



## **Response to Department of Education Review of Public Administration – Promoting Equality through the Review of Public Administration**

**August 2009**

### **Introduction**

1. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (“the Commission”) is an independent public body established under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Commission is responsible for implementing the legislation on fair employment and treatment, sex discrimination and equal pay, race relations, age, sexual orientation and disability. The Commission’s remit also includes overseeing the statutory duties on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (s 75).
2. The Commission’s general duties include:
  - working towards the elimination of discrimination;
  - promoting equality of opportunity and encouraging good practice;
  - promoting positive / affirmative action;
  - promoting good relations between people of different racial groups;
  - overseeing the implementation and effectiveness of the statutory duty on relevant public authorities; and
  - keeping the legislation under review.

### **Context - education**

- 3 The Commission welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the potential impact on equality and good relations of the Department of Education’s (the Department) paper, ***Promoting Equality through the Review of Public Administration.***

- 4 The Commission and the Department expressed their shared commitment to ensuring that all children and young people should be allowed the opportunity to develop to their full potential at our annual conference in November 2008 when we launched ***Every Child an Equal Child***, the Commission's statement on key inequalities in education and our strategy for intervention.
- 5 ***Every Child an Equal Child*** outlines the Commission's three overarching objectives
  - every child has equality of access to a quality educational experience
  - every child is given the opportunity to reach his or her full potential
  - the ethos of every school promotes the inclusion and participation of all children<sup>1</sup>.
- 6 ***Every Child an Equal Child*** also describes the four pillars of the Commission's work to achieve these objectives
  - reviewing curriculum support materials and developing good practice guidelines
  - setting strategic actions and outcomes to reduce inequalities through equality schemes
  - developing equality and good relations elements to the training programmes provided for student teachers, existing teachers, heads and governors
  - developing equality and good relations indicators for schools to be used to monitor progress on embedding equality and good relations.
- 7 The Commission is also committed to work on the Review of Public Administration (RPA). We see the change which it brings to be a once in a generation opportunity to create new structures, policy making and service delivery with equality of opportunity and good relations at their heart. As it has an impact on all of public policy it can also bring the changes in other areas of public service which complement the role of schools as they interface with other aspects of society to develop sustainable, successful communities

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<sup>1</sup> Every Child an Equal Child, ECNI 2008

8 The tools for doing this are in the mechanisms of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (s 75). Equality appraisal is an iterative process. As policies cascade from high level strategies they should be subject to the equality appraisal process in order that the equality of opportunity and good relations outcomes are maximised. The Commission has separately given advice to the Department on this and will continue to do so.

## **Opportunities through the RPA**

9 The Commission's work on the RPA has established a set of principles which should be embraced by organisations throughout the RPA as new structures are created for delivering future services. They are

- leadership
- communication
- accountability and information
- collaboration
- inclusion.

10 These principles can, as the Commission has previously advised<sup>2</sup>, be at the heart of all aspects of education

- structures
- recruitment
- public appointments
- training
- the schools estate
- procurement.

11 All change requires effective monitoring and review. The Commission recognises the work being done by the Department and the new bodies to establish indicators such as that being undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) within Together Towards Improvement. We welcome the opportunity for continuing engagement with them on this and other initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>2</sup> On RPA papers 5, 19, 20 and in other statutory advice

- 12 Continuing engagement between Department and the Commission, as well as between the Department and all stakeholders, is imperative in order to maximise the gains for equality of opportunity and good relations through the RPA. The Commission looks forward to working with the Department in achieving this.

**Equality Commission  
August 2009**