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## Monitoring Report

*View from the Chair. Business Newsletter*

*Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner, The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.*

Today the Equality Commission publishes the 22nd Annual Monitoring Report which paints a picture of the workforce composition amongst registered employments in Northern Ireland in 2011.

The collation of returns from just over 3,800 employers confirms recent trends. The overall composition of the monitored workforce is now 53.7% Protestant and 46.3% Roman Catholic. The incremental increase in the Roman Catholic share over the last 10 years sees the monitored workforce broadly in line with the latest estimate for the community shares of those available for work. The 2010 LFS Religion Report indicates that the Catholic share of the economically active (working age) likely falls somewhere in the range [43.3%] to [46.5%].

The correlation of these high-level figures is of significant interest. It confirms that the composition of the monitored workforce at a Northern Ireland level has shifted over the two decades of monitoring to closely mirror labour availability.

The monitoring process, and the three yearly reviews which fair employment legislation also requires, have made an important contribution in helping us understand what is happening in the monitored workforce. Carrying out this work has ensured that employers focus on the community composition of their own workforce and on any issues which may be affecting fair participation by members of the Protestant or Roman Catholic communities.

The depth and breadth of the data allows for a comparison on the basis of sector, gender and type of employment, as well as on religion. It provides an opportunity for analysis of the composition differences across the public and private sectors as well as into different types of employment - full-time, part-time.

Of course, there are limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from this data on its own. While uniquely valuable as an indicator, it does not provide a complete diagnosis of fair participation. To understand if fair participation is being provided fuller

investigation is needed. The Commission continues to look more deeply at the detail of what is contained in employer reviews of fair participation and equality practices, most recently publishing reports on the five Health Trusts and on the proportions of applicants and appointments in the public and private sectors. We carry out a rolling and ongoing programme of work with employers to help them carry out these reviews and to implement any affirmative action plans to address under-representation.

It is important to remember that it is for each individual employer to provide fair participation in their workplace. One part of our role when advising employers is to ask the difficult questions.

Sometimes the most challenging aspect of this work is in dealing with perceptions. This may be around what is acceptable or appropriate in recruitment or selection processes. It can also be around workplace 'chill factors'.

Addressing this can be difficult. The collation and analysis of evidence by employers is key to building understanding of reality in their workforces.

It provides the confidence needed to make and implement a change, or to hold fast to a particular course. Employers across Northern Ireland have shown incredible leadership to bring about the level of balance that the Monitoring Report now indicates.

Recent weeks, with disputes over issues involving community background and symbols of national and/or political identity have shown how fine that balance can be.

The Commission will continue to work with policy-makers, across the areas of employment and service provision, to advise on the parameters of their legal obligations and on good practice in promoting equality of opportunity and good relations when taking their decisions. . It will also be responsive to evidence where this has not taken place.