



# Equality News

Autumn 2006



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The contributions to Equality News are welcome and appreciated. The opinions of the contributors do not necessarily reflect the position of the Equality Authority. We welcome your feedback on any article in Equality News. Please send information to Patrick O'Leary (contact details on back page).



# Update

by Niall Crowley, Chief Executive Officer, Equality Authority

## There have been a number of important developments in the work of the Equality Authority during the last quarter.

The Equality Authority has been appointed by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform as the National Implementing Body for the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. A final action plan has been developed by the Equality Authority for this year's Anti-Racist Workplace Week and we are progressing work on the issue of negative stereotyping of young people. Two new publications set out the position of the Equality Authority in relation to *Embedding Equality in Immigration Policy* and in relation to *Traveller Ethnicity*.

## European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

The Equality Authority is now working to prepare, and submit to the European Commission, a strategy for the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. The European Year will benefit from limited funding from the European Commission - €150,000 for Ireland. However, its importance lies in the capacity of the year to serve as a lever for the further development of policies, programmes and practice to promote equality, accommodate diversity and combat discrimination in Ireland.

In preparing a strategy for the year the Equality Authority will consult a broad range of stakeholders. The current perspective of the Equality Authority is that the Year should provide a stimulus for:

- reflection on how we define equality and on the ambition for equality reflected in current policy and practice,
- implementation of equality mainstreaming within the design and development of new policies and programmes,
- action to enhance the equality competence of key institutions and organisations,
- initiatives to further develop channels of communication and advocacy with groups that experience inequality about their rights particularly under equality legislation,
- action to address and seek progress on burning issues within each of the grounds covered by the EU Directives (gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion and race/ethnic origin),
- exploring issues of multiple discrimination for women across these six grounds.

The European Year should have a particular focus on the role and impact of specialised equality bodies and the important principle of independence that underpins their work. The Equality Authority will be working as part of EQUINET, the EU network of specialised equality bodies, to mark the Year in this regard.

It is also hoped that the European Year for Equal Opportunities for All will provide an opportunity for new developments at EU level in particular in relation to equality legislation, equality mainstreaming and equality data.

## Anti-Racist Workplace Week

The seventh annual Anti-Racist Workplace Week will take place from November 6th to 10th. The partners include IBEC, Congress, SFA, Construction Industry Federation, IFA, Chambers Ireland and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

A core theme for this year is the integrated workplace. This theme seeks to establish integration as a challenge:

- to migrant workers where support is necessary for them to adapt to the Irish workplace,
- to indigenous workers where support is necessary for them to adapt to and perform within a workplace characterised by cultural diversity,
- to the workplace itself where support is needed for workplace policies, procedures and practices to be developed to take account of cultural diversity, to ensure non discrimination and to promote full equality in practice.

A new development for the week this year will be a focus on local level strategies to support awareness of the week and action at local enterprise level to mark the week. This local level work will involve Black and minority ethnic (including Traveller) organisations, trade union centres, business networks and area based partnerships.

New sectoral initiatives will also be developed with the Irish Management Institute and the Public Appointments Service to develop new standards in responding to the challenge posed, and opportunity presented, by cultural diversity in the workplace.

The week is an important part of the National Action Plan Against Racism. Funding is provided for the week by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform through the National Action Plan and by the European Commission. The National Action Plan contains an important commitment to “evolve and mainstream the principles established as part of Anti-Racist Workplace Week into employment and workplace policy”.

## Inequality and the Stereotyping of Young People

The Equality Authority and the National Youth Council of Ireland are following up on the recommendations made in the joint study on *Inequality and the Stereotyping of Young People*. This study concluded that the young people involved saw their relationships with adults as for the most part unequal, troubled and rooted in stereotypical ideas about their attributes and abilities.

A starting point in the follow up to the report is to develop an information and resource pack for youth organisations on the issue. This should support young people and youth organisations to identify the issue of stereotyping and to develop practical strategies to deal with the issue.

Contact has also been made with the new Office of the Minister for Children who are doing valuable work in the area of play and recreation policy and in relation to school councils. Developments in these areas could contribute much in addressing issues identified in the report in relation to powerlessness of young people and lack of resources for young people.

## Immigration and Residence Bill

The Equality Authority made a submission to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on their discussion document on the Immigration and Residence Bill. This submission is currently being published under the title *Embedding Equality in Immigration Policy*.

The submission puts forward the position that where the state imposes a formal process on a migrant, the migrant should be entitled to the advantages of the principle of equality. A migrant's experience of the immigration process should be protected by the state in a context where the migrant has no protection available from his or her own state.

Recommendations in the submission emphasise the need for new immigration legislation to:

- impose a positive duty on public bodies with responsibilities in this area to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality and good relations in relation to migrants,
- require public bodies with responsibilities in this area to be planned and systematic in their approach to equality in both employment and service provision,
- expand the definition of services under the Equal Status Acts to explicitly include the functions of the State so as to bring immigration control and police powers within the ambit of the Equal Status Acts.

The submission identifies approaches in Northern Ireland, Britain and Canada to including an equality principle in the immigration area. Paragraph 3(3)(d) of the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act states that the Act is to be

applied in a manner that “ensure that decisions taken under this Act are consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms including its principles of equality and freedom from discrimination.....”.

## Traveller Ethnicity

A new Equality Authority report has been published on *Traveller Ethnicity*. The report examines the public policy literature on Travellers and the academic literature as they relate to recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group. The report has been prepared because an understanding and recognition of Traveller ethnicity is central to the effective promotion of equality of opportunity for the Traveller community and because the issue of Traveller ethnicity could be raised in casework supported and pursued by the Equality Authority and others.

This report highlights an evolution over time of the understanding of ethnicity in public policy debate and academic literature. From 1976 and the work of Sharon and George Gmelch, there has been a uniform clarity that Travellers are an ethnic group in academic literature with only one dissenting voice. The national policy debate has moved from the conclusion of the Commission on Itinerancy in 1963 that Travellers do not constitute an ethnic group, to the introduction of a definition of Travellers in the Equal Status Acts that effectively recognises Traveller ethnicity.

The report validates the position of the Equality Authority in recognising Travellers as an ethnic group and recommends that the Irish government should now recognise Travellers as an ethnic group and that this recognition should be reflected in all policies, programmes and institutional practices that impact on the Traveller community.



# European Year for All - 2007 Celebrating Diversity, Ensuring Equality

by Stefan Olsson  
Head of Unit, Anti-Discrimination and Relations  
with Civil Society, Employment, Social Affairs  
and Equal Opportunities DG



## Why a European Year?

Past experiences have shown that European Years, if launched at the right moment and carried out with real commitment in close co-operation with stakeholders, can make a real difference!

Take the European Year against Racism in 1997, for example. Since then we've had some extraordinary developments. That Year led to the inclusion of the anti-discrimination article in the Treaty, the two anti-discrimination Directives and later the Action Programme to combat discrimination.

The idea is simple and straightforward: the Year of Equal Opportunities for All will be a strong, once-off political initiative which goes beyond the usual stakeholders in order to create momentum and reach out to the wider public.

## What are the messages of the Year?

**There are two very important messages we hope to get across.** Firstly, we all need to be more aware of the benefits of diversity. We need to make sure people see the important advantages of involving all people in society and in the labour market. We also have to remember

the demographic backdrop of ageing and the challenges of globalisation. We need to be competitive in Europe by involving everybody, not excluding people – we can't afford that any more. There is a human and economic cost to discriminating against people.

Secondly, people in the EU need to be made aware of their rights. We have very advanced legislation based on Article 13 of the EU Treaty. Since the Council of Ministers adopted the two directives against race discrimination throughout society and discrimination on the basis of religion, disability, age and sexual orientation in the labour market, we have used the 'For Diversity. Against Discrimination' campaign ([www.stop-discrimination.info](http://www.stop-discrimination.info)) to raise awareness on the rights and obligations contained in these Directives. The impact of these directives relies heavily on individuals taking cases supported by NGOs, social partners and equality bodies. The work with stakeholders will continue under our long-running information campaign but the European Year will provide an excellent opportunity to reach out to the general public on the existence of these important rights.

Also we hope of course that the Year will give an extra boost to member states to finalise the implementation of the Directives. The Commission is closely examining the transposition of the Directives into national law. This work should be fully completed by the end of this year

### Which concrete projects are we envisaging?

The Year will give all of us an excellent opportunity to bring equal opportunities

policy forward at national and EU level. While legislation is crucial we all know many informal barriers exist in society which can only partially be removed by enforcing legal rights. The persisting gender pay gap is one obvious example, the alarming poverty rates of the Traveller and the Roma community is another. The European Parliament recently issued an opinion on the future of anti-discrimination policy, emphasising the need for reliable data and the development of positive action as key tools to remove those barriers.

These are two areas where the European Commission supports member state activities by developing tools, disseminating information and facilitating the exchange of good practice. This autumn, the Commission will issue a handbook on data collection and continue the technical work within our working group on data collection. On positive action, there will be a first legal report on the issue this year and we will then look at possible future activities.

These are two examples of important issues for which the European Year can be used in presenting best practice and alleviating fears. That is why it is important that member states in their national strategies and concrete actions pick up on innovative practices and experiences.

The Commission has launched a number of other important initiatives which will feed in to the Year and future work.

We have for example commissioned a comprehensive study on multiple discrimination, with one EU-level event planned to present and discuss the results of this during the European Year.

In January 2006, the Commission set up a high level group on the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the labour market, chaired by Professor Süssmuth, former President of the German Bundestag. The group has been asked to deliver a set of recommendations to European institutions, member states and stakeholders during 2007. The work of the group will be accompanied by a study and the findings will be launched at an event in the context of the European Year.

### How will the Year be run in practical terms?

About 15 million euro has been set aside for the Year. Around half of this goes to European level activities (conferences and exchange of good practice, Eurobarometer surveys, evaluation and above all a European wide information campaign). The other half goes to national activities to be supplemented by 50% co-funding from national sources; thus all in all 15 million euro is available at national level.

Experience from previous European years has shown that for every euro put in from the European Union budget at least 3 euros are added at national level. Furthermore, the European activities are not happening in a vacuum. They will support directly what is going on at national level. At the same time it is important not to overstate budgetary issues as the European Year is first and foremost about willingness to commit to equal opportunities for all and to present new and practical examples of how we can achieve this together.

Before the end of this year, each participating country shall present a strategy and a list of activities for the European Year. This is

agreed with us at the European Commission and the activities of the Year can then begin. The national activities can take a number of different forms, from conferences to studies, from competitions to information campaigns. Two things are crucial to remember: there has to be a balanced treatment of the grounds of discrimination and civil society has to be involved. This makes good sense. Previous years have shown that the involvement of the people that actually deal with the issues on the ground is key to success.

Apart from the many interesting national activities we can look forward to, the European Year will kick off with an equality summit and opening conference in Berlin at the end of January. The Portuguese presidency will round up the Year and look forward to the 2008 year on intercultural dialogue at a closing conference in Lisbon.

The European Year will mean a lot of hard work, a lot of fun and most importantly, significant progress in bringing about equal opportunities for everybody.

### How can the people get involved?

The European Commission invites you all to participate in the Year at events, competitions etc. and through your individual everyday activities.

We are very much looking forward to Ireland's contribution in this respect. You have come a long way in this field and have many interesting and innovative ideas to share.

For more information on the European Year, please consult our website: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equality2007/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equality2007/index_en.htm)



“the new legislation could and would change behaviors”

# Nearly Thirty Years Ago - The Establishment of the Employment Equality Agency

by Sylvia Meehan, Irish Senior Citizens Parliament  
First Chair and Chief Executive of the Employment Equality Agency



The Employment Equality Agency (EEA) was established in October 1977. It was set up to oversee the operation of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974, which came into operation on December 31 1975 and the Employment Equality Act of 1977. The Agency was also directed to work towards the elimination of all gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

The Agency was headed by a Chair and Chief Executive, and was staffed by civil servants from the Department of Labour, where its office was based. The Board of the Agency had two members representing the Minister for Labour, two from the

Federated Union of Employers (FUE), two from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and three from the Council for the Status of Women (CSW). As the first Chair and Chief Executive of the Agency, I was not short of advice or criticism from a wide variety of sources. These ranged from messages of welcome to comments of derision and predictions that “Law doesn’t change attitudes”.

At that time, now thirty short years ago, there were lots of ‘attitudes’ concerning equal pay for men and women in the workplace. It was part of our way of life that women were paid less money than men when they performed

the same work for the same employer. Even more rigid 'attitudes' ensured that women had to resign from jobs in the civil service and public sector (state sponsored industries etc) when they got married.

The belief that women in the workplace had different – less prestigious-roles than men in a variety of employments was deeply entrenched and generally accepted. Women were clerks and secretaries - not heads of departments; they were teachers, but not principals of schools, and they were excluded from almost all areas of apprenticeships to craft trades – so they were not electricians or carpenters, or plumbers or painters and decorators. Women did work in the retail trades throughout the country, but unless they were the owners of a business, they were unlikely to be 'running' the place.

Education was claimed to be provided equally for boys and girls in primary and secondary schools, but schools were in fact prime examples of sex-stereotyping. There were very few co-educational schools and certain subjects, particularly mathematics, were not taught at higher levels in girls' schools.

In one way you could say that girls performed equally or better than their male comparators at school level, but it was clear they were not equally equipped for the world of work. They were expected to underachieve in most areas of employment, and this outcome of gender differences was the norm.

The Employment Equality Agency (EEA) had a wide area of work. We were of course quite knowledgeable about 'attitudes'. We were quite confident however that the new legislation could and would change behaviour and create rights and duties in the workplace.

Claims concerning equal pay were assigned for adjudication to the Labour Court. In some cases the employer contended that the question at issue was governed within the context of industrial relations rather than the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act. However the Labour Court confirmed the right of an individual to make a claim under the Act, despite the fact that a negotiated pay agreement had been made between her union and employer.

Claims were first examined and decided by an Equality Officer, who issued a recommendation. Either party could appeal to the Labour Court for a determination against the recommendation, or could appeal to the Court for a determination that the recommendation had not been implemented. There was a 42 day time-limit for lodgement of the appeal.

This machinery, adjudication by the Labour Court, had the advantage of being cost-free in the sense of freedom from legal costs before the court. There was some disadvantage however in that the Labour Court, being a court of industrial relations, did not give reasoned judgements, itemising grounds for determinations.

This approach was satisfactory where industrial relations were concerned, but it had limitations when the matter at issue was the implementations of statute law. A determination of the Labour Court could be appealed to the High Court on a point of law, but this was made difficult or sometimes impossible when the Labour Court gave no grounds for its judgement in a particular determination.

An interesting claim in 1977 was lodged for the removal of sex discrimination from an employer's pension scheme. The Equality Officer found that the scheme did not give equal benefits to men and women because certain provisions of the scheme differentiate between men and women regarding requirements and conditions of membership. The company appealed to the Labour Court against the recommendation mainly on the grounds that the pension plans did not come within the compass of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974. The company also requested clarifications concerning a part of the recommendation as to the company undertaking a revision of their pension scheme.

The Labour Court upheld the Equality Officer's recommendation in favour of equal pension benefits. The Court also referred the company to that part of the 1974 Act where they could appeal to the High Court as there was a question of law involved. The Court did not define what detailed changes would need to be made in their pension plan so as to comply with the Act. The company did not exercise this option of bringing the case to the High Court on the interpretation of a point of law. The Employment Equality Agency subsequently proposed an amendment to the Act which would clarify the definition of 'remuneration' by specifying that it covered pension benefits.

Slowly but steadily the volume of claims concerning equal pay built up. In the year 1980, 107 cases were referred and 65 recommendations were issued. 16 recommendations rejected the employee's claim, and 55 were appealed to the Labour Court. Forty determinations were issued, with the further number of cases (15) being dealt

with later. Of the 40 determinations issued, four favoured the employers' appeal, and 24 employers' appeals were rejected. Eight appeals by employees against the Equality Officer were rejected, and two were partially or fully rejected. Geographical location of cases showed that most claims originated in Dublin, but the distribution of cases was widespread.

In the same year (1980) the 1936 prohibition on industrial night-work for women was used as a justification for a differential pay rate for men and women. The Labour Court determination found that the work performed by female operatives was like work with their named male counterparts. As regards the company's arguments that the restrictions of the 1936 Act justified a lower rate for females, the Court held "that since the legislation referred to, i.e. the 1936 Act is itself based on sex, it does not constitute grounds other than sex as provided in Section 2(3) of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act".

The Employment Equality Agency was active in assisting claimants who sought advice in pursuit of their legal rights. We also advised employers who frequently requested guidance on the terms of the Acts, though we did not assist them in defending claims.

The launch of the Employment Equality Agency was a notable event which affected many areas of Irish life and society. It ring-fenced 1977 in my memory and I have happy memories of the people and places where such great progress was initiated and encouraged.



## Say No To Ageism Week

by Patrick O'Leary, Equality Authority

Practical action to combat ageism and promote equality for older people as customers formed part of the 'Say No To Ageism Week' (May 15-May 19). This week is an initiative of the Equality Authority, the Health Service Executive and the National Council on Ageing and Older People. The poster for the campaign is of a long line of birthday candles and is a celebration of ageing that encourages us all to reflect on the stereotypes of older people, and indeed younger people, that we hold. The aim of the week is to promote new awareness and understanding of ageism and of how ageism excludes older people from participating in and contributing to society.

As part of the week, Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann, Rural Transport Initiative and Veolia Transport (operators



of the Luas) launched an action programme to assist them in creating age friendly customer services. Highlights of the action programme include:

- Dialogue with older people – organising meetings with organisations of older people to explore age friendly practices.
- Training – provide age awareness training to customer service staff and front line staff involved in the provision of services.
- Communication – review and develop information materials to ensure they are user friendly and accessible to older people.
- Customer Service – develop and communicate a policy that includes a focus on age friendly customer services in consultation with older people and their organisations.



Bob Carroll, Director of the National Council on Ageing and Older People

The partner organisations in the transport sector described the individual initiatives of the organisations in the action programme as follows.

Veolia Transport are the operators of the Luas, Dublin's Light Rail Service. According to its

General Manager, Brian Brennan over 10% of Luas passengers are aged over 65. In a recent customer survey it was discovered that many older people have made lifestyle changes as a result of the Luas. Finding it easier to travel has made it easier to go to work, shop, visit family and friends. The service has many features – low floors, audio visual announcement, handrails, seating and shelter at stops – making it easier for all to travel, in particular older people. The travel needs of older people are taken into account in staff training.

Dawn Bailey, Marketing Manager with Dublin Bus stated that almost 150 million passenger journeys are facilitated by Dublin Bus every year. In 2000, Dublin Bus made a commitment to ensure that every new bus purchased is a low floor bus, thereby ensuring accessibility for all. At present over 50% of the bus fleet are low floor, with 45% of routes now designated fully accessible. The *Transport for All Policy* of Dublin Bus seeks to develop services with a customer focus and meet the travel needs of all customers. A part of that policy includes a framework for consulting with organisations representing older people to include them in decisions relating to customer service.

Martin Nolan, Chief Operating Officer of Bus Éireann stated that as part of the action programme, Bus Éireann has earmarked their communication process, ensuring that their message is accessible to all and also that they contribute to further enhancing the profile of older people in society. An information leaflet on ageism will be included in the induction packs for all new employees and distributed to all staff to build a greater understanding of the issues surrounding ageism. New signage at bus stations and on buses will focus on

older people accessing services and using them safely. Bus Éireann intends to develop an age friendly customer service policy and ethos which will take into account the particular needs of older people as customers.

Focused training is fundamental for Iarnród Éireann staff who interact with customers on a daily basis, said John Keenan, Director of Strategy and Business Development. A training module has been revised to accommodate the needs of older customers. Topics covered include:

- stereotyping and attitudes,
- language,
- how ageism is perpetuated,
- how ageism can be counteracted, and
- the benefits of treating older customers with dignity and respect.

This element of the training for staff has been designed in consultation with Age and Opportunity. Iarnród Éireann believe that this will encourage positive age awareness among all staff and it will provide skills development for front line people in promoting equality for older people. Moreover Iarnród Éireann have organised equality training and awareness raising sessions for a diverse range of large organisations with whom it liaises regularly.

Erin Cotter, National Co-ordinator of the Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) stated that the service was established due to the fact that a significant number of people in rural areas found that transport was not available, affordable or accessible to them, particularly

older people. The aim of the initiative is to provide integrated rural public transport services for a wide profile of passengers. These services are targeted at those who are most in need. Thirty four RTI Groups are operational nationally.

The 'Say No To Ageism' campaign enhances the role of community transport in the co-ordination and provision of services for older people. It is becoming more obvious that many older people, especially in rural areas of Ireland, do not have alternative transport as a means of accessing basic essential services and integrating socially. Research and consultation over the life of the Rural Transport Initiative highlights transport as the key for these people in unlocking dependency and promoting healthy and active living, regardless of age, race, gender or geographical location.

RTI offers older people:

- the opportunity to be involved in the local management and decision making structures of the Initiative;
- services that are locally designed, planned, developed and delivered;
- services that are more flexible, available and affordable and
- services that are more accessible from both a physical and a spatial perspective.



Jim Dorney, General Secretary TUI



# The Inclusive School

by Annette Dolan, Assistant General Secretary, Teachers Union of Ireland

A key objective of the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) which represents 13,500 members in second level, further education and higher education, is that all schools and colleges should become inclusive educational institutions, which prevent and combat discrimination, value and accommodate diversity; seek positive experiences, a sense of belonging and positive outcomes for all students and staff.

TUI has therefore an important leadership role to play in combating all forms of discrimination in the learning environment. This means in reality that we must question our policies, practices, procedures and methodologies on a daily basis to ensure that we move towards truly inclusive schools on all of the nine equality grounds of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion,

race, marital status, family status and membership of the Traveller community.

## The race ground

Over the last few years, the student population in schools and colleges has dramatically become much more diverse. In many of our educational institutions students from minority ethnic backgrounds comprise one quarter or more of the total student enrolment. In some of our schools there are now students from in excess of 20 different ethnic groups.

It follows that teachers must have a role against racism. It is important that teachers tackle racist comments of any kind. The school code of behaviour should be very clear that racist comments, gestures or acts are not acceptable.

As a union we are acutely aware that teachers and lecturers are dealing with very difficult situations and that this is compounded by the inadequate level of resources funded by the Department of Education and Science. For example if a school has 28 students for whom English is not their mother tongue, and who require language assistance, the school will get two additional resource teachers. However if they have 100 non-national students, as do many of our vocational schools, the level of resource teachers will not increase above those two teachers. The situation is even worse in PLC colleges where no matter how many non-English speaking students there are, they receive no additional supports. In addition, the restriction to two years of English language tuition per student also creates significant difficulties for individuals.



Paddy Healy, President of TUI addresses the conference

As teachers, what initiatives can we take to ensure that students from minority ethnic backgrounds mix with Irish students? Sport provides one obvious opportunity to break down barriers, as little or no language is required to play tennis, football or basketball.

There are high concentrations of students from minority ethnic backgrounds in particular areas, due to planning and housing policy or

due to the already depressed nature of an area. Because of the enrolment policies of some secondary schools, vocational schools and community and comprehensive schools have a larger intake of non-national students. In some instances it seems that some schools are in danger of becoming ghettoised and this fact must be faced squarely and addressed. We have to learn from the mistakes made in this regard in other jurisdictions.

### The Traveller ground

Many Travellers are still not transferring to second level schools and those that do, tend to drop out early. Part of the answer to retaining such students is to convince their parents of the value of education. The achievements of Traveller children who do transfer and make progress should be acknowledged and rewarded in the presence of their parents. How schools communicate with Traveller parents is therefore of utmost importance.

The education system needs to respond more effectively to the needs of Travellers who lead a nomadic life by providing portable records of achievement and module based programmes.

At the moment there are only a handful of Traveller students in Colleges of Further Education and in Institutes of Technology. Traveller children should be encouraged to progress to further education and third level education.

### The gender ground

While progress has been made in tackling gender discrimination there is still a lot more to be achieved. How can teachers encourage girls to take up non-traditional subjects of



woodwork, technical drawing, physics, honours maths etc to pursue careers in science, engineering and the trades, which are still male dominated? How can teachers be advocates for change to ensure that barriers are not put in the way of students choosing such options? For instance if you have a student who wants to do both art and technical drawing but both are timetabled together, such timetabling arrangements are forcing choices which in a majority of cases will be made on gender grounds.

Are girls encouraged as much as boys to engage in games and other extra-curricular activities? If not how can this be encouraged? Is the achievement of girls in sport rewarded and acknowledged to the same extent as that of boys? If not why not and how can staff in schools tackle this?

According to recent research there is still a significant gender pay gap of up to 15%. Despite the fact that there are now more female than male teachers in second level schools, men hold the majority of principal and deputy principal posts. For instance in Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools there are currently 4,200 teachers, 63% (2,653) of whom are female and 37% (1,547) of whom are male.

The gender breakdown of post holders in C&C schools is currently as follows:

Males holding post of responsibility allowances		
	Number	%
Principals	84	80%
Deputy principals	61	53%
Assistant principals	418	52%
Special duties post holders	450	37%

Females holding post of responsibility allowances		
	Number	%
Principals	21	20%
Deputy principals	55	47%
Assistant principals	387	48%
Special duties post holders	770	63%

This pattern is replicated in the Institutes of Technology with the majority of senior management posts being held by men. This inequity must be addressed in our schools and colleges.

Teaching should reflect society and it would be preferable for students to have male and female role models. The teaching profession is becoming more feminised. While the Department of Education and Science, unions and management bodies have a role in tackling this issue, so too do teachers, in presenting and promoting teaching as an attractive career.

## Conclusion

These are but a few examples of the issues that need to be tackled to combat discrimination and inequality in our educational institutions. The TUI is committed to playing a leadership role to help achieve equality in Irish education.



# Annual Report of the Equality Authority

by Patrick O'Leary, Equality Authority



Michael Mc Dowell, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform recently launched the 2005 Annual Report of the Equality Authority.

During 2005 the Equality Authority assisted the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in developing a special survey on equality. This found that, for the population aged 18 years and over, 12.5% had experienced discrimination within the last two years – 5.1% had experienced work related discrimination and 9% had experienced discrimination in accessing services. This makes clear the challenging context within which the Equality Authority seeks to implement its mandate. It provides an important benchmark against which to measure progress in promoting a more equal society and makes the case for an empowered and well resourced equality infrastructure.

Policies, procedures and practices in institutions need to adapt to take account of the diversity of their employees and of their customers, if institutions are to be effective in preventing discrimination, promoting equality and accommodating diversity.

During 2005 the Equality Authority reports on significant progress in the development of new systems and practices by a wide range of institutions.

- A total of 159 small and medium enterprises were supported in developing employment equality policies and equality and diversity training strategies. This was done through the Equal Opportunities Framework Committee which involves a wide range of organisations including the

Equality Authority, IBEC and Congress. This is double the number of enterprises involved in this scheme in 2004.

- The Health Service Executive, the Department of Health and Children and the Equality Authority published guidelines on the Equal Status Acts for the sector. This set out an agreed approach to the further development of equality competence in health service organisations. The Health Service Executive has now established structures and strategies to further develop this equality competence within health organisations.
- Kerry VEC led the way in terms of institutional change in the education sector. During 2005, Kerry VEC became the first educational establishment to be supported to conduct an Equal Status Review. This review is an audit of the level of equality of opportunity that exists in the service provided. An equality action plan is being developed and implemented on foot of the review which was carried out in two schools and one adult education establishment.

These organisations, representing many different aspects of working life and services for the wider community, have demonstrated a valuable leadership in the promotion of equality.



Karen Erwin, Chairperson of the Equality Authority, Michael Mc Dowell, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Niall Crowley, CEO of the Equality Authority

2005 saw increased demand on the services of the Equality Authority. The Public Information Centre dealt with 11,474 enquiries during the year on the Employment Equality Acts, the Equal Status Acts, the Maternity Protection Acts, the Adoptive Leave Act and the Parental Leave Act. Enquiries on the Employment Equality Acts grew by 18% and on the Equal Status Acts by 6%.



The Equality Authority had 754 casefiles in 2005: 359 casefiles under the Employment Equality Acts, 358 casefiles under the Equal Status Acts and 37 casefiles under the Intoxicating Liquor Act.

- The race ground (32%) remains the largest category of casefiles under the Employment Equality Acts, involving discrimination against migrant workers in accessing employment, working conditions, harassment and dismissal.

- The Traveller ground remains the largest category of casefiles under the Equal Status Acts (29%). These include allegations of discrimination covering access to schools, licensed premises, shops and public sector and private sector accommodation.
- There are high levels of casefiles under both Acts on the disability ground involving allegations of a failure by employers and service providers to make reasonable accommodation to facilitate access by employees and customers with disabilities.
- High levels of casework on the gender ground under the Employment Equality Acts reflect the continuing inequalities experienced by women in the workplace.



- Casefiles under the Intoxicating Liquor Act reflect allegations of discrimination by publicans across the disability, sexual orientation, age and Traveller grounds.



# MAMA Ceremony

by Catherine Reilly, News Editor, Metro Éireann and Derek O'Halloran, Freelance Journalist

On a sunny evening outside Dublin's Liberty Hall on 11 May last, the drum-beats reverberating around the Quays must have seemed a curious sound to many Dubliners. The pulsating rhythm, performed by percussion band Masamba, provided an amplified heartbeat as men, women and children of various nationalities arrived at Dublin's tallest building to honour ten champions of multicultural Ireland.

May 11 saw the fifth annual MAMA (Metro Éireann Media and Multicultural Awards), in association with RTE, take place in Dublin. The MAMA celebrate the contributions of Irish and non-Irish people who challenge racism and promote integration and cross-cultural understanding in Ireland, north and south. The Awards are the brainchild of Chinedu Onyejelem, the Nigerian-born editor of Metro Éireann, Ireland's only multicultural newspaper. Onyejelem established the awards in 2002 to showcase the efforts of people who are working towards an inclusive society. This year over 130 entries were received from individuals, groups and media organisations across Ireland.

The Equality Authority's CEO Niall Crowley is chair of the MAMA judging panel and told the audience: "The entries tell the stories of individuals and organisations within minority ethnic communities who have engaged with wider society. This engagement is not merely to integrate, it is an engagement that seeks to both enrich and change this wider society...The project for an integrated society respects all cultures as equal and acknowledges that organisations and institutions must adapt to cater for the practical implications of different cultures and identities and to achieve a sense of ownership and belonging for all ethnic groups."

Canadian-born Shalini Sinha, who co-hosted the event with Adewumi Oke from Nigeria, described MAMA as "the biggest night of the year for ethnic minorities in Ireland" and it soon became clear how influential the awards have become.



Divine Fangha from Cameroon, winner of the Multicultural-Individual Award, perhaps summed it up best when he compared winning a MAMA to hearing an encouraging voice saying 'you can do it, c'mon you can do it' as you struggle up the hill. As a former professional boxer, Fangha is well used to pushing himself to be the best - but no victory in the ring has given him as much incentive as collecting a MAMA. A founding member of ARAK (Association of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Kilkenny) Fangha said: "It's a huge boost for me. It is making me feel that someone is seeing what I'm doing." In Kilkenny, he has been promoting links between asylum seekers and local organisations; organising training for local council members in anti-racism, and encouraging asylum seekers to get involved in local sports clubs.

Polski Herald, the Evening Herald's weekly Polish supplement, was joint winner in the Print-Media category, alongside the Limerick Leader's Ethnic Limerick page. Polski Herald editor Tom Galvin later revealed: "Since

winning the award we've decided to go from eight to twelve pages. It was something that we discussed in the past, but the award has given us the incentive - which is great," he said.

The other media awards, which were presented by RTE's chief news correspondent Charlie Bird, went to RTE Young Peoples' Department/The Den (Visual); Inishowen Community Radio/China Times (Broadcast), while Lizelle Joseph and Olatyn Jidownu from Ballyfermot College of Further Education won the Student Media award for their radio programme African Scene on Anna Livia FM.

In the Multicultural section, the group award went to Cairde, an NGO which has formed an alliance of minority ethnic organisations to engage with policy makers on health, employment and legal issues. Galway City Partnership picked up the Multicultural-Institution award for its local anti-racism action plan, the first of its kind in Ireland. Salome Mbugua, who is originally from Kenya and represents the African Women's Network, presented the Multicultural section prizes.

The NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) received the inaugural NPAR (National Action Plan Against Racism) Award from NPAR chairperson Lucy Gaffney, for its Intercultural Guidelines for Primary Schools. The purpose of the NPAR Award is to highlight the work of public sector bodies and Government departments which have promoted diversity.

Niall Crowley presented the Special Judges' Award to Rotimi Adebare, a Nigerian who has entered local politics in Portlaoise, Co Laois. Adebare took the opportunity to publicly raise serious questions about discrimination in

Ireland, recalling an incident during an interview for a sales consultant post in 2002. Having worked in the sales and marketing department at Ogun State Television in Nigeria, Adebare knew he met all the job criteria - until he was told the successful applicant would "preferably be a local". "I asked 'how do you define a local' and they said, 'local as in local'". In 2004, Adebare was successfully elected onto Portlaoise Town Council.

During the ceremony James Knox, an Equality Commissioner with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, announced that, from 2007, the MAMA will have a special section for entries from the North, aimed at encouraging participation in the awards by people in Northern Ireland. "Racist incidents have been increasing in frequency, and we cannot close our eyes to the prejudices which underlies those attacks," said Knox. "We all have a responsibility to challenge racist behaviour and racist attitudes and to support initiatives which promote mutual engagement, participation and understanding between all the people who live in Northern Ireland."

The MAMA, in association with RTE, are supported by The Irish Times, Language, Reception and Integration Agency and NPAR (National Action Plan Against Racism). Those interested in finding out more can contact Chinedu Onyejelem at 01-8690670 or [awards@metroireann.com](mailto:awards@metroireann.com).

# Case Reports

by Patrick O'Leary, Equality Authority

## Failure to provide wheelchair accessible toilets for customers resolved

The Russell Court Hotel has consented to a finding by the District Court that prohibited conduct occurred on the night of 27th May 2005. The hotel also undertook to the Court to install a wheelchair accessible toilet on or before 25th July 2006 to serve the hotel bar. Any other terms remain confidential. Mr Jimmy Hayes took a case for discrimination on the disability ground and for failure to provide reasonable accommodation under the provisions of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003. Mr Hayes was represented by the Equality Authority. The case was heard in the District Court on 25th May 2006.

In May 2005 Mr Hayes attended a staff function in the Russell Court Hotel, Dublin. Prior to the event, his employer had enquired and had been informed by hotel management that the premises were accessible for wheelchair users. It was suggested by the hotel that the party use the beer garden as it was most accessible for wheelchair users.

During the course of the evening, Mr Hayes went in search of a wheelchair accessible toilet but was unable to locate one. One of his colleagues enquired about a wheelchair accessible toilet and was informed by a member of the bar staff that there was none. Mr Hayes then found himself in the difficult position of trying to locate accessible toilets in any of the nearby premises. His efforts proved fruitless and he had no alternative but to go to the toilet down the side lane of the hotel which he did with the assistance of a work colleague.

Mr Hayes experienced significant humiliation due to the failure of the Russell Court Hotel to make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities. This case highlights the indignities and disadvantages that accrue for people with disabilities in an environment that is not designed or developed to meet their needs. The case reinforces the contribution that can be made by the equality legislation to necessary change for the inclusion of people with disabilities in all areas of society. The case provides further valuable clarity to the provisions of the equality legislation on the reasonable accommodation of customers with disabilities.

Service providers need to take note of this case and to take the necessary action to gear up to their responsibilities under equality legislation to make reasonable accommodation for customers with disabilities and not to treat such customers less favourably on the grounds of their disabilities. Service providers need to engage in a dialogue with their customers with disabilities about their needs and how best to meet these and they need to develop staff awareness and staff skills to enable an effective response to these needs.

## Discrimination by a school on Traveller and disability grounds

In the case of a mother and her son vs a primary school (DEC-S2006-028), the mother Ms A alleged her son M was bullied and was called offensive names such as “knacker” and was taunted by other children because he is a member of the Traveller community. Ms A also said that she was called to the school on several occasions concerning her son’s behaviour. She alleged that at one stage her son was transferred on a full time basis to the resource teacher for Travellers where he was very happy. On 26th October 2001, she was called to the school to attend a meeting about M being returned to his class teacher. During the course of the meeting, a garda entered having been invited by the principal. Ms A had not been told that a garda would participate in the meeting. She left the meeting in some distress and subsequently withdrew her children from the school for three weeks. The children returned to school after an apology was made by the principal. Ms A consulted a solicitor who warned the school that they were considering lodging a complaint under the Equal Status Act.

The Equality Officer was satisfied that the meeting was a private parent/teacher meeting to discuss the return of M to his mainstream class and that the complainant did not give her permission for the garda to attend this meeting. It was the Equality Officer’s view that it would be highly unusual for a garda to attend a parent teacher meeting. She was satisfied that from Ms A’s perspective, as a member of the Traveller community, it was reasonable for her to find the presence of a garda at the parent teacher meeting to be intimidating. The Equality Officer

found that Ms A was harassed in relation to the parent teacher meeting and awarded €830 for the discrimination and harassment experienced

In relation to Ms A's son, the Equality Officer examined whether the school had done all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability by providing special treatment or facilities. The Equality Officer noted that this placed a demanding standard on the respondent. The Equality Officer also noted that both the principal and the class teacher recognised the symptoms of ADD and that there was already a pupil in the school with ADD who was provided with special assistance. The Equality Officer found that the school failed to do all that was reasonable to accommodate the needs of M. This would have included the school prioritising M for assessment with the educational psychologist and requesting educational supports from the Department of Education and Science to meet his needs. Part of this process would have been to seek out information on the procedures for sending M forward for assessment, to provide the parents with the information and to consult with the home school liaison teacher. She noted that the school was in possession of the appropriate guidance from the Department of Education and Science on procedures for dealing with the issues raised and that this guidance placed a degree of responsibility on the school principal to seek out appropriate facilities for the child. The Equality Officer found that the school had failed to provide reasonable accommodation for M and awarded €3000 as redress for this.

The complaints from the school about M's behaviour continued after the children returned to school and his parents eventually withdrew him from the school. Subsequently

M was due to make his confirmation in May 2001. However he was informed that he was not on the list for the school confirmation. The father of the child made contact with the local priest who was also a member of the Board of Management of the school. The father alleged that the priest said the child was not on the list for the school confirmation because the family were suing the school. The local priest in his evidence said that the refusal of the confirmation had nothing to do with the case lodged against the school. He accepted he did mention the case and that he thought it was strange for the father to be suing the school and to still want his child confirmed.

The Equality Officer found that M had been victimised in relation to the refusal of confirmation by the local priest who was on the Board of Management of the school and awarded a further €2000 redress for this.

During 2005 educational establishments were the largest single sector for Equality Authority casefiles under the Equal Status Acts. These casefiles predominantly involved allegations of discrimination by Travellers and by people with disabilities. This case must provide a new impetus for schools to gear up to their obligations under the Equal Status Acts through preparing and implementing equality policies and anti-harassment and sexual harassment policies.

The claimants were represented by Fergus Dunleavy & Co Solicitors, Dublin. The Equality Authority provided support to the case in the form of partial funding.



## Radio presenter wins disability case against pub

A consent Order was made by Judge O'Donnell of the District Court that Searson's Pub Baggot Street, discriminated against a customer with a disability in a case involving a wheelchair user being denied access to toilet facilities. Searson's undertook as part of the Order to provide wheelchair accessible toilets in accordance with Part M of the Building Regulations by 1st December 2006 and to pay €500 to the claimant and a further €500 to the Irish Wheelchair Association.

This case was taken by Mr Olan McGowan who is a wheelchair user with the support of the Equality Authority. Mr Olan McGowan is the presenter and producer of the 'Outside the Box' radio series on RTE. He attended a college reunion in Searson's public house on Baggot Street, Dublin 4 on 22nd October 2005. He was one of a group of 25 people. The group reserved an area of the pub for themselves and had ordered some food. During the course of the evening, Mr McGowan approached one of the barmen with a friend and asked whether there was a toilet that was wheelchair accessible. The barman informed them that there was no wheelchair accessible toilet and suggested that Mr McGowan try the Waterloo Bar which was located nearby. The barman did not offer any apology or assistance to Mr McGowan. Mr McGowan was then compelled to leave the pub and visit the Waterloo Bar which kindly offered their toilet facility and then returned to Searson's Pub.

The Equality Authority sought to clarify what efforts were made by the pub to cost the facilitation of a wheelchair accessible toilet. However, despite numerous requests by the Equality Authority no such information was

provided by the pub up to and including the day of the hearing.

The outcome of this case is important for people with disabilities. It clarifies that the failure of licensed premises, which includes public houses, hotels and restaurants, to provide toilets that are accessible to wheelchair users constitutes less favourable treatment, is discriminatory and breaches the service provider's obligations to provide reasonable accommodation for its customers with disabilities. This has important implications for all service providers. It should therefore contribute to greater accessibility for and participation by people with disabilities in social life.

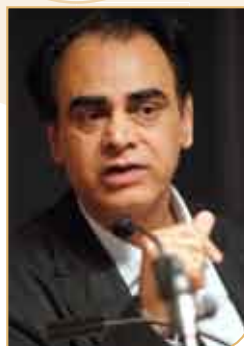


# Meeting the Challenge of Islamophobia

by Dr Chandana Mathur, Anthropology Department, NUI Maynooth

A panel discussion on 'Meeting the Challenge of Islamophobia', jointly organised by the Equality Authority, NUI Maynooth and the Royal Irish Academy, was held on 24th May 2006 at the Chester Beatty Library and Museum. Anti-Muslim prejudice is rampant in many parts of the world today, and is unfortunately beginning to emerge as an issue in Ireland. Since the experience of societies with longer histories of religious diversity is worth considering in this context, the panel brought together three eminent public intellectuals from Britain and India: Professor Ziauddin Sardar of the City University, London, the Indian scriptwriter and poet Javed Akhtar, and the Indian cinema actress and social activist Shabana Azmi.

The packed event was chaired by Niall Crowley, the Chief Executive Officer of the Equality Authority, and he began by discussing the dimensions of the problem in Ireland. Dr Chandana Mathur of the Anthropology Department at NUI Maynooth spoke next of the worrying spread of Islamophobia across the globe in recent times, in a manner reminiscent of the dreadful heyday of anti-semitism. She introduced the speakers, all noted for their passionate and critical engagement with their communities, and remarked on how rare it is for Muslim intellectuals to be afforded the opportunity to speak for their communities. There is a widespread Islamophobic assumption in mainstream society that 'backward' Muslim communities can only be represented by their religious functionaries, and that Muslim intellectuals are not worth hearing from because they are too 'reasonable' to articulate the views of ordinary Muslims.



Professor Ziauddin Sardar was the first panelist to address the gathering. He has written extensively on Islam, science policy, cultural studies and related subjects. Of the over forty books that he has authored, two recent works in particular have occasioned much public discussion: *Why do People hate America* (2003, with Meryll Wyn Davies) and *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim* (2004).

He began by elaborating on Edward Said's concept of orientalism, which refers to the particular way in which knowledge about the 'East' has historically been absorbed in the 'West'. A discourse has emerged which has sought to present the East, and Islam specifically, in a negative light. In orientalist learning, Islam has been presented as the dark side of Europe, and these modes of thinking continue to drive public debate today. Despite moments of incontrovertible greatness such as 12th century al-Andalus, the Islamic world has mainly been understood as under-developed, 'traditional' with all the imperfections that that word implies, and in need of civilisation.

Sardar noted that Islamophobia in Britain nowadays tends to get amalgamated with racism towards new immigrants, and also with incipient class prejudice (on the whole, British Muslims are working-class). The three forms of prejudice reinforce each other. But bad as anti-Muslim views might be in Britain, Sardar felt that they are far worse in France and on the continent



generally, where there is simply no space for Muslim representation at all – historic anti-semitism seems to have transferred all too neatly into a deep hatred of the Muslim. Sardar ended by noting regretfully the inroads that Islamophobia appeared to be making in contemporary Ireland.



Javed Akhtar was the next speaker. Best known for scripting hugely successful 'Bollywood' films and songs, he is also a very highly regarded Urdu poet. Long engaged in efforts to mobilise liberal Muslim leadership in India,

he is the President of the organisation 'Muslims for Secular Democracy', which advances a progressive, secular and feminist stance on issues pertaining to Indian Muslims. He is also a key figure in the organisation 'Citizens for Justice and Peace', which has been struggling to bring to court those involved in the massacres of Muslims in the Gujarat pogroms of 2002.

Akhtar spoke about how Islamophobia helps unscrupulous governments by distracting their citizens from real issues. For Western governments, the notion of an Islamic enemy serves to unite their populace behind their policies. For corrupt Islamic

states, Islamophobia serves as an excuse for their actions, and helps cover up their own unfair economic and social systems.



The actress and activist Shabana Azmi was the final speaker. Beginning in the alternative cinema movement in India in the 1970s, she has acted in about 200 films, and garnered national and international acclaim for her work. She is also a committed social activist, best known for her work on slum dwellers' rights and inter-communal harmony.

She started on a personal note, by musing about the complexity of identity. She would define herself, she said, as a woman, an actor, an activist, a former Member of Parliament, a daughter, a mother, a Muslim. To reduce these multiplex aspects of anyone's identity to just one – to just 'Muslim' – is a gross misrepresentation of the person. Yet it seems that after September 11th, the world has decided that 'Muslim' is apparently the over-arching, defining identity. She went on to speak about the difficulties that lie in the path of breaking down stereotypes, given that the liberal Muslim voice tends to be ignored by the media, since it does not make for exciting copy or TV images.

The general discussion that followed the presentations was frank and vigorous, and many of those present spoke about the pressing need for continued debate around these issues.



Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

## Good Relations

Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

This article seeks to inform readers of the work of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the current direction of public policy in this area of good relations.

The legislative context for the Commission's work is based on two statutes. We have a duty, under the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, to promote good relations between people of different racial groups. We also have a duty to offer advice to public authorities and others in connection with good relations duties which apply in Northern Ireland. Under Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act, public authorities also have responsibilities to have regard to the need to promote good relations between

people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. This means that public authorities must consider how the policies they make and implement affect relationships amongst the people they serve and those they employ. The purpose of the good relations duty, like the equality duty contained in s75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act, is to place consideration of promoting good relations at the heart of public policy.

The policy context was set out by Government in March 2005 in *A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland*. The Government highlights in this that progress towards a shared society must be built upon the significant progress that has been achieved in promoting equality of opportunity and human rights. The public service response will also be shaped by the good relations duty under s75(2).

*A Shared Future* followed a major review of initiatives to promote good relations over the last decades, initiated by the Northern Ireland Executive in its 2001 Programme for Government, and a significant public consultation exercise.

The consultation posed questions around what sort of society we wanted to live in. It expressed a vision for the future in Northern Ireland as a choice between two alternatives – an acceptance that the existing pattern of segregation and division is likely to remain for some time and that the focus of efforts should be on stabilising and managing the worst consequence of division, both between and within the two main communities, or alternatively we should try to promote rapid progress towards a more integrated and shared society.

Our response to the consultation document and indeed our strategy is based on the premise that equality is a pre-requisite for good relations; we believe essentially that good relations will not be effectively achieved unless people feel that they are being afforded equality of opportunity.

We recommended an underpinning policy aim for the Government's strategy should be the promotion of an understanding of equality and human rights standards in society. There was significant support among consultees for the view that there cannot be good relations until there is equality of opportunity and outcome and full protection of human rights in society – 'the active promotion of equality can lead to good relations but not visa versa'.

The Government's strategy commits to tackling the visible manifestations of sectarianism, such as the display of flags and murals; to reclaiming shared space; to promoting shared education, communities, services and workplaces; to promoting cultural diversity; and to tackling disadvantage. The strategic framework involves actions at Government level – Departments are to develop triennial action plans on good relations on which they must report progress either to the Assembly or to Westminster; at regional level, with the existing Community Relations Council to be 'revamped'; and at a local level - District Councils are to implement a new good relations challenge programme and to develop good relations plans against which funds can be drawn down. The Government published its First Triennial Action Plan 2006-2009 on 27 April 2006.

All this has implications for the Equality Commission, in particular in its work to provide advice and assistance to public authorities in respect of their s75(2) duties to promote good relations on grounds of religion, political opinion and race. We have in place an action plan to promote good relations, including establishing a good relations forum, which will serve as a think tank to explore creatively the implementation of the good relations duties, working in partnership with the Community Relations Council on this.

We have published an audit of the progress being made on the good relations duty by public authorities, with the aim of identifying and sharing good practice and effective models for implementing good relations. We published an update to the audit during Community Relations week in April of this year and we plan to produce guidance on the good relations duties shortly.

A close liaison between the Equality Commission and the 'revamped' Community Relations Council under the Government strategy is envisaged and we are working closely with the Council to ensure there is clarity of roles and responsibilities for our respective organisations.

What underpins the fulfilment of the Equality Commission's duties under the legislation is our commitment to the creation of a shared, integrated and pluralist society in Northern Ireland - a society that is based on the principle of equality for all, one that recognises the importance of interdependence, taking account of the increasingly multi-cultural nature of Northern Ireland society and the need to respect and embrace diversity in all its forms. Fairness

of treatment, respect for difference and promotion of social cohesion are important components of delivering good relations.

It is clear that there is much progress to be made in promoting good relations in Northern Ireland; the Equality Commission, in fulfilling its duties, is committed to playing its part in moving to an integrated, shared and equal society.

# Research and Consultancy Contracts

The Equality Authority is reviewing its register from which tenders are sought and wishes to invite individuals/organisations with expertise in equality, research and certain corporate issues to apply for inclusion on its register by completing a registration form.

The register will be used when the Equality Authority is issuing Requests for Tenders. Inclusion on the list will not, however, imply that individuals/organisations will be invited to tender.

Information on the work of the Equality Authority is on its website at: [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie)

Requests for registration forms should be e-mailed to: [tenders@equality.ie](mailto:tenders@equality.ie)

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Visit [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie) or contact our Public Information Centre directly at 01 417 3333 or Lo Call number 1890 245 545, for information on the Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004 and the Equal Status Act 2000 to 2004. Information is also available on the Maternity Protection Acts 1994 and 2004, the Adoptive Leave Acts 1995 and 2005 and the Parental Leave Acts 1998 and 2006.