



## **Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21**

### **Consultation Responses**

A public consultation on the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 was held from 16 March 2016 to 10 June 2016. The responses from consultees are included in this document.

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## **Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Draft Good Relations Action Plan 2016-2021**

### **Consultation Response Form**

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission welcomes your views on the proposed content of the Assembly Commission Draft Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21, which can be downloaded [here](#):

Please return your completed response form by **Friday 10 June 2016**, by email or post, to:

**Email:** [equality@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:equality@niassembly.gov.uk)

**Post:** Equality and Good Relations Unit  
Room 26, Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
BELFAST  
BT4 3XX

**Telephone:** 028 9041 8377

**Textphone:** 028 9052 1209

## Alternative Formats

If you require this document in an alternative format such as Braille, audio CD/MP3, easy read, computer disc and/or another language, please contact us to discuss your requirements

## Consultee details

Name	The Cedar Foundation User Forum
Name of Organisation (if applicable)	The Cedar Foundation
Address	1 Ravenhill Reach Close Ormeau Embankment Belfast BT6 8RB

In line with the Assembly Commission's commitment to openness and transparency, all responses will be treated as public and may be published on the Assembly website as part of the consultation process.

If you are content for your name, or the name of your organisation, to be published alongside your response, please tick this box:

☒

If you do not tick this box, your response will be treated as anonymous.

**Question 1:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions in aim 1, dialogue and consultation (page 16-19 of the Action Plan)?

**Disability or sexual orientation/persuasion is not mentioned in 7.2**

**Question 2:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions in aim 2, promotion of good relations? (Pages 20-21 of the Action Plan)

**Question 3:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions in aim 3, equality of service provision (pages 22-26 of the Action Plan)?

**Question 4:** Do you have comments on any of the proposed actions under aim 4, training and development (pages 26-27 of the Action Plan)?

**Question 5:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions under aim 5, management information and data (pages 27-28 of the Action Plan)?

**Question 6:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions under aim 6, monitoring (pages 29 of the Action Plan)?

**Question 7:** Do you have any other comments on the draft good relations action plan?

**The User forum groups struggled with this document in terms of the wording and understanding of it.**

**Thank you for taking the time to respond to this consultation**

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## **Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Draft Good Relations Action Plan 2016 - 2021**

### **Disability Action's Response June 2016**

Any enquiry concerning this document should be made to  
Kevin Doherty  
Chief Executive  
Disability Action  
Portside Business Park  
189 Airport Road West  
Belfast  
BT3 9ED

Tel: 028 90 297880    Fax 028 90 297881  
Textphone: 028 90 297882  
Website: [www.disabilityaction.org](http://www.disabilityaction.org)  
Email: [hq@disabilityaction.org](mailto:hq@disabilityaction.org)



## INTRODUCTION

- 1 Disability Action is a pioneering Northern Ireland charity working with and for people with disabilities. We work with our members to provide information, training, transport awareness programmes and representation for people regardless of their disability; whether that is physical, mental, sensory, hidden or learning disability.
- 2 21% of adults and 6% of children in Northern Ireland have a disability and the incidence is higher here than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Over one quarter of all families here are affected
- 3 As a campaigning body, we work to bring about positive change to the social, economic and cultural life of people with disabilities and consequently our entire community. In pursuit of our aims we serve 45,000 people each year.
- 4 Our network of services is provided via our Headquarters in Belfast and in three regional offices in Carrickfergus, Derry and Dungannon.
- 5 Disability Action welcomes the opportunity to respond to this draft and to aid our response has put the relevant page/paragraph of the draft in brackets at the end of our comments.

## SPECIFIC COMMENTARY

- 6 Regarding the Good Relations Action Plan Disability Action would make the following comments:-
  - Teachers' Conference – Special School teachers should be included. (Page 17)
  - The Education Programme for schools must include special schools. (Page 18)
  - Welcome the planned focus groups meetings. (Page 19)
  - Regarding events and external guests Disability Action recommends that International Day for Disabled People, 3<sup>rd</sup> December, be added to the list. (Page 22)
  - Social Media – traditional methods of engagement should be employed for people with multiple identities, in particular, people with disabilities. (Page 27)

- 7 Disability Action would recommend the Action Plan measures be extended to include people with disabilities as they are one of the groups listed under Hate Crime legislation.

## **CONCLUSION**

- 8 Disability Action recognises the time and effort that have gone into producing this document for consultation and thanks the Commission for the opportunity to respond and looks forward to continued dialogue.



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## Consultee details

Name	Dr Richard Montague
Name of Organisation (if applicable)	(independent researcher)

In line with the Assembly Commission's commitment to openness and transparency, all responses will be treated as public and may be published on the Assembly website as part of the consultation process.

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☒

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**Question 1:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions in aim 1, dialogue and consultation (page 16-19 of the Action Plan)?

The Assembly Commission's 'Draft Good Relations Action Plan for 2016 – 2021' is a welcome and salient policy in light of ongoing inequalities and discrimination within Northern Ireland. Outlined below are general comments in relation to the promotion of Good Relations and equality for all. Some of these issues pertain to definitional concerns within existing legislation relating to Good Relations Action Plan.

- 'Sexual orientation' is outlined as a protected category in Article 1 (a) Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- However, sexual orientation should also be included within the 'Good Relations' paradigm in Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This would ensure the promotion of the key principles of Good Relations (p.10 of Draft proposal Action Plan), namely: equity, diversity, and interdependence.
- Marriage opportunity for same-sex couples is a key issue of equality promotion. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 makes the marriage of same-sex couples lawful in England and Wales; but unfortunately parallel legislation does not yet exist in Northern Ireland.
- Stormont has repeatedly denied the right for same-sex couples to marry – with a fifth attempt to redress this discrimination blocked by a DUP-led 'petition of concern' in November 2015 despite a majority vote within the Assembly in favour.
- It is troubling – and ironic – that the 'petition of concern' device as a safeguard for equality is being exploited as a means to *deny* equality.
- Northern Ireland therefore remains the only part of the UK where LGBT members do not have the right to marry.

- Therefore, promoting equal of opportunity should be extended to the LGBT community and requires urgent address through legislation, which, in turn ought to be included within Good Relations policy. (This response also pertains to Aim 3, 'equality of service provision'.)
- Furthermore, if Good Relations policy is to seek redress against sectarianism, there needs to be an appropriate definition of sectarianism included within a Good Relations agenda.
- Within existing legislation, such as the Criminal Justice No. 2 (NI) Order 2004, there is a highly ambiguous and inadequate formal definition of sectarianism, which only covers offences aggravated by hostility based on membership of a 'religious group', i.e. 'a group of persons defined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief'.
- This narrow conception of sectarian hostility confuses hate crime definitions/categories with other prejudices such as Islamophobia or Anti-Semitism as there is no distinction made between what is a sectarian hate crime and what is a religiously-motivated hate crime in the 2004 legislation.
- Sectarianism thus requires a formal definition in order for it to be appropriately identified and redressed through Good Relations policy.
- Sectarianism can be viewed as more than just differences of 'religious belief' or 'political opinion' because it also includes in its expressions, (perceived) differences of culture, tradition, language, sport, and national origin ('British' or 'Irish').
- 'Ethnicity' is therefore a more encompassing term to accurately and fully describe both sectarianism and racism.
- To this end, I propose that the term 'Ethnicity' could be written into the Good Relations definitions to include, for example, 'Persons of different ethnicity', or 'Persons of different ethnic background'. This definition

would also seek to encompass the Traveler community who remain a marginalized and discriminated against ethnic group.

**Question 2:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions in aim 2, promotion of good relations? (Pages 20-21 of the Action Plan)

- Belfast to be recognized as a shared and diverse city of varying cultures and ethnicities beyond the 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' dichotomy, through promotion of minority ethnic and LGBT community events.
- The annual 'Pride' festival in Belfast and across Northern Ireland is a positive example of the promotion of diversity and should therefore be included, recognized, and promoted within a Good Relations framework.
- Exploring both Irish language and Ulster-Scots culture is an exciting opportunity to promote Good Relations on a platform of inclusion, rather than continuing to allow these topics to be politicized, belittled, and exclusive.
- Through a public-sector organization I recently conducted research on Ulster-Scots education and it is clear that there is much in common (or

overlap) between 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' in relation to history, music, language, literature, for instance.

- Ulster-Scots is therefore a rich and varied subject and an opportunity to promote Good Relations on a platform of inclusion – particularly the history aspect.
- Good Relations policy can promote a 'shared history' narrative to counter sectarian beliefs.
- We must not waste opportunities to promote Good Relations by tapping into resources already established, particularly at the community or 'grass-roots' level. For instance, teaching of the Irish language at the East Belfast Mission (Skainos Centre, Newtownards Road) by Linda Ervine is an excellent example of Good Relations work in practice.
- I would like to see aforementioned projects of this nature widely promoted on an official platform of Good Relations policy.



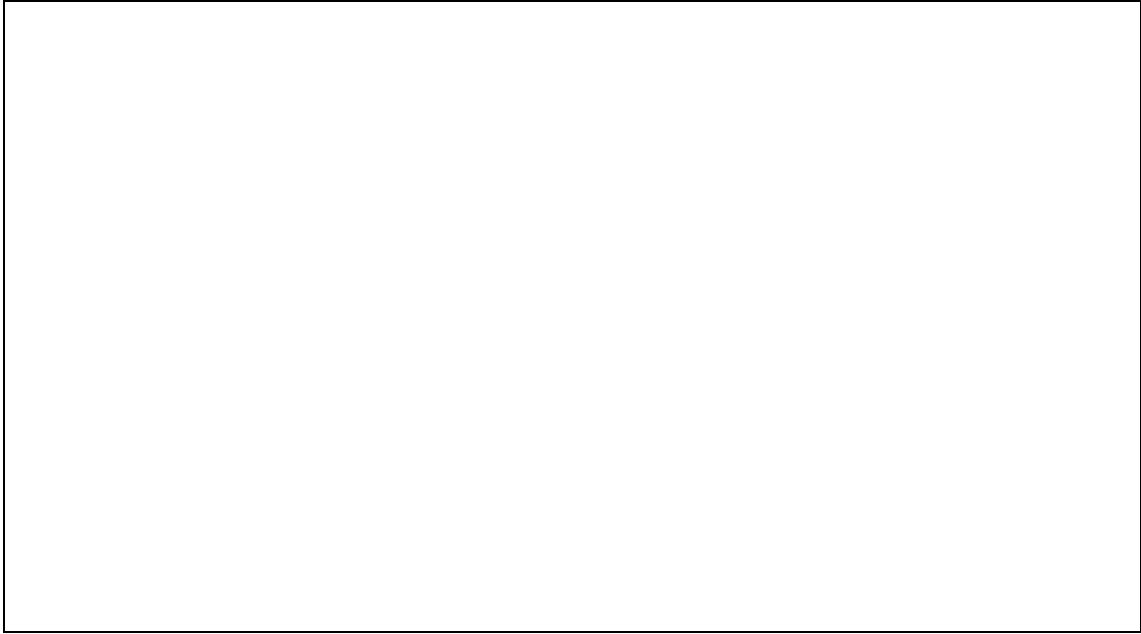
**Question 3:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions in aim 3, equality of service provision (pages 22-26 of the Action Plan)?

- There is a continued need for robust government policy to ensure measures of equality of opportunity, capacity building and equal access to services and resources for ethnic minority citizens in Northern Ireland.
- The unfolding refugee crisis by 2015, and the welcome arrival of refugees to Northern Ireland, has significant implications for equality and Good Relations practice. For instance, the NICRAS (2016) report ‘The Effects of Destitution on Refugees in Northern Ireland’<sup>1</sup> shows that refugees face a myriad of problems frustrating their integration into society including poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, and an ineffectual and incompetent bureaucracy dealing with applications and/or entitlement to benefits. These are major barriers to the key principle of integration within Good Relations policy which urgently need addressed.
- Further to the refugee crisis, certain sections of the media and politicians are seeking to exploit fears around immigration and terrorism – particularly in light of the upcoming EU referendum.
- Good Relations should therefore promote equality of service provision by continuing to debunk myths that refugees and migrants are threatening resources (such as jobs and social housing allocation) or are involved with ‘terrorism’ etc.
- Indeed, there is plenty of factual evidence to show that far from being ‘a drain’ on the economy migrants actually boost the economy and contribute positively to our society.

**Question 4:** Do you have comments on any of the proposed actions under aim 4, training and development (pages 26-27 of the Action Plan)?

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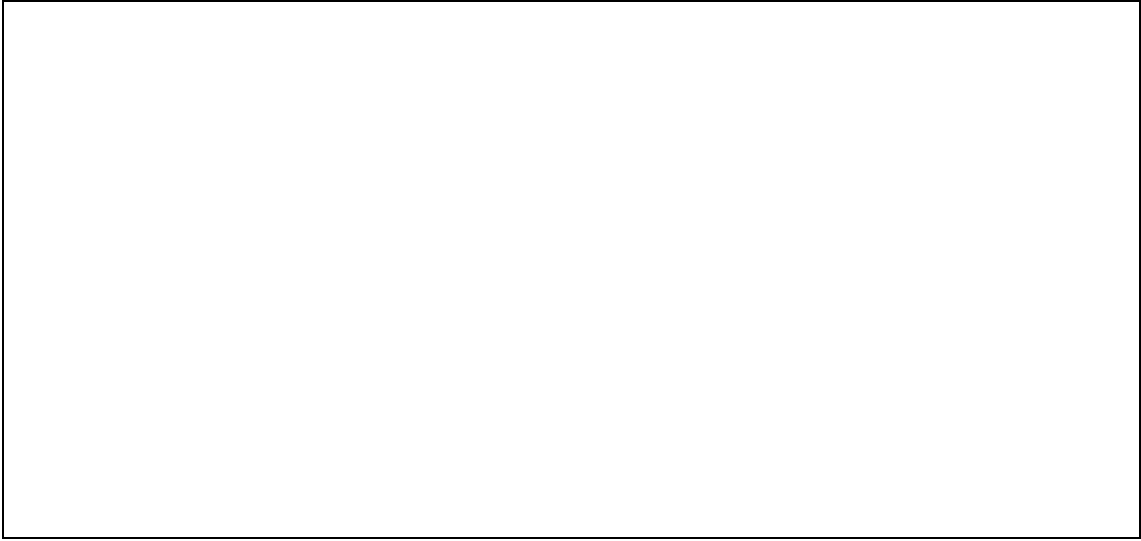
<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nicras.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NICRAS-summary-report.pdf>



**Question 5:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions under aim 5, management information and data (pages 27-28 of the Action Plan)?



**Question 6:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions under aim 6, monitoring (pages 29 of the Action Plan)?



**Question 7:** Do you have any other comments on the draft good relations action plan?

- Issues of equality have come into sharper focus in recent years, with the rise of the austerity agenda and the resulting cuts to public services.
- These cuts have a disproportionate impact on already disadvantaged groups, such as minority groups, who are more likely to be employed in the public sector and to be users of public services for instance.
- The situation is particularly pronounced in Northern Ireland in view of the size of the public sector, which employs 28% of the workforce (compared with a UK average of 18%).
- While this compound inequality is a significant concern for Good Relations policy in light of commitment to equality of opportunity and service provision, it assumes additional importance as sections of minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland continue to feel marginalised. It is hoped therefore that a robust Good Relations policy will address such concerns.

**Thank you for taking the time to respond to this consultation**

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## Consultee details

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Name of Organisation (if applicable)	Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
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Telephone	02890238645
E-mail	luke@nicem.org.uk

In line with the Assembly Commission's commitment to openness and transparency, all responses will be treated as public and may be published on the Assembly website as part of the consultation process.

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**Question 1:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions in aim 1, dialogue and consultation (page 16-19 of the Action Plan)?

NICEM notes with approval that the Assembly's Draft Action Plan contains a measure to '[focus] on engagement with disenfranchised groups', which includes provision for informing groups on how to utilise Assembly resources.

The efficacy of this measure could be improved by including community groups and the All-Party Group for Ethnic Minority Communities as potential conduits for disseminating information to BME communities.

It is also noted that the Draft Action Plan expresses the Assembly's intention to consider new art initiatives, to be reflective of the wider community within Parliament Buildings.

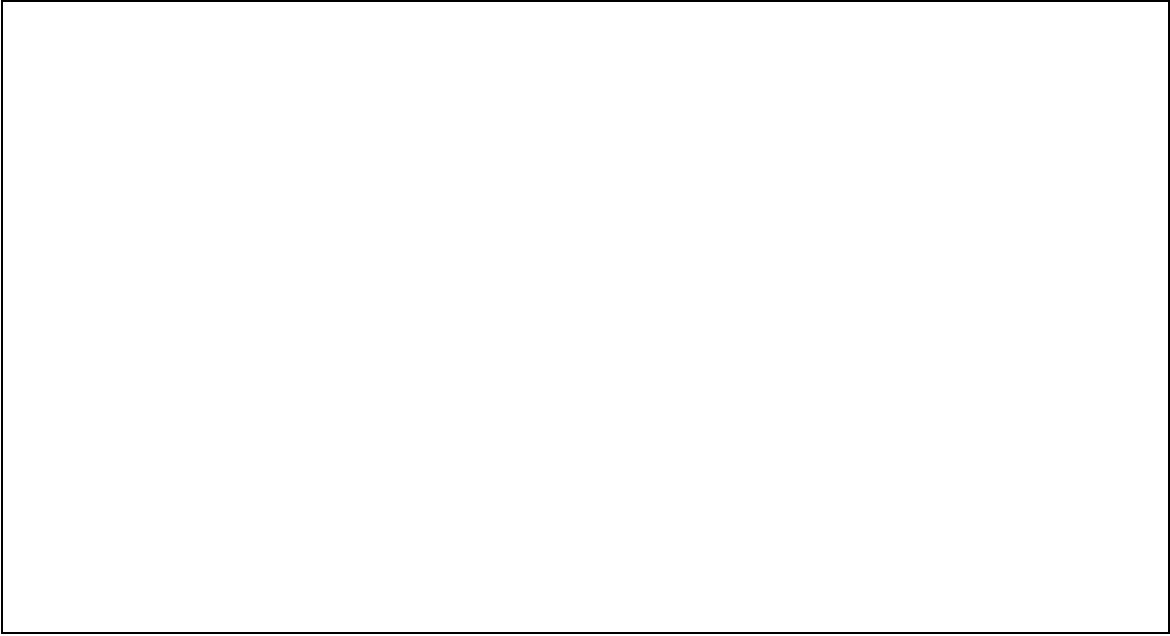
This would be a good opportunity to include artwork from ethnic minority artists, or depicting BME subjects, as a high proportion of those visiting Parliament Buildings are not White British/Irish.<sup>1</sup>

**Question 2:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions in aim 2, promotion of good relations? (Pages 20-21 of the Action Plan)

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<sup>1</sup> 16% of visitors between 2009-2010: Northern Ireland Assembly, 'Exhibitions Screening Form' (2013), p.10





**Question 3:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions in aim 3, equality of service provision (pages 22-26 of the Action Plan)?

It is noted that the current draft action plan aims to inform communities of Committee calls for evidence through daily newspapers. This is a useful mechanism, as not all BME households have access to online notifications. However, newspaper circulation is on a steady decline, thus it is important to use a multi-faceted approach to raise awareness of opportunities to submit evidence.<sup>2</sup>

One way of ensuring that potential BME respondents are reached would be through disseminating information on calls for evidence through relevant community groups and the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities.

It is further noted that the current plan makes provision for targeting 'disenfranchised groups', with a focus on youth. In this context, it is important to note that there is a low turnout amongst BME persons entitled to vote, with some commenting that politics in NI does not reflect their interests.<sup>3 4</sup>

Therefore, it would be useful if the plan expanded its provision for targeting disenfranchised groups beyond youth to include BME people who are entitled to vote in NI.

Also under this section, the plan makes commitments on access to information, with initiatives focusing on the Irish language. According to the 2011 Census, approximately 3% of NI's population does not have English as their first language.

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<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2015/news/sales-drop-at-newspapers-in-northern-ireland/>

<sup>3</sup> Rogers, S. and Scullion, G., 'Voices for Change: Mapping the Views of Black and Minority Ethnic People on Integration and Their Sense of Belonging in Northern Ireland' (2014), pp. 15, 25, 31, 35 and 45

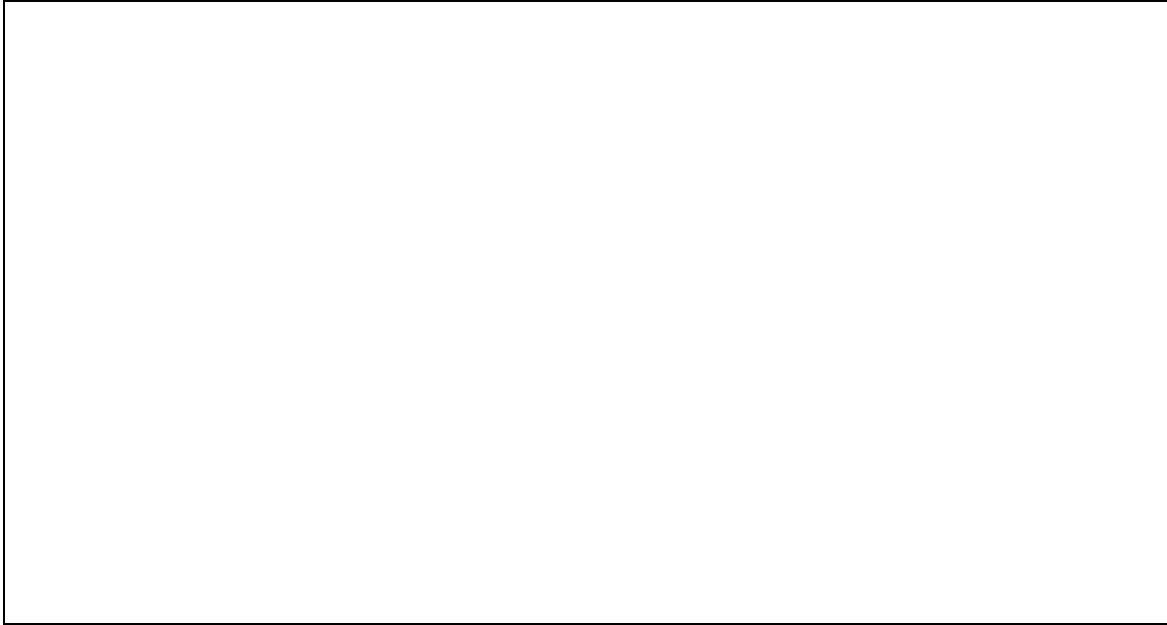
In 2014/15, 3.5% of new enrolments were newcomer pupils – pupils who do not have English or Irish as their first language – thus it seems likely that language need will increase over the coming years.

Thus, it would be useful for the Action Plan to include a commitment to provide information on available services in key minority languages, as well as allow for the translation of relevant documentation - such as consultations, the Equality Scheme and the Action Plan itself - upon request.

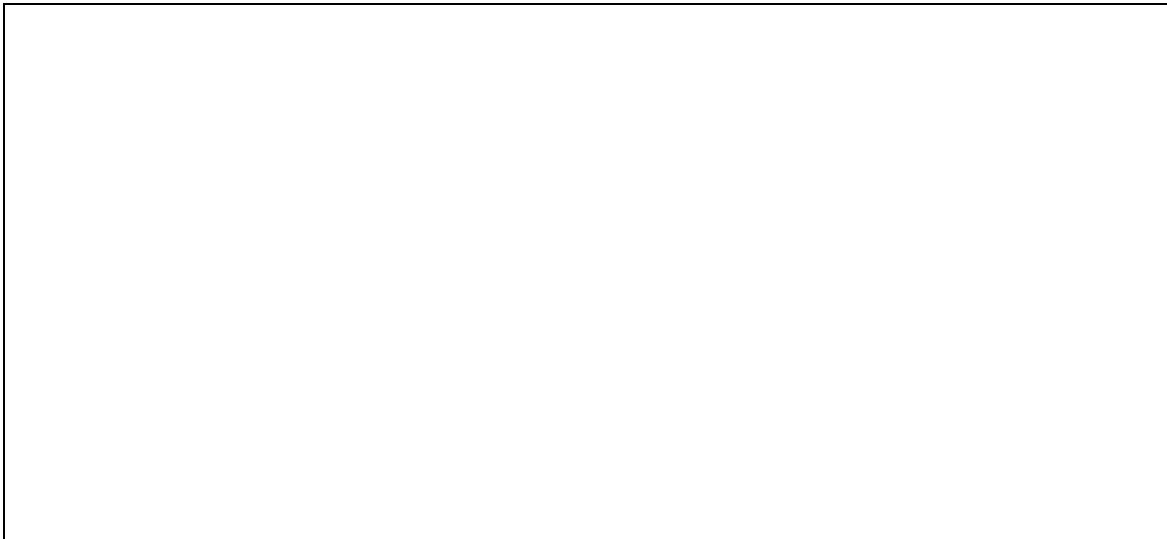
**Question 4:** Do you have comments on any of the proposed actions under aim 4, training and development (pages 26-27 of the Action Plan)?

NICEM notes with approval that both new and existing staff will receive good relations training under the terms of the Draft Action Plan. However, the Action Plan could provide more detail on what type of training will be delivered, particularly what training staff will receive on good relations between persons of different racial group.

**Question 5:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions under aim 5, management information and data (pages 27-28 of the Action Plan)?



**Question 6:** Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions under aim 6, monitoring (pages 29 of the Action Plan)?



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**June 2016**

## **Sinn Fein Response to: Draft Good Relations Action Plan 2016-2021**

Sinn Fein welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Sinn Féin takes our responsibility seriously and are striving to create a society which is inclusive and based on Equality, Mutual Respect, and Parity of Esteem, the underpinning principles of the Good Friday Agreement.

This involves reaching out to all sections of our community and convincing them that we are serious about addressing any differences that exist between us.

We are not talking about tolerance – We are talking about acceptance of cultural, political and religious differences and of people who espouse these differences.

We are talking about acceptance, which, within the bounds of equality of treatment, means almost unconditional acceptance of the other.

We need to focus on the need to give effect to the Good Friday Agreement provisions with respect to the establishment of a Single Equality Act and a Bill of Rights for the North of Ireland and the creation of an All-Ireland Charter of Rights, based on agreed measures for the protection of the fundamental rights of everyone living on the island of Ireland.

The call for a Bill of Rights and Single Equality Act is supported by a wide range of progressive opinion including leading and influential voices from academia and civic society.

The Good Friday Agreement provided for a Bill of Rights for the north. The agreement was democratically endorsed by the majority of those who cast their votes in the historic referendums north and south in May 1998.

Human rights are there for everyone. It is widely agreed that a Bill of Rights for the north needs to address the specific realities of our society. This is a society of great inequalities and divisions. As many as one in five people have a disability and people with a disability are twice as likely to be unemployed. One in three children here lives in poverty. 1/3 of those who are economically inactive have no qualifications. Sectarian and racist attacks still happen all too frequently and often with a backdrop of intolerant commentary on our local airwaves and reported in our print media.

But it must be remembered that a survey carried out by The Equality Commission found that 91% of people in the North supported equality laws.

Sinn Fein has long lobbied for a Bill of Rights for the North of Ireland on the grounds that a comprehensive Bill of Rights can serve as a guarantor of the vision of equality of treatment and parity of esteem of all contained in the Agreement.

It is our view that the Bill of Rights, the harmonisation of human rights standards throughout Ireland within an all-Ireland Charter of Rights, are central to the consolidation of the peace building process.

It is important to note that in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the equality duty in Section 75 (1) is a stronger duty than that of Section 75 (2) relating to good relations.

**Sinn Fein are clear that the good relations duty must not be used to set aside equality duties.**

Regarding the consultation while there is no statutory definition for good relations in Section 75 or in any other North of Ireland legislation. The question is how can ‘good relations’ be measured without a definition of the term? The Equality Commission in their guidance to councils on good relations Duties Guidance makes reference to

(1) Equality Commission Working Definition (2007 Guidance from the Commission)

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

### 3.2

(2) Equality Commission (2015 Guidance from the Commission)

Good Relations could be said to exist where there is:

- A high level of dignity, respect and mutual understanding
- An absence of prejudice, hatred, hostility or harassment
- A fair level of participation in society

The Equality Commission has indicated that the above elements would be helpful in formulating a definition for Good Relations.

(3) Section 149 Equality Act 2010 (GB legislation)

To have due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular to the need to:

- (a) tackle prejudice
- (b) promote understanding

Sinn Fein believe that the above guidance should be incorporated into the good relations Action Plan 2016-2021. We believe in the issues of ‘tackling prejudice’, ‘promoting understanding’ but also believe that the issues of “a high level of dignity, respect and mutual

understanding; an absence of prejudice, hatred, hostility or harassment; a fair level of participation in society;" is a much better way of framing a strategy.

This is in line with the Together Building a United Community strategy which outlines a vision of a united community:

"based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation."

The strategy seeks to:

"address the deep-rooted issues that have perpetuated segregation and resulted in some people living separate lives."

It goes on to say that "division, intolerance, hate and separation", unless addressed, can damage individuals and communities in various ways, including in terms of economic prospects.

Programme for Government 2011-2016 reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and building a united and shared society. The Together: Building a United Community Strategy outlines a vision based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation. It provides the framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation. Clearly this has been breached within the last week or two.

Regarding the aims of the action plan:

## **Aim 2: Promotion of Good Relations**

Sinn Féin are concerned regarding the use of the language 'contentious Issues' (page 20). Good relations should not be framed as a contentious issue. We are concerned that this will lead to a negative impact on equality issues i.e. LGBT rights, Irish language etc. being hindered by mechanisms put in place under the 'good relations policy'. We believe that the promotion of equality of opportunity is an integral aspect of building a better future for everyone.

While the 'vision' in this document of good relations being about tackling racism and sectarianism is a good vision –however where are the actions aimed at tackling racism and sectarianism? It is important that every person has the right to be protected from torture and from all forms of physical, emotional or mental abuse, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. This includes sectarian, homophobic and racial abuse, neglect, bullying, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual exploitation, abuse or assault and domestic violence in all its forms. This government has an obligation to provide effective protection from all of the above.

Together building a United Community Strategy provides the framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation.



Regarding participation and inclusion of external groups it is important to note The Civic Forum was set up under the Good Friday Agreement to engage wider civic society, and its mission statement was:

"The Civic Forum will exercise effective community leadership and directly influence the building of a peaceful, prosperous, just, cohesive, healthy and plural society."

This is an important method of active participation. It could bring about change where people from the voluntary, business and community sectors feel that they are making a contribution to improving the quality of life of others. This can be a very rewarding experience. Active participation opens up the process. The Civic Forum was accepted in the Good Friday Agreement as a means of ensuring transparency in the political process. The setting up of the Civic Forum is an important action that we can take to make our society more inclusive.

### **Aim 3: Equality of Service provision.**

Sinn Féin wish to see the inclusion and action points on public bodies needing to conform to the EU Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. This is an international convention designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages. Any attempt to dilute it would be in contravention of the EU charter which seeks to enhance and support Irish Language.

### **Aim 4: Training and Development**

Together Building a United Community Strategy provides the framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation. Increased racist attacks should be taken account of, it is therefore important that staff receive anti-racism/sectarianism training.

Pierre Berton said: "Racism is a refuge for the ignorant. It seeks to divide and to destroy. It is the enemy of freedom, and deserves to be met head-on and stamped out."