

Equality News

Autumn 2003



*Ireland's EU Presidency
- An Exciting Time for Equality*

*Why a Forum on the Workplace
of the Future?*

*Launching Anti-Racist Workplace
Week November 3rd - 9th*

Publication of 'Library Access'

Viewpoint: The Irish Deaf Society



THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAIS

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By Niall Crowley

November 3rd to November 7th marked the fourth Anti Racist Workplace Week. The organisations involved this year are:

Congress, IBEC, Small Firms Association, Construction Industry Federation, Know Racism and the Equality Authority.

Substantial progress has been made in the build-up to the week. Organisations and enterprises have been asked to demonstrate their commitment to the anti-racist workplace by hanging a poster that sets out their commitment to a workplace that:

- Is free from discrimination and harassment;
- Is welcoming to Black and minority ethnic (including Traveller) employees and customers;
- Accommodates and values cultural diversity in the workplace;
- Takes practical steps to ensure equality; and
- Communicates a message for greater equality within the wider community.

The poster is backed up by leaflets which are available for circulation to all employees. The response to this initiative has been very positive to date.

During the week the partners will be launching a publication prepared by the ILO on 'Achieving Equality in Intercultural Workplaces'. It is hoped that individual enterprises around the country will mark the week with their own initiatives.

Another area of work for the Equality Authority that has made considerable progress is on the theme of reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities as employees and as customers.

In partnership with the European Year of People with Disabilities we have launched a television advertisement on the issue of reasonable accommodation. This seeks to build a public consciousness

of what reasonable accommodation is and why it is important.

Behind this wider public awareness we are also working to support a practice of reasonable accommodation of customers with disabilities. Joint work with the Library Council has involved the publication of a guide on the reasonable accommodation of current and potential library users with disabilities. Joint work is also being developed with the Irish Bankers Federation who have prepared a stocktake of initiatives already taken in this area by the banks. An exchange is being developed with the Irish Bank Officials' Association (IBOA). Further work is planned with An Post on this issue.

It is hoped to build on these initiatives over the coming years so that we can reach out to key service providers in local communities and support a greater accessibility for and participation by people with disabilities in key local services.

Important successes have been achieved in recent legal work of the Equality Authority Partnership rights issues for same sex couples were raised in an important settlement with the Department of Social and Family Affairs in a case on the sexual orientation ground. The Department had refused to issue a Free Travel Pass to the cohabiting partner of a gay man. The Department accepted that the non-statutory scheme did not extend benefits to same sex and opposite sex cohabiting couples on an equal basis and was not in conformity with the Equal Status Act.

Age Discrimination in the provision of motor insurance was the focus in another important and successful case. Royal and Sun Alliance were found to be discriminating on the age ground in refusing a quotation based solely on an upper age limit with no account taken of the person's particular circumstances.

Equality proofing has been another significant focus for recent work. This is centred around the Equality Proofing Working Group convened by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform under the 'Sustaining Progress' National

Agreement. A number of ground breaking initiatives in this area have been led by the Equality Authority in the recent period. These include:

- An equality proofing exercise carried out with the Office of Social Inclusion on the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion
- The development of equality impact assessment guidelines for use by the City and County Development Boards
- The engagement of consultants to develop an integrated proofing mechanism encompassing poverty proofing, gender mainstreaming and equality proofing. This involves a partnership between the Equality Authority, the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, the Department of Social & Family Affairs (Office of Social Inclusion) and the Combat Poverty Agency. Both Departments have agreed to test out the template in a policy area under their responsibility.
- The implementation of employment equality reviews in private, public and voluntary sector organisations.
- The development of a template for an equal status review and the testing out of this template in the North Western Health Board. This is a joint project with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

This reflects a body of work with a capacity to underpin the wider commitment to equality proofing policies and services in the public sector contained in the 'Sustaining Progress' National Agreement. The roll out of this commitment across a range of Government Departments over the coming year will be important.



Ireland's EU Presidency

An exciting time for equality as Ireland assumes the Presidency of the EU

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, Willie O'Dea, outlines the equality elements of the Irish EU Presidency Programme.



As I'm sure you all know, Ireland assumes the Presidency of the EU on 1 January 2004 and will hold this office until 30 June 2004. When a country holds the Presidency of the EU, the Ministers and officials are charged with a responsibility to advance a number of EU policy and legislative proposals. It is no exaggeration to say that the first six months of next year will present challenges for my Department.

Equality, particularly gender equality, features strongly in Ireland's EU Presidency Programme. As readers of Equality News will be aware, equality between women and men was one of the founding articles of the Treaty of Rome and, more recently, under the Amsterdam Treaty the achievement of gender equality has become one of the central tasks of the European Union. In this regard I am very pleased that the first annual report of the EU on gender equality will be presented to the Heads of Government during our Presidency. This event will give an important focus to our other activities and, to a large extent, sets the context for much of our work programme.

As you can see from the programme details (see box on opposite page), our activities range from advancing legislative proposals to organising information events such as conferences and seminars. In addition, my Department is undertaking work on the development of sexual harassment indicators in the workplace. This project is being carried out in conjunction with our Dutch counterparts. Ireland is undertaking the first stage of the project, which involves carrying out research on this topic. The intention is that this research will contribute to the development of indicators by the Dutch Presidency in the second half of 2004.

The legislative tasks are considerable. My officials will be working on two proposals for new directives on gender equality; one is a consolidation of existing directives and the other is a proposal for a new directive on gender equality in goods and services. The proposal to consolidate the existing gender equality directives will involve co-decision with the European Parliament. The proposal for a gender equality directive in goods and services will require unanimous agreement between all member states. It is Ireland's intention to advance these proposals significantly during our Presidency.

We are also hosting a number of conferences during our Presidency. Conferences provide an opportunity to communicate existing EU policies to as many people as possible and to showcase the valuable work on equality which is taking place in Ireland. We look forward, in particular, to highlighting the achievements of the Equality for Women Measure and of the implementation of gender equality under the National Development Plan.

The main information event of the Presidency will be my address to the Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities Committee of the European Parliament. I am scheduled to address this Committee in mid-January where I will outline our Presidency's priorities on equality. On this occasion, and throughout the Presidency, I will be addressing not only national issues, but issues that impact on the

European Union as a whole. A fruitful co-operation between the Presidency and the Parliament is particularly important in order to advance legislative proposals and I look forward to working closely with the Parliament during our Presidency.

In March 2004, I will address the United Nations session of the Commission of the Status of Women in New York on behalf of the EU. This meeting will examine issues of concern to women generally and focus on two core themes. The first theme is women in conflict resolution and the second theme is men and gender equality. This meeting will bring together approximately two hundred countries and about fifty international women's organisations including the European Women's Lobby.

I should also mention that equality issues already form part of the framework of the Employment Guidelines and the Anti-Poverty work, both of which feature in Ireland's wider Presidency Programme. The conference on 'Approaches to Policy Development' will look at partnership strategies and showcase work by Equality Bodies in Northern Ireland as well as in Ireland. The proposal regarding the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia is a technical matter concerning the nominations of members to the Board of the Centre. The intention is to finalise this matter under our Presidency.

I am delighted to have the honour of presiding over this ambitious programme. I'm sure you will agree that we have a busy six months ahead. It coincides with enlargement and I look forward to welcoming Ministers from the new Member States to Ireland during our Presidency. It is vitally important that we build on the energy and momentum, that is so evident across the Member States and elsewhere, to ensure that all our policies, national and international, are clearly directed towards the promotion of equality. I would like to thank the Equality Authority in advance for its support during this time and I look forward to a fruitful collaboration.

Conferences and Seminars during the Irish EU Presidency – January to June 2004

- High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming, Dublin Castle, 9 January
- Tipping the Scales – Making Work Life Balance Happen, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, 6 February
- Gender Mainstreaming – Partnership in Practice, Dublin Castle, 15 April
- Gender Equality in Practice in a new Europe, Limerick, 6/7 May
- Violence against Women, Dublin Castle, 24/25 May
- Implementing Equality – Planned and Systematic Approaches to Policy Development, Limerick, 27/28 May

Policy issues arising during the Irish EU Presidency – January to June 2004

- Presentation to the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities, Brussels, 19/20 January
- Co-ordination of the EU position at the Commission on the Status of Women, 1-13 March, New York
- Gender Mainstreaming of Education Council
- Development of Indicators on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace
- A number of legislative tasks including:
 - (i) Consolidation of Gender Employment Equality Directives
 - (ii) Proposal for a new Gender Equality Directive under Article 13 in the non-employment areas
 - (iii) Proposal to amend Council Regulation 1035/07, which governs the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia

European briefing

The equality agenda in Europe: stormy times for the Irish Presidency

by **Brian Harvey**

The Irish Presidency of the European Union coincides with a turbulent period in the European equality agenda. Top of the list is the legislation against discrimination approved by the European Union in 2000. Two directives were approved then, one against racial discrimination, the other against multiple categories of discrimination in employment. No country has yet put the race directive into effect even though the deadline to do so was 19th July last.

“top of the list is the legislation against discrimination approved by the European Union in 2000”

The deadline for the employment directive is 2nd December and there is little sign of urgency on the part of the member states to implement this either. Already, the European Parliament has formally expressed

its concerns. The European Commissioner for Social Affairs, Anna Diamantopoulou, has hinted that she will take to the European Court of Justice any member state that continues to procrastinate.

A démarche between the Commission and the member states over the 2000 directives echoes two stand-offs over specific discrimination directives in disability and gender. Earlier this year, the European Disability Forum put forward a draft directive devoted to tackling discrimination on grounds of disability not just in employment, but in all areas. This was a well thought out, carefully argued, comprehensive draft directive which, the Forum had good reason to believe, had a good chance of adoption during the European year of people with disabilities, 2003. Not so. When the European intergroup of parliamentarians concerned with disability met with Commission officials this summer, they were told in no uncertain terms that there was no immediate prospect of the Commission adopting the shadow directive.

The Commission told the parliamentarians that the focus of the Commission's work was on the correct transposition of the existing directive on discrimination. Shifting the focus to a new directive could put all this at risk and could be a setback for the advances made, they were told. The MEPs were urged to be patient, to play a longer game and get governments comfortable with the 2000 directives. The only light at the end of the tunnel was news that the Commissioner for Social Affairs had written to member states asking them for their views on a disability-specific directive, but their response is not yet known. Most MEPs and all the non-governmental organisations involved are deeply disappointed with the Commission's response.

Similarly, proposals for a gender-specific directive have also encountered difficulties. Here, the European Women's Lobby proposed a shadow gender specific directive, one that would tackle all forms of discrimination against women. Again, the

lobby put forward a comprehensive piece of ideal legislation, pressing the Commission to adopt as much of it as possible.

This time, though, the Commission seemed prepared to run with the idea, probably reflecting the higher political profile of gender equality issues.

A Commission text was drawn up and this was leaked into the public domain during the summer. The draft text proposed not only to ban a broad range of discriminations against women, including in banking and insurance, but set limits on the stereotyping of men and women in the media and required that advertising respect the dignity of women.

There was a storm of protest from the advertising and insurance industries, though some of the press discussion focussed on whether men and women would have to pay the same price for hair cuts. Social Affairs Commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou came under so much fire that the European Women's Lobby felt obliged to rush to her defence. Too late, for the Commissioner told the European Parliament this October that although a new gender-specific directive would be published, the media and advertising would now be excluded. Insurance and pensions will still be included. Although the European Women's Lobby is not happy with the retreat on the media and advertising, it seems that the directive will still go ahead, though a timetable is not clear.

As if this was not a controversial enough background for the Irish presidency, a major row has broken out concerning the future of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia in Vienna, Austria. The Centre was an important innovation, setting down a marker for European intentions to combat the rise of xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism and, since 11th September 2001, islamophobia. In practical terms, the main thrust of its work has been to bring together a common

European databank on racism and racist crime as well as contribute to fresh thinking to combat racism. Now, following a critical evaluation, the Commission has proposed to amend the job description of the centre, putting forward proposals to change its composition and working methods. At a meeting of the European Union's Economic and Social Committee in October, the Commission's proposals came under fire from the committee and representatives of the centre, who argued that the centre was being blamed for the failure of member states to give it proper cooperation. Will its role now be emasculated? Some fear its role will be diminished.

“parliament amended the current round of public procurement legislation this summer accordingly”

The final issue likely to come before the Irish Presidency is public procurement. This is the system whereby all public sector contracts above a certain value must be put out for tender across all the member states according to a common system of criteria. Equality, disability and environmental groups have long fought for the idea that the public authorities should be allowed to take into consideration, in awarding a contract, companies that have a good record in environmental responsibility, disability access and the promotion of equal opportunities. The European Parliament amended the current round of public procurement legislation this summer accordingly. The European Commission directorate general responsible for enterprise and the Council of Ministers have taken a strong stand against the idea and the matter has now gone to a conciliation conference.

Why a forum on the Workplace of the Future?



by Peter Cassells, Executive Chairperson,
National Centre for Partnership and
Performance

In the past ten years, we have made remarkable progress in this country. More people than ever before are in employment, most people have a higher standard of living and workplace relations have improved significantly. In the equality area, we have very comprehensive legislation and to quote Niall Crowley "the Equality Authority is working closely with the social partners to develop equality based workplaces that seek to include and accommodate the diversity of the workforce and to reconcile family life and work".

However, our prosperity and our achievements of recent times are now in a critical period of transition.



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We can see in the private sector, that many older companies are facing serious competitive pressures. Equally, there are concerns that international investment will

move to low cost locations. To safeguard jobs and competitiveness these companies will have to drive down overall operating costs and shift quickly to higher skilled, higher value added activities.

In the public sector, there is no doubt that there will be severe constraints on expenditure for some time. This will lead to a much stronger focus on ways of improving the delivery of services, as managers seek to maintain services to the public, achieve promised improvements and motivate staff to embrace change.

The recent job losses and the difficulties with the effectiveness and efficiency of public services, show the urgent need for considered change. When linked to the changing needs of a more diverse workforce, you can see how we must plan for the future and undertake a fundamental review of how work is organised and managed.

It's for this reason, that the Government has asked the National Centre for Partnership and Performance to establish a Forum on the Workplace of the Future. The aim of the forum is to foster in-depth discussion between employers, employees, managers, unions, policymakers and the general public on how the world of work can best adapt to competitive pressures, improve the delivery of services and respond to the changing needs and preferences of all employees.



One of the first areas the Forum will examine is the forces driving change. In general, we know that the pressure for change is happening because:

- People, as citizens, are changing, are leading more complex lives, placing more emphasis on personal development and demanding greater choice;
- People, as users of services, be it health, education or transport, are demanding better quality, a better response to changing needs and more of a say in how these services operate;
- As employees, people are better educated, want more responsibility, better access to learning and new rewards and a better balance between family and workplace responsibilities;
- A fundamental transformation is occurring in the composition of the workforce. Women are expected to account for about 45% of total employment by the year 2015. While we are at the early stages of population ageing, already the number of older workers, aged over 45 years is growing faster than younger workers. Also with

the increase in migration, Ireland is becoming a more ethnically and culturally diverse country;

- Information and communication technologies are being used in all sectors and are enabling us to shift from mass production to knowledge intensive jobs. They are also enabling us to alter the way in which work is organised and managed;
- The need to move to higher value-added activities in all sectors will in turn lead to occupational upgrading, a rise in the skill content of jobs and increase the importance of education and training. In that context, it is forecast that the proportion of workers with no qualifications will fall to less than 5% by 2015 while the proportion with third level qualifications will increase to 45%;
- All of these workplace innovations, will also fundamentally alter workplace relations and traditional management methods.

In response to these changes, including the needs of a more diverse workforce, all sectors and all organisations dealing with



the world of work, including companies, public sector bodies and managers, will need to modernise. But this modernisation should take place within the competitive and social vision we have set ourselves as a country. At the heart of this vision is a dynamic, inclusive and knowledge-based economy, capable of sustaining competitiveness, social cohesion and a commitment to equal opportunities.

We have published a consultation paper on *'Modernising Our Workplaces to Deliver Ireland's Competitive and Social Vision'* to assist the Forum (on which the Equality Authority, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the social partners will be represented). We have commissioned a major ESRI survey, which should enable us to identify how well workplaces in Ireland are placed to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Over 5000 Irish employees and employers participated in the largest and most comprehensive survey ever taken of attitudes to change in the workplace.

As pointed out earlier, we have comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. Understandably, this relies on after-the-fact enforcement. In many cases, what we are seeing are gestures of compliance with legal obligations without any change in the organisational arrangements and behaviour causing the problem. The Forum would be anxious to explore what are the dominant cultures, systems for advancement and organisational structures causing serious blockages in this area. But more importantly, we would also like to help improve the capacity of companies, public sector organisations and unions to remove glass ceilings, manage more complex workplace relationships and promote diversity as a positive advantage.

The introduction of a successful and sustainable change in this area will depend largely on the capacity and creative commitment of employees and managers. With this in mind and knowing that there is no one set of answers, devised by experts, the government has asked the Forum to consult widely and engage with all who have an interest in shaping the workplace of the future. There is no doubt, in my mind, that many new possibilities for modernising our workplaces will emerge from a process of experimentation, problem solving and shared learning and I hope you will actively participate in this dialogue.

Peter Cassells is Executive Chairperson of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance, and Chair of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future. Details of the Forum, including the consultation document are available from the National Centre for Partnership and Performance, 16 Parnell Square, Dublin 1. Telephone: 8146300, E-mail: forum@ncpp.ie, www.ncpp.ie/forum

how do we move beyond first generation employment discrimination to second-generation employment discrimination”

A key question the consultation document raises is the workplace implications of the increasing participation of women and how different groups within the workforce, for example people with disabilities, immigrants, older workers are affected by changes in work and employment arrangements. In a sense, how do we move beyond first generation employment discrimination to second-generation employment discrimination.

Making progress on equality in public services

by Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland



On 23 September the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland hosted a conference in the Ramada Hotel, Belfast, to examine progress in implementing unique equality duties placed on public authorities in Northern Ireland. The Conference was attended by two hundred and fifty delegates from Government and the public sector, the voluntary and community sector, trade unions, political parties, academics and other equality bodies. Mainstreaming equality has been a project attracting widespread interest internationally for many years now, and the Equality Authority has been leading discussion in the Republic with, for example, a major conference on the issue last February at which I was pleased to participate. Now, half way through the five year span of the first equality schemes drawn up by public authorities in Northern Ireland, the Commission wishes to take stock; to analyse the extent to which we are delivering on the hopes we all have for this innovative measure; and to plan ahead so that we can make even greater strides towards equality in the years to come.

The equality duties, established under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, place a legal requirement on public bodies in Northern Ireland to have due regard to

the need to promote equality of opportunity between 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. They are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The production of 'equality schemes', action plans saying how they would implement section 75, to be approved by the Commission, was the first stage of the process, and those public bodies who were among the first designated under the Act

“getting the process right is important for those who are delivering the new duties”



have now had approved schemes in place for more than two years.

The participation of representatives from both the public sector and the voluntary and community sector was particularly important as those who have been devising and implementing the schemes and those who have been contributing to consultations have much to learn from each other's experiences. Getting the



process right is important for those who are delivering the new duties and for those who are affected by them, and we saw welcome evidence of new relationships being developed, both within the different sectors and between them and the public bodies.

Positive outcomes cited at the conference included decisions by two different Health and Social Services Trusts to return previously privatised services to an 'in-house' arrangement after detailed equality consultations revealed the impact on women workers. In another instance warrants for the arrest of a number of Portuguese workers in Tyrone were

people in the community. That will depend on an ongoing commitment to the promise contained in the equality schemes and on enforcement of the measures set out in them.

Earlier this year, the Commission published its first report on the implementation of the duties. The report was drawn from individual reports received from all the designated public bodies covering the first two years of operating the schemes. The public authorities provided a wealth of information in their individual reports, helping the Commission analyse how effectively the first steps have been taken

Screening exercises have helped public authorities focus on their key functions and policies and they are now consulting upon and implementing the equality impact assessments. It has been noticeable, however, that the carrying out of these assessments has taken longer than expected, and the timetables set by some authorities have fallen behind. In this year's report we are able to highlight instances of good practice for the benefit of all and, where appropriate, to identify where there has been a lack of progress so that we can develop strategies for more effective implementation of the duties.

resources is essential, and there is also a need to build capacity in the voluntary and community sector to enable groups to play their part in the process more effectively. In addition, the Commission has developed and is implementing a Section 75 Complaints and Investigation strategy

The success of the measures introduced by Section 75 will be judged ultimately by the impact they have on the lives of the people of Northern Ireland. Affording people equality of opportunity is a continuous process, not a once off event, and building good relations within Northern Ireland is, as we all know, a challenge which has to be addressed on many fronts.

The changes in law and procedure in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 are intended to build a firm commitment to equality into public policy development and to ensure that, when making decisions, public authorities consult those who will be affected, and respect the responses they get from them. Ultimately, it will not be the process of mainstreaming equality which will matter to people, but the practical benefits they see from it. Those of us involved in the processes must make sure we maintain that focus on equality outcomes.

People working for equality around the world are watching closely the progress we are making here through this unique equality tool. A great deal has already been achieved, but we can improve the benefits to everyone in the community by putting into practice some of the core principles of the equality duty – openness, consultation, and a willingness to act on the lessons we learn from our discussions.

“there are now 157 approved equality schemes in place, covering all aspects of public policy and service delivery”

withdrawn, after consideration of the equality issues involved in sending formal correspondence concerning TV licences in the English language only to people who were non-English speaking. In addition to withdrawal of the warrants, a commitment was made to provide more effective and pro-active language support.

It was clear from all the contributions that the equality duty will only be meaningful to the extent that it improves the lives of

towards implementing the duties, and what the impact has been for the people served by these public bodies.

There are now 157 approved equality schemes in place, covering all aspects of public policy and service delivery. That indicates the beginning of a real culture change in the public sector, with a much greater degree of accountability and transparency. The equality schemes, screening reports and equality impact assessments have been published in a range of languages and accessible formats.

Many of the next steps identified in this year's report are already being acted upon. Following an audit of the implementation of the good relations aspect of the duties, the Commission is developing a strategy for effective implementation of this part of Section 75. We are also reviewing our advice and guidance documentation to reflect what has been learned, and work on how public bodies can monitor across all nine equality categories is being advanced. More effective management of the consultation process to share information and make best use of available



School planning needs to nurture Equality

by Patrick O'Leary, Equality Authority

The Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Noel Dempsey T.D., recently launched a publication entitled 'Schools and the Equal Status Act' at the Department's Clock tower Conference Centre in Marlborough Street, Dublin.

This publication outlines the main features of the Equal Status Act 2000, which prohibits discrimination and promotes equality across nine grounds – gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community. It highlights the particular provisions relevant to schools and identifies strategies for schools to work towards compliance with the legislation and the creation of an inclusive school.

“this publication outlines the main features of the Equal Status Act 2000”

A shared commitment across the various partners in education is evident to further developing inclusive schools. This commitment places equality at the heart of school life. The inclusive school:

- prevents and combats discrimination;
- respects, values and accommodates diversity across the nine grounds;
- achieves a positive experience, a sense of belonging and educational outcomes for all across the nine grounds.

During 2002, the provision of education emerged as a significant issue in the case-files under the Equal Status Act. A total of 40 out of 795 case-files referred to educational establishments – the second highest area of specific service provision after licensed premises. These include:

- refusal of access for Traveller children;
- restricting access to a small number of students of a particular religion in a very large school run by another religious denomination;



Above: Maureen Bohan, Senior Inspector, Department of Education and Science with Eileen O'Connor, Director of the Drumcondra Education Centre and Bernadette McHugh, Director of the Navan Education Centre. Right: Emer Ni Chuagáin, Press Secretary, Union of Secondary Schools



- refusal of access for students with disability.

This caseload highlights the need to support schools to gear up to their obligations under the Equal Status Act. The joint publication of 'Schools and the Equal Status Act' by the Department of Education & Science and the Equality Authority is the first step in making such support available.

School development plans, admission policies and codes of student behaviour are identified as key opportunities to advance this ambition for an inclusive school.

- School development plans need to identify equality objectives and the steps required to achieve these objectives.
- Admission policies need to identify the measures a school will take to achieve maximum accessibility and ensure the principles of equality are respected.
- Codes of behaviour need to prohibit sexual harassment and harassment, to set out policies and procedures to deal with such issues if they arise, and to identify actions to ensure harassment and sexual harassment do not occur.

Such an approach will underpin compliance with the Equal Status Act. It will provide the motor for the further emergence of the inclusive school.

“school development plans need to identify equality objectives”



It is a time of promise for progress on these equality goals. The various partners in education have placed significant emphasis on these issues.

Niall Crowley, Chief Executive Officer, Equality Authority addresses the audience at 'Schools and the Equal Status Act' launch



This shared ambition, commitment and expertise must now be translated into new practice within schools, within the classroom and in the playground.

Copies of 'Schools and the Equal Status Act' can be downloaded in a number of different formats from the following addresses on the Internet:

- http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/ge_schools_and_equality.pdf (in English)
- http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/ge_schools_and_equality_ir.pdf (as Gaeilge)
- http://www.equality.ie/cgi-local/search/doc_search.cgi?step=details&docid=72 (in English)
- http://www.equality.ie/cgi-local/search/doc_search.cgi?step=details&docid=75 (as Gaeilge)

Or copies may be obtained from the Department of Education and Science.

Please contact: Maria Barriscale, Gender Equality Unit, Department of Education & Science, Ground Floor, Talbot House, Talbot St., Dublin 1. Tel. (01) 889 6572 (mornings only) email: gender_equality@education.ie

**SHARED THE FEELING?
Now let's share
the future!**



**is committed to making a difference in our school
for European Year of People with Disabilities 2003**

SCHOOLS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE! Week
November 10 - 14 2003



Library Access

by Niall Crowley, Chief Executive Officer, Equality Authority

The Library Access Project that we have been able to develop with the Library Council is an important point of departure for a wide ranging and ambitious focus on supporting planned and systematic approaches to making reasonable accommodation for customers and consumers with disabilities. It is the starting point for building a literature, a knowledge base, a body of good practice and a commitment to ensure appropriate adjustments are made and necessary facilities are provided for people with disabilities such that their demand for full participation in Irish society is fully realised.

The public libraries are the first public service provider to engage with us on this issue. Their commitment and ambition demonstrates that customers with disabilities can be effectively included and that this brings benefits to people with disabilities, to other customers in need of special facilities and to the general quality of the service being provided. The public libraries are showing a key leadership which we hope will be followed across the full spectrum of service provision.

Reasonable accommodation is an important element in our equality legislation. The Equal Status Act requires providers of goods and services to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities through making reasonable changes in what they do, and how they do it, where without these changes it would be very difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to



obtain those goods or services. The Employment Equality Act requires employers to do all that is reasonable to ensure their employees with disabilities can perform capably in their jobs.

Both requirements are subject to a nominal cost exemption. However, reasonable

accommodation usually involves low cost adjustments and initiatives. It is also important to highlight that the positive action provisions of the legislation also allow employers and service providers to go beyond their obligation and approach the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities with an ambition that clearly is demonstrable in the approach of the Library Council and the public libraries.

“reasonable accommodation is an important element in our equality legislation”

The failure of employers and service providers to make this reasonable accommodation has been a feature of most casework on the disability ground. Discrimination against people with disabilities has emerged as a significant issue under both Acts. In 2002 19% of our case files under the Employment Equality Act and 11% of our case files under the Equal Status Act related to the disability ground. This has stimulated our commitment to prioritising action on reasonable accommodation in our current strategic plan.

It is appropriate that the public libraries have been the first to work with us on realising this commitment. Public libraries

play so many valuable roles in local communities around the country – they are sources of knowledge, information, entertainment and networking. Their service to people with disabilities has a key contribution to make to their inclusion in the wider community

Clearly employers and service providers need supports to enhance their approach to the challenges posed by reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities. Library Access is the first such support to be published. It is foundational in tracing out the key dimensions to making reasonable accommodation for library users with disabilities and doing so in a manner that:

- supports a planned and systematic approach; and
- has a relevance across the full spectrum of service providers from other sectors.

It establishes the need for:

- Stated commitment in the form of a disability policy that establishes objectives for people with disability and strategies by which such objectives could be realised;
- Building capacity in training staff to understand disability issues, to counteract stereotypes and negative assumptions, and to interact effectively with people with disabilities as part of quality customer care;
- Evidence based initiatives to gather the information necessary to secure the participation of customers with disabilities. These would include auditing:
 - (a) the local community to identify people with disabilities and their needs;
 - (b) the services provided to assess their accessibility and relevance; and
 - (c) the staff to identify the skills, knowledge and experience already available in this area;

- Consultations that ensures library users with disabilities have the opportunity to identify their needs and aspirations and that engages disability networks in defining the most effective approaches to reasonable accommodation.

It establishes how this commitment, capacity, evidence gathering and consultation needs to shape:-

- (a) an inclusive service design that realises a physical environment that people with disabilities can approach, enter and navigate, and that achieves an accessible service covering all dimensions from library collections in alternative formats, to the use of assistive technology, to outreach services that target and include people with disabilities.

At the launch of 'Library Access', L-R: Karen Erwin, Chairperson of the Equality Authority with Norma McDermott, Director, Library Council



Delegates at the 'Library Access' launch



Mary Keogh, Director, Forum of People with Disabilities at the launch of 'Library Access'



(b) A marketing strategy that communicates effectively with people with disabilities, that employs different formats and media, and that engages with the channels of communications used by people with disabilities.

“the public libraries provide fertile ground to test out and apply the full range of ideas developed in ‘Library Access’..”

Our work with the Library Council and our contact with many individual public libraries tells us that the publication we are launching builds on a history of good practice in securing inclusion for library users with disabilities. The public libraries provide fertile ground to test out and apply the full range of ideas developed in 'Library Access'. In doing this the public libraries will not only create new opportunities for people with disabilities but will also provide ongoing important and innovative leadership in making reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities across all areas of society.

The research for this publication highlighted how legislation in other jurisdictions has been the key driver of positive change for people with disabilities. We believe the equality legislation has begun to play that role

here in Ireland. It should now be strengthened with the transposition of EU equality Directives and augmented with strong disability legislation such that real change becomes a realisable ambition for people with disabilities, and such that the goal of full inclusion for people with disabilities can be realised in a society that values and accommodates diversity.

Legislative change must further reinforce the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities through:

- Replacing the current nominal cost exemption with an exemption that only allows employers and service providers to be excused from providing reasonable accommodation where a disproportionate burden arises
- Requiring service providers and employers to be planned and systematic in promoting equality for people with disabilities.
- Placing specific requirements on public sector service providers to reasonably accommodate people with disabilities.

Such change will reinforce the ambitions and commitments that have shaped Library Access.

'Library Access' charts a valuable and exciting way forward. We look forward to ongoing work with the Library Council, public libraries and organisations of people with disabilities in turning these ideas into new innovative and effective actions achieving real change for people with disabilities. The public libraries are showing the way. Reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities is not a difficult challenge. We also look forward to the full spectrum of local service providers following their example – from local community groups, to social welfare offices, to shops, post offices and banks.

Blanchardstown EQUAL initiative

by Terry McCabe, Blanchardstown
EQUAL Co-ordinator

SME's in Blanchardstown have clearly identified that they need support, advice and information to help them to actively promote equality within their businesses. This need is being addressed through 'Blanchardstown EQUAL Initiative' an EU initiative that serves to combat discrimination in the workplace.

In 2002, Blanchardstown Area Partnership (BAP) and the Greater Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce (GBCC) secured funding under the PPF Framework Committee for the Development of Equal Opportunities at the Level of the Enterprise, administered through the Equality Authority, to conduct a joint research initiative.

The aim of this research is to identify the barriers, supports and attitudes that exists among employers in Blanchardstown towards diversity and equality.

This piece of work was targeted at both large and small, for profit and not for profit employers. A qualitative and quantitative approach was used.

Current situation

The research carried out in 2002 showed that while there was a certain level of awareness and positive approaches to diversity and equality among employers there is a considerable amount of work to do. Some of the findings were:

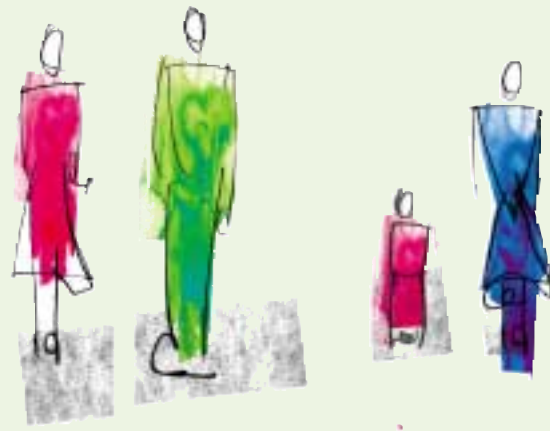
- 62% of employers had an equality policy in place.



- 67% of staff had received no diversity/equality training.
- 54% of human resources staff had no equality/diversity training.
- 70% of employers had taken no specific action to attract and retain the most excluded.
- 46% of employers had taken no action to make their workplace accessible to people with disabilities.
- 50% of smaller employers have no procedures to deal with equality issues
- 75% of SMEs have not familiarised themselves with the employment legislation.

SME's are more likely to seek, attract and retain the more excluded than larger companies. Niall Crowley, CEO of the Equality Authority, launched the outcomes of this fact-finding initiative in February 2003 at a breakfast meeting that was extremely well attended by local business representatives.

Simultaneously in 2002, Blanchardstown received funding under EQUAL Community Initiative. Blanchardstown EQUAL Initiative is one of 21 EQUAL initiatives in Ireland and we are funded by the European Union through the



Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment. The aim of the initiative is to tackle the factors that lead to discrimination and inequality in the labour market. The Action plan has three Themes:

- Theme 1** Individual theme – Developing the Employability of individuals
- Theme 2** Service providers Theme – To improve the access of and co-ordination of services that effect people's employability.
- Theme 3** Employers Theme - Supporting employers to develop Equality/Diversity policies and ultimately to employ those most distant from the labour force.

Due to the active interest shown by employers during the research, the development partnership that manages Blanchardstown EQUAL agreed that it would be best to build on this work. EQUAL funded the publication and launch of the research and proposed to the original research project group that it expand its' membership to develop theme three to support employers employ the most distant from the labour market. This made very practical sense as employers had already been successfully engaged with throughout 2002.

A sub-group was set up under EQUAL to take the recommendations forward and to develop the existing plan. This group consists of employers IBM, Symantec and two representatives of SMEs (Barrington Insurances and Merge Print Post Ltd); these are also members of the Blanchardstown

Chamber of Commerce. Voluntary sector employers are represented through the Community Forum.

The new expanded project team met in February for the first time and has met on a regular basis

Since then this sub-group developed a strategic action plan and prioritised the recommendations in the research. This plan was then agreed with the EQUAL Management Committee who gave it their full support. Greater Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce and Blanchardstown Area Partnership are jointly managing the delivery of this Action for EQUAL.

Priority Actions

The group prioritised its' work into 3 areas on the basis of the 2002 research findings

- Selection and Recruitment
- Equality legislation and equality policies
- Employer support

Action 1 - Recruitment and Selection Training from an Equality Perspective. This training took place in two afternoon sessions, on the 9th and 15th October, 2003.

This training is specifically aimed at owner managers or the person responsible for the HR function within large companies, SME's, Recruitment Agencies and the Voluntary sector.

The programme was delivered by Keelin O'Reilly, Med, MCIPD, MIITD. Keelin is an Associate Lecturer of the National College of Ireland. This includes lecturing in Recruitment & Selection for managers.

There was a very good response to this training offer. The first course was full and we will be running a second course very soon. This course is nearly full at the moment. There will be a very good mix of both large and small employers, as well as representatives from the community & voluntary sector.

Action 2 - Equality Legislation and Equality Policies

There will be two Equality briefings for employers in the Blanchardstown, one in November and another one in February 2004. These are planned as breakfast briefings.

There will also be a workshop with employers to help them develop Equality policies. This will take place in November.

Action 3 – Employer Support

One of the recommendations that came out of the original study was that employers needed/wanted a local support unit or person that could be a point of reference on Equality & Diversity issues. This would be particularly useful to SME's that would not have a particular person/department dedicated to this function. We feel that this "expertise" is starting to build as we roll out the actions. However the sustainability and mainstreaming of this support has yet to be decided.

International Seminar

We hosted our first transnational visit from our EQUAL partners at the end of September 2003. As part of this visit we hosted a seminar in IBM Technology Campus in Damastown on Friday 26th September entitled "The Business Case for Corporate Social Responsibility"

The purpose of the seminar was to allow employers from different countries to exchange their experiences on;

- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Promoting Social Inclusion
- The benefits of promoting Equality/Diversity in your company
- Fears/Barriers that exist in employing the most distant from the labour market

Our EQUAL partners from France, Portugal, Germany, Czech Republic and the UK were with us on the day accompanied by employers that they work with in their respective countries. These were joined by Irish employers and members of

Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce. In all we had 38 people attended on the day.

Presentations were made by Blanchardstown EQUAL. This focussed on the growth of Blanchardstown and the Social Inclusion issues that this presented for the area. It also presented the benefits of having Corporate Social Responsibility on a company's agenda.

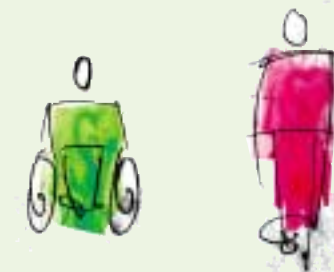
Our French partners presented next on their FACE ("Act against Exclusion") Foundation. This foundation is a network of business clubs created in partnership with local territory authorities, involved in economic and social development of territories "in difficulty". This presentation included input from two employers that are actively involved in FACE, Monsieur Jean Robinet from Medronic and Ms Laurence Pithion of Flunch.

Finally our Portuguese partners presented on working with Barriers/Fears of employers and how to minimise these. They focussed on the Fundação António Silva Leal and its work in Portugal for social inclusion. It also included input from an employer actively working for social inclusion in Portugal –Mr Joaquim Fernandes.

The Seminar participants then prioritised three areas that they would like to discuss further:

- How can companies be attracted, what Networks and supports are needed
- How can companies integrate employees once they have been employed
- How can Recruitment be organised to employ the most excluded.

For any more information contact Terry McCabe, Blanchardstown EQUAL Co-ordinator tmccabe@bap.ie or mhughes@bap.ie Phone 820 9550



Poverty/Inequality interface

National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005

by Carole Sullivan,
Equality Authority



Introduction

An effective anti-poverty strategy needs to have the capacity to accommodate the diversity of people living in poverty. This diversity includes groups covered by the equality legislation, people with disabilities, women, older people and young people, people with caring responsibilities, gay and lesbian people and Black and minority ethnic people, including Travellers.

An effective anti-poverty strategy must also contain a focus on discrimination as it is recognised that discrimination can be a causal factor of poverty. To date there has been very different policy approaches to the issues of poverty and inequality.

A National Anti-Poverty Strategy has been in place in Ireland since 1996. Poverty proofing has been developed. The poverty proofing guidelines usefully include a focus on 'inequalities likely to poverty.' However a real application of this question in the poverty proofing process has yet to be established.

It is accepted that there is a need to move towards better coherence between poverty and equality strategies given the intrinsic link between groups that experience inequality and poverty. Work is currently progressing in developing an integrated proofing mechanism (i.e. bringing together

equality and poverty proofing) under the Equality Proofing Working Group, established under the 'Sustaining Progress' National Agreement.

The work is very much at a developmental stage so in an attempt to strengthen the equality dimension of Ireland's National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs/incl) and to further evolve the concept of equality proofing, the Equality Authority in co-operation with the Office of Social Inclusion carried out an equality proofing exercise on the NAPs/incl.

What is the NAPs/incl?

Each member state of the European Union is required to submit a two-year National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion to the EU Commission. Ireland's National Action Plan was submitted in July of this year. This is Ireland's second plan and follows a previous Plan for 2001-2003. This current plan was built on the existing National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2002-2007 – 'Building an Inclusive Society'.

The key elements of Ireland's NAPs/incl consist of

- An overview of the current economic and social context
- A progress report on the extent to which targets and objectives of the first NAPs/incl have been achieved
- An outline of the overall strategy and targets for tackling poverty
- Policy measures to be implemented from 2003-2005

- The institutional arrangements to implement the plan
- Examples of good practice

The Office of Social Inclusion within the Department of Social and Family Affairs were responsible for co-ordinating the development of Ireland's Plan. Organisations and individuals were invited to make submissions and a number of consultation seminars were held throughout the country.

In addition to the widespread consultation process, the Office of Social Inclusion in co-operation with the Equality Authority organised a meeting to conduct an equality proofing exercise with the participation of groups from across the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation. In recognition of the fact that equality proofing is a complex exercise, it was agreed that this initial exercise would be seen as a first step towards building a more developed equality proofing process into the future.

The equality proofing exercise

The equality proofing exercise was carried out using a draft of the NAPs/incl. The meeting focused on the main themes and related targets contained in the draft, to establish if they were relevant and meaningful to the diversity of people living in poverty.

A number of overarching issues were identified that were relevant across the plan:

- The absence of data across the nine grounds was highlighted. There is a need to develop data collection systems across all grounds in order to determine their current situation;
- The issue of discrimination and its direct impact on poverty needs to be addressed within any anti-poverty plan; and
- The participation of groups experiencing poverty and inequality in the implementation and monitoring of the Plan will be crucial in ensuring positive outcomes for all.

The equality proofing exercise was also successful in establishing some key principles that should inform any anti-poverty strategy. These include the following:

- Anti-poverty measures should be able to accommodate the diversity of people living in poverty in terms of their situation, identity and experience;
- Additional resources may need to be targeted on specific groups at high risk of poverty. Some of these groups will be covered by the nine grounds and therefore this targeting must be able to take into account the interaction between poverty and inequality; and

"to date there has been very different policy approaches to the issues of poverty and inequality"



- Most importantly, anti-poverty strategies need to be able to build an institutional capacity to further address the poverty/inequality interface.

Ireland's NAPs/incl was published in July of this year. It notes the equality proofing exercise and makes an important commitment to "continue and further develop this process over the life of this plan."

The Equality Authority looks forward to working with the Office of Social Inclusion, in partnership with groups experiencing inequality to further evolve equality proofing in order to apply a more effective proofing exercise when developing Ireland's next NAPs/incl.

Case reports



by Patrick O'Leary, Equality Authority

Equality Settlement Progresses Partnership Rights for Same-sex Couples

The Equality Authority has welcomed a settlement with the Department of Social and Family Affairs in a case on the sexual orientation ground. The settlement reflects an important recognition for gay and lesbian couples.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs refused to issue a Free Travel Pass (under the Free Travel Scheme) to the co-habiting partner of a gay man. Under the scheme a person who is aged 66 or over and who is married or co-habiting is entitled to a free travel pass which allows a spouse or partner to accompany him or her free of charge when travelling on public transport services. Following intervention by the Equality Authority and a settlement agreed with the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Free Travel Pass was issued to his partner and both men received €1500 each in compensation. The Department accepted that the Free Travel Pass Scheme, insofar as it did not extend benefits to same-sex and opposite-sex co-habiting couples on an equal basis, was not in conformity with the provisions of the Equal Status Act, 2000. It withdrew

formally its letter of 7/11/01 in which it set out reasons for refusing the applicant's application.

The Equal Status Act, 2000 contains a major exemption in section 14, which exempts anything that is required by statute. The discriminatory provisions in this case were not contained in statute, but in an administrative scheme. This settlement has widespread ramifications for other equivalent administrative schemes. The Equality Authority will be examining other non-statutory schemes and will be in correspondence with the appropriate authorities if necessary.

This settlement will have a beneficial impact on the gay and lesbian community. It is an important acknowledgement of the positive change our equality legislation can realise in relation to gay and lesbian people. It reflects an important accommodation of diversity in acknowledging the needs and rights of gay and lesbian couples.

Government Departments and public sector bodies should now equality proof their various non-statutory schemes in the light of this settlement. Such an exercise would provide an opportunity to examine statutory schemes as well.

The Equality Authority has previously raised the issue of partnership rights for gay and lesbian couples. The report, 'Implementing Equality for Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals' recommended that same-sex couples should have the legal right to nominate a partner.

This is important to address the difficulties that can be experienced by same-sex couples and to ensure an acknowledgement of the valuable diversity gays and lesbians bring to our society. The settlement of this case advances this issue in a small but significant way. While the implications of this settlement only apply to non-statutory administrative schemes the separate



Over-70s fall

development of legal partnership rights should lead to a common approach across statutory and non-statutory schemes. This would be particularly important given the scale and economic significance of so many of the statutory schemes.

Landmark Decision on Age Discrimination in Motor Insurance

In a landmark decision by the Equality Tribunal the refusal of a motor insurance quotation in 2001 by Royal and Sun Alliance to Mr. Jim Ross was found to be discrimination on the age ground under the Equal Status Act 2000. Mr. Ross was 77 years old at the time and possessed a 7-year no claims bonus. The Equality Officer of the Equality Tribunal in his finding stated that the company's across the board policy of refusing quotations to persons over 70 years of age cannot be accepted and awarded Mr. Ross €2000. The Equality Authority represented Mr. Ross before the Tribunal

The Equality Authority welcomed the finding of the Equality Officer of the Equality Tribunal. The key message of this case is that it is not acceptable to refuse a quotation based solely on a person's age with no account taken of the persons particular circumstances such as a person's driving history. Age limits in the provision of insurance are all too common. Insurance companies will now need to review any existing practices that are still in place where an individual is refused a quotation simply on grounds of age, as recommended by the Equality Officer.

The Equal Status Act 2000 prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods, services and facilities on nine grounds including age. Discrimination occurs where a person is treated less favourably on any of the specified grounds. Insurance companies are deemed to be service providers and within the scope of the Act. However there are very broad exemptions that allow insurance companies to discriminate where the difference in the treatment of persons "is effected by reference to actuarial data

obtained from a source on which it is reasonable to rely, or other relevant underwriting or commercial factors, and is reasonable having regard to the data or other relevant factors".

The Equality Officer in his decision noted that the source and integrity of the data, which the insurance company sought to rely on, was called into question. Moreover he discovered that:

- Royal and Sun Alliance's policy had no regard to the Declined Cases Agreement which specifically states 'No insurer shall decline a risk on the grounds of age of driver alone'
- Royal and Sun Alliance had previously indicated to the Motor Insurance Advisory Board that- in respect of older drivers - 'they do not quote unless there is a five-year bonus'.

The Equality Authority welcomes the Equality Officer's finding that "what cannot be accepted is the complete refusal of a quotation based solely on a persons age". The Equality Authority continues to be concerned that the exemptions available under the Equal Status Act for insurance companies are too broad. Despite this important decision we continue to recommend that the exemption related to relevant under- writing or commercial factors should be deleted.

Over-70s fall victim to ageist travel insurance

WELL done to Jim Ross who, through the Equality Authority, won his case against the Royal and Sun Alliance Insurance Company for its refusal to offer him car insurance because he was over 70. This follows on the recent suggestion that the retirement age be extended to 75. Perhaps the extra effort involved would bring about a premature demise, thus saving the State even further expense. Perhaps the Equality Authority might now investigate the fact that travel insurance is not universally available to those of us in the over-70 category? Even where it is available, we are required to pay a double premium. This is surely a case of penal discrimination on age grounds.

Viewpoint

Irish Deaf Society National Association of the Deaf

by Kevin Stanley

The aims and objectives of the organisation:

The Irish Deaf Society (IDS) is the national representative organisation of Deaf people, serving the interest of the Deaf community.



The mission statement of the Society:

Striving to highlight the societal needs of all sections in the Deaf community, advocating the human rights of Deaf people through empowerment and achievement of equal access in all aspects of life endowed by full Irish citizenship.

The main objective of the Society as stated in the constitution:

To promote, advance and uphold the civil and human rights of Deaf people in Ireland, to seek empowerment and to achieve equal access in all situations of life endowed by full Irish citizenship, in accordance with the United Nations Standard Rule for Equalisation of People with Disabilities and the World Federation of the Deaf.

The Society upholds the status of Irish Sign Language (ISL), which is the first and preferred language of Deaf people in Ireland.

It provides a number of specific personal and social information services to Deaf adults, children and their families.

The Society seeks to enhance the standard of living for all Deaf people, who have traditionally faced the threats of poverty, limited employment opportunities and other

difficulties, due to lack of public understanding for the essential needs of Deaf people.

The Society is the sole Irish member of the World Federation of the Deaf and European Union of the Deaf and thus has a long experience of representing Ireland's Deaf population at global level.

The management structure of your organisation:

The Society is managed by the Board, who are entirely Deaf people and elected by the grassroots members of the Deaf community. They determine policies and activities of the Society, which is carried out by the Executive Committee.

The Board is supported by the National Council, which is a unified umbrella body. It consists of 25 local and regional Deaf organisations around the country and develops the Society's policies and objectives.

The Society is managed daily by the Programme Manager, supported by the administrator, FAS CE staff with supervisors and projects co-ordinators. The Society consists of 10 full time and 8 part time staff members.

Origins and development of the organisation:

After years of endurance of paternalistic and sub-standard services as well as being ignored a group of Deaf people formed the Irish Deaf Society, during the UN International Year of Disabled in 1981, with a campaign as follows:

- Reformation of Deaf education
- Improved broadcasting and telecommunication access
- Establishment of Interpreters' service.

The Society altered the public outlook of the Deaf community especially ISL as the language of the Deaf community, the ability of Deaf people, and the flaws of the Irish Deaf education system. The Society transformed the Deaf community with achievements as follows:

- First ever legal acceptance of ISL in Education Act 1998

- Model School for the Deaf Project
- Centre for Deaf Studies
- Interpreters' agency
- Deaf Adult Literacy Project

The activities of the organisation:

Information Base:

The Society issue publications, information packages, fact-sheets and websites on the Deaf community, Irish Sign Language and other Deaf issues.

Video Access Services:

The Society produces ISL videos to disseminate a wide range of information on education, health and social affairs to the Deaf community, through Irish Sign Language.

Research

The Department of Social and Family Affairs, Combat Poverty Agency and National Disability Authority funded the Society's Research on the poverty levels in the Deaf community.

Community Advocacy Services:

Funded by the Department of Gaeltacht, Community and Rural Affairs, this service develops advocacy and empowerment of local Deaf communities through Irish Sign Language based networking.

National Campaign Unit

The Society lobbies for changes in legislation and government policy within a national framework, involving the Deaf community, service providers, parents and professionals working with Deaf people on broadcasting, communication, education, employment, health and telecommunication services.

Linkup Literacy Services:

Established in 2000 and funded by the Department of Education and Science, providing training to Deaf literacy tutors and free service to Deaf adults offering English/literacy classes.

Benefit of the organisation to the Deaf Community and society

The Society advances and protect the interests, needs and opportunities of Irish Deaf People. Empowerment and equal

opportunities are key elements behind this philosophy towards achieving an equal position in society and being recognised as full citizens in our own right.

Traditionally, the Deaf community has been marginalised due to general misconceptions and communication barriers. One of the main frustrations for Deaf people is the lack of access to information, which is a major barrier to full participation in society. Deaf people face barriers to lifelong learning, when community education facilities fail to provide adequate support services.

Therefore, the Society established an Information Base Unit to provide essential information that would normally not be available elsewhere, where it is given chiefly through ISL. Parents, teachers and professionals are also included as target groups for disseminating information.

The Society understands the essential communication needs of Deaf people, realising the importance of mainstream society's comprehension of this and the bridging of the communication gap to enable the integration of Deaf people into the public. Information and computer technology are key mechanisms for effective communication and information services to Deaf people, where the Society are capitalising on this technology providing numerous benefits.

The Society believes there is a risk of isolation of Deaf people living in rural areas due to lack of adequate services. The Society have established the Community Advocacy Service to advise and assist Deaf people to advocate on a local level, where advocacy-training programmes are required.

The Society's services are the best way forward for the long-term coming to fruition of the Deaf community in serving Deaf and hard of hearing people as well as parents, professionals, and all those in the area.

**Irish Deaf Society
National Association OF the Deaf**
30 Blessington Street, Dublin 7,
Tel: (01) 860 1878 Fax: (01) 860 1960
Minicom: (01) 860 1910 E-Mail: ids@indigo.ie
Website: www.irishdeafociety.ie



Racism in the workplace



Racism in the workplace must be rooted out!

By Patricia Callan, Assistant Director, Small Firms Association

If Ireland is to take its place among the most advanced, competitive economies in the world, we are going to have to embrace the concept of a multi-ethnic workplace to a far greater extent. We cannot negate our responsibilities in this area. To do so would identify Ireland as having no interest in the development of an integrated, open society with opportunities for all. We have come too far in economic and social terms to be hindered by our culture, which in the past has been based on parish, town and county principles.

“to do so would render Ireland a nation of backwoodsmen with no interest in the development of an integrated, open society with opportunities for all”



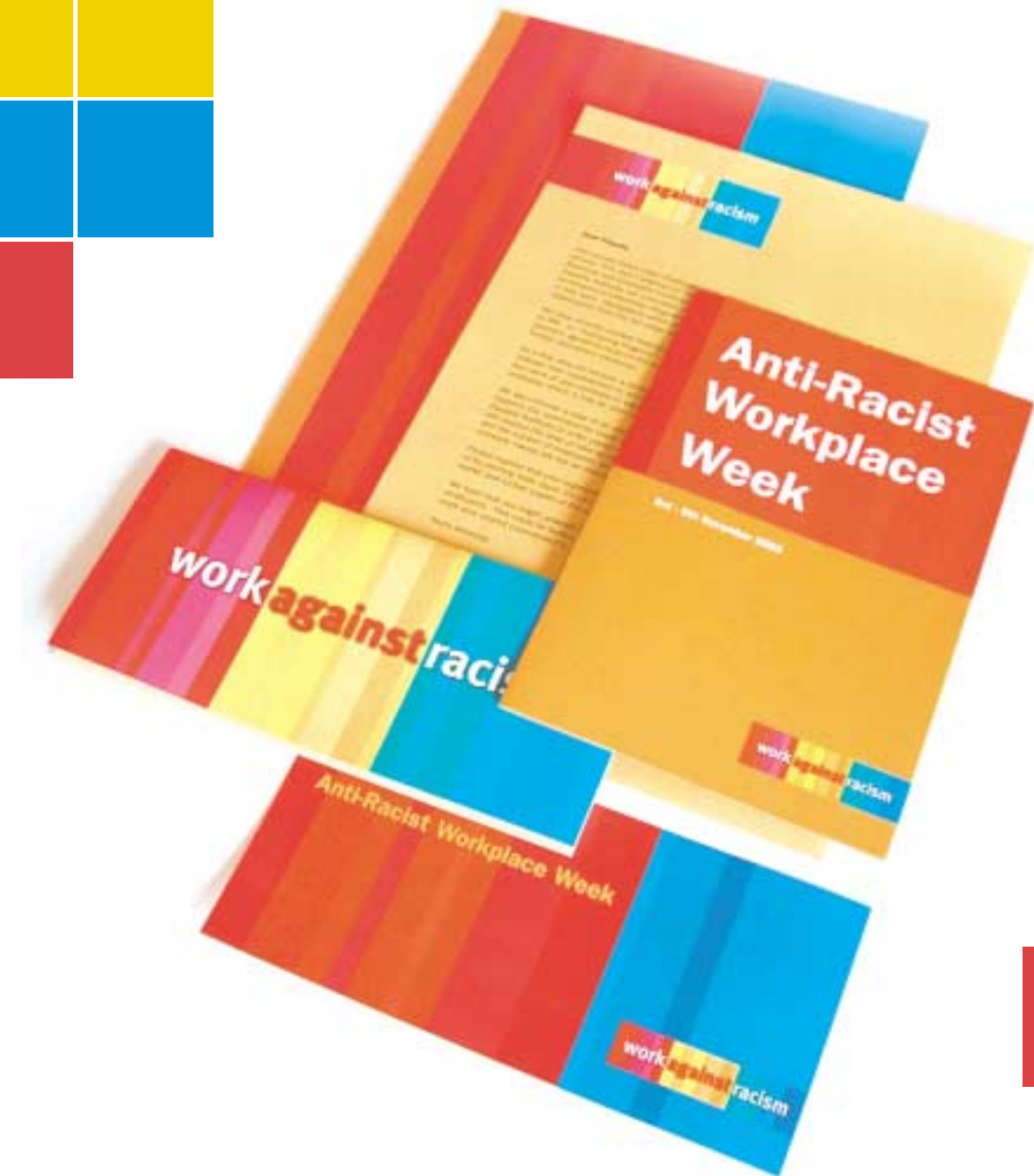
It is now time to have a national and international perspective, where no individual is treated less favourably in the areas of access to health, education, housing, welfare and employment. Within

the workplace every one should have equal expression and opportunity for training and advancement.

The Small Firms Association has in recent years become increasingly concerned about racism in Ireland and its effect in the workplace. It is fully supportive of the Anti-Racist Workplace Week campaign, which it sees as an opportunity for all businesses, both large and small, to play their part in designing initiatives, to ensure that anti-racism measures are put in place in their workplaces, and also to celebrate the diversity of the new Irish workplace.

At a company level, the SFA is advising all members to actively participate in the week, beginning with the display of the “work against racism” poster prominently in the workplace, and the distribution of related pamphlets to employees and customers. It is also advocating for companies to take practical steps to ensure equality, whether through implementing an equality policy in the workplace, taking part in anti-racist and diversity management training, or having staff/customer discussion groups to learn more about minority ethnic workers and customers. The SFA is also suggesting that the opportunity could also be used to celebrate the cultural diversity in the workplace, through social events, themed on ethnic minority countries of origin.

On a more national level, the SFA is calling for a more proactive approach from government agencies and others in dealing with the issue going forward. For example, codes of practice outlining best



Some of the materials produced for Anti-Racist Workplace Week, 2003

practice in employment and in the provision of goods and services would be a very important development. Greater access to language classes, opening bank accounts, acquiring accommodation and easier access to public services are all priority areas for improvement. It is also important for us to develop policy initiatives to incorporate non-nationals, not just into the labour market, but into our social and cultural fabric. There is a need to deal with the issue in all areas of the education system by providing guidance to pupils and also to engage in

promotional and awareness raising activities amongst the wider public.

The SFA actively supports diversity in Irish society and the elimination of racism in business and employment, and views the forthcoming Anti-Racist Workplace week, as a key step in promoting awareness of such issues.

Events/Diary

Together we can conference

- Disability Awareness
- Employment
- Rights Responsibility & Partnership
- Youth & Disability

A conference hosted by North Eastern Health Board in association with Southern Health and Social Services Board, Northern Ireland

18th & 19th November 2003

**The Fairways Hotel, Dundalk,
Co. Louth**

For further information contact:

Áine O'Donovan or Michelle Corbo,
Regional Disability Services Unit, North
Eastern Health Board, Rooskey,
Co. Monaghan.

Tel. + 353 (0) 473 0841

Fax. + 353 (0) 473 0849

Email: aine.o'donovan@nehb.ie or
michelle.corbo@nehb.ie

The Equality Authority would like to advise all callers that they can visit www.equality.ie or contact our Public Information Centre directly at 01 417 3333 or Lo Call number 1890 245545, for information on the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2000. Information is also available on the Maternity Protection Act, 1994, the Adoptive Leave Act, 1995 and the Parental Leave Act, 1998.

The Equality Authority,
2 Clonmel Street, Dublin 2, Ireland.
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Information – Lo Call: 1890 245 545
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Email: info@equality.ie
Web: www.equality.ie

'Regulating for Freedom' Events in Dublin City Public Libraries, November & December 2003

This series of lectures explores the nature of human freedom and the paradox of regulating for freedom. Admission is free.

Programme of Events: November

Mon. 17th 6.30pm Terenure Library
The Curse of the Three-pint Provos: How a Perverse, Self-deluded View of National Identity Neutered a Nation and Diminished its People
by Alan Ruddock, columnist with the Sunday Independent

Thurs. 20th 6.30pm Rathmines Library
Freedom, Responsibility and Feminism
by Emer O'Kelly, columnist with the Sunday Independent and arts critic

Mon. 24th 6.30pm Cabra Library
Why Women's Rights are Human Rights
by Prof. Ivana Bacik, Reid Professor of Criminal Law, Criminology and Penology at T.C.D. and a practising barrister

Thurs. 27th 6.30pm Central Library, Ilac Centre.
Planning for Equality
by Niall Crowley, Chief Executive of the Equality Authority

Programme of Events: December

Mon. 1st 6.30pm Coolock Library
Autonomy, the Family and Society: New Choices
by Prof. William Binchy, Regius Professor of Law, Trinity College Dublin

Mon. 8th Dec. 6.30pm Pembroke Library
Ideas nurture the Individual, Ideology nurtures the Collective
by Eoghan Harris, Sunday Independent political columnist

Mon. 15th 6.30pm Central Library
Legislative Action: A Winner's Curse
by Constantin T.Gurdgiev, Director of the Open Republic Institute and Trinity College Dublin lecturer