSector0508.pdf>

Education and a Strategy for Intervention”⁷ the Commission noted that it was:

“difficult to avoid the conclusion that the long experience of separate educational provision has represented a lost opportunity for everyone in Northern Ireland.”

3.3 In 2010 the Commission jointly published a challenge paper entitled *“Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts - A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st Century.”*⁸ The paper included a number of recommendations to progress sharing and good relations in education, including highlighting the need for *‘greater sharing and collaboration between teacher training colleges*⁹.

3.4 In our February 2012 response¹⁰ to the consultation on “Building A Better Future: Draft Programme For Government 2011-2015” we recognised *“the steps taken in terms of shared resources, including the schools estate and teachers, and shared programmes”* and endorsed:

*“the development of a clear focus on shared education so as to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations”.*¹¹

3.5 The Commission considers that sharing in education must impact meaningfully and substantively on every participant and we have highlighted the importance of sharing at all stages of educational provision – pre-school; early years; primary; post-primary; special needs; and tertiary levels.

3.6 In our November 2012 Submission¹² to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education we advocated:

⁷ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention, pages 5 and 6. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECkeyinequalities.pdf>

⁸ The Good Relations Forum (2010): Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts – A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st century. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EnsuringGoodRelationsWorkinourSchoolsCounts.pdf>

⁹ Ibid, page 17

¹⁰ECNI (2012): Consultation response to the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/word/PfG_ECNIResponse_PfG220212.docx

¹¹ ECNI (2012): Consultation response to the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015, page 3. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/word/PfG_ECNIResponse_PfG220212.docx

“a move to a system of sharing across the full range of education providers at each level of provision; one which routinely teaches students together via a shared curriculum in shared classrooms. The Commission considers that such an approach could better provide children with shared awareness, understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds in Northern Ireland; while also enabling children from different cultures/communities to experience a shared society.

The Commission considers that sharing in education must impact meaningfully and substantively on every child and that a shared experience should be central to the education system as a whole”.

3.7 We also highlighted, inter alia,

- The importance of addressing wider issues linked to sharing in education – including teacher training; the teacher’s exception under FETO; academic selection at age 11; and better understanding the reasons for, and impacts of, any differential patterns of enrolment to education providers
- that societal mixing and social cohesion is limited by separation in our education provision and that a system of shared education has a central role to play in advancing a shared society.
- that advancing sharing in education is aligned not only to delivering good relations, but also to the delivery of a range of government strategies and programmes and maximising efficiencies.
- The importance of engaging with stakeholders to refine and develop an improved system and model(s) and ensuring that any subsequent arrangements be evaluated against a set of indicators, in order to acknowledge success and promote improvement.

4 Teacher Training

4.1 In 2003, the Commission funded research¹³ by Queen's University Belfast entitled '*Equality Awareness in Teacher Education and Training in Northern Ireland*' which concluded that:

*'A significant barrier, identified by teachers, to their wider professional development in these areas was the relative lack of opportunity to teach or work outside their own community background. Aligned with this, was a concern about the unequal access for employment across the Controlled and Maintained school sectors for all teachers.'*¹⁴

4.2 Among the recommendations of the QUB researchers in '*Equality Awareness of Teacher Education and Training in Northern Ireland*' relevant to the Department's current enquiry were:

- The teacher competency framework for initial teacher education (ITE) should be amended to give greater emphasis to the need for teachers to address and deal with the full range of equality issues which may inhibit pupil learning. Progress towards improving awareness of equality issues in teacher education and training, should not be promoted solely through legislation (although this is unquestionably a major avenue), but also through revisiting the underlying principles of education. This is a responsibility which must be shared by all those involved in framing and providing teacher education and by those who are responsible for the employment of teachers.
- A more in-depth approach to training and the promotion of a broader range of experience to enhance teachers' awareness of equality issues should be considered. This might be facilitated by the use of secondments and exchanges within the teaching profession across all types of school in Northern Ireland. This approach would be enhanced if supported by longer and more sustained training by Curriculum and Advisory Support Services (CASS) and others with some specialist knowledge in the area of equality. If this training were delivered

¹³ <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/SumRepEA220304.pdf>

¹⁴ [Equality Awareness in Teacher Education and Training in Northern Ireland 2003 QUB](#)

with firm backing by the Education and Library Boards and the Department of Education it would also introduce a more multi-agency approach as proposed by the universities and university colleges.

- There is a need to ensure that accurate information on equality legislation, as it relates to schools, be provided and be easily accessible to those involved in the provision of initial teacher education. This should have both a primary and post-primary focus. Higher Education institutions should be encouraged to work to ensure that tutors involved in the provision of ITE are trained in the applications of this legislation within schools. The Commission should seek a more pro-active role in working with teacher educators in the integration of equality issues into ITE programmes. However such integration should not be seen as a further external imposition but as a core aspect of the ITE curriculum. This would go some way to reduce the lack of awareness of equality issues as expressed by tutors.

4.3 In November 2008¹⁵ one of the Commission's four key proposals for embedding equality and good relations in education was *'developing equality and good relations elements to the training programmes provided for student teachers, existing teachers, heads and governors'*. We consider it vital that equality and good relations are central to the structures and content of initial teacher education.

4.4 Since then, the Commission has made similar recommendations in specific areas. For example, in July 2013, in relation to girls and young women, the Commission reported to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) who included in their Concluding Observations that Government should *'improve the gender awareness of teaching personnel at all levels of the education system'*¹⁶.

¹⁵ ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention, pages 5 and 6. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECkeyinequalities.pdf>

¹⁶ CEDAW Committee Concluding Observations, UK, July 2013. Available at <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhsldCrOIUTvLRFDjh6%2fx>

4.5 In 2010 the Commission jointly published, with the Community Relations Council, a challenge paper entitled “*Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts - A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st Century.*”¹⁷ The paper included a number of recommendations to progress sharing and good relations in education, including calling for:

“Greater sharing and collaboration between teacher training colleges – the Department and ESA to encourage stronger collaboration between the different teacher training institutions, to ensure all student teachers, whatever their community background, have the appropriate time and opportunity to experience other sectors and school ethos. All initial teacher training courses/programmes to encompass an element of teaching from different sectors on a cross-community basis.”

4.6 This issue is inextricably linked with the maintenance of the teachers exception within the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO). In 2004¹⁸, the Commission undertook a formal investigation and called for the removal of the teacher’s exception from posts in secondary level education. In 2008, the Commission reiterated this position and further called for “*early consideration to be given to the question of urging the removal of the exemption at all levels.*”

4.7 In our 2011 response¹⁹ to the ‘Proposed discontinuance of Stranmillis University College (SUC) and its proposed merger with the Queen’s University of Belfast (QUB)’ we noted that, with regards to that *specific* merger, we had “*reservations in relation to the potential impact on the availability of training places for teachers from the Protestant / Other communities, the ethos and proposed governance arrangements for the new structure*” and

[1pWB8bSlKfa34XmmIN3IG11hwWhjFqrEprJHQfoipZTwnVkhDALmzaR6gCkIPapM2exTMh89SX7GUOJHbH%2bN8Qq9U](http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EnsuringGoodRelationsWorkinourSchoolsCounts.pdf)

¹⁷ The Good Relations Forum (2010): Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts – A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st century. Available at

<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EnsuringGoodRelationsWorkinourSchoolsCounts.pdf>

¹⁸ [Formal investigation under Art 41 \(FETO\) on the Teachers Exception](#) (2004)

¹⁹ ECNI, (June 2011), “Proposed discontinuance of Stranmillis University College (SUC) and its proposed merger with the Queen’s University of Belfast (QUB) –

www.equalityni.org/archive/word/ConsultationResponse_StranMillisQUBSEMerger140611Final.doc

noted that any mergers “cannot be seen in isolation from the overall provision of initial teacher education across Northern Ireland” and that any developments to ITE “must take account of this wider context and potential implications”.

4.8 We set out below some of the concerns raised in our 2011 response so that they might inform the current review.

- **Training Places:** “There is the real possibility that the outcome of the merger may mean that fewer places will be available for training teachers from the Protestant community. This is partly because positions in the merged Stranmillis University College / School of Education at Queen’s may be increasingly sought by applicants from across the community, in particular from the Roman Catholic Community; and partly because prospective teachers from the Protestant community are unlikely to apply to attend St Mary’s” (para 11) and “While the Commission welcomes an increasingly integrated teacher training system, the outworking of this change in equilibrium must be considered ... This is not an argument against a merger but rather a factor which should be borne in mind.” (para 12)
- **Ethos considerations:** “The Commission is mindful that new teachers will increasingly enter a world where greater diversity among those they teach will be more evident than before. It is important that recognition of this increasingly diverse environment finds greater expression within the ethos and governance structures of those providing initial teacher training.” (para 14)
- **Stakeholder Forum:** “We are mindful also of the increasingly diverse nature of our society and believe that provision should ... be made for representation from those groups that reflect the increasingly diverse population of Northern Ireland’s schools”. (para 16)

5 Conclusion

5.1 The Commission is mindful that, in 2013, teacher training in Northern Ireland represents the sole segregated area in the provision of third-level education in Northern Ireland.

- 5.2 We consider it vital that equality and good relations are central to the structures and content of initial teacher education.
- 5.3 The Commission has previously expressed concerns about the impact that the separate provision of teacher training has on job opportunities, professional development and the promotion of good relations; and considers that closer collaboration between all initial teacher training providers in Northern Ireland would have a range of benefits, including in relation to good relations.
- 5.4 In conclusion, there is a compelling need for placing equality of opportunity and good relations at the heart of education structures. Improvements to teacher education are an essential part of moving to the Commission's vision of a society where all children and young people are valued equally and allowed the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

ANNEX 1: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

1. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) is an independent public body established under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Commission is responsible for implementing the legislation on fair employment, sex discrimination and equal pay, race relations, sexual orientation, disability and age.
2. The Commission's remit also includes overseeing the statutory duties on the Department to promote equality of opportunity and good relations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Section 75) and to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in public life under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
3. The Commission's general duties include:
 - working towards the elimination of discrimination;
 - promoting equality of opportunity and encouraging good practice;
 - promoting positive / affirmative action
 - promoting good relations between people of different racial groups;
 - overseeing the implementation and effectiveness of the statutory duty on relevant the Department;
 - keeping the legislation under review;
 - promoting good relations between people of different religious belief and / or political opinion.
4. The Equality Commission, together with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, has been designated under the United Nations Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) as the independent mechanism tasked with promoting, protecting and monitoring implementation of the Convention in Northern Ireland.