



**Equality Awareness in  
Teacher Education and  
Training in Northern Ireland**

**Summary Report**

**March 2004**

**Graduate School of Education, Queen's University of Belfast**

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## **OVERVIEW**

This document presents a summary of research examining Equality Awareness in Teacher Training, funded by the Equality Commission.

The views expressed herein are those of the authors.

Copies of the full report can be downloaded from the Equality Commission website at: <http://www.equalityni.org>

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## RESEARCH CONTEXT

Differential achievement in educational performance has been the subject of international research which has sought to understand the complex interaction of achievement with characteristics such as gender, race and class. Findings (Good, 1987), in part, have indicated that teachers form expectations of, and assign labels to, pupils based upon such characteristics as body build, gender, race, ethnicity, given name and/or surname, dialect, and socio-economic level, among others.

In Northern Ireland – reflective of an education system with a distinct level of religious segregation, a large but declining degree of gender segregation, and a marked level of social segregation – much research has been focused on the potential impact of a religiously segregated school system on community attitudes and divisions. In addition, while Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage were established as a compulsory component of the curriculum in Northern Ireland, the effective focus was on religious and community differences and tended not to address other social divisions such as gender, race/ethnicity and disability.

Research published by the precursors of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (hereafter ‘the Commission’) has indicated that in Northern Ireland initial or in-service teacher training did little to inform teachers’ awareness of equality issues or how differences based on gender and ethnicity might inform classroom practice.

For example, in research entitled “Sex Stereotyping of Occupations amongst primary schools”, (Leith et al, forthcoming & Knipe et al, 2001) a survey of primary teachers found that less than a third agreed that issues with regard to gender were raised as part of their initial teacher training. In the same survey, 44% of teachers thought that in-service courses attended raised gender issues. Furthermore, evidence from a 1999 Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland study (Johnston et al, 1999) on the teaching of primary science suggests that teachers are given little systematic training on how to approach the issue of gender in the classroom. This report recommended that initial teacher training courses should instil an awareness among trainees with regard to gender issues and developing strategies to avoid unwittingly engaging in inappropriate gender-discriminatory teaching behaviours.

More recently, evidence from a survey of teachers funded by the Commission (Gallagher & Leitch, 1999) found that 96% of respondents said they had received no information on ethnic minorities as part of their initial teacher training, while 85% said none was received as part of in-service training. The practical implications of this lack of information and training are evidenced in recent research in Northern Ireland - Mann-Kler (1997), for instance, recommended that DENI publish guidance on the teaching of all ethnic minority children. Additionally, Connolly & Keenan (2000) found that the majority of schools tend to respond inappropriately to

incidents of racist bullying and harassment and that the approach of teachers, unwittingly, sometimes made matters worse.

## **RATIONALE**

The above work suggests that teachers have had little exposure 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.

Differential exposure to equality issues serve to ensure an imbalance and, in most cases, a continued lack of understanding of the impact of equality issues on teachers' own practice and professional development and thereby on the educational achievement of their pupils. The Commission therefore initiated a study to gauge the extent of awareness and prioritisation of equality issues in teacher education and training in Northern Ireland. The research seeks to address the following questions:

1. To what extent do equality issues inform the development of teacher education policy in Northern Ireland?
2. To what extent do initial and/or in-service teacher education and training programmes inform and promote teachers' awareness of equality issues?
3. Does any awareness of differences based on gender, race, community background and disability inform teachers' own classroom and school practice with respect to pupils' educational achievement?
4. Is there evidence of good practice in equality issues in teacher education and training in jurisdictions beyond Northern Ireland? If so, what form do these take?
5. How might equality issues best be addressed and included in programmes of teacher education and training in Northern Ireland?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

To best operationalise the aims of the study, three specific groups were identified as encompassing all those involved with both the provision and receipt of initial and continuing teacher education and training. Thus, the research seeks to explore:

- (i) **Equality Issues at Policy and System Level:** amongst the policy makers and stakeholders in teacher education and training across all levels
- (ii) **Equality Issues in Teacher Education and Employment:** amongst 'providers' of teacher education and training at each of its main stages, and
- (iii) **Issues of Equality in the Teacher Education Curriculum and in School Classrooms:** amongst 'users' including those who are experienced teachers, those recently qualified, and those who were still in training.

### **Research Tools**

*A desk study / literature review* collated and analysed currently published materials from other jurisdictions outside Northern Ireland to initiate the research process. This encompassed the establishment of the level of awareness of equality issues in relation to the content and delivery of teacher education and training policy beyond Northern Ireland. This includes and prioritises equality issues in teacher education and training.

*Seminars* were used to gather together key policy makers in teacher education and training and those who provide education and training for teachers, either through higher education, the Regional Training Unit and the Education and Library Boards. Here, the contexts within which equality issues are shaped for teacher education and training in Northern Ireland and the extent to which these issues are prioritised in policy and practice were explored. This took the form of a mapping exercise of the current status of equality issues within teacher education and training, and some consideration of issues emerging from this.

*Focus groups* were used to assess the awareness of equality issues in teacher education and training amongst the 'users' of such education and training, i.e. the teachers themselves. Data were collected from a sample of teachers from each of the main teaching phases. These were student teachers, those recently qualified (engaged in induction and early professional development programmes) and those with longer teaching service. Views regarding the extent to which equality issues have been adequately included in their professional education and training and how these were addressed in schools were sought.

### **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

The summary presents the research in two major sections; an abridged summary of relevant literature arising from the desk study, followed by the research findings and recommendations arising from the seminars and focus groups.

## Literature Review

The intention here is to provide some comparative information on policy on equality in education in a range of other jurisdictions providing a wider context for a consideration of the role of equality in teacher education and training in Northern Ireland. The comparative survey focused on a number of English-speaking countries.

The discussion is organised into three main themes:

Equality legislation in Northern Ireland: The first theme provides a background to equality legislation in Northern Ireland and identifies some of the factors that have influenced its development.

Education as an Employer: The second theme provides a comparative discussion beginning with an examination of the role of education systems as significant employers and the protection that exists against discrimination in the employment of teachers, and the caveats to uniform anti-discrimination measures, and whether there are any special measures taken to encourage the participation of minorities or other specified groups as teachers.

Education as a service: The final theme relates to the role of education systems as significant providers of a service to society. The key interest here lies in any policy framework which seeks to address the pattern of distribution of qualifications; how the curriculum is important as it provides the potential for public recognition of diverse cultures, traditions or identities; and the structural organisation of schooling.

### (I) Equality legislation in Northern Ireland

The legal basis for measures on equality in Northern Ireland can be seen to have derived from three main sources. First, a significant body of legislation emerged as a consequence of political violence and attempts to promote community relations and/or ameliorate claims of religious/political discrimination. Second, some equality legislation had its origins in British legislation, particularly dealing with gender and 'race'. Third, some equality measures originated in the European Commission, especially in relation to gender.

In Northern Ireland, the 1976 Fair Employment Act which created the Fair Employment Agency, made direct discrimination illegal on the basis of religion of political opinion and provided a basis for dealing with allegations of discrimination against individuals. However, the rigours of the 1976 Fair Employment Act did not apply to teachers (but not other ancillary staff employed in educational establishments). This was in recognition of the fact that Northern Ireland had *de facto* parallel religious school systems. There was a *de jure* system of denominational schools owned and managed by the Catholic Church. The local authority schools were, in theory, open to all, but in practice the vast majority of



pupils and teachers were from the Protestant community. If teaching posts had not been made exempt from the anti-discrimination provisions then two disputes would likely have arisen. The Catholic authorities would probably have argued that this would have been in breach of their legal right to operate denominational schools, the ethos of which, they argued, required the employment of Catholic teachers. This, and other, complexities were recognised during the debates on the Fair Employment Act in the House of Commons and provision was included in the Act for the Fair Employment Agency to keep the matter under review.

The Fair Employment Act (1989) made indirect discrimination on the basis of religion or political opinion illegal, and created the Fair Employment Commission (FEC) and Fair Employment Tribunal. It provided a legal basis for affirmative action and obligated employers to monitor the religious compositions of their workforces and make annual returns on these data to the FEC. As before teaching posts were exempt from these requirements.

An area of distinctive policy in Northern Ireland concerned the Targeting Social Need (TSN) initiative. This was promoted by a desire to promote equality as between the two main religious communities, allied with a desire not to favour one category over another simply on the basis of religion. The chosen solution was to encourage government departments to skew spending towards areas or institutions with higher levels of measurable social need. This initiative was later to be developed as New TSN (see below).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the myth was maintained that there was little or no 'race' discrimination in Northern Ireland and hence there was no need for an extension of the British race relations legislation. Eventually this legislation was passed to outlaw discrimination on the basis of 'race'. Significantly this applied not just to employment, but to the provision of goods and services (including education). In Northern Ireland, Irish Travellers were identified as a distinct ethnic minority. A separate Commission for Racial Equality was established in Northern Ireland.

Opportunity laws designed to promote gender equality were passed in Britain and in Northern Ireland in 1976. The legislation passed in Britain was virtually identical to that applied in Northern Ireland. A separate Equal Opportunities Commission was established in Northern Ireland.

The third area of influence from Britain lies in provisions for disability legislation. Disability legislation in Northern Ireland does not yet apply fully to access to schools, and the Special Educational Needs Disability Act (SENDA) has still to be introduced. In addition to the equality legislation there is education legislation that applies to special educational needs and which encompasses disability. This education legislation is designed to ensure that there is appropriate educational provision and access to the Northern Ireland curriculum for those with special educational needs, and underpins the move towards the integration of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools.

The main equality area promoted by the European Commission/Union has been on the issue of gender. A variety of directives have established guidelines and rules which have shaped British legislation and, hence, Northern Ireland legislation.

A desire to encourage the pro-active promotion of gender equality, as compared with simply outlawing inappropriate behaviour, promoted the establishment of equality proofing. This was taken up in Britain with the aim of promoting equality proofing for gender and 'race', although in practice there is little evidence that any action of significance occurred. The same approach of equality proofing was addressed in Northern Ireland, but now to include religion and political opinion as well. However, the level of external scrutiny was much more significant in NI so that the failings of the approach became evident more quickly. A New Labour government introduced radical new proposals in a White Paper on Equality, many of which have been implemented through the Northern Ireland Act (1998), which combined proposals on equality with a New TSN strategy.

The main features of this were the establishment of a unified Equality Commission, the creation of obligations on public authorities to have due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity, and the extension of anti-discrimination measures to include the provision of goods and services.

The Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) requirements oblige public bodies to produce an equality scheme on how they will promote equality on a range of dimensions, including persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation, between men and women generally, between persons with a disability and persons without, and between persons with dependants and persons without. Section 75 plans must be approved by the Equality Commission and public bodies are obliged to consult widely during the preparation and monitoring stages. As well as government departments, Education and Library Boards, Higher Education Institutions, Further Education Institutions and a number of other education-related organisations including, for example, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) are subject to statutory duties to have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.

The main equality legislation to impact on schools and the employment of teachers concerns gender: for example, the 1989 Education Reform Order made Boards of Governors responsible for recruiting. However, despite long standing evidence that the employment level of teachers is mediated by gender, there appear to have been relatively few complaints brought by teachers to the EOC over the years (see Rees et al., 2000).

The main curriculum area in which equality concerns ought to have had a place lies in the educational themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage as these themes were created to provide a community relations dimension to the curriculum. The available evidence (Smith and Robinson, 1992; 1996; Leitch and Kilpatrick, 1999), however, suggests that few teachers took up

the opportunity provided by these themes to examine Equality issues. The newly emerging framework on education for democratic citizenship will include themes related to justice/equality and human rights/responsibilities.

## (II) Education as an Employer

All of the jurisdictions considered in this paper have legislative frameworks against arbitrary discrimination in employment, much of which applies to the employment of teachers. The general pattern of protection provided under the law across most jurisdictions give specific legislative protection against discrimination on the basis of sex, 'race' or disability status. In addition, many jurisdictions also have general rights or anti-discrimination measures that cover a range of social dimensions and services in addition to employment. It should be noted also that a common feature of all these jurisdictions is that the legislation provides for special agencies or bodies with oversight, promotion or enforcement responsibilities.

An issue of particular interest lies in the operation of any special measures to encourage a more diverse workforce among teachers by identifying under-represented groups and seeking ways to reduce this under-representation. Thus, for example, in different contexts there is under-representation of men teaching in primary schools, and of ethnic minorities or disabled people generally among teachers. In addition, research on gender patterns in teaching in Northern Ireland suggest that the 'glass ceiling' remains intact as relatively few women are found in senior positions in schools (Rees et al., 2000).

The issue of under-representation of ethnic minorities among teachers has received specific attention in recent years in England. In the quinquennial review of the Teacher Training Agency (England)(1999) efforts by the TTA to encourage people into teaching from those groups currently under represented in the profession included: the use of teachers from ethnic minority groups in advertising; focus groups on teacher recruitment from ethnic minorities; research projects in different aspects of the recruitment and retention of members of ethnic minorities; and the sponsorship of a project to encourage 50 ethnic minority graduates a year into initial teacher training ([www.canteach.gov.uk/about/archive/corp-op-plan2001/aim1.htm](http://www.canteach.gov.uk/about/archive/corp-op-plan2001/aim1.htm)). In addition, the TTA has sought advice on future action from organisations representing people with disabilities. Inter alia there has been a drive to recruit more men into primary teaching.

In different parts of Canada there have been pro-active attempts to encourage more minority candidates to seek entry to teacher training courses. The stated goal of the initiative is that the cultural composition of the teaching population reflects that of the general population. In Australia it is possible to see a related priority in teacher recruitment, although the focus of policy is directed specifically at increasing the participation of indigenous minorities in educational decisions and to increase the number of teachers from indigenous backgrounds (MCEETYA, 2000).

There are some circumstances where educational institutions are permitted exemptions from the anti-discrimination laws. In many cases these exemptions relate to schools which are run by and for faith communities and which seek the right to appoint teachers with specific attributes that are related to the ethos of the school rather than to any specific educational criterion. More generally, exemptions on aspects of 'normal' regulations may apply to schools which operate as independent and private institutions, or which have been accorded a significant degree of autonomy from local authority regulation. However, under most circumstances these exemptions do not apply to anti-discrimination measures in relation to the employment of teachers and relate more to freedom from administrative regulations and oversight of school district authorities.

The Australian National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) works collaboratively with all educational authorities and while Catholic schools receive public funds they have a degree of autonomy. The Commission recognises that school authorities have a duty to ensure that proper standards of education and financial management are maintained in accordance to, in many cases, by the government and statutory authorities. However where differences arise the objectives established by the Catholic community will over-ride those of the government. Teachers intending to teach in Catholic schools must fulfil the Accreditation Policies of the Catholic Education Commissions and diocesan requirements. This varies across Australia, with not all territories specifically requiring courses of the Catholic faith. Where this requirement does exist, however, it creates a situation where the Catholic schools are permitted to discriminate on the basis of religion in their recruitment of teachers.

In Canada, the Toronto Catholic District School Board serves students from diverse cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds through a broad range of programs and services. Working in partnership with parents, local parishes and the wider school community, TCDSB schools offer a learning environment which reflects Catholic tradition and values. Toronto's Catholic schools follow the provincial curriculum as set out by the Ministry of Education, but add a specific commitment to the spiritual and emotional development of pupils. In order to maintain this ethos the Catholic schools are permitted to require applicants for teaching posts to provide a recommendation from a priest with pastoral responsibility who can affirm the applicant's commitment to the Catholic faith.

A similar exemption is permitted in the Equal Status Act (2000) in the Republic of Ireland which permits denominational schools to admit pupils and teachers from within the faith community in order to maintain the religious character of the institution. This exemption has not been without controversy as it has led to calls for religiously integrated schools and to a vigorous campaign by Humanist groups to reverse this legal exemption. In some ways this dispute is similar to debates over the teacher exemption in Fair Employment legislation in Northern Ireland in which the recruitment of teachers does not come within the anti-discrimination provisions of the law.

### (III) Education as a service

The third main strand for this section concerns the somewhat broader role of education as a service to society and the public. This covers a range of dimensions, including attainment and qualifications, access to educational pathways and issues related to the curriculum.

#### *Attainment*

The acquisition of educational qualifications is an important outcome of education, not least because it impacts on an individual's ability to compete in the labour market for employment. This has led to policies designed to boost the educational performance of targeted students, thereby reducing the 'attainment gap' between disadvantaged groups and mainstream students and, it is hoped, creating a level playing field in the competition for jobs.

In many jurisdictions the focus of attention has been on the position of ethnic minority communities. For example, the issue of an attainment gap between ethnic minorities and mainstream students received significant focus in Britain in the 1970s and early 1980s, with the establishment of the Rampton, and later the Swann, Commission. Towards the end of the 1980s a similar issue arose in Northern Ireland regarding the differential educational outcomes for leavers from Catholic and Protestant schools. Although the policy outcomes were more immediate and concrete in that they resulted in the opening of two new Catholic grammar schools, the allocation of 100 per cent capital grant to Catholic schools and a commitment to monitor the impact of policy and practice on the religious school systems (Gallagher et al, 1994).

In England the Teacher Training Agency provides material aimed at ensuring that initial teacher training equips all new teachers with the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to enable all pupils to realise their full potential. The guidance identifies some of the ways in which successful teachers and schools should work to raise pupil achievement, improve the quality of their education and prepare all pupils to live in a socially just, democratic, pluralistic society. Other parts of the guidance show how, in preparing trainees to meet the Qualified Teacher Standard, Initial Teacher Education providers should address issues around the differential attainment of some minority ethnic groups. Indeed, the fact that this issue is mentioned in the requirements at all is worth noting. In addition, the guidance identifies the main issues which training might address and provides extracts, examples and other reference sources to support each issue.

A report from the School Inspectors (OfSTED, 1999) focused on strategies schools have implemented to raise the attainment of minority ethnic groups, the policies developed by schools for tackling stereotyping, ensuring high expectations and promoting good 'race' relations and local authority assistance to achieve successful outcomes. The main findings of the report indicated that attainment of

minority ethnic groups as a whole is improving although some groups continue to underachieve. Those schools that have been most successful in raising attainment have senior management teams which make clear that under-performance of any group is unacceptable and challenge individual teachers and departments to come up with ways to improve the situation. Furthermore, most of the local education authorities were conscious of their responsibility for promoting good 'race' relations. However, the report also found that few monitored the implementation of these policies; the local authorities that do monitor appear more likely to provide good support for training teachers and other schools staff.

In Australia the Department of Education report 'Learning for all - Opportunities for Indigenous Australians' showed that, despite gains in the last 30 years, significant inequality still remains. This report showed that, as a group, indigenous students recorded markedly lower achievement levels in all academic subjects compared with their non-indigenous counterparts. The Literacy and Numeracy strategy which was launched in March 2000 aims to ensure that every child leaving primary school should be numerate and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level.

In the Republic of Ireland attention on attainment patterns has tended to focus on the position of Irish Travellers. Recently, new guidelines on education for Travellers were launched to tackle educational disadvantage within the Traveller community. The initiative builds on a programme of support for Traveller education which includes a National Education Officer, additional resource teachers, visiting teachers and additional money for schools enrolling Travellers.

In British Columbia a series of education initiatives aim to improve enhanced educational opportunity for Aboriginal students. These include workshops for teachers, curriculum, communication with Aboriginal parents and communities, and employment equity (BC Teachers' Federation Aboriginal Education, 2000). The Learning Opportunities Grant (2000) launched by the Ontario government, provides funding to help students who may be at greater risk of not achieving their educational goals. The programmes available for the students include reading programmes, adapted curriculum tutors, counsellors, mentoring, classroom assistants and reduced class sizes.

This brief review indicates that across most jurisdictions there has been a recognition of the unequal distribution of education outcomes among different social groups and measures introduced to tackle unequal outcomes for minority communities. The extent and range of approaches used vary considerably across the jurisdictions, as does the extent to which there is any evidence to demonstrate the efficacy of these measures.

A related measure concerns the relationship between attainment and social disadvantage. Social disadvantage and ethnic minority status often go hand in hand due to the consequences of discrimination, residential segregation and other factors. In consequence, the lower average attainment achieved by students from

social disadvantaged backgrounds often acts as an indirect influence on attainment differences for minorities. Thus, while it is possible to differentiate policies which specifically target action on identified groups as compared with those target a condition (for example, social disadvantage), the latter often acts as an over-inclusive, but not exclusive, impact on ethnic minority groups. From the 1960s both approaches based on state-led intervention to ameliorate the consequences of social disadvantage, in line with Keynesian economic policy, and the 'trickle-down' theory of improvement based on neo-liberal policies have largely been discredited. Now, a variety of approaches are used to tackle the consequences of social disadvantage. To the extent that any coherence can be identified in 'third way' practice in this area, it would appear to be based on Rawlsian ideas which permit a degree of inequality to operate with limits set by a demands of social justice. This remains a highly contested area in social policy and, in many respects, current practice in Northern Ireland may be more interventionist and pro-active in comparison with most other jurisdictions. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that while measured performance levels for all pupils have steadily risen over time, the gap in performance between pupils who are socially advantaged as compared with those who are socially disadvantaged persists.

### *Access Issues*

A second dimension of the role of education as a service to society lies in access to educational opportunity. This has been addressed in a number of ways in different societies. Currently the key focus across most jurisdictions probably lies in access to post-compulsory education. In particular, towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many of the jurisdictions moved towards de facto mass higher education and began to address issues related to the access of minorities and people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. But in earlier years other access issues arose, perhaps most particularly related to the consequences of segregated education.

In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed racial segregation in schools and struck down the long-standing ruling of 'separate but equal' provision on the grounds that separate provision was inherently unequal in its consequences. that racially separate schools are inherently unequal (*Brown v. Board of Education, 1954*). Throughout the 1960s the Supreme Court permitted various measures to promote integration, including bussing, that is, the assignment of pupils to schools and the use of transport as a matter of policy in order to achieve racial mixing in individual schools. The period of liberal rulings changed in the early 1970s when a more conservative court began to constrain the conditions in which bussing and other measures might be applied. Over more recent years there has been a pattern of court decisions which release school districts from court supervision and thereby effectively end bussing policies. In consequence, many urban school districts are moving back to a pattern of racial segregation as students return to neighbourhood schools.

Another contentious issue in US education policy lies in the use of affirmative action measures to encourage minority entry to higher education. Although there have been various initiatives over the years aimed at promoting the participation of women in higher education, the main focus of controversy has centred on the use of 'race' in admissions decisions in order to enhance the proportion of ethnic minority students gaining entry to higher education. Throughout most of the period of debate African-Americans were the main target group for affirmative action measures, although currently the group most likely to benefit from these measures is Latino, or Spanish-speaking, community.

From at least the 1970s there has been a general trend in the United States towards increasing the participation of women in post-compulsory education and addressing practice which encouraged young women to undertake curricula which emphasised 'traditional' domestic roles. Although the administration under President Clinton was probably more pro-actively committed to this issue, in comparison with the current Bush administration, the goals of promoting gender equity in education remain significant within educational policy.

Measures to enhance access for ethnic minorities and women in order to encourage institutional diversity can be found in other jurisdictions. The programme for diversity in British Columbia schools (2001) aims to assist the school system in meeting its obligations under the Constitution Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the BC Human Rights Code, the Multiculturalism Act, the Official Languages Act, the Employment Equity Act and the School Act. In the same jurisdiction the Second Language Policy Framework package is intended to provide leadership and a basis for consistency in the delivery of Education as a Second Language (ESL) services in BC schools. The package has been developed to address key policy issues around the delivery of ESL programs and services in the compulsory schools system. In addition, the British Columbia Gender Equity Advisory Committee (1994) provides support for teachers in gender-equitable education involving the inclusion of the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of girls and women, as well as boys and men, in all aspects of education.

Once again, policy and practice varies across the jurisdictions depending on their own particular context, but there is a general pattern such that policy has aimed to identify and remove arbitrary barriers to the participation of different social groups in education. Normally this is based on two judgements: first, that the existence of arbitrary barriers to participation is unjust, and second, that wider access enhances the diversity of social institutions and that this, in itself, is a desirable outcome.

It should be noted, however, that a key part of the debates on these measures relates not just to the removal of contemporary barriers to participation, but issues related to the legacy of past barriers. This raises the question of active ameliorative measures to address past disadvantage and, in some places, arguments over the extent to which special measures, including reverse discrimination, should be



adopted. This is perhaps clearest in the debates over affirmative action in the USA but, as noted above, this particular debate remains far from settled.

An important arbitrary barrier to access is also provided by a disabling environment that limits the physical access that some people have to buildings and hence denies them access to educational and other opportunities. Sometimes these environmental restrictions relate to basic structural assumptions about the assumed appropriate location for people: up to the 1980s most children with severe learning difficulties were under the remit of the health department rather than education, with the consequence that they were kept in social care rather than school, thereby placing significant limitations on opportunity.

In England, Wales and Scotland, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) and the Code of Practice for Schools places new duties on education authorities not to discriminate against disabled pupils in the provision of education in schools and in respect of admissions and exclusions. The Special Education Needs Standards Fund Grant (England and Wales) provides funding for local authorities to improve the education of children with SEN through the professional development of coordinators, teachers and learning support assistants.

### *Curriculum*

One of the earliest consequences of the recognition of the importance of equity in education was a consideration of stereotypical representations in textbooks and curriculum material more generally. A significant amount of work went into the development of new materials, particularly ones which did not present gender and racial roles in ways which would encourage prejudice. Related to this was work which sought to examine the curricula that were available to students and the patterns of choice that were taken when options were presented to students. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the significant body of work on gender and the curriculum. Thus, for example, a significant factor in the decision to introduce a statutory curriculum in England, Wales and Northern Ireland arose from a concern that some students were being denied access to a broad and balanced curriculum and that it was necessary to define a minimum entitlement on equity grounds (Ofsted, 1998).

The issue of a statutory curriculum raises questions about the way decisions are made about the inclusion or exclusion of material. In many jurisdictions there have been debates over what should or should not be included in the history curriculum. In large part this arises from the traditional role of public schooling as a mechanism for social integration and the equally traditional role of history curricula in forging a common national narrative.

Advocates of a more diverse curriculum have argued for the inclusion of wider elements both to challenge unitary, and often overly simplistic, national narratives

and to provide recognition of the role played by minorities (importantly, including women) in national stories.

This issue is perhaps highlighted to an even greater extent in programmes for citizenship education. In many jurisdictions these programmes offer little more than uncritical lessons in political literacy so that children learn about the structures and procedures within their own society without necessarily being offered alternatives. The political realities of Northern Ireland make it difficult to apply a citizenship education programme in such a unitary manner, so that the development work underway in this area has tended to focus on skills rather than content, and is based on the three elements of (a) democratic structures and systems, (b) justice and equality issues, and (c) issues related to rights and responsibilities. It should be said, however, that this programme is still under development and its final form remains unclear.

As the focus of this research is on the role of equality awareness within teacher training, the present interest lies more directly with the curriculum provided for teachers, both through initial training and as part of professional development. In this respect it is possible to identify a wide range of initiatives and programmes across most of the jurisdictions surveyed, although the variety of approach is as much a feature of this practice as anything else.

There have been local authority programmes to support teaching in linguistically diverse classrooms in the UK generally, while in Wales, Scotland and England there has been official recognition of the right of parents to opt for teaching through indigenous languages. In the United States the National Science Foundation has funded a series of initiatives aimed at university and college educators, the purpose of which is to ensure that the training they provide to prospective and existing teachers addresses issues related to gender equity. Similar types of programmes, of varying scale and duration, can be found in practically all of the jurisdictions surveyed.

Legislation on the rights of disabled people, and on special needs more generally, have provided a context for support programmes for teachers. When special needs measures include specific codes of practice or equivalent guidelines there is often training for teachers to ensure they know how they are expected to conform to these requirements. The pattern in England has tended to be one which provides training directly to teachers, while in the United States a somewhat wider range of support is provided including, as above, programmes directed at trainers of teachers rather than teachers directly.

### Summary of Literature Review

As a major employer education systems are subject to legislation on terms and conditions of employment, including legislation against discrimination. We found that all of the jurisdictions surveyed operated anti-discrimination legislation, some

of which provided general protection while others were more specifically tailored to protect the interests of specific social groups. In some places varying degrees of exemption from standard legislation is permitted, particularly where denominational authorities are accorded the right to run their own schools while being in receipt of public funds.

Education provides an important social service to society as a whole. In our discussion we focused on three main aspects of this: first, the social distribution of educational qualifications within a society; second, measures to prevent arbitrary restrictions on access to educational opportunities, or measures designed to encourage access and diversity; and third, issues related to the curriculum. As with the role of education as an employer, there has been a general trend across all the jurisdictions surveyed towards pro-active measures in all these areas, although the nature and extent of measures adopted varies quite widely. As a general comment, many of the issues dealt with in this section focus on the broader social role of schools. By tradition, schools owned and managed by the state, have acted as an important focus for social integration and hence have tended to emphasise an assimilationist approach through which students are encouraged to think of themselves as members of a common community. The practical consequence of this approach is to downplay diversity in public spaces, including schools. The major problem with this approach was that it assumed a fictive homogeneity of identity that served to deny public recognition to minorities or, as in the case of women, provided identities that were fixed and subordinate. Over the past three decades or so there has been a general move away from these assimilationist assumptions. As reflected in the discussion above, there has been a general trend towards recognising the existence and condition of minorities and the establishment of legislation across a range of areas to prevent arbitrary discrimination against minorities. In education this is manifest mainly through the recognition of minorities and women in the curriculum, pro-active measures towards legitimising diversity and a recognition that special measures are sometimes need to ensure that all groups are provided with equality of opportunity.

## **Research Findings and Recommendations**

This section presents findings arising from the seminars and focus groups. Building on the review of literature, the research findings and recommendations are now presented for each of the core areas associated with the provision and utilisation of teacher training and education. The research findings and recommendation sections below will each consider the following broad themes:

Equality Issues at Policy and System Level

Equality Issues in Teacher Education and Employment

Issues of Equality in the Teacher Education Curriculum and in School Classrooms

## Research Findings

### *(i) Equality Issues at Policy and System Level*

- Many respondents sought a coherent and cohesive equality framework within education, underpinned by commonly held values and beliefs, and promoted through continuing professional and personal development, rather than prescribed by legislation.
- Respondents from the Department of Education (DE) believed that in general, current arrangements do address the major equality issues. However, all other respondents articulated concerns across the major aspects of equality, and believed that current constraints, including resource constraints, limit their capacity to attend to these issues.
- Evidence from the representatives of other stakeholder groups (Transferors' Representative Council, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Governing Bodies Association) suggests that they believe that their capacity to influence schools' awareness of equality issues and to facilitate good practice is very limited.
- Overall, evidence from the seminars with policy makers and stakeholders suggests that at the policy level, there is no generally-known or accepted programme within the system either to identify the full range of equality needs, or to address those already identified. Limited resources also reduce capacity to attend to issues such as creating access for pupils with physical disabilities.
- Because the statutory competency model which underpins the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) curriculum does not give explicit prominence to equality issues and, accordingly, these are not given priority within initial teacher education.
- In focus group discussions with teachers, there seemed to be a clear distinction in terms of awareness of the full range of equality issues between teachers trained outside Northern Ireland and those trained locally. Teachers trained outside Northern Ireland had more explicit exposure to equality issues in their courses of study.
- It appears that the Department's current dominant agenda of improving standards in schooling obliges schools to prioritise teaching, learning and assessment practices in relation to improving pupil examination performance. This is currently a key indicator of school improvement, and is also a benchmark for teacher performance-related pay. Other concerns for schools, such as equality may be marginalised within this standards agenda.

*(ii) Equality Issues in Teacher Education and Employment*

- Respondents from all groups interviewed expressed concern about ongoing gender-equality issues in the recruitment and promotion of teachers, especially in primary schools. These issues included unequal access to employment, unequal opportunities for promotion, and perceptions of the 'feminization' of teaching. Student teachers, in particular, believed that although there are more female teachers, especially of younger children, male teachers still have better opportunities for promotion.
- Student teachers' and teachers' awareness of equality issues was uneven. This variability may well be a consequence of the very limited emphasis on equality issues within the teacher competence model which dictates the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) curriculum. However awareness was more evident among those respondents with direct experience of equality considerations, either from personal experience, or from exposure on an ad hoc basis through certain optional courses.
- Teachers' take-up of opportunities for training in equality issues varies greatly. Only a minority of teachers at present express an active interest in taking forward such issues. Thus, the main focus of Continuing Professional Development provision in universities and university colleges is on those aspects of the equality agenda prioritised by teachers, in particular Special Educational Needs. This has resulted in the marginalisation of other aspects and in a somewhat disparate and uncoordinated approach to equality issues in general. Given that the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are reluctant to consider introducing courses on equality issues without clear evidence of demand from teachers, it is unlikely that such provision will be expanded in a more systematic way without external encouragement and resourcing.
- Higher education providers also identified problems of access to Continual Professional Development (CPD) courses and/or training for some teachers, especially in relation to gender, but also location, finance and disadvantage.
- A significant barrier, identified by teachers, to their wider professional development in these areas was the relative lack of opportunity to teach or work outside their own community background. Aligned with this, was a concern about the unequal access for employment across the Controlled and Maintained school sectors for all teachers.
- Student teachers felt that applicants to teacher education and students engaged in teacher education should not be discriminated against on

the basis of disability or sexuality. However, some believed that this might happen.

*(iii) Issues of Equality in the Teacher Education Curriculum and in School Classrooms*

- The Department of Education representatives interviewed expressed the view that the promotion of equal opportunities is the responsibility of all teachers in pursuit of the statutory requirement for all children to have equal access to the curriculum. Through various initiatives and ongoing processes, such as school inspection, the Department believes itself to be well-informed about the nature and extent of disadvantage and inequality.

Initial Teacher Education Issues

- All the providers of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) indicated that equality issues were a consideration within their courses. However, the extent to which the constituent aspects of equality (community background, race, gender, disability) are addressed varies between the providers.
- Student teachers indicated that, in their experience, the Education for Mutual Understanding programme, designed to heighten mutual awareness of student teachers from Catholic and non-Catholic backgrounds, is not being implemented in an effective way.
- Issues of gender, race, social class, etc., tend to be covered in ITE in an ad hoc manner, either through subject methods courses or through one-off lectures. It is therefore possible for students to go through their initial teacher education course without having to focus in a formal way on many of the aspects of equality. In addition, the practicalities of the present university-school volunteer partnership model for student placements were considered by the ITE providers to be barriers to equality issues being dealt with effectively during teaching practice.
- Tutors also may be more comfortable with higher profile equality issues, such as those related to gender and SEN, but seemed to be unsure of the wider area of equality legislation in general and how this applies to schools and student teachers' experiences within schools.
- Those trained as teachers in Northern Ireland agreed that, in general, issues of equality or equal opportunity were not explicitly addressed in their courses. The exception to this was special educational needs (SEN). Teachers trained in Great Britain expressed the view that

issues of gender, race, and social disadvantage had been more formally addressed in their initial teacher education and they appeared to be more confident in addressing such issues in their classrooms.

- Student teachers felt that the equality issue given greatest emphasis in their courses was differentiation in terms of pupil ability. Although issues such as social disadvantage, the differences between grammar and non-grammar schools, and gender were also addressed in training, they felt they were not taught how to deal with them directly. What knowledge they had about these equality issues came from experiences gained during school placements. These included the following:
  - There are more female teachers, particularly of younger children, yet male teachers have better promotion opportunities;
  - Applicants to teacher education and students should not be discriminated against on the basis of disability or sexuality;
  - Students were highly conscious of attempting to ensure that children of different academic abilities were given equal opportunities in their lessons;
  - Gender was less of an issue for students – however, many of them saw different treatment of girls and boys by teachers as ‘unfair’;
  - Students were able to describe problems they had observed or encountered with pupils who were from Traveller backgrounds, were disabled or socially disadvantaged. They felt that their university or university college courses did not equip them well to deal with such pupils; and,
  - Students commented that, in Northern Ireland, ‘race’ was considered to be a lesser issue than religion. However, in school placements they had noted the inappropriate attitudes of some pupils in relation to ‘race’ and ethnic minorities.

#### Continuing Professional Development Issues

- The major responsibility for the support of beginning teachers during induction and Early Professional Development lies with their employing schools. Education and Library Board (ELB) Curriculum And Support Services (CASS) have a supplementary, supportive role. Thus, the extent to which schools take seriously these responsibilities is the dominant influence on the beginning teacher. In addition, CASS

officers believed that the ethos and value systems of individual schools will largely determine the extent to which beginning teachers are encouraged to engage with any issues of diversity.

- Within their current programmes of support for beginning teachers, ELBs do not at present explicitly identify equality as a concern. It appears that considerable attention is given within these programmes to issues of differentiated learning. However, this emphasis is located within a framework of the development of effective teaching skills, rather than within an equality agenda.
- There is at present a range of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses dealing with SEN issues. These are popular with teachers and other educationalists, probably because recent reforms contained in the Education (NI) Order 1996 and the accompanying Code of Practice on Special Educational Needs has put pupils with learning difficulties very firmly on the agenda of mainstream schools.
- Consideration of a more equality-focussed approach to aspects of the ELB support programmes for beginning teachers is in its infancy. ELB officers felt, however, that there may be some scope, within present arrangements, to accord greater priority to equality awareness for beginning teachers, and felt that this would be a productive strategy.

### Practice in Schools

- Teachers were aware of certain equality issues, (e.g. gender, ethnicity) but attention to them in the classroom and in their day-to-day practice varied, depending on how comfortable or knowledgeable they felt in dealing with them. They indicated that individual teachers are often left to deal with equality issues and to take individual responsibility for tackling these issues in their classrooms
- Teachers acknowledged that issues around gender, especially boys' and girls' achievement had become a particular area of focus in the past few years. They suggested, however, that certain initiatives (e.g. around boys' underachievement) may not be as much about creating equality of opportunity as about fulfilling a more instrumental need within certain schools to improve attainment.
- Some teachers were more commonly aware of equality issues arising from pupils' social background. However, they also acknowledged that there was a certain degree of labelling attached to children from certain backgrounds, and that children from disadvantaged areas were perhaps not expected to do as well as children from more affluent backgrounds.



- When speaking of equality issues around disability, teachers normally defined these in relation to special educational needs (SEN), specifically learning or behavioural issues. It was rare for teachers to offer comments on, or to consider, physical disabilities and the integration of pupils with physical disabilities in their schools.
- Teachers felt that often equality issues of community background (i.e. religion) or 'race' were often categories of equality either ignored (race, especially) or not dealt with adequately (religious differences/sectarianism). They themselves had difficulties in dealing with these issues in their classrooms. In addition, they considered some practices and behaviours in their schools, from colleagues and pupils, around issues of 'race' or religion to be unacceptable, but did not feel able to challenge these within the prevailing ethos of the school.
- In general, it was felt that most Northern Ireland teachers have had limited experience of diversity, either in their own schooling or in their professional lives. This may limit their capacity to engage across the range of equality issues. In addition, it was felt that the commitment of schools to the equality agenda is variable so that even if teachers individually show commitment to equality issues, they may not be supported in their actions.

### Recommendations

Having outlined key findings from the seminars and focus groups the report now concludes with a series of recommendations in each of the key areas

#### *(i) Equality Issues at Policy and System Levels*

- The Equality Commission should, if possible, promote a reconsideration of the values which underpin the teacher education system in Northern Ireland in order to shift emphasis away from the teaching of subject knowledge towards an emphasis on an holistic approach to meeting the learning needs of the whole child.
- If the school system as a whole is to move forward across the range of equality issues, it will be necessary for the Department of Education to prioritise these explicitly in the processes of school improvement.
- The Equality Commission should seek a more pro-active role in working with government, key education stakeholders and teacher educators to create an explicit and well-known equality programme within the education system and to prioritise the integration of such a

programme into teacher education. However this should not be seen as a further external imposition but as an integral aspect of teacher education and school practice.

- The Equality Commission should consider how it might work with Government and Higher Education Institutions to encourage greater representation of men and minority groups into teacher education. Potential student teachers from less affluent backgrounds should be able to access the same bonus payments from Government to train in Northern Ireland as they receive if they train in Great Britain.
- The teacher competency framework for initial teacher education (ITE) should be amended to give greater emphasis to the need for teachers to address and deal with the full range of equality issues which may inhibit pupil learning. Progress towards improving awareness of equality issues in teacher education and training, should not be promoted solely through legislation (although this is unquestionably a major avenue), but also through revisiting the underlying principles of education. This is a responsibility which must be shared by all those involved in framing and providing teacher education and by those who are responsible for the employment of teachers.
- The Equality Commission should recommend to the Department of Education that at least one Professional Development Activity within the EPD programme should have a compulsory equality-related focus.
- Prioritisation should be given to changing school practice. Stimulus for such change would result from, for example, devising indicators of tangible outcomes in these areas of equality concern, and by resourcing the implementation of new policies, through both recurrent and capital funding processes and through special initiatives. A more explicit focus might also be given to equality indicators within the inspection process, to include explicit monitoring of practice relating to gender, disability and race.
- In addition, schools might be required to monitor, for example, examination attainment, suspensions and expulsions and attendance rates according to gender, free school meals entitlement, ethnicity, disability and special educational needs. It is likely that the computerised CLASS information system, currently used in Northern Ireland schools can accommodate such monitoring. Such information should be published in the annual reports of school governors to parents.
- Simultaneously, there is scope for stakeholder groups, such as the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Governing Bodies' Association, the Transferors' Representative Council, to become more

proactive (within the limitations of their roles) in prioritising discussion and development around equality concerns for those institutions in which they have some influence. If, for example, Transferor representatives on the Education & Library Boards, the governing body of Stranmillis University College, and Controlled school boards of governors, gave clear priority to the implications of such issues in the on-going decision-making processes of these bodies, equality concerns would become more visible at both system and school levels and in teacher education. In the same way, CCMS and GBA have capacity to highlight areas of concern and to influence behaviour, so could give greater prominence to equality issues within their schools.

- Given the imminence of new legislation (the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill, currently out for public consultation), many of the issues identified by this research will come to the forefront of concerns in teacher education and schools. Action to support teacher educators and teachers will become urgent, once the final form of the legislation is known. The Commission should therefore prepare guidance for all interested parties in the education system as to the implications of the legislation and how issues may be confronted.
- If implemented, the recommendations from this study will have some resource implications. Therefore consideration must be given by government to identifying additional monies, possibly hypothecated, to accommodate necessary improvements.

*(ii) Equality Issues in Teacher Education and Employment*

- Young people from all backgrounds need to be encouraged to enter teaching as a profession. The Equality Commission should explore with government and Higher Education institutions how access to graduate and post graduate courses for those who come from non-traditional educational backgrounds can be encouraged and enhanced.
- Gender-inequities in the recruitment and promotion of teachers remain a deeply entrenched issue. The Equality Commission should revisit this issue as a priority and consider how it can progress its work with employers of teachers to redress these employment inequalities as they apply to women and other groups identified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998). The Commission might also consider whether teachers should continue to be exempted from Fair Employment legislation and whether individual schools should be designated as public bodies for the purposes of Section 75.

- A more in-depth approach to training and the promotion of a broader range of experience to enhance teachers' awareness of equality issues should be considered. This might be facilitated by the use of secondments and exchanges within the teaching profession across all types of school in Northern Ireland. This approach would be enhanced if supported by longer and more sustained training by Curriculum and Advisory Support Services (CASS) and others with some specialist knowledge in the area of equality. If this training were delivered with firm backing by the Education and Library Boards and the Department of Education it would also introduce a more multi-agency approach as proposed by the universities and university colleges.
- Issues of unequal access for teachers to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses, according to factors including gender, location, educational background and financial constraints, need to be addressed.

*(iii) Issues of Equality in the Teacher Education Curriculum and in School Classrooms*

- There is a need to ensure that accurate information on equality legislation, as it relates to schools, be provided and be easily accessible to those involved in the provision of initial teacher education. This should have both a primary and post-primary focus. Higher Education institutions should be encouraged to work to ensure that tutors involved in the provision of ITE are trained in the applications of this legislation within schools. The Commission should seek a more pro-active role in working with teacher educators in the integration of equality issues into ITE programmes. However such integration should not be seen as a further external imposition but as a core aspect of the ITE curriculum. This would go some way to reduce the lack of awareness of equality issues as expressed by tutors.
- In order to address the understandable reluctance of Higher Education institutions to introduce courses on topics for which they feel there will be limited demand, equality awareness should be included as a core outcome of all Continuing Professional Development modules taught. Additionally, HEIs may be encouraged to review the viability of offering specific modules on equality issues in education.
- The Equality Commission should consider how it might support tutors and student teachers through the provision of suitable resources including training and web-based materials, CD ROMs, and other teaching resources. The Commission might also consider offering specialist expertise as appropriate to the institutions concerned: the existing EC education-related materials e.g. *Raising Awareness* –

*Diversity and Racism* (2001) would provide a useful basis for this if more widely disseminated and supported.

- The Curriculum and Advisory Support Services (CASS) of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) should also consider how they might influence, in a more systematic fashion, teacher tutors within schools who are responsible for beginning teachers, to consider equality issues as appropriate foci for Early Professional Development work. It would also be beneficial to encourage wider learning within schools from these EPD activities, perhaps through their incorporation into wider school development planning and practice.
- Consideration should be given within CASS beginning teacher programmes to creating a more explicit equality framework so that issues of access to learning for all pupils are not simply viewed as a skills-based activity.
- Although attention is given within schools to some issues of equality, especially special needs and gender differences in attainment, it is recommended that, through teacher education programmes, teachers should be encouraged to locate these within the broader debate of equality. This will require the development of appropriate values and attitudes, as well as practical strategies for dealing with these issues in the classroom.
- Training for serving principals and other school senior managers should include an explicit examination of the equality and human rights philosophy and legislation, as well as an in-depth consideration of the underlying value system of education, as already occurs within provision for aspiring principals (Professional Qualification for Headteachers [Northern Ireland]).

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