Equality Commission FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Equality Focus

The e-newsletter of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

June/July 2008

Welcome to Equality Focus - the e-newsletter of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. 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.

Procurement guidance for the public sector launched

Commissioner Bryan Johnston with Peter Robinson, MP, MLA, then Minister for Finance and Personnel and ECNI Chief Executive Evelyn Collins.

The Equality Commission and the Central Procurement Directorate have launched important new guidance to advise the public sector on taking equality and sustainable development considerations into account in the purchasing of all goods and services. The guidance will support public authorities as they embed equality of opportunity and sustainable development in the planning and delivery of services which will provide an overall benefit for Northern Ireland society.

The procurement guidance will also be of use to potential contractors who wish to engage in procurement contracts with organisations in the public sector.

Click here to view the procurement guidance.

Let's Talk, Let's Listen - consulting children and young people

Bob Collins Chief Commissioner, ECNI; Patricia Lewsley, Children's Commissioner, NICCY and Paula Keenan, Participation Network with pupils from schools in Loughgiel and Cloughmills, Rebecca Lightbody aged 9; Geoffrey Og Laverty aged 10; Ryan McFarland aged 7; Áine Laverty aged 9 and Eimear Mullen aged 5.

The Commission has launched guidance, **"Let's Talk, Let's Listen"**, for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people. Public authorities have a duty, under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to consult directly with children and young people. The guidance highlights why it is important to consult with children and young people who are affected by policies and provides advice on best practice.

The "Let's Talk, Let's Listen" guidance has been produced in both Plain English and Easy Read versions. The Easy Read version is a colourful story book designed for children under 10 years old and for those with learning difficulties. It can help discussion about how best children and young people can make their voice heard by public bodies.

Click here to view Let's Talk, Let's Listen.

If you would like any further information or guidance please contact Paul Noonan telephone 028 9050 0570; email pnoonan@equalityni.org or Patricia Stewart, telephone 028 9089 0856; email pstewart@equalityni.org

Age discrimination settlement

A County Down man, who was found in a Tribunal ruling to have been subjected to age discrimination, has agreed to accept a sum of £70,000 in compensation.

Mr Terence McCoy brought the case against James McGregor & Sons Ltd with the assistance of the Commission, and the Tribunal's decision in January that they discriminated against him on grounds of his age was the first such decision in Northern Ireland since the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 were introduced on 1st October 2006.

The Tribunal had scheduled a hearing on remedies in the case, but the parties have agreed a settlement by which James McGregor and Sons Ltd will pay Mr McCoy £70,000 and have agreed to liaise with the Equality Commission regarding their practices and procedures.

Eileen Lavery, the ECNI's Head of Strategic Enforcement, said that the settlement emphasized for all employers that they must treat issues of age discrimination seriously. "Decisions about recruitment, or any other matters in the workplace, should not be based on assumptions about the capacity or suitability of individuals just because of their age. The law now protects people against such discrimination and the Equality Commission can advise anyone who believes they may have been treated in a similar fashion." Click here to view the press release.

Equality Training for Employers

The Commission works with employers to help them comply with existing equality legislation and to develop employment policies, practices and procedures which promote equality of opportunity for all. As part of this work, we are committed to providing high quality training to employers, particularly those in the private sector, on a wide range of equality issues.

Training seminars are offered on a range of topics such as Equality Awareness, Recruiting Fairly, Managing Disability in the Workplace, Sex Equality and Flexible Working, Employing Migrant Workers, Age Discrimination legislation, Bullying and Harassment at work and employers' duties of Monitoring and Article 55 Review as required by the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

Seminars are held in various locations throughout Northern Ireland and are free of charge. They will be of particular interest to Human Resources professionals, line managers and supervisors, as well as those involved in complying with the employers' duties under the fair employment legislation.

If you would like further details about those planned between September 2008 and March 2009 and for details on how to book a place, please consult the Employer Focus section of the Commission's website. Alternatively you may contact the Commission's Advice Line on 028 9089 0890, by textphone to 028 9050 0589 or by fax to 028 9023 8039.

Customer Satisfaction Survey with Legal Support

There is a high satisfaction level with the Commission's legal services according to a customer satisfaction survey.

166 people who have been assisted by the Commission were surveyed. Just under 80% expressed high satisfaction levels with the overall level of support, with the work of the legal team and with the process of applying for funding/assistance. Levels of communication are considered high and the vast majority of complainants feel that they are kept well informed.

The survey suggests improvements could be made in certain areas such as frequency of communication, continuity of personnel and management of expectations, both of Commission assistance and the legal process. The Division is developing an action plan to implement the suggested improvements.

If you would like more information on the survey, please contact Eileen Lavery on elavery@equalityni.org

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Debate on Homosexuality

Chief Commissioner Bob Collins spoke on the Stephen Nolan Show, BBC Radio Ulster, to give the Commission's point of view on MLA Iris Robinson's comments about gay people. Bob said, "The free expression of personal belief is a crucial right in our society. However, it must show the same restraint that is required of all public utterances. It must be located firmly within the law. And it must not seek to characterise those who do not share the same belief as being worthy of any lesser regard or entitlement.

Elected representatives have a particular duty to promote respect for the law and to encourage its observance. Debate on these matters ought to be moderate in tone and respectful of the legal rights of all the people of Northern Ireland. Public representatives should not use language or make statements which might contribute to a sense of isolation or vulnerability by gay people, who still face prejudice within the community".

Click here to read the full text of the ECNI statement on homosexuality.

Bob also spoke at a Rainbow Project event in The Long Gallery, Stormont on 24 June. The Rainbow Project had organised the event to discuss the inclusion of all section 75 categories in the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (Good Relations) Strategy for NI - including sexual orientation. The focus in the previous Shared Future Good Relations Strategy documents was on actions relating to sectarianism and racism only.

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: Christina Martin, Communications Officer at **cmartin@equalityni.org**
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