

To: Equality Commission for Northern Ireland  
Equality House  
7 – 9 Shaftesbury Square  
Belfast  
BT2 7DP

From: The Community Relations Council  
6 Murray Street  
Belfast  
BT1 6DN

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> February 2006

Issue: Equality for all – continuing progress in a changing environment.

The Community Relations Council (CRC) would firstly like to welcome the publication of this consultation and the opportunity to reply to it. It has become apparent that it is crucial for organisations in the North of Ireland to have in place a clear strategy in order to perform its duties properly.

The Corporate Plan 2006-2009 covers the general intentions of the Equality Commission to promote the Equality Agenda over the next few years, and CRC wishes them well with its implementation. We also look forward to the particular detailed annual programmes of work following the consultation period, when we can examine further how we can collaborate on joint areas of interest. We also welcome the Commissions *'vision of a Northern Ireland as a shared, integrated place, a society where difference is respected and valued, based on equality and fairness for the entire community,* which very much mirrors the principles and beliefs of CRC.

As stated in the consultation, there have been numerous achievements in the field of equality but due to the growing and changing economy and community there still remains work to be done. Equality legislation can enforce minimum standards of acceptable behaviour and practice (Section 75.1) but needs additional work to promote diversity and good relations (section 75.2). The Equality Commission challenges employers and service providers to ensure 'they are meeting their obligations' in regard of legislation, and monitors and gathers information on equality strategies from public sector bodies. The CRC has a strategic and important relationship with the Equality Commission; in particular, we are a key partner in the area of Good Relations – section 75.2. *'Good relations and equality go hand in hand. Equality cannot stand alone without the reinforcing scaffolding of good relations. Real equality needs good relations to underpin and strengthen it.'*<sup>1</sup>

With the forthcoming publication of programme of work CRC would welcome further discussion on the documentation and implementation of the Good Relations Agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> Good Relations Framework, CRC, page 7.

We want to continue to develop existing partnerships between both organisations, and are encouraged that the corporate plan emphasises the need to share and learn from partnerships. Already the Community Relations Council and the Equality Commission are joint partners on the Good Relations Forum, and they are both represented on the South Belfast Round Table on Racism. Both organisations are strategic associates in the governments “Racial Equality Strategy” and “A Shared Future”, and it is essential these partnerships continue. For example A Shared Future examined the area of shared work places and states that “The Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council should open up a dialogue with employers and trades’ unions about developing good relations in the workplace. A particular focus of this will be in relation to migrant workers”.<sup>2</sup>

A Shared Future also states that: “Government, in consultation with the Equality Commission, the Community Relations Council, employers and trades’ unions, will bring forward proposals to ensure that access routes to places of employment are free of overt sectarian or racist displays”<sup>3</sup>. And that The Equality Commission and CRC will:

- build on the work of employers and trades’ unions and begin a new dialogue about relationships within a safe environment and shared workplaces; and
- build on their work with employers and trades’ unions to challenge sectarianism and racism, and consider, in particular, the issues affecting migrant workers<sup>4</sup>.

It also points out that “These initiatives have the potential to build significantly on the very positive developments that have been initiated in the workplace”<sup>5</sup>.

CRC believe there is an opportunity to collaborate on joint projects, to discuss areas of mutual policy interests and to support each other’s staff capacities for development. Building on capacity could materialize as roundtable discussions, shared work, research and training across each other’s organisations. This type of collaboration can only benefit the equality agenda. Of course each body has their own particular remit and responsibilities but it is essential that we accept that joined up approaches, where practical and necessary, can only add to the area of equality, good relations, race relations and the promotion of a shared society, whilst at the same time resolving issues around duplication, and enabling each body the opportunity to maximize their resources.

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<sup>2</sup> A Shared Future; Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland, March 2005, page 37

<sup>3</sup> A Shared Future; Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland, March 2005, page 38

<sup>4</sup> A Shared Future; Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland, March 2005, page 39

<sup>5</sup> A Shared Future; Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland, March 2005, page 38

The Community Relations Council has a trusting relationship with the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. These affiliations can help 'build access to equality provisions and protections', and use a joint approach to ensure that 'equality and good relations are at the heart of public policy-making and service delivery'. As independent bodies we have a duty, and a desire to press ahead with the implementation of existing strategies and shape future plans.

Whilst acknowledging the memorandum of understanding between the Community Relations and the Equality Commission, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss further how we can combine forces, pool resources and collaborate on different equality projects, whilst maintaining each others independence. We look forward to hearing from you and wish you well over the next 4 years in your programme of work.