

**GENDER ADVISORY PANEL SUBMISSION TO THE OFMDFM
COMMITTEE ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2009 – GENDER EQUALITY
STRATEGY 2006-2016**

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In response to a request from the OFMDFM Committee, the Gender Advisory Panel presents the current paper as a summary of its views and recommendations on implementing the Gender Equality Strategy, and on the current cross-departmental gender equality action plans. The Panel welcome the OFMDFM Committee's interest in the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016. The product of extensive consultation to which many Panel members contributed, it was an important step for the Executive to adopt GES, through actions co-ordinated by OFMDFM through the Programme for Government, as a framework to tackle remaining gender inequalities.

The Strategy was to be implemented by two main tools – gender mainstreaming, and gender specific actions – and the Panel's views address both mainstreaming, and actions as set out in the draft cross-departmental gender equality action plans 2008-2011.

ROLE OF THE OFMDFM ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE

No one underestimates the importance of the Committee's advisory, consultative and scrutiny role and influence on policy and legislative process. These are important issues for the freedoms and rights of all women in our society, and the Panel are disappointed not to have longer to present evidence to the Committee; and would have liked all members (many will attend as members of the public on 23 September) to meet the Committee.

However the Panel have devoted considerable energy into taking full benefit from the invitation to give evidence, and through this paper seek to highlight their most important concerns. Five nominees from the last meeting of the Panel on 11 September 2009 will represent the Panel's views, worked through at the meeting, at oral evidence. Their names are asterisked on the current list of active Members of the Gender Advisory Panel:

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OFMDFM GENDER ADVISORY PANEL, SEPTEMBER 2009¹

NAME	ORGANISATION
Paddy Skates	Women's Forum NI
Annie Campbell*	Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
Bronagh Hinds*	Women's National Commission
Colin Fowler	The Men's Project
Deirdre Stewart	CBI
Helena McCormac	Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
Pauline Buchanan	ICTUNI
Liz Law	Equality Commission
Mairead McCafferty	Coalition on Sexual Orientation (COSO)
Michael Lynch*	Men's Action Network
Patricia Haren*	Women's Support Network
Michael McKenna	Youth Action
Pauline Buchanan	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Orlaith Hendron	Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative (LASI)
Siobhan Doherty	Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network
June Mallon	Ólder Women's Network
Margaret Ward*	Women's Resource Development Agency
Karen Sweeney	Training for Women Network
Eileen Bell	Women into Politics

¹ Current main representatives of groups who have participated in the Panel's work regularly and have attended least one meeting over the past year.

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MAINSTREAMING AND GENERAL ISSUES

Gender Advisory Panel

We invite the Committee to acknowledge the Panel is a diverse, stakeholder-led advisory body, whose membership reflects the diversity of men and women represented by the OFMDFM Committee. Both men's and women's concerns are voiced through the work of this cross community, all-age Panel, which has a rich diversity of affiliated membership, as illustrated by the list of member groups at Annex A.

Gender Neutral Approach

The Gender Advisory Panel are concerned that a **gender neutral** approach (equal provision for men and women) to policy and services is seen as fulfilling s 75 obligations regarding men and women generally. The Panel submits that this is contrary to the intention of the legislation. A recent report recommended that the Equality Commission should "... ensure that public authorities identify the inequalities which exist, so as to enable them to introduce policies to promote equality of opportunity.' (Section 75 – Keeping it Effective, final report November 2008, p78).

This would mean authorities routinely review the equality (and gender) impact of all they do – and introduce positive action to tackle any inequalities. So, both mainstreaming and positive action.

Indeed the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland clarified, in the publication Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – Guide to the Statutory Duties, February 2005, page 48, that :

"... the statutory duties require more than the avoidance of discrimination. Public bodies should actively seek ways to encourage greater equality of opportunity and good relations through their policy

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development such as, for example, the kind of measures taken under fair employment and treatment, sex discrimination, race relations, and disability discrimination legislation.

It was made clear in the parliamentary debate on the legislation that the statutory duty concerning equality of opportunity does not inhibit action to counter disadvantage among particular sections of society. As Mr. Murphy, the responsible Government Minister, made clear in the House of Commons: *“[Section 75] in no way calls into question the ability of public authorities to take affirmative action in appropriate cases to correct disadvantage. Affirmative action in appropriate circumstances is an important method of combating inequality, and it is our firm intention that that should remain so...”*

House of Commons, Official Report, 18 November 1998...”

Gender Budgeting

Lack of resources impacts on many aspects of the Gender equality action plans – eg. childcare (not enough provision); violence against women (more investment needed in work with young men).

The Gender Advisory Panel recommend that a mainstreaming approach is needed to redress the situation. In practical terms, this would mean that in budget negotiation processes early and continuing equality assessment of policies is required, while there are measures such as ringfencing resources for specific policies such as childcare. It would also require, through an EQIA process at the outset and **throughout** the budget negotiation and allocation process, and at monitoring rounds, which specifically considers whether men or women in gender are the beneficiaries of particular investment decisions.

Relevance of Actions

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The Panel acknowledge that Departments have put considerable effort into the Gender Equality Action Plans, and welcome this. However they are concerned that in all cases actions should be relevant to delivering objectives – this was not always the case in the Gender Equality Action Plan, which sometimes looked just like a list of things Departments are already doing.

Conspicuous absences

The Panel identified the Review of Public Administration as the major current policy which is already having an impact on the involvement of men and women in public life, and were very concerned at what they considered to be absence of coverage of the forthcoming Review of Public Administration, where one of the transition committees is comprised wholly of men.

The Panel also noted that some of the action plans overlooked some other important issues (including some where there has been concerted effort to address problems which apply more to men than to women, or vice versa). For example there is no reference to transport issues - a major concern for many rural women - in the Gender Equality Action Plans.

Cross-references

Clearer cross-references are needed to strategies such as anti-poverty which have particular relevance for groups such as pensioners and lone parents.

The gender action plans should specifically refer to sexual orientation and race strategies (reflecting multiple identify issues).

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**COMMENTS ON THE CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL GENDER EQUALITY
ACTION PLANS**

In this section we have examined the cross-departmental gender equality action plans for men and women, in order to identify the single most important issue for the Gender Advisory Panel under each objective.

Objective 1 – Data collection and use

The Panel expressed concern that the Action Plans do not include key data from Departments and propose that specific, quantifiable targets should be included in actions to support the Objectives.

(See also the Panel's comments on Objective 3.)

Objective 2 – Economic security

Childcare is the fundamental concern for women's efforts to secure economic security. If there is no or inadequate childcare provision, you cannot get out to work (or take part in education and training to improve life changes).

Having said that, Panel members also consider that attitudinal change is essential in order to tackle the barriers to lifelong learning and access for women and men. Occupational segregation needs to be monitored, and challenged. Mandatory pay audits should be statutory.

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There are some indications that sexual harassment is still an issue for too many women at work. Statutory safeguards are important and need to be fully reflected in workplace policies.

Objective 3 – Work of Equal Value

While welcoming the *Gender Equality Strategy – a Baseline Document* (OFMDFM 2008) and the annual publication *Women in Northern Ireland* (DETI) the Panel noted the complexity and lack of transparency in key data on lifetime income distribution.

The Panel would like to see mandatory collection and analysis of key gender disaggregated data, so that the relative position of men and women in general is clear and kept under review.

The Panel suggested mandatory, published pay audits, and better information on segregation in the labour market. The Panel recommend that TUS should be involved in collection and analysis of NICS data on workforce composition.

Objective 4 – Health

Mental health services are still a major issue for women and for men (as evidenced by suicide rates). The Panel urge DHSSPS not to let up on actions to fully implement the recommendations of the Bamford Report. The Panel notes DHSSPS actions to clarify the position on abortion, but urges HDSSPS to undertake a full consultation on reproductive rights, as called for by CEDAW.

The Panel welcome DHSSPS Programme for Government targets to increase life expectancy and quality of life, but note that life expectancy for men continues to be lower than for women.

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Objective 5 – Under-representation of women on public bodies

The Panel expressed considerable disappointment that the actions listed under this objective would not deliver anything – they are not proactive. There is concern that the nomination process perpetuates the exclusion of women from public bodies.

Objective 6 - Active and equal participation of women and men

The Panel have concerns at the lack of actions on RPA and all it entails. Structures, finances and membership must all be shaped in the light of a full and rigorous gender equality impact assessment. Lead responsibility for this lies with DOE.

The Gender Equality Strategy is explicitly drafted in conformity to international commitments, with explicit reference to European Union provisions, UNSCR1325 and the Convention in the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women – all of which emphasise the importance of enhancing women's role in decision making and public life.

Objective 7 – Promoting and protecting the rights of girls and boys

The Panel emphasised the need for mindset change across government. While welcoming the references to the revised curriculum, the Panel asked what evidence there was that change to attitudes could be delivered. The curriculum on its own will not deliver this – for example, it must be supported by effective, focused teacher education in gender issues. The Panel emphasised their support for initiatives to explore the roles of fathers and to unravel stereotypical assumptions about men and women in general.

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Objective 8 – Elimination of gender-based violence

The Panel welcomes the co-operation across Departments and the work with providers and voluntary sector groups, which has been led through the Inter-ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence, and emphasises that although much has been achieved, the gains need to be held and resources cannot be reduced nor policy work set aside.

As a separate issue, the Panel noted that major and well-documented issues around violence against women are not acknowledged or specified in the description of this objective in GES. Yet there is widespread support, across the Assembly, for actions to tackle the crime that is violence against women.

NIO's continuing and lead contribution on combating Violence Against Women (VAW) needs to be captured across the spectrum eg. work on trafficked women, treatment of offenders. Action plans need to reflect what NICS Departments, and NIO, as employers are doing – for example as regards sexual harassment, and policies on support for victims of domestic violence.

The Panel posited that there was, in the action plans, inadequate evidence of rape crisis provision in Northern Ireland – beyond plans for the provision of a regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre.

Objective 9 – Equal access to education and lifelong learning

The Panel recognise many helpful initiatives but call for evidence of a coherent overall strategy to tackle the barriers to lifelong access to education and learning.

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Attitudinal change and a wholehearted approach which implements the spirit as well as the letter of policies to expand access are essential if we are more effectively to tackle the barriers to lifelong learning and access for women.

Gender segregation remains an issue - it is important to accept women in non-traditional roles such as construction, driving and a more diverse range of professions, and men in caring roles such as nursing, midwifery, family work, primary school teaching, social work.

REQUESTS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE COMMITTEE

The Panel also resolved to take the opportunity to seek action and support of the OFMDFM Committee as follows:

- 1. We urge you to requests clear evidence of gender equality impact assessment of the overall RPA strategy and implementation (in particular transition committees) as a matter of urgency.**
- 2. We encourage the Committee to recommend enhanced involvement of the Panel across Departments.**
- 3. We call on Committee to press for gender budgeting across government, including ring-fenced budgets for actions to tackle remaining gender barriers such as specials men's or women's health programmes, employment policy initiatives, provision of childcare facilities, and extension of parental leave provisions.**
- 4. We urge the Committee to lend its continued support to policies to promote and support lifelong learning, which is of particular importance as we move through a period of sustained economic recession.**
- 5. We thank the Committee for their attention, and look forward to a response from the OFMDFM Committee and other Committees, and their views and advice on implementing GES, and on the GEAPs.**

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- 6. The Gender Advisory Panel hopes that this will be the start of a continuing engagement with the OFMDFM Committee and with the Assembly, on these important issues of gender equality.**