Equality Commission FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Equality Focus

The e-newsletter of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Annual Conference November 2008

Welcome to a special edition of Equality Focus - the e-newsletter of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. This edition focuses on the Commission's 8th Annual Conference which took place on 12 November. We hope you find this informative and that you will pass it on to anyone you think would find it interesting. We welcome any suggestions or comments you may have.

Equality Commission Conference Focuses on Education

The theme of this year's annual conference was 'equality in education'. Chief Commissioner Bob Collins opened the Conference with a keynote speech setting out the Equality Commission's overarching objectives for the education sector. Delegates were also addressed by the Minister for Education, Caitriona Ruane MLA.

ECNI Chief Commissioner Bob Collins with Minister for Education Caitriona Ruane MLA and ECNI Deputy Chief Commissioner Jane Morrice

Mr Collins said, "To address the very real inequalities in education, and set a course which will offer meaningful equality of opportunity to all children, there must be structural change and a strategic focus. That is a huge task which presents enormous challenges to a range of organisations. It challenges Government, which must recognise the central role education has in determining life chances and its importance for the economy. It challenges educational bodies and partners agencies, in health and housing for example, to develop policies and practices to deal with these constraints. And it challenges the Equality Commission. We must continue to raise public awareness and make sure all those involved in education embed the principles and practices of equality into their core activities. We have developed proposals to do just that and, by working in partnership with all who work in the education field, we can help ensure that no child is left behind."

Click here to read the Chief Commissioner's keynote speech.

"Every Child an Equal Child - the challenge for education"

The Conference also saw the launch of an important new document "**Every Child an Equal Child**" which sets out the extent of educational inequalities in Northern Ireland. Mr Collins said, "Whether you look at disability, at Traveller children, race, new residents, Protestant boys, children in care or who are themselves care-givers; you will see educational disadvantage relative to the total population. This translates almost automatically to diminished potential in the society in which we all live. This publication outlines the Commission's recommendations to embed the principles and practices of equality into the core of the education system."

Leading Educationalists Attend Conference

The conference was attended by those engaged in primary and post-primary education including representatives from teaching unions, youth and community based organisations, education and library boards, schools, colleges and universities.

Delegates were also addressed by Professor Tony Gallagher, Queen's University, Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive Designate, Education & Skills Authority, and Avril Hall-Callaghan and Fern Turner, both from the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council. There were also contributions from young people and representative organisations on personal educational experiences.

ECNI Annual Conference Speakers (l-r) Prof Tony Gallagher, Gavin Boyd, Bob Collins, Avril Hall-Callaghan, Evelyn Collins and Fern Turner

Feedback from those attending was positive with many valuing the exchange of views and ideas, appreciating the contribution by speakers and enjoying the practical nature of the workshops. Recommendations from the workshop discussions will be drawn together into an 'equality in education' Commission report.

Minister for Education's Conference Address

Minister for Education, Caitriona Ruane MLA

The closing address to the Conference was given by the Minister for Education, Caitriona Ruane MLA. She said, "Across many areas of education we have great successes and I recognise and applaud these. There are, however, areas where we need to prioritise those children and young people at risk of not having the educational opportunities to reach their full potential."

"I welcome the work of the Equality Commission and believe that together we have the opportunity to enhance the life chances of children and provide equality of opportunity for all."

Chief Executive Summed Up

Chief Executive Evelyn Collins chaired the event and, in closing, indicated that the Commission appreciated the contribution that had been made by speakers and attendees alike. It was clear, she said, that change is imperative to improve the educational experience and outcomes for many children and young people and that a range of stakeholders have a role to play in driving and supporting change. This was not without its challenges but was necessary for moral, legal, economic and personal development reasons. The Chief Executive welcomed the conference as a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of these issues and to confirm the potential of education to help deliver equality of opportunity for every child.

ECNI Chief Executive Evelyn Collins (second right) with Joanne Bargewell, Michaela Hollywood, Robert Toner and Loraine Devlin who addressed conference delegates about their educational experiences

Chief Commissioner Bob Collins with Denise Moore from St. Catherine's College, Armagh, Patrick McAleavey from St. Patrick's High School, Armagh, and Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive Designate, ESA

ECNI Head of Promotion and Education Fionuala Devlin, with Glenn Reilly, Principal Limavady High School and Marie Cowan from the Integrated Education Fund

---

Need advice or guidance about equality or discrimination?

The Commission provides free and confidential advice about to individuals, employers and service providers on all aspects of equality. We also provide a range of training services. Contact our Enquiry line on 028 90 890 890 or view our advisory publications here.

If you have any comments on this newsletter or would like it in other formats please email: Mark Soult, Communications Officer at **msoult@equalityni.org**
If you received this newsletter from someone else and wish to subscribe to future issues of Equality Focus **please click here**.

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Equality House, 7 - 9 Shaftesbury Square, Belfast, BT2 7DP
Tel: (028) 90 500 600 **Enquiry Line:** (028) 90 890 890 **Fax:** (028) 90 331 554
Textphone: (028) 90 500 589 **Website:** http://www.equalityni.org/

Click here to unsubscribe