



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Joint Committee

November 2015

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on recent engagement by the Independent Mechanism for Northern Ireland (IMNI) as part of its role under Article 33 of the Convention.

IMNI Engagement

2. IMNI has taken forward the following engagement activities outlined below.

Seminars on the UNCRPD with MLAs and officials

3. IMNI staff have taken forward proposals with assistance from Politics Plus, as highlighted at the last Joint Committee meeting, to deliver a seminar on the UNCRPD and effective disability strategies for MLAs and officials. The seminar included a representative of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Dima Yared, and the academic expert Eilionóir Flynn (Deputy Director at the Centre for Disability Law and Policy, NUI Galway).
4. Separate invitations were sent to all MLAs, the members of the nine disability-related All Party Working Groups and members of relevant Assembly scrutiny Committees e.g. the Social Development

Committee (welfare reform), the Health Committee (Transforming Your Care), the Employment and Learning Committee (the Disability Employment Strategy) etc.

5. The seminar, introduced by IMNI Commissioner Christine Collins, took place in the Members Dining Area in Parliament Buildings, Stormont on 9 June 2015 and was attended by 4 MLAs and 25 other individuals including other party members, members of the assembly research service and Committee Clerks.
6. A post-event evaluation indicates that the event was well received. Of those who responded (9) to the evaluation survey, all rated the event as good or very good.
7. A seminar was also delivered (10 June) by Ms Yared and Ms Flynn to officials from the OFMDFM Equality, Human Rights, Disability and Active Ageing Unit and other Departments concerned with the delivery of the Disability Strategy (total: 20).

Related ECNI / NIHRC Engagement

8. In addition to direct engagement to highlight the Convention; the role of IMNI; and the parallel and shadow reporting processes to the UN, both Commissions also continued to use wider engagement activities to advance disability rights issues.

Political engagement

9. The NIHRC provided a briefing to the NI Assembly Social Development Committee on its report 'The Human Rights of Carers' (5 March 2015). During the briefing session the NIHRC highlighted the impact of the Welfare Reform Bill on persons with disabilities and their carers.
10. A representative of IMNI attended a meeting of the All Party Working Group on Mental Health (10 March 2015) at which presentations were made by Mindwise on Supporting Young People with Mental Health Issues in contact with the Criminal Justice System and by

Action Mental Health on the provision of personal well being courses¹ to meet the needs of offenders in Hydebank and Maghaberry prisons. Both projects claimed positive and cost-effective outcomes. Action Mental Health will publish research into the funding of mental health services in April 2015.

11. A representative of IMNI participated in a meeting of the All Party Working Group on Disability (28 April 2015) to discuss participation of disabled people in public life and highlighted relevant UNCRPD articles.
12. A representative of IMNI attended a meeting of the All Party Working Group on Mental Health (19 May 2015) at which Contact NI delivered a presentation 'Towards zero suicide in healthcare systems'.
13. The Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commissioner and staff members gave evidence on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill to the NI Assembly Education Committee (24 June 2015). (For details of issues raised see accompanying Policy and Research update paper).

Good Practice Advice

14. The Equality Commission continues to promote good practice in relation to positive action regarding employment and access to public life, consultation, monitoring and training and continues to deliver training sessions on the DDA and the disability duties to employers and service providers on the employment and access provisions of the DDA as well as Section 75 and the disability duties.
15. The Equality Commission has developed a 'Short Guide to the Equality and Disability Duties'².

¹ For example: Anger Management, Developing Confidence and Self-Esteem, Understanding Risk, Healthy Lifestyles, Communication Skills, Understanding Relationships, Valuing Equality and Diversity, Mental Health Awareness etc.

² Available at: <http://www.equalityni.org/Employers-Service-Providers/Public-Authorities>

16. The Equality Commission also organised a conference on the positive disability duties for public authorities (3 December 2014), including speakers representing Cavan Council and the Scottish Prison Service, to highlight good practice.

Disability Action Plans

17. The Equality Commission continue to carry out desk audits of Disability Action Plans (DAPs).
18. The Commission held meetings with 32 public authorities in first 6 months of the current business year with the aim of improving the action measures contained in the Plans i.e. that they appropriately focused on duty as well as ensuring that a current DAP is in place for the public authority.
19. The Commission also provided feedback on DAPs to 55 public authorities during engagements on 5, 6 and 12 November 2015, encouraging, where necessary, the revision and updating of Plans and the sharing of good practice.

Engagement with the Disability Voluntary and Community Sector

20. A representative of IMNI attended a meeting of the Omnibus DPLO All Inclusive Project on Health and Social Care (4 December 2014) to outline the role of IMNI and its work on the CRPD.
The event was attended by 64 disabled people from the Greater Belfast area, Bangor and Lisburn, representatives of pan-disability organisations, the DHSSPS Minister and Assembly Health Committee Members.
21. A representative of IMNI attended a Mindwise stakeholder conference (29 January 2015), drawing attention to the Jurisdictional Parallel Report on the Implementation of the CRPD in Northern

Ireland and to IMNI's position on the Disability Strategy for Northern Ireland.

22. A representative of IMNI attended an event organised by the Omnibus Partnership as part of their All Inclusive project (20 February 2015). The representative provided an overview of the UNCRPD and the work of IMNI.
23. A representative of IMNI participated in a meeting of the Disability Action Forum on Self-Directed Support (1 April 2015).
24. IMNI arranged a briefing (10 June 2015) by Ms Dima Yared (OHCHR) with representatives of DPOs and NGOs (12 participants) on developments concerning the UNCRPD and the seminars held with MLAs and officials (referred to above).
25. A representative of IMNI participated in a meeting of the Northern Ireland Union for Supported Employment (16 June 2015) to discuss concerns relating to the forthcoming Disability Employment Strategy.
26. A representative of IMNI participated in the AGM of the Omnibus partnership (26 June 2015). The event provided an opportunity to further discuss the Equality Commission's position on the SEND Bill with the Chair of the Assembly Education Committee.
27. Equality Commission representatives met with representatives of the British Deaf Association (30 July 2015) to provide an update on the role of IMNI, developments regarding UNCRPD and the Disability Strategy.
28. Representatives of IMNI met with a representative of Disability Action (12 August 2015) as part of regular liaison meetings agreed, in order to share information regarding developments at local, national and international level.

29. Representatives of IMNI met with representatives of the Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance (20 August 2015) to discuss issues arising from the SEND Bill.
30. Representatives of NIHRC and ECNI met with members of the Treacy and Kelly families and their medical and legal advisors (12 October 2015) to discuss concerns with regard to the response of the education and health authorities concerning children with brain injuries. Advice was provided on the opportunity to raise relevant issues in the context of the UNCRPD shadow reporting process.
31. A representative of IMNI participated in a seminar hosted by Age NI and Ark on 'Older People and Health and Social Care' (22 October 2015).

Engagement with public authorities

32. A representative of IMNI participated in a meeting (25 March 2015) with members of the Health and Social Care Board to discuss the Equality Impact Assessment of proposals to take forward Self-Directed Support policy and to provide advice on obligations arising from the UNCRPD.
33. A representative of IMNI participated in a pre-consultation meeting (8 June 2015) by the Health and Social Care Board on the closure of statutory residential homes for older people, drawing attention, inter alia, to the principle in international human rights law of non-regression of rights.
34. Representatives of IMNI participated in a pre-consultation meeting on the Accessible Transport Strategy (18 June 2015) with a representative of the Department of Regional Development. The IMNI representatives outlined the relevant obligations arising from the UNCRPD.

35. A representative of IMNI participated in a briefing by the Department for Employment and Learning (17 November 2015) on the Disability Employment Strategy.

Academic engagement

36. The NI Human Rights Commission are represented on the University of Essex research cluster examining mental capacity law compliance in NI and Scotland with the UNCRPD, the research cluster held a round table in Belfast on the Mental Capacity NI Bill including key stakeholders and experts from across the UK. (September 2015).
37. Representatives of ECNI and NIHRC spoke at Disability Research Network Conference (20 October 2015): 'Putting People at the Heart of Human Rights' on the work of IMNI and the challenges arising from implementation of the UNCRPD, including expectations, resources, awareness and monitoring compliance. A case study of the challenges of implementing Article 12 of the UNCRPD (equal recognition before the law) in the context of the Mental Capacity Bill was provided.

General awareness raising

38. The Equality Commission issued a press release³ (3 December 2014) to mark the UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities
39. The Equality Commission issued a UNCRPD e-zine (December 2014) to highlight the delay in consideration of the UK State Party Report, Northern Ireland specific issues with regard to the implementation of the UNCRPD, IMNI's role and the UNCRPD reporting process.

³ Available at:

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/News%20and%20Press/Press%20Releases/2014/Intl-Day-Disabled-Persons-FINAL.pdf>

40. The Equality Commission has also issued a number of tweets about UNCRPD over the past year to Twitter account followers (numbering approximately 4,000).
41. The Equality Commission and Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission have undertaken a range of general awareness raising activities over the past 12 months:
- a briefing on disability rights at a National Union of Students/Union of Students in Ireland event (ECNI, 11 February 2015).
 - participation in a meeting of the Bill of Rights consortium (NIHRC, 18 March 2015) providing an update development with the UNCRPD Committee.
 - information stand at a Disability Fair organised by the Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership (ECNI, 20 March 2015).
 - equality awareness session with a focus on disability for final year Occupational Therapy students at the University of Ulster (ECNI, 23 March 2015).
 - information stand at a Disability Show organised by Ability Now (ECNI, 25/26 September 2015).
 - eight equality awareness sessions with students in further and higher education with special needs (ECNI, February – November 2015).
 - Presentations at advice and information days organised by the Omnibus Partnership (ECNI, 11 February 2015: 35 participants; 6 March 2015: 70 participants).

42. The UNCRPD is specifically featured in the foreword of the Equality Commission's 'Annual Report 2014-2015'⁴.
43. Most recently, the Equality Commission issued a press release⁵ (9 November 2015) to mark twenty years of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which included links to the UKIM interim list of issues report and the Commission sponsored research on implementation of the UNCRPD in Northern Ireland.

'Every Customer Counts' Initiative

44. The '*Every Customer Counts*' (ECC) initiative, launched by the Equality Commission in October 2014, aims to:
- raise awareness amongst service providers of legislative requirements and good practice issues, in relation to disability and service provision; and
 - encourage changes to policies, practices and procedures in relation to provision of services for disabled people.
45. The initiative included extensive engagement with stakeholders including Ards District Council; Newtownards Chamber of Trade; Disability Action; Tourist Board; Building Control; FSB; and Armagh District Council and Healthy Cities Project, Derry. Two round table consultation events were also held, one involving small businesses and one involving disabled service users.
46. The Commission has developed a suite of guidance documents for service providers which are now available to download from the new 'ECC' section of the Commission's website. In February 2015 the

⁴ ([press release](#) 10 Nov 2015); Publication: <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Corporate/Annual%20Reports/AnnualReport2014-15.pdf>

⁵ Available at: <http://www.equalityni.org/Footer-Links/News/Delivering-Equality/20-yrs-of-the-Disability-Discrimination-Act>

Commission also began promoting the 'ECC' commitment statement which traders were invited to sign and communicate to their customers.

47. The "ECC" initiative has been piloted in the market town of Newtownards. Key Partners included Ards Borough Council, Newtownards Chamber of Trade and Disability Action.
48. Feedback has been positive with 14 traders attending the launch event (November 2014) with the majority advising that they would use the ECC materials. Website outputs included 286 visits to the main page, 182 visits to the press release and 12 commitment registrations. A leaflet campaign was also undertaken resulting in 2 online commitments.
49. Further work to be undertaken as part of the project includes: documenting case study examples for use on the ECC webpage; working with the new North Down and Ards District Council to extend promotion of the scheme to Bangor and Hollywood; and to identify project outcomes/impact.
50. The Private Sector Team within the Advice & Compliance Division have been involved in a range of activities aimed at promoting employment practices consistent with the equality related Statutory Codes of Practice, including the Disability Code of Practice for Employment & Occupation.

IMNI
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