



Section 75 and Schedule 9
The Northern Ireland Act 1998

Equality Impact Assessment on

**Reforming Qualifications and
Promoting Learning for the
21st Century**

**A consultation on the development
of a new framework for achievement**

June 2005

Equality Impact Assessment on Reforming Qualifications and Promoting Learning for the 21st Century

A consultation on the development of a new framework for achievement

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1: INTRODUCTION

Under the statutory duties contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, CCEA gave an undertaking to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on each policy or group of co-joined policies where screening had indicated that there may be significant implications in relation to one or more of the nine equality dimensions.

This report has been made available as part of the Formal Consultation on the development of a new framework for achievement.

In carrying out this EQIA, CCEA is co-joined with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education (DE).

Further copies of this EQIA report are available on the Council's website at www.rewardinglearning.com/development/qualifications/qualifications.html

If you have any queries about this document, and its availability in alternative formats (including Braille, disk and audio cassette, and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English), then please contact:

Equality Officer:

Ms Anne Bennett
Tel: 028 9026 1200 Ext. 2352
Text Phone: 028 9024 2063
Fax: 028 9026 1274
E-mail: abennett@ccea.org.uk

Write to:

Ms Anne Bennett
People Services and Equality Officer
CCEA
29 Clarendon Road
Clarendon Dock
Belfast BT1 3BG

SECTION 75 AND THE STATUTORY DUTIES

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires each public authority, when carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine categories of persons, namely:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to its obligations above, the public authority must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland approved CCEA's Equality Scheme in June 2001. The Scheme outlines how the Council proposes to fulfil its statutory duties under Section 75. Following approval of the Scheme, existing policies were screened to assess impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity or the duty to promote good relations using the following criteria:

- is there any evidence of higher or lower participation or uptake by different groups?
- is there any evidence that different groups have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the particular policy issue?
- is there an opportunity to promote equality of opportunity between the relevant different groups, either by altering the policy, or by working with others in government or in the larger community, in the context of the policy?
- have consultations with relevant groups, organisations or individuals indicated that policies of that type create problems specific to any relevant group?

A report describing the results of the screening process is available on the Council's website (www.ccea.org.uk).

This report represents the first 4 stages of CCEA's Equality Impact Assessment of the Development of a New Framework for Achievement.

THE COUNCIL

CCEA is the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. It was set up by government to provide advice on, and support for, what is taught in schools and colleges in Northern Ireland and how it is assessed. CCEA is responsible for the assessment of pupils at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and accreditation of Records of Achievement. CCEA conducts public examinations such as GCSE, GCE, Certificate of Education Achievement (CoEA) and Graded Objectives in Modern Languages (GOML) for students aged 16 to 19 and beyond, and administers the Transfer Test on behalf of the Department of Education. CCEA is also responsible for the regulation of GNVQs in Northern Ireland.

CCEA's remit is set out in The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. CCEA has a statutory responsibility to:

- With the approval of the Department, develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of relevant external qualifications;
- Accredite, where they meet such criteria, any such qualifications submitted for accreditation.

The Council shall advise the Department on the exercise of its power under Article 81.

In this Article,

- 'external qualifications' means any academic or vocational qualification authenticated or awarded by an outside person;
- 'relevant external qualifications' means an external qualification which is, or is to be, provided for –
 - pupils in attendance at a grant-aided school; or
 - persons under the age of 19 in full-time education or an institution of further education.

The Council's mission statement is:

'to enable the full potential of all learners to be achieved and recognized'.

2: DEFINING THE AIMS OF THE POLICY

Aim of policy

The overall aim is to develop the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF) into a more inclusive framework (the new framework for achievement) that will recognise a wider range of achievements in a more flexible and responsive manner than is currently possible. The proposals set out a radical new structure that recognises achievements through a system of interconnected units. Learners will be able to combine, accumulate and transfer these achievements between qualifications and awarding bodies.

In addition, the new framework is to enable the qualifications system to be:

- more responsive - the needs of learners and employers are not always easily met through existing qualifications;
- more inclusive - there are many achievements gained by learners in employment, in community-based learning activities, and in other less formal contexts that are not always recognised through existing qualifications;
- transparent and easily understood - the relative values of different kinds of achievement cannot be represented within the current NQF; and
- less bureaucratic - the administrative burden of accrediting qualifications is still too complex.

Who is affected by the policy and who are the main stakeholders in relation to this policy?

The stakeholders who will be affected by the policy include:

- Regulatory Authorities (QCA in England, ACCAC in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland);
- Awarding Bodies;
- Skills for Business (SfB) Network [which brings together the Sector Skills Councils (SSC's) and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA)];
- Funding Bodies (DEL in Northern Ireland, DfES and LSC in England and ELWa in Wales);
- Learners;
- Employers, Training Councils and Professional Bodies;
- Providers (e.g. further and higher education, training organisations, voluntary and community organisations).

CCEA, along with its regulatory partners, QCA in England and ACCAC in Wales will work closely with the Skills for Business (SfB) Network [which brings together the Sector Skills Councils (SSC's) and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA)], awarding bodies and funding bodies to implement the policy. It is envisaged that the roles and responsibilities of these stakeholders will change with the introduction of the new framework. Awarding bodies, in particular, will have a different and enhanced role to play within the new framework.

The following describes the benefits of the new framework for learners, employers and employees, providers and awarding bodies:

Learners

- The opportunity to earn credit within the framework and accumulate credits towards an appropriate qualification.
- Those who leave their chosen programme of study, for whatever reason, will be able to earn credits for the units completed and use these credits, where relevant, towards an alternative qualification on their return to learning.
- If learners change their mind about their initial target qualification, they may transfer relevant credits to a different qualification without undue costs or bureaucracy.
- Present a record of their achievements that is easily accessible, simple to understand and comparable with all other achievements within the framework.

Employers and Employees

- Provide more relevant qualifications and assessment, which meet the specific needs of employers and employees.
- There will be an increased range of recognised achievements that are relevant to employers and employees.
- The ability to offer employer-based training programmes which are widely recognised.
- Improved staff retention and fulfilment of career development strategies.
- More informed decisions can be taken when recruiting staff.

Providers

- Develop innovative learning opportunities that meet individual and group needs.
- Plan provision on the basis of learner needs rather than qualification aims, enabling individual routes to achievement to be better managed.
- Make efficient use of e-learning, workshop and other specialised facilities by encouraging the clustering of learning opportunities around units shared between several progression routes.
- Improve retention and progression rates by recognising smaller steps of achievement.
- Reduce the bureaucratic burden of centre approval and learner registration.
- Make use of more learner-centred assessments leading to the award of credit.

Awarding bodies

- Reduction in the paperwork and time required to admit individual units and accredit qualifications within the framework.
- Access to a shared resource that will increase the efficiency and speed with which new qualifications can be developed. (The resource will be a unit databank).
- Ability to develop units and qualifications that can meet the needs of individuals and employers.
- Greater control over the design of assessment.
- Continuing development of partnerships across awarding bodies, SSCs and Regulatory Authorities based on a shared interest in the stability of the framework and the successes of learners within it.

Are there associated policies, if so what are they?

The proposals for the new framework are an important element of the work programme set out across the United Kingdom to reform vocational qualifications. The introduction of credit will support greater flexibility and responsiveness and increase access for learners.

The development of the new framework has immediate relevance to vocational qualifications, particularly for adult learners. However, it is important that these reforms encompass all learning, including qualifications taken by 14-19 year olds. CCEA has recently consulted widely on the nature and scope of curriculum and qualifications development for 14-19 year olds. In taking forward the 14-19 reform agenda it is the intention to consider how best credit can facilitate learning and achievement for all.

The proposals take account of policy initiatives being taken forward in Northern Ireland by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), in particular the Review of Further Education and the Northern Ireland Skills Strategy. The new framework proposed will enable the aims behind these policy initiatives to be fulfilled.

The proposals will also support Government policy in relation to inclusion/ widening participation, creating a culture of lifelong learning, equality and fairness and enhancing workforce development.

3: CONSIDERATION OF AVAILABLE DATA AND RESEARCH THAT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROPOSALS WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO INFORMATION ON EQUALITY ISSUES

This Equality Impact Assessment on Reforming Qualifications and Promoting Learning for the 21st Century: A consultation on the development of a new framework for achievement, draws upon the following sources of information.

Northern Ireland

- Section 3 of the Report of the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation & Transfer System (NICATS) Project – April 1996-1999 outlines the rationale for the development of a credit framework in Northern Ireland. The rationale elaborates on how a credit system has enormous potential as a tool for widening participation. This is particularly pertinent in Northern Ireland where under-representation of certain groups is a significant problem. The report sets out the basic recommended structural components of a credit framework for Northern Ireland and recommended the establishment of a NICATS central unit to take forward the implementation of the credit framework in Northern Ireland.
- In the report '*Lifelong Learning - A New Learning Culture for All*', (February 1999) the Government outlined a clear vision for the future of lifelong learning in Northern Ireland. Within this report NICATS was perceived as central to the realisation of this vision, facilitating more flexible education and training provision and progression opportunities. The following extracts taken from the report illustrated the Government's commitment in 1999 to the establishment and implementation of a credit system in Northern Ireland:

'In order to ensure that learners gain credit for achievement, to provide a system which is easily understood by all and which is valued, a single, unitised credit-related learning framework is needed to ensure the long-term development of lifelong learning. To this end, the Government is committed to the development of a National Framework for qualifications and the NI Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS) which interfaces with the National Framework'.

'The implementation stage of NICATS, which will also be funded by Government, will commence on 1 April 1999 and will end not later than 2002. A new central body will be established, under the direction of a NICATS Implementation Committee, to take forward this stage'.

- After NICATS submitted its final report (July 2002), CCEA was asked by Government to '*keep under review CAT developments in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and, in the light of these developments, to provide advice on the next phase of credit developments in Northern Ireland*'.

CCEA's advice was forwarded to the Department for Employment and Learning in November 2003. The key recommendation was *'to work towards the development of a unified credit system across England, Wales and Northern Ireland whereby all learning can be formally recognised by jointly agreed credit principles, guidelines and quality assurance processes'*. Over the past year CCEA has been working with its partner Regulatory Authorities, particularly QCA in England and ACCAC in Wales. These proposals are the result of this joint work.

- In November 2004, the Department for Employment and Learning launched the Northern Ireland Skills Strategy which supports the development of a credit accumulation and transfer system whereby *'learners will be able to undertake bite-size chunks of learning and will be able to progress at their own pace towards achieving a full qualification. Providers and employers will be able to tailor qualifications and units to meet learners' skills needs. Such a system of credit accumulation and transfer will extend access to and take-up of learning, improve equality of opportunity and promote lifelong learning'*.
- *'Reform of Vocational Qualifications'* - In December 2002, all UK countries received a ministerial remit to secure a coherent and high-quality system of vocational qualifications. One of the objectives of the remit is to *'develop and implement a modernised VQ system which meets individual and employment needs'*. The context for this work derived from the Quinquennial Review and its recommendations for change in VQ policy and implementation in response to criticisms that the system was insufficiently flexible and responsive.

Over the past eighteen months CCEA has been working with partner regulatory authorities in England, Wales and Scotland on the reform of vocational qualifications. From the early stages of this work it was clear that the application of credit principals would provide greater flexibility and access to qualifications for learners.

England

- Following the publication of the DfES document *'Success For All: Reforming Education and Training'* (Nov. 2002) ministers asked QCA and LSC to report on the future role of credit in relation to such policy priorities as widening participation, enhancing workforce development and improving the transparency of the NQF. In November 2002, LSC and QCA provided advice to ministers on the role of credit in relation to the learning and skills sector and the National Qualifications Framework. The advice received by DfES from both QCA and LSC pointed out: the continuing demand for a credit-based system; drew attention to the development of a credit-based system in Wales and Scotland; and identified the development of a credit-based system as a natural progression from a unitised qualifications framework.
- *'Successful Participation for All'* was the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) national consultation document that suggested a new, planned approach to widening adult participation and was launched in February

2003. Widening participation is crucial to the Government's skills agenda and the LSC has a clear remit to widen adult participation, increasing the number of learners from those whose background or circumstances have disadvantaged them. The consultation document identifies ways in which more adults may be attracted to learning and how they can positively be engaged and retained in the learning process. Key recommendations include, for example, equality and access – addressing equality and diversity, quality improvement, provider staff development, and information, advice and guidance issues. The document stated that there was *'an urgent need to accelerate progress in developing a national system of credit'*.

- *'Customised Awards for Adults at Work' (Jan. 2003)* - Work undertaken by QCA to investigate the use by employers of customised awards concluded that there was evidence that the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and criteria should be developed to support a wider and more flexible range of vocational qualifications. Key principles underpinning successful practice were identified. The report also concluded that without some movement towards revising the framework and regulatory arrangements to extend inclusion, the perceived relevance and importance of national qualifications could be threatened. This could in turn undermine efforts to move closer to a demand-led and coherent national qualifications system.
- The DfES National Skills Strategy White Paper – *'21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential'* (July 2003) announced the development of a credit framework for adults. It stated that: *'We will develop a credit framework for adults to provide greater flexibility for both learners and employers in packaging the learning programmes that best suits their needs. As the first step, we will invite the bodies which award the largest number of qualifications to adults to collaborate, under the leadership of the QCA, to develop a shared credit-based approach'*.

The challenges for our qualifications system were set out in chapter 5 of the white paper *'Reforming Qualifications and Training Programmes'*. Some of these changes were foreshadowed in the 2002 Cabinet Office publication *In Demand: Adult Skills for the 21st Century*. Other elements of this reform strategy arise from the quinquennial review of QCA carried out in 2002. In chapter 5 it was proposed that qualifications reform should be underpinned by a unit-based national system of credit and qualifications.

- In light of the published commitment in the Skills Strategy White Paper (July 2003) to the development of a credit framework for adults, both the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) received remit letters, in September 2003, from Ivan Lewis, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Skills and Vocational Education, in relation to progressing such a system in England.
- *'A report to the LSC and NOCN on the first phase of a project to evaluate the impact of Open College Network (OCN) and OCNW*

provision within a unit-based credit framework' (June 2004). The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and National Open College Network (NOCN) commissioned the University of Warwick to investigate provision leading to awards that are already operating within unit-based credit frameworks. These include all Open College Network (OCN) and Open College of the North West (OCNW) accredited provision and Access to Higher Education courses. The main emphasis of the research was to evaluate the impact and comparative success of unit-based credit frameworks on increasing flexibility, ensuring and enhancing quality, facilitating progression and widening participation.

- In April 2004, the development of a credit framework and the reform of vocational qualifications were brought together in a single programme of work. In July 2004, QCA set out the aims of this programme of work in *'New Thinking for Reform'*. To take forward this programme of work in England, a new framework for achievement (FfA) is being established. In November 2004 QCA published a stakeholder consultation document on the new framework *'A Framework for Achievement: Recognising Qualifications and Skills in the 21st Century'*. These proposals are very much in line with CCEA's proposals and the QCA consultation runs parallel to the CCEA consultation.

4: ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS AND CONSIDERATION OF MEASURES TO MITIGATE ANY ADVERSE IMPACT

As demonstrated in section 3, the case for the development of a new framework for achievement designed to recognise a wider range of achievements in a more flexible and inclusive way than is currently possible with the NQF is well established and flows directly from key government policy initiatives such as widening participation, creating a culture of lifelong learning, equality and fairness and enhancing workforce development.

How the proposals will widen participation and increase participation in learning at all levels

In Northern Ireland the low rate of participation in learning by certain groups, for example, adults, the socially and economically disadvantaged and the unemployed is well documented. Widening participation is crucial to the Government's skills agenda and we have a clear remit to widen participation and increase the number of learners from those whose background or circumstances have disadvantaged them.

The proposals for the new framework will allow a flexible approach to learning by, for example:

- requiring awarding bodies to develop arrangements for unit-based assessment so that achievement can be recognised at unit level;
- the development of a unit databank with free access (to the units submitted to it) by any organisation, will mean that providers, employers etc. will be able to design provision tailored to meet the specific needs of particular groups of learners and employees; and
- the introduction of flexible and responsive assessment arrangements will ensure that assessment methods are appropriate to meet the specific needs of particular groups of learners and employers.

These proposals will allow learners to access small chunks of learning, which promotes self-confidence and provides learners with motivation to continue with their studies/training. Lack of time and other resources often prevents potential learners from participating in programmes of education and training. The easier access to discrete learning opportunities offered through units helps to remove these constraints.

Open College Networks have a long history of operating a unit-based credit system accrediting a wide range of valuable learning. The LSC/NOCN research (June 2004) to evaluate the impact of Open College Network provision within a unit-based credit framework indicated that there was overwhelming support for the proposition that OCN-accredited provision made a significant contribution to widening participation. Statistically, 94% of respondents believed this to be the case and they provided a striking range of examples of learners who had been successfully targeted by OCN work, especially at entry level and level 1, including disaffected youth and excluded school leavers, adults with special needs, members of the community

experiencing trauma, women in low paid manual jobs, volunteer training with those who had experienced homelessness, refugees and asylum seekers, learners in rurally deprived areas, young men at risk from drug misuse, informal carers, young parents, and lone parents on low incomes. More generally, many respondents commented on the success of OCN provision in engaging '*the hardest to reach learners*', the marginalized, the socially and economically disadvantaged, the unemployed and those who had had negative experiences of education in the past.

How the proposals will promote greater equity and fairness

Learners working at the lower end of the framework (below Level 2) are likely to experience significant benefits from the introduction of the new framework. Currently a considerable proportion of the learning that takes place at this level is not recognised within the NQF and completion rates of full qualifications are relatively low.

The new framework will include a 'bottomless' Entry Level that will allow access for all learners working below Level 1, rather than just those capable of achieving at a level equivalent to National Curriculum Level 1 and above.

Awarding credit will enable the learners to build up qualifications over time, which will be of particular significance to a group that tends to be very mobile and to experience radical changes in circumstance (e.g. through homelessness, illness or receiving a custodial sentence). For a number of reasons, learners at this level - perhaps more than at other levels - make false starts and change direction; the proposals on mutual recognition for the new framework will allow them to take forward the relevant credit they have gained in one area to a different course in a different setting (e.g. a health and safety unit gained as part of a catering course may be valid as part of a retail qualification).

5: DETAILS OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

In order to mainstream equality issues, consultation on equality issues was made an integral part of the wider consultation exercise. All respondents were invited to identify any adverse impact on equality of opportunity arising from the proposals.

All consultees were invited to respond via a downloadable response booklet. While CCEA was prepared to consider requests for documentations and correspondence in alternative formats, including large print, on computer disc, in Braille, on audio-cassette, on video presented in British and Irish sign language with accompanying subtitles and voiceover and in minority languages to meet the needs of those people who are not fluent in English, there were no requests of this nature.

Feedback to the consultation was sought in the following ways:

- Launch of the consultation document on 8 February 2005 at the Stormont hotel.
- Full consultation document, equality impact assessment document and response booklet available at:

www.rewardinglearning.com/development/qualifications/qualifications.html

- Mail out to 111 organisations with an expressed interest in equality issues (*see List of Equality Consultees outlined in Appendix 1*).
- Specific consultation seminars as listed at Appendix 2

The deadline for completed responses was 29 April 2005. A total of 34 formal responses to the consultation document were received. One of these responses was from an umbrella equality organisation. A representative from the same organisation attended the consultation seminar for community, voluntary and equality groups (note of meeting attached at appendix 3).

6: DECISION BY PUBLIC AUTHORITY

In terms of the written responses, the majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the proposals would promote equality of opportunity for the different categories. Where respondents did not answer the question in relation to equality or disagreed that the proposals would promote equality of opportunity, it was stated that insufficient information was provided to allow any judgements to be made in support of the promotion of equality of opportunity.

The one major concern in both the written response and the consultation seminar was that the framework should accommodate a wide range of achievements at Entry level which could be accessed by socially and economically disadvantaged learners. One of the major aims of the new framework is to widen participation and promote progression at every level. This will be a particular challenge at the lowest levels and it is the intention

that the framework will include a 'bottomless' Entry Level, with progression awards, that will allow access for all learners working below Level 1.

A report on the outcomes of the consultation along with recommendations was forwarded to the Northern Ireland Minister at the end of June 2005 and a response is expected later in July. The report and recommendations will be available on the CCEA website from July 2005.

7: MONITORING FOR ADVERSE IMPACT IN THE FUTURE

As mentioned in section 6 above a report on the outcomes of the consultation along with recommendations was forwarded to the Northern Ireland Minister at the end of June 2005. If the recommendations are accepted by the Minister, CCEA will work with key partners to agree a clear timetable for implementation of the new framework.

The consultation responses identified the need to ensure a pragmatic and manageable timescale for implementation. It is envisaged that the new framework will be fully operational by 2010. Rigorous evaluation processes and success measures will be established in order to report on the development of the new framework between 2006 – 2010, this will include monitoring for adverse effect on equality .

List of Equality Consultees

Action Mental Health
Action MS
Age Concern
Age Positive
AIAC
Alzheimer's Society
Amnesty International
Blind Centre for NI
British Deaf Association
British Institute of Learning Disabilities
British Irish Rights Watch
British Psychological Society
CACDP
CAIN
Cara-Friend
CARE for Northern Ireland
Cedar Foundation
Citizens' Advice Bureau
City Partnership Board
Coalition on Sexual Orientation
Commission for Racial Equality
Committee on the Administration of Justice
Community Relations Council
Community Work Education & Training Network
Co-operation Ireland
Criminal Cases Review Commission
Deafblind UK
Democratic Dialogue
Department for Social Development
Disability Action
Disability Rights Commission
Disability Unit of the Equality Commission
Down Syndrome Association
East Belfast Partnership
Employers' Forum on Disability
Equality Authority Dublin
Equality Challenge Unit
Equality Commission
Equality Rights and Social Inclusion
European Court of Human Rights
Family & Schools Development Worker
Forster Green Hospital
Foyle Friend
Gay Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland
Greater Shankill Partnership
Groundwork NI
Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

Hands that Talk
Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
Help the Aged
Human Rights Consortium
Human Rights Watch Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus
INCORE
Independent Panel for Special Education Advice
JEDI
Justice London
Labour Relations Agency
Law Centre NI
Law Society of NI
Legal Island
Londonderry Deaf Youth Service
ME Association
Mediation Network NI
Mencap NI
Meningitis Research Foundation
Multiple Sclerosis Society NI
Muscular Dystrophy Campaign
National Autistic Society Services for Children
National Schizophrenia Fellowship
Newtownards Road Women's Centre
NI Association for Mental Health
NI Deaf Youth Association
NI Gay Rights Association
NI Human Rights Commission
NI Womens' European Platform
NIACRO
NICVA
NISCC
North Belfast Partnership
Northern Ireland Dyslexia Association
Northern Ireland Policing Board
NOU (Northern Ireland)
ODEI
Office of Law Reform (OLR)
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Ombudsman
Opportunity Now
Orchardville Society
PAPA Resource Centre
Parkinson's Disease Society
PHAB Northern Ireland
Pobal
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
Praxis Care Group
Probation Board NI
QueerSpace
Rainbow Project
RNID Northern Ireland
Sense Northern Ireland

Sisters of Mercy Education & Justice
Skill NI
South Belfast Partnership
Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights
Transferors' Representative Council
Victims Groups
Volunteer Development Agency
West Belfast Economic Forum
West Belfast Partnership Board
Women's Aid Federation
Women's Forum for NI
Women's Support Network

Appendix 2

Consultation Seminar Details

Date	Stakeholder Group	Venue
24 February 2005	Further Education	Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick
28 February 2005	Higher Education	Dunadry Hotel
8th March 2005	Training Organisations	Dunadry Hotel
9th March 2005	Employers, Sector Skills Councils and Training Councils	Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick
10th March 2005	Awarding Bodies	Dunadry Hotel, Templepatrick
15th March 2005	Community, voluntary and equality organisations	Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick

Umbrella Equality Organisation representatives invited to consultation seminar

Majella McAteer, British Deaf Association (BDA)
Chris Common, Age Concern NI
James Knox, Coalition on Sexual Orientation (COSO)
Denis Palmer, Youthnet
Moirá McCombe, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
Siobhann McKeating, Women's Support Network
Anna Lo, Chinese Welfare Association
Monica Wilson, Disability Action

The Framework for Achievement

– Community, Voluntary and Equality Groups Consultation Seminar
15th March 2005 - Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick.

Attendees

Tony Mcateer	Clanrye Employment and training Services
Brian Greenwood	Belfast Harbour Police
Gary Haire	Christian Guideline Ltd
Roisin McCooey	Southern Childcare Partnerships (NIPPA)
William McLaulhlan	CAFRE Greenmount Campus
Roberta McLarney	Eastern Childcare Partnerships (NIPPA)
Colin Neilands	WEA
Betty Robinson	ETI
Pamela Sheilds	East Antrim Institute
Tony Cramichael	Disability Action
Joanne Jones	Community Education, BIFHE
Patricia Short	NIOCN
Matt Mulroe	Lifestart Foundation
Caroline Egerton	CCEA
David Crosbie	CCEA

Caroline welcomed the group, outlined the arrangements for the session and presented an overview of the framework proposals, the structure of the consultation document and how to respond to the proposals.

Discussion was encouraged based on the consultation proposals and the response document. The main discussions raised the following points:

- The currency of unit is an important issue for community provision where learners often enter and re-enter learning through community provision;
- Community based education was experiencing a growth in provision to other European nationals, leading to a greater need for a framework which could recognise learning achieved through other European countries and especially ROI
- It was felt that the lack of grading in the NVQ system had a negative effect on perception of these qualifications for some users;
- Grading was viewed as important for progression and recruitment, although some felt that this was a Northern Ireland issue and demonstrating other skills may be more useful than grading;
- The 'lower end of the ladder' for entry level on the current NQF was perceived as too high a level of attainment for some groups. It was felt that this would need to be addressed in the framework;
- The framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland should be the same
- The group questioned if the Northern Ireland funding could support the achievement of units in the framework, and expressed that funding should not restrict learner choice of provider;
- There was a need for positive marketing of the framework;

- There were perceived differences between Awarding Bodies regarding levels of assessment and other requirements, which some felt would be a barrier to transferability;
- The differences in notional and actual learning time was an issue for consideration for providers in the community and voluntary sector;
- There may be resource implications for smaller providers in the community;
- Need to ensure equality of access to the framework for community groups.