



**Evidence to the Committee for the Office of  
the First Minister and deputy First Minister  
inquiry into 'Building a United Community'**

**October 2014**

UNISON represents nearly 40,000 workers delivering essential public services in areas such as health; social services; education; local government; private companies providing public services; and the community and voluntary sector.

Alongside the Committee on the Administration of Justice we are a Co-Convenor of the Equality Coalition and Board member of the Human Rights Consortium. Our extensive work to promote equality of opportunity and human rights and in support of the peace process is a matter of public record. As a trade union operating across the public, private and community and voluntary sectors our membership is a significant reflection of the diversity of NI society. Our membership also reflects all categories of groups designated under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998.

As part of our contribution to the discussion on Together, Building a United Community, we recently sponsored the two expert briefing papers written by Dr Robbie McVeigh on potential definitions for sectarianism and good relations. We also chaired round-table discussions on both papers. Those discussions were attended by researchers, academics, trade unionists, public bodies, anti-sectarianism practitioners, Equality Coalition members, the Community Relations Council, the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. At both events there was strong agreement on the need for definition in both areas.

**UNISON endorses the submission to the T:BUC Committee prepared by the Committee on the Administration of Justice. UNISON is clear that:**

- **the proposals to turn the Equality Commission into an ‘Equality and Good Relations Commission’ endanger the Commission’s primary function in respect of the anti-discrimination legislation and the statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity;**
- **the proposals to add a good relations section to Equality Impact Assessments risk undermining the equality duty, and**
- **definitions of ‘sectarianism’ and ‘good relations’ which draw on international equality and human rights instruments and good practice are essential.**

For ease of reference we append the CAJ submission and Dr McVeigh’s final papers on definitions.

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