

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Mainstreaming Equality of Opportunity for Travellers in Education: Towards a Strategy

April 2006

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Introduction

1. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an independent non-departmental public body established under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Commission has responsibility for legislation on equal pay, sex discrimination, disability discrimination, fair employment and treatment, race relations, and the public sector statutory duty, including the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.
2. The remit of the Commission in respect of Travellers is to promote equality of opportunity and affirmative action; work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination; keep relevant legislation under review; promote good relations between persons of different racial groups and oversee the effectiveness of statutory duties on public authorities.
3. Equal access to education by Travellers is a policy priority for the Commission. The Commission's Business Plan for 2006 to 2007 recognises that prejudices of many kinds continue to influence the way people are treated in Northern Ireland. The plan contains a strategic objective to '*maximise the potential of section 75 so that equality and good relations are at the heart of public policy making and service provision in a number of strategic policy agendas*'. The Commission considers mainstreaming equality of opportunity in education to be a strategic policy agenda for the coming year.

Developing our Policy Position

4. The Commission's policy positions are informed by our knowledge of the practical impact of inequality on people's lives. Our work in relation to Travellers has focused on building relationships with organisations working directly with Travellers, and crucially gauging the views of Travellers. The findings and experiences of the following exercises will inform the development of policy positions within the Commission.

Consultation directly with Travellers

5. The Commission recently consulted directly with Traveller parents and children on their experiences of education in Traveller specific provision, mainstream provision and those not currently in education. Initial findings suggest that Travellers want their children to be engaged in education but also recognise that attendance at school will not necessarily result in acceptable attainment levels for their age group. The following quotes from a child and a parent highlight this:

“If I was sitting on my own.... who ever was asked to sit beside me wouldn’t do it and the teacher would say ‘ach go on she’s a nice girl’. And if I waited off a day, I’d loose a lot of work and I’d try and get it done and I wouldn’t be able to catch up. No one would give me their notes. If there was me and other girls in the class with their hand up the girls would say, ‘why are you going over to her?’”

“My children have very good attendance, great! I never let them miss school, little as they learn at school it is more than what they would learn around the site”.

6. Other findings highlight good practice among some schools but not others and how a joined up approach is necessary. Mixed views on separate provision were expressed by both children and parents but where separate provision was advocated it was to do with safety and the fact that their children would not be bullied. The following range of quotes from children highlight the extent of racist bullying experienced by Traveller children:

“I was beaten up quite badly twice by a country boy,¹ and when the third attack happened, I beat the other boy (badly). The teacher had made us shake hands after the first two fights even though I was quite badly injured - bloody nose, cut over the eye. The third fight resulted in my being suspended for two weeks”.

“... the teachers stick up for the buffers more”.

“They [teachers] blame us more if there’s a fight”.

¹ ‘Country’ is an expression Travellers use for any person not from their own Travelling community.

“They do treat you the same but you have to work much harder to be treated the same”.

“The last time a teacher made me cry was P7”.

Roma EDEM Project

7. The Commission is a partner in a transnational project entitled the *Roma EDEM Project (Promotion of Roma /Traveller Integration and Equal Treatment in Education and Employment)* established with support from the EU Commission. The other participants in the Project currently include three other specialized bodies (representing Romania, the Czech Republic and Hungary) as well as two NGOs (representing Spain and Romania).
8. The purpose of the Roma EDEM Project is *‘To reduce the existing gap between legislation and institutional practices, while including the Roma/Traveller issue in the European political agenda’.*
9. This project is in its final year and conference reports have been produced for education and employment. The conclusions from the education seminar are consistent with the findings from the consultation exercise the Commission held directly with Travellers. Additional issues of partnerships and processes were identified as matters that need to be addressed to improve the educational profile of Travellers. The theme of partnership alongside networking and equal treatment in education for Roma/Traveller will be the framework for the final year of this project. The Conference Report, ‘Travellers and Education Roundtable’ is available on our website at www.equalityni.org.

Policy Position Paper on Segregation

10. The Commission has commissioned a paper on the issue of Traveller provision in education in order to develop our thinking on this issue. This is a major issue for Roma in central Europe and lessons learnt from the Roma experience on policy initiatives around desegregation will be of benefit to Northern Ireland. Two successful models of desegregation have been identified in Central and Eastern Europe that have the potential to provide valuable lessons and tools for mainstreaming equality of opportunity for Travellers in

education. Issues of increased and additional funding, partnerships, full involvement of Travellers and effective promotion of the benefits of these projects contributed to the successful outcomes for Roma children.

Joint Research with NICCY

11. In partnership with the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Commission is carrying out research into the effectiveness of educational provision for Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland. This joint project will ascertain the availability and effectiveness of education services provided by, or on behalf of, relevant authorities to Traveller children and young people across Northern Ireland. The concluding report, due in October 2006, will provide both organisations with recommendations for improvements to policy and practice.

Inequality in Education

12. Our policy work to date has highlighted a number of issues for Travellers in terms of access to education, for example:
 - The high levels of non-attendance at school amongst Travellers, especially the high drop rate for those aged 14 and over is problematic. Recent research² found that non-attendance tended to be caused by three factors: disillusionment; fear of bullying; and the irrelevance of education for Travellers. Evidence³ from our consultation exercise with Travellers, highlights that some Traveller children do not attend school and there is little/no follow up action from the statutory agencies.
 - The vast majority of Travellers leave school with no qualifications and there are high levels of illiteracy amongst Travellers. The lack of accurate data in this area means that it is difficult to compare Key Stage levels of Traveller children with non Traveller children.

² Connolly, P. and Keenan, M. 2000. *Opportunities for All: Minority Ethnic People's Experiences of Education, Training and Employment in Northern Ireland* Belfast. NISRA.

³ ECNI, 2006. Consultation with Travellers and Traveller Children, March 2006

- Following consultation⁴ with Traveller parents and children it is evident that Traveller children are often marginalised within schools in terms of participation in school activities whether extra curricular or an integral component of the school curriculum.
- The significant level of racial prejudice and hostility towards Travellers is a real concern. Evidence⁵ shows that 77% of people do not want Travellers as a family member or close friend; 66% of people would not willingly accept a colleague at work who is a Traveller; 57% would not be willing to accept Travellers as residents in their local area; 40% felt that the nomadic lifestyle of Travellers was an invalid one that should not be supported or resourced by Government.
- There is a need to counteract the high level of Traveller children who do not attend school past the age of 14; and the non-existent attendance of Travellers at tertiary level are issues that need to be addressed immediately.
- The need to reduce problems associated with transitions throughout the school life cycle, the availability of education provision and in what settings.

13. Emerging themes from our work in this area and the extensive research that is available on Travellers and education, suggest that attainment, attendance, participation and transitions are issues that need to be addressed to resolve access to education for Travellers.

What the Commission will do

14. Alongside our consultation with Travellers, joint research with NICCY, and other work listed above, the Commission will consult with key stakeholders on this Paper to inform our policy direction on Traveller education as part of this year's Business Plan.

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Connolly, P and Keenan M. 2000. *Racial Attitudes and Prejudice in Northern Ireland* Belfast. NISRA

15. This paper sets out some of the critical issues for Travellers in relation to their access to education and some broad policy solutions, which the Commission will develop in the coming year. The Commission seeks your views on the direction of this policy agenda as we identify and implement strategies and action for effective public policy intervention. Do you think these are the right ones and have we identified the right problems and solutions?

We will consult on this Paper up to Monday 10th July.

Chapter 2 The Irish Traveller Community - A Profile

16. The Northern Ireland 2001 Census contained a specific Traveller category, which produces the most accurate figure for the number of Travellers in Northern Ireland. It must be noted that this will not guarantee full enumeration due to the nomadic lifestyle for a small number of Travellers, whether this is by choice or as a result of public policy in relation to accommodation, or a reluctance to identify themselves as Travellers.
17. The 2001 census found that there were 1,715 Irish Travellers in Northern Ireland. Males accounted for 52.3% and 47.7% were female. 32.2% were under the age of 16, this compared with 23.5% for the non-Traveller population. The largest concentration is found in west Belfast, with others in Newry, Derry, Strabane, Omagh, Coalisland and Craigavon.
18. The Promoting Social Inclusion Report (PSI) (see below) highlighted a number of revealing statistics, which showed the level of exclusion and inequality that Travellers experience:
 - Only 11% are in paid employment and of those who are economically active, 70% stated that they have had no paid work in the last 10 years;
 - Travellers are eight times more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, have limited access to basic amenities such as running water, electricity and sanitation, this includes some of those living on serviced sites;
 - The mortality rate of Traveller children up to the age of 10 has been found to be 10 times that for the population as a whole. Overall the life expectancy of Travellers is around 20% lower than the general population. Only 10% of the Traveller population are over 40 years of age and only 1% is aged over 65;
 - Attitudes and behaviour of the non-Traveller population appears to compound the problems. A recent survey found that over half the population, 57%, did not want Travellers as residents in their local area and 66% would not accept a Traveller as a work colleague;
19. As regards education, there are high levels of illiteracy among the Traveller community. The vast majority have no

formal qualifications, 92% have no GCSEs or equivalent. This is exacerbated by the high levels of non-school attendance where the majority of Traveller children do not attend school regularly after primary education. This is despite some recent improvements in school attendance and achievement.

20. There are approximately 677 pupils attending school over the five board areas. However it is suggested that the number of Traveller pupils is underestimated as there are fears of bullying if they disclose their ethnicity. It is important that this is factored into any data collection and that the benefits of monitoring are explained to Traveller parents and pupils.

21. In the '*Race Equality in Education Conference Report*⁶' Connolly points out that Traveller parents when interviewed were concerned about their children's education and that they themselves regretted not staying on at school. Our own research⁷ with Travellers also supports this view as those parents who did not attend school themselves insisted that they did not want their children or any of today's young Travellers to have the same experience: "*Our own bad experiences make us want our children to do better*" Connolly, concluded that effective strategies of intervention are needed to address the major problems that Traveller children face in education.

⁶ Connolly, P. 2003, *Racial Equality in Education Conference Report*, Equality Commission and Department of Education February 2003

⁷ ECNI, 2006. Consultation with Travellers and Traveller Children, March 2006

Chapter 3 Policy and Legislative Context

22. The legislative and policy context for accessing education for Travellers in Northern Ireland is complex; Appendix One of this paper gives further information on legislative and policy initiatives in this area.

Legislative Context

23. Travellers have some limited legal protection in Northern Ireland and are defined in the Race Relations Order 1997 (RRO) as: *“a community of people commonly so called who are identified (by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.”*
24. In addition to the RRO, Travellers as a racial group also come within the scope of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This requires designated public bodies in carrying out their duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different racial group.
25. It could be argued that the provisions in the RRO and Section 75 are stronger and have immediate and effective enforcement mechanisms, than for example European or International legislation. However, despite the statutory recognition of Traveller ethnicity, and the legislative framework, Travellers themselves are highly unlikely to seek legal redress when their rights are breached.

Policy Initiatives

26. The DENI (Department of Education, Northern Ireland) policy for Travellers is defined by Circular Number 1993/37 *Policy and Guidelines for the Education of Children from Traveller Families*. The circular is a direct response to Council of Europe resolution 153/01 – 02⁸ on school provision for Gypsy and Traveller children which ‘undertook to promote measures to overcome obstacles to their access to schooling, ‘within the constitutional and financial limits of

⁸ Official Journal C 153 of 21.06.1989

[each state's] own specific educational policies and structures'.

27. This policy was, however, developed before the RRO placed the identity of Travellers as a racial group on a statutory footing. Moreover, it was developed before the Northern Ireland Act established the statutory duty to equality proof and before the whole PSI Working Group on Travellers process. There is therefore a need to revise the policy in the context of these substantial developments.
28. Recent policy initiatives for Traveller education are informed by the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers (PSI)⁹ and the Race Equality Strategy¹⁰.
29. The PSI report contained a recognition that Traveller equality and social inclusion would require an integrated approach across the statutory sector. The PSI report made it clear that: 'Improving the educational attainment of Travellers represents a significant element of any strategy to reduce existing inequalities and to encourage their full inclusion within society'.
30. The Race Equality Strategy provides a framework to tackle racial inequalities; eradicate racism and to initiate actions to promote good relations. Action planning for the Race Equality Strategy is currently being taken forward by Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister through the Race Forum and the Travellers Thematic Sub Group (see Appendix) oversees the implementation of the PSI recommendations.
31. Despite these interventions and commitments from Government, the Commission is concerned by a lack of action in a number of areas, specifically education. It is unlikely that the PSI recommendations by themselves will deliver significant improvements in Traveller education. The recommendations focus on a series on interventions and actions that are not necessarily linked to achieving tangible targets and outcomes for eliminating educational disadvantage for Travellers. For example the recommendations included a proposal to establish a targeted

⁹ *Consultation on the Final Report of the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers: NTSN, OFMDFM 2000*

¹⁰ *A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2010. OFMDFM July 2005*

initiative aimed at promoting the use of integrated (off-site) nursery and pre school provision; develop comprehensive transfer records; and develop support materials for children from nomadic families. The Commission is disappointed that these recommendations have not been completed and that there is a lack of clarity around what commitments in terms of resources and/or people have been dedicated to these initiatives. Of the 14 PSI recommendations relating to education only four have been progressed since 2000. Furthermore action plans for the Race Equality Strategy lack the strategic focus and actions necessary to achieve the stated aims. For example the strategic aim to 'eliminate racism, racial inequality and unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity in all aspects of life' has only illustrative actions rather than specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound objectives or targets.

32. The Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 requires that **all** pupils of compulsory school age (16) in grant aided schools should have access to a balanced and broadly based curriculum, with their progress regulated, assessed and reported to their parents. These provisions apply to all children including Traveller children.
33. Evidence from our consultations with Travellers suggests that for Travellers who leave school at 14 or who drop out all together at whatever age, follow up is limited, ad hoc or non existent which is inconsistent with the provisions of the above Order. Traveller parents believe this to be discrimination, as the following quote highlights,
"The schools don't check on attendance, they are glad not to have to bother with the Travellers".
34. New funding arrangements were introduced in April 2005 through the Common Funding Formula, to ensure that all schools will be funded through a single formula and budgets will be calculated on a consistent, fair and transparent basis. Other elements include support for children of the Traveller community. Each full time pupil designated on the day of the school census as being of the Traveller community will

generate an additional allocation for the school equivalent to the 0.5 of the basic Age Weighted Pupil Units (AWPU).¹¹

35. This is problematic as Traveller children may not be in school on the day of the school census or may attend another school in the same year. The Commission is concerned that as the money is not ring fenced, it may be appropriated for the general school budget. It is unclear whether the use of this extra funding is monitored and linked to tangible achievements for Travellers.
36. Although a number of other initiatives exist across the five Education and Library Boards and through the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children, without a strategic framework in place the educational situation of Traveller children will remain as disadvantaged as ever.

¹¹ Current rates are AWPU £1,728.49 + £864.24 (Weight applied to pupils identified as Travellers - x 0.5).

Chapter 4 Developing Policy Solutions for Travellers in Education

37. The Commission has set out some of the barriers in access to education for Travellers in Chapter One, alongside a critique of the current policy and legislative context in Chapter three. This chapter explores some broad policy solutions with a view to mainstreaming equality of opportunity and promoting good relations for Travellers in education.
38. On the basis of our knowledge of Travellers experiences in accessing education, the Commission considers policy solutions to mainstreaming equality of opportunity for Travellers in education to fall within four board policy strands:
- Attendance
 - Participation
 - Attainment
 - Transitions.

Issue 1: Attendance

39. The attendance rates for Traveller children in education have been consistently low for a number of reasons which are complex and inter-twined with many other issues such as accommodation, nomadism and cultural traditions. Connolly, in the *Race Equality in Education Conference Report*, argues that non-attendance at school tended to be caused by three key factors:
- disillusionment arising from what some Travellers felt to be the low expectations of teachers and thus the poor levels of education they felt they received;
 - a fear among the children of being bullied, especially at secondary schools; and
 - for some of the children especially, a view that education was just not relevant to them and what they intend to do in the future.
40. This is consistent with the findings from our direct consultation with Travellers. Whilst a range of views were expressed by Travellers over attendance, the following is a typical view,

“Children are good attendees until something happens, and parents will keep them away from school if they are being bullied”.

41. The Commission is in no doubt that an improvement in the educational status of Travellers will impact greatly on other aspects of their lives. It is therefore important that following on from the PSI recommendations that this issue does not lose the focus needed for improvements in this area. The Commission will work with the relevant statutory agencies to develop long term effective strategies and initiatives to address this issue.
42. The development of strategies must apply to pre-school through to adult education and build on the good practice that exists and link in with the strategies in Great Britain and Ireland. For example ensuring that admissions processes are flexible and responsive to include joint registration or short term admissions would increase attendance rates. In relation to adult education, practical partnerships between education providers and representative agencies should be developed to promote pro-active links with parents, communities, employers and the corporate sector to increase the training opportunities for Travellers.

Issue 2: Participation

43. Whilst attending school is an area that requires attention, participating and feeling a sense of belonging is another that requires a policy focus. Evidence from the consultation exercise highlighted that Traveller children tend to be regulated to minor roles in school activities and do not fully participate in the broad range of extra curricular activities. The impact that racist bullying has on participation cannot be underestimated and was a common thread throughout our consultation with Travellers. The following quote from a young child shows how this can manifest itself,

“If you have to hold a buffers hand in school when you let go their hand they smell it like there’s a bad smell on their hands”.

44. Anecdotal evidence also highlights that those involved in the education system are not aware of the cultural and family traditions or the problems faced by Travellers when

accessing education. The following is a typical comment from Traveller parents,

“Our children should be enabled to participate in schools because they should not be treated differently from other children”.

45. The use of toolkits can assist all those involved in education to tackle and address this issue. Good practice guides or toolkits in the context of Traveller culture, the legislative framework and equal opportunities can facilitate an understanding of the issues from a rights based approach and promote the issue of Traveller’s generally in the education system. For example, evidence from our consultation with Travellers suggests that an awareness and recognition of their culture would enable young Travellers to be valued and respected within schools. What was also evident was the need to involve and build the capacity of parents to encourage their children in all aspects of education. The use of role models in the classroom, Traveller parents represented on Boards of Governors etc is a useful solution.

Issue 3: Attainment

46. One of the main difficulties in discussing attainment levels is the lack of accurate data in this area. What evidence exists shows that Traveller children leave school early and many leave school with few or no qualifications. Traveller parents are also concerned over the lack of data,

“There should be routine checks in school to compare how settled children are learning and then measure Traveller children learning against that”.

47. Access to accurate baseline data disaggregated by Traveller status from the minority ethnic category is an area that needs immediate action. The Department, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the Education and Library Boards (ELB’s) have not published information despite the collection of school census data and other research. Recent research in March 2005, by the ETI, on “Traveller Children’s Experiences on Mainstream Post-Primary schools in

Northern Ireland: A Qualitative Study” failed to address the issue of systematic data collection. Whilst social inclusion and integration are important issues, the fundamental issue of data relating to Traveller children remains unresolved. Data collection is also required and is a fundamental aspect of the Equality Impact Assessment process.

48. From the update on the PSI Recommendations (21, 22), provided to the Commission from the Department, it appears that some work is progressing on this by the Statistics Branch in conjunction with the Equality Unit and ETI, but it is still not in the public domain.
49. In term of outcomes the availability of robust data would:
 - Facilitate knowledge of the distribution of Traveller children throughout the education system;
 - Enable a comparative analysis on attainment levels at all key stages of Traveller children who attend Traveller specific provision as opposed to Travellers who attend mainstream education provision and a comparative analysis of Traveller children with non-Traveller children;
 - Provide information on applications for admission, school attendance, destination of school leavers, suspensions and exclusions;
 - Be used to measure targets and priorities set by the Department in the Priorities and Budgets; and
 - Examine transitions between pre-school, primary and post primary schools for Traveller children in Northern Ireland.
50. The availability of this information would enable a thorough analysis on the above. Relevant statutory agencies should then develop strategies and effective interventions to ensure that Travellers have acceptable attainment levels similar to their peers.

Issue 4: Transitions

51. Transitions into primary and from primary into post-primary are important milestones for all children and Traveller children are no exception in this regard. Traveller children who attend segregated provision and have little or no contact with the non Traveller community, this period can be problematic for Traveller children and parents. Results from our consultation directly with Travellers suggest that

overwhelmingly they are in favour of integrated provision and that separate provision does not mean equal treatment.

52. The issue of segregated educational provision on racial grounds is problematic as this may contradict the principle of non-segregation in the RRO. Traveller specific provision exists in many forms such as on-site pre-school provision, Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) programmes, and Traveller specific provision at primary level at St Mary's school in Belfast, as there are no non-Traveller pupils attending the school. It is important to note that there is a distinction between targeted provision in a mainstream setting to address known inequalities, to separate provision per se.

53. St Mary's school (formerly St Paul's School for Travelling Children) in Belfast, although no longer formally segregated, is described by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) as '*primarily a school for Traveller children*', however there is no restriction on other children attending. Children travel there by bus, past all their local primary schools, to the school from other areas by the Belfast Education and Library Board. No other school such as this exists in any of the other Boards or at secondary level in Northern Ireland. As one Traveller parent put it,

"Mixed schools where boys and girls learn together is better for all the children, who should all be treated the same".

54. The PSI working group made a specific recommendation to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), Belfast Education and Library Board and the Department of Education to '*develop a clear strategy and action plan to phase out St Mary's...over a 5 year period*' (Recommendation 20). The Government did not accept this view arguing that the CCMS were opposed to the forced closure of St Mary's and it was in accordance with parental choice.

55. The Commission's response to the draft document on A Shared Future stated that "*separate can never be equal*" and that continued segregation has the effect of ghettoising other groups, in this instance Travellers. The Commission's experience in implementing the duties in relation to the promotion of good relations under Section 75, the Race Relations Order 1997 and the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 has indicated that a partnership approach which builds capacity and is properly resourced is critical to solving this issue.
56. As has been pointed out, the Commission, as part of the development of the next steps, has commissioned a paper on this issue to develop our own thinking. This, along with the results of the consultation exercise directly with Traveller parents and children, the outcomes of the NICCY research, the results from consulting on this Paper and our experiences as outlined in the previous paragraph, will direct the Commission's next steps.

Chapter 5: How to Respond

57. We would welcome your views on this Paper on Traveller Education. We would be particularly interested in:

- General comments on the Paper;
- Your views on our policy priorities;
- Any issues we should consider alongside or alternatively to the priorities we have identified; and
- Whether our focus is appropriate.

58. As part of the development of this paper we have held a series of pre-consultation meetings with key stakeholders. We will continue engaging with key stakeholders involved in the provision of Traveller education in Northern Ireland in the development of this.

59. Printed copies of this paper will be circulated to all key stakeholders and an electronic version will be available on the Commission's website at www.equalityni.org.

60. We will consult on the paper for a twelve week period, the deadline for responses is **Monday 10 July 2006**. Please send your response to:

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Appendix 1

Setting the Scene

Appendix 1 will examine the legislative and policy background as it relates to Travellers and will provide further contextual information on Travellers.

The legislative and policy contexts are set out, as are specific Department of Education initiatives to highlight the current policy agenda as it relates to Travellers. Also included in this section is a brief outline of specific Equality Commission initiatives that impact on Travellers.

Legislative Background

There are a number of legislative provisions that afford protection to the Irish Traveller, either distinctly as a racial group as defined in the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, or under a more general duty to promote equality of opportunity as a racial group, such as Section 75, or the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Listed below are some of the relevant domestic legislative instruments that afford protection to Travellers or place a duty to promote equality generally and are specific to education:

Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (RRO)

- The RRO defines the Irish Traveller community as “*a community of people commonly so called who are identified (by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.*”

Section 75 of the NI Act 1998

- In addition to the RRO, Travellers as a racial group also come within the scope of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. This requires designated public bodies in carrying out their duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different racial groups.

The Education Reform (NI) Order 1989

- The Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 requires that **all** pupils of compulsory school age in grant aided schools should have access to a balanced and broadly based curriculum, with their progress regulated, assessed and reported to their parents. These provisions apply to all children including Traveller children.

Policy Context

Recently there have been three specific major policy initiatives in relation to Travellers, the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers, the Race Equality Strategy and the Housing (NI) Order 2003.

The Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers

Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) is a specific initiative within the government's policy of New Targeting Social Need that aims to bring together different government departments, agencies and voluntary bodies to put in place more targeted and additional action to effectively tackle issues facing certain groups. The needs of Travellers were one of the first issues to be identified by government in June 1999 to be addressed within its Promoting Social Inclusion initiative.

The Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group Report on Travellers made a series of recommendations across a number of areas including education. Recommendation 31 directs the Equality Commission to:

“...take responsibility for facilitating, co-ordinating and monitoring a broader education strategy in conjunction with Traveller organisations aimed at reducing racial prejudice and promoting good race relations in the region.

While including a focus on the diverse range of minority ethnic groups that exist, a particular emphasis should be placed on Travellers. With this in mind the Commission should give due regard to the current Citizen Traveller campaign launched in October 1999 and funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in the Republic of Ireland.

The Commission should consider including the following within such a strategy:

- *A specific media campaign (including television and radio adverts, posters and leaflets); and*
- *The production of training resources for use by youth and community groups.”*

The governments response to this recommendation stated that the Commission, “..will take forward a broad education strategy with a particular focus on these good practice guides....” .

Recommendations 14 through to 23 specifically direct the Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Learning to a series of actions. Also included were inter-departmental recommendations looking at monitoring and the setting up of an inter-agency forum.

The government responded to each of the PSI Working Group recommendations in February 2003, also stating that the responses to the Working Group’s recommendations and monitoring of action would be taken forward as part of the Government’s Race Equality Strategy.

The Commission has made progress on Recommendation 31 and has published Good Practice guides in relation to Health and Social Care, Racial Equality in Education, Race Equality for Travellers in Planning and is currently working on a housing Code of Practice.

Race Equality Strategy

The government’s Race Equality Strategy was prepared by OFMDFM and a working group set up which is the Race Equality Forum. The ongoing Race Equality Forum is chaired by OFMDFM, and consists of representatives from government departments, relevant statutory agencies, voluntary organisations working in and with the black and minority ethnic and Traveller communities and the Equality Commission. It was established in February 2003.

A Traveller Thematic Group has been set up to assist the forum to consider issues specifically relating to Travellers and is currently

being reviewed. The Commission is a member of the Thematic Group.

Housing (NI) Order 2003

Responsibility for existing owned and managed Council serviced sites transferred to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) as a result of the Housing Order. The NIHE has strategic responsibility for the accommodation for the Traveller Community, which includes assessment of accommodation needs. The NIHE has recently launched the 'Travellers' Accommodation Needs Report'.

Wider Policy Context

Specific Department of Education Initiatives

The Department of Education has progressed a number of initiatives that are either specific to Travellers or impact on Travellers generally:

DE Circular 1993/37: Policy and Guidelines for the Education of Children from Travelling Families

This circular is a direct response to the Council of Europe resolution 153/01-02 on school provision for Gypsy and Traveller children. This circular was developed before the introduction of the RRO into Northern Ireland which specifically identified Travellers as a distinct ethnic group and the introduction of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Department of Education is about to begin the process of updating this and has given a commitment to adhere to Section 75 in all stages.

Common Funding Formula

New funding arrangements were introduced in April 2005 to ensure that all schools will be funded through a single formula and budgets will be calculated on a consistent, fair and transparent basis. Other elements include support for children of the Traveller community. Each full time pupil designated in the school census as being of the Traveller community will secure an additional

allocation for the school equivalent to the 0.5 of the basic Age Weighted Pupil Units (AWPU).¹²

Education Training Inspectorate

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) monitors, inspects and reports on the standard of education and training provided by schools, colleges and other grant-aided organisations. Traveller children in west Belfast are likely to attend one primary school, at which all the enrolled pupils are Travellers. A series of inspections have been carried out on St Paul's (1995 and 1998) and thereafter St Mary's (2001/02/04/05). It appears from the reports that attendance and attainment are still areas where further improvements are needed. There have been measured improvements in attendance and attainment over the last number of years.

Forum for the Education of Traveller Children

The Forum for the Education of Traveller Children was formed in 1993 and comprises representation from the Department of Education, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). Their mission statement is, "to *promote and support the statutory education of Traveller's children in accordance with Circular 1993/37 and the DENI Strategic Plan.*" The purpose of the Forum is advisory and consultative; to maintain a strategic overview of Travellers' education and to liaise with other agencies outside Northern Ireland.

Developments in Great Britain and Ireland

Both the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in England and the Department of Education and Science (DES) in Ireland have developed strategies to tackle Traveller education disadvantage - 'Aiming High: Raising the attainment of Gypsy Traveller pupils' and 'The Traveller Education Strategy' respectively. Wales and Scotland are introducing similar strategies to complement their devolved administrations.

The Commission for Racial Equality has launched 'Gypsies and Travellers: 'A Strategy for the CRE, 2004 – 2007' and focuses on a number of areas such as, population and population records, race

¹² Current rates are AWPU £1,728.49 + £864.24 (Weight applied to pupils identified as Travellers - x 0.5).

relations, accommodation, employment, health, criminal justice and education.

Equality Commission Initiatives

Racial Equality in Education: A Good Practice Guide

The Commission developed a Good Practice Guide in keeping with its remit under the RRO and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, and in response to the PSI recommendations. It is a resource for policy makers and administrators within the education system and a benchmark against which racial equality standards can be established and measured.

Equality Awareness in Teacher Education and Training in Northern Ireland

The Equality Commission undertook research into the exposure that teachers had in relation to equality issues as they relate to pupils' learning and their own practice within classrooms in either their initial teacher training or their continuing professional development.

A number of issues were identified, specifically in relation to: equality issues at policy and systems levels; equality issues in teacher education and employment; and issues of equality in the teacher's education curriculum and in school classrooms. Addressing these equality issues systematically will have a positive impact in relation to the quality and provision of education for Traveller children.

Roma EDEM Project

The Commission is a partner in a transnational project entitled the *Roma EDEM Project (Promotion of Roma/Traveller Integration and Equal Treatment in Education and Employment)* established with support from the EU Commission. This project aims to reduce the gaps between anti-discrimination legislation and institutional practices whilst at the same time empowering Traveller organisations and to foster trans-national good practice among the partners. The other participants in the project currently include three other specialized bodies (representing Romania, the Czech Republic and Hungary) as well as two Non Governmental Organisations (representing Spain and Romania).

The objectives of the Project are to promote an anti-discrimination approach within public services as follows:

- *To promote an anti-discrimination approach within public services and the fostering of systemic policies improving the access of the Roma/Traveller people to education and employment;*
- *To promote the capacity building and specific training of stakeholders in the public and private fields;*
- *To improve Roma/Traveller access to all the information and resources available in order to combat discrimination in education, employment and other related fields;*
- *To empower the Roma and Traveller Associations and their participation in the decision process in the field of equal treatment;*
- *To promote quality and non-stereotyped information concerning Roma and Traveller reality and culture;*
- *To foster trans-national, inter-institutional and inter-sectoral cooperation among all agents involved in the field of equal treatment;*
- *To increase the involvement and participation of the regional and local administrations with key competencies in the implementation of anti-discrimination.*

A steering group has been set up to oversee this project which includes representation from An Munia Tober, Save the Children, the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children and the two education departments.

Roundtables have recently been held on education and employment; reports will be available shortly.

Wider ECNI Education Initiative

The Commission is currently undertaking a mainstreaming equality in education initiative looking at the potential designation of schools for Section 75; building equality into the Inspection and teacher training. The issue of Traveller education will be fed into each of these elements as appropriate. This is progressing in the current business year 2005/06.