

View from the Chair; Business Newsletter; 14 February 2023 Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission NI

Adding social value in tendering processes

Public sector procurement is big business. A new social value procurement policy came into effect last year in Northern Ireland and at the same time it was announced that up to £158million worth of government tenders would include social value as part of the criteria.

The Social Value Unit of the Strategic Investment Board is championing social value across the public sector. It helps public bodies to design, implement and monitor social value clauses in their contracts, for example employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups. These contracts can deliver improvements to the quality of life of people, including promoting equal opportunities in the workplace. Contracts could include, for example, work placements for people facing disadvantage, skills development for existing employees, opportunities for social enterprises and SMEs in the supply chain, initiatives which encourage fair work practices, business in education activities and digital inclusion activities.

The Commission is working with NIUSE (the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment) to encourage employers to take positive action for disabled people and achieve that double win of improved equality outcomes and better performance in tender competitions. There is a lot of information about positive action and disability on our website, including examples of lawful positive actions that employers have taken. This may include working with NIUSE as a brokerage to widen the pool of job applicants coming forward, using disability organisations who are NIUSE members. These positive action steps can help a company perform better in competitive tendering by standing out and showing they are supporting public sector goals.

Together with our partner, NIUSE, we are running a free webinar on 20 February 2023, from 11 to 12.30. This webinar aims to raise awareness of the types of positive action measures and support available in the training and employment of people with disabilities that can put organisations in a stronger position when tendering for government contracts.

We will be joined by speakers from the Strategic Investment Board and organisations who have obtained contracts using social value. We will also be joined by a participant from one of the pre-employment programmes who will be talking about his experiences in one of the programmes. We will have a panel discussion about social value, adopting positive action measures and support available in Northern Ireland.

The Equality Commission is here to help you navigate through and beyond equality rules and regulations to get the best outcomes for our businesses, our communities and our people. Phone us on 028 90 500 600 or email us at enquiries@equalityni.org with any queries about positive action or any equality issues at work.

We know from our work with Northern Ireland employers that many forward-thinking companies are already pushing the boundaries with proactive, equality-driven initiatives. The spin-off is not just that you improve your business and make it the kind of place that people really want to work in, but also that you are playing a part in harnessing the spending power of our public sector to help deliver equality, economic, environmental and wider societal benefits.