

Monitoring Report

*View from the Chair. Business Newsletter 16 February 2010.
Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner, The Equality Commission.*

Many employers will already have started the process of collating data for their annual Fair Employment Monitoring returns to the Equality Commission. They will be compiling a full record of their employees, applicants and appointees in the year 2009, broken down by religion and gender and, where appropriate, by other factors such as grade and part-time or full-time status. It represents a considerable annual commitment by employers and it is gratifying that the level of compliance is so great – each year it comes close to 100%.

Collecting and submitting this data, of course, is not an end in itself. It is the foundation on which a great deal of extremely valuable and demanding work is based. In addition to annual monitoring, employers carry out three yearly reviews, assessing whether they are providing fair participation for Protestants and Roman Catholics throughout their business. They can use the information they have gathered about the make-up and changes within different parts of their workforce to address any problems which are evident, and to track the impact of measures - such as affirmative action plans – which they have been taking to rectify them.

That “ground level” benefit from the annual monitoring data is often overlooked but it has played a key part in the very significant changes which have occurred in the Northern Ireland workplace over the past two decades. These changes have been evident in the overall religious composition of the workforce, but they have also had a great impact on individual workplaces. This has been seen in a greater use of fair and effective recruitment and selection practices and of the development of equal opportunities policies and working environments which encourage the participation of a more diverse and representative workforce.

The data employers provide to the Commission during this year will be the basis for our 20th annual Monitoring Report which will cover the monitored workforce in the year 2009. This will be the first Monitoring Report to reflect the full impact of the enormous economic upheaval and the recession which has followed it. The economic context for employment in Northern Ireland has already changed substantially and is still in flux. Its effects on the workforce will be an issue for consideration over the period of the next few Monitoring Reports.

The Commission will, in the incoming year, be undertaking a study into the composition of the Northern Ireland workforce as a whole, both monitored and unmonitored. It has already proposed to Government that changes be made to the existing monitoring requirements, both by extending them to cover the grounds of nationality and ethnic origin, and through requiring employers to provide monitoring data on applicants and appointees in relation to each recruitment competition, and not, as is currently the case, overall figures for each year.

The work carried out annually on these reports has been, and continues to be, of great benefit both to our understanding of trends and dynamics within the workforce and to the constant development of equality of opportunity and good practice. The Equality Commission knows well and appreciates the great contribution individual employers throughout Northern Ireland make each year, in providing us with this essential data.