

## PROMOTING GOOD RELATIONS

### A Summary Guide for Public Authorities

#### Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to give a summary of the advice, information and good practice recommendations highlighted in the Equality Commission's '**Promoting Good Relations - A Guide for Public Authorities**' ('the Good Relations Guide'), which sets out in detail how public authorities can proactively address their legal obligations under **Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998** ('Section 75 (2)'). It is important that readers consult the Good Relations Guide for a detailed explanation of the points raised below.

#### What is the good relations duty on public authorities?

##### The Good Relations Duty

A public authority when carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, **must** have **regard** to the **desirability of promoting good relations** between persons of different **religious belief, political opinion** or **racial group**.

**Section 75 (2)** of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

Section 75 (2) places a **statutory duty** on public bodies to **pro-actively** address good relations. This means a public authority must consider how the policies it makes and implements, affect relationships between people of different religions, political opinions and racial groups.

It involves considering steps to promote good relations amongst, for example, its employees, service users and others affected by its policies. The purpose of the duty is to **mainstream** good relations by placing it at the heart of public policy decision making.

Section 75 (2) formalises the shift from **managing** diversity and difference to **promoting** diversity and integration. It requires public authorities to take a **pro-active** initiating approach to contributing to a shared society, rather than responding to the effects of a divided one.

## What other equality legislation is relevant to the promotion of good relations?

The **race equality legislation** places a specific duty on **local councils** to have due regard to the need to promote good race relations. There are also obligations on public authorities and others under the race equality and **fair employment legislation**, not to discriminate on racial grounds, or on the grounds of religious belief and/or political opinion, respectively. In addition, the **Fair Employment Code of Practice** recommends that employers promote a **good and harmonious** working environment.

## What is meant by ‘good relations’?

Neither ‘good relations’ nor ‘promoting good relations’ is defined in legislation. The Equality Commission has developed the following working definition of ‘good relations’.

### ‘Good Relations’

“The growth of relationships and structures for Northern Ireland that acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society, and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms.” **Equality Commission**

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The Government's vision for Northern Ireland is set out in *A Shared Future*,<sup>1</sup> its policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland and the *Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland (2005-10)*<sup>2</sup>. These strategies set out policy objectives and priority areas, and identify specific actions for government departments and key non-departmental public bodies.

## How have public authorities promoted good relations?

The Good Relations Guide gives a wide range of good practice examples of public authorities who have proactively taken measures to promote good relations both in the workplace and within the communities they serve.<sup>3</sup>

Promoting good relations can involve proactively **challenging sectarianism and racism**. This requires not only reacting swiftly to incidents and manifestations, such as graffiti or name-calling; but also educating and training people to understand that prejudice is not acceptable. It can involve challenging misconceptions, preconceptions, stereotypical assumptions and prejudices against people perceived as outsiders or different (such as migrant workers or Irish Travellers).

It can mean creating an ethos, a culture, of good relations and recognising the need to promote good relations both **within** and **between** communities. Promoting good relations involves a level of engagement from public authorities to change not only behaviour, but **attitudes, hearts and minds**.

It can involve tackling difficult issues, such as the display of aggressive and intimidating **flags and emblems**, and taking steps to create **safe and shared public spaces** in towns and cities that can be accessed and used by all sections of all communities. It can include promoting **shared space in the workplace** in order to develop respect for, and understanding of, the needs and concerns of diverse communities. **Training for employees** on good relations issues is one of the most important initiatives that public authorities can take to facilitate the promotion of good relations.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Shared Future* and the First Triennial Action Plan, [www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk](http://www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk).

<sup>2</sup> [www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk](http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk).

<sup>3</sup> See in particular Annexes 1 & 2 of the Good Relations Guide. Further examples are outlined in the Equality Commission's *Audit of Progress on the Good Relations Duty 2000-2003* and *Good Relations in Practice: A Report of Progress on the Good Relations Duty 2003-2005*, [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org).

## Key Principles

Summarised below are a number of key principles that should underpin a public authority's implementation of the good relations duty.

### Key Principles:

- effective **leadership**;
- a visible and unequivocal **commitment** which is communicated internally and externally;
- to address **both** equality of opportunity and good relations and to recognise their inter-dependence;
- to work towards **integration** not segregation; and
- to ensure effective **collaboration**, **co-ordination** and **consultation**.

## How can public authorities implement the good relations duty?

The promotion of good relations by public authorities must be **action-based** in a way that is tailored to the specific remit and functions of the organisation. Each public authority needs to ascertain what needs to be done in the particular circumstances in which it carries out those functions. Certain functions may be more relevant than others to the good relations duty. In addition, as the functions of a public authority may change over time, an authority's approach to good relations will need to be **regularly reviewed** to reflect its circumstances (for example, as a result of the Review of Public Administration).

- **Mainstream good relations into public policy decision making**

Promoting good relations must be **central** to the functions of a public authority and an integral part of policy development and service delivery in an organisational wide approach. The purpose of the good relations duty is to **mainstream** good relations, so that the desirability of promoting good relations is considered by those developing and implementing policy, at all stages and at all levels.

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- **Compliance with Equality Scheme Commitments**

The commitments and arrangements contained in a public authority's approved equality schemes relate to **both** the good relations duty and the equality of opportunity duty. The equality scheme is therefore a public authority's **primary framework** for implementing the good relations duty.

The Equality Commission **recommends** that public authorities' equality schemes set out a **clear** and **unequivocal commitment** to promoting good relations. Public authorities must ensure they **comply** with all good relations actions to which they have committed in their equality schemes.

- **Screening and Impact Assessment**

The Equality Commission's *Guide to the Statutory Duties*<sup>4</sup> **recommends** that any policy with an impact on good relations should be **screened in**; which can be done within the context of taking forward a Good Relations Strategy. The screening process is **an opportunity** to identify how to **better promote** equality of opportunity and good relations.

The Equality Commission **recommends** the use of the **equality impact assessment** (EQIA) to consider whether and how policies have an impact on good relations, whether that impact is positive or negative, and to consider **mitigating measures** and **alternative policies** which might better promote good relations.

A failure to screen and conduct an equality impact assessment on a policy which impacts on good relations, has been found by the Equality Commission to be a breach of an equality scheme.<sup>5</sup>

- **Corporate Objectives**

Specific good relations objectives and targets should be included in corporate and annual operating plans; thereby demonstrating that the organisation has given serious consideration to its role in promoting good relations.

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<sup>4</sup> *Guide to the Statutory Duties*, 2005, ECNI, p61, [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org).

<sup>5</sup> See example on p25 of the *Good Relations Guide*.

## • Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan

The Equality Commission **recommends** that public authorities develop a **Good Relations Strategy** in order to provide a clear and workable framework for, and to formalise its commitment to, the promotion of good relations.

### Good Relations Strategy – Key Elements

- a **vision** or **aim** (reflecting leadership);
- the key **principles** under-pinning the Strategy (see above);
- an **action plan** to include specific measures with a timetable for implementation;
- a commitment to meaningful and effective **consultation**;
- a commitment to the **communication** of the strategy;
- **training plans** and performance **indicators/targets**;
- a commitment to **monitor, review** and **evaluate**.

## Action Plan

Many organisations have found conducting external or internal good relations **audits**, or both, to be a useful starting point in developing an action plan. Audits help to determine the **existing state of relationships** internally or with customers and stakeholders, and/or to identify what current or existing work promotes good relations. They enable an organisation to identify where there is potential for further or better promotion, and therefore to identify key areas or policies for strategic action.

## Monitoring, reporting and evaluation

Measures and initiatives undertaken to promote good relations must be monitored, evaluated and reviewed.

In considering methods of monitoring and evaluating good relations actions, account should be taken of the Equality Commission's *Section 75 Monitoring Guidance for use by Public Authorities*<sup>6</sup>, which includes monitoring advice on the good relations duty.

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<sup>6</sup> ECNI 2007, [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org).

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It is particularly important that there is a focus on **impact and outcomes** rather than simply outputs. Public authorities should also consider what **monitoring information** they need to collect in order to evaluate whether the outcome has been achieved.

Examples of outcomes are highlighted in the Good Relations Guide<sup>7</sup> and can include a decrease in sectarian or racist incidents or complaints in the workplace, or an increase in awareness and understanding of cultural diversity.

Public authorities are required to detail their actions, planned and taken, and **report on progress** made, in their annual progress report to the Equality Commission on the implementation of Section 75 (2).

Annual reporting on actions taken to promote good relations, not only communicates compliance with the statutory duty to the Equality Commission, stakeholders and senior management, it also provides a useful regular review point at which to assess the extent and effectiveness of activity and progress, and to identify further opportunities for action.

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<sup>7</sup> See paragraph 3.59.

## Further Information

Further information and practical guidance on implementing the good relations duty is available from the Equality Commission. Public authorities can also obtain information and advice on their responsibilities under the fair employment and race equality legislation.

This summary guide and the Good Relations Guide can be obtained in alternative formats. The Equality Commission produces a range of advisory publications on promoting good relations, which can be obtained free of charge from the Equality Commission, or downloaded from its website ([www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)).

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