

**A Response to Labour Relations Agency consultation:**

**“Labour Relations Agency  
Communications Policy”**

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## **Introduction**

### **Women's Support Network**

The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is an infrastructural umbrella organisation, which provides support services to, and represents over 40 groups (see Appendix 1 for full member and associate member listing) including; community-based women's centres, women's projects and women's infrastructure groups.

WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network aims to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups and to promote and develop networking opportunities, to enable collective action and to impact upon policy and decision making processes. The WSN provides an accessible, feminist, relevant and high quality support service and resource for its member groups. The Network is also an important information resource on issues relevant to community-based women's organisations and for other infrastructure groups, nationally and internationally.

WSN welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Labour Relations Agency (LRA) Communications Policy.

## **Specific Comments**

### **1 Equality Impact Assessment**

1.1 WSN notes that the covering letter accompanying the draft Communication Policy states that the "Labour Relations Agency has decided to carry out an equality impact assessment on its Communications Policy". This does not appear to have been circulated along with the draft policy. We would recommend that the EQIA is circulated in order to ascertain if an adverse impact has been identified by the proposed policy and if there have been any alternatives considered to mitigate adverse impact.

### **2 Policy Introduction and Objectives**

2.1 WSN notes in the policy introduction references to "the effects of racism, social exclusion and the removal of other discriminatory barriers to full participation in society". WSN notes that Sexism is not included along with the other barriers. WSN would contend that Sexism is a major barrier to full participation and we would recommend that reference to this is included in the Communication Policy.

2.2 The Communication Policy states that one of its key objectives is to "meet all statutory obligations and to go beyond what is required to reflect best practice." WSN notes that it is not clear what these obligations are and we would recommend that there should be specific references to statutory obligations in the Communications Policy, particularly Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which places a statutory obligation on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity. WSN also examined the LRA website to view its equality scheme and whilst there is a reference to it in the Annual Report<sup>1</sup>, we found it is not easy to locate. WSN would contend that this could be improved.

2.3 The document states that the policy will cover all printed information available to the general public and makes specific reference to the website,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.lra.org.uk/annual\\_report\\_accounts\\_2006\\_-\\_2007-2.pdf](http://www.lra.org.uk/annual_report_accounts_2006_-_2007-2.pdf)

intranet, emails, public meeting, events etc. WSN would ask LRA to clarify if the proposed policy will cover for example public consultations and job vacancy notices.

### **3 Translation and Interpretation of key documents**

3.1 The policy makes a commitment to make available a number of key documents translated into community languages on request. The policy identifies a number of LRA key documents including Agency Strategies, Annual Report, Annual Report to the Equality Commission (NI), Annual Business Plan, Corporate Plan, Publications Scheme. WSN notes that there is no reference to an Equality Scheme. The policy should make it clear that the LRA has an Equality Scheme and clarify what arrangements are in place for it to be translated.

3.2 WSN notes that the LRA home page has a set of flags which apparently lead to different languages. The following pages are always in English. There is a further link to a non-English document, but WSN believes that clicking on one of the flags should lead to a page in the relevant language and would recommend that LRA reviews this.

### **4 Internal Communication Policy**

4.1 The policy document makes reference to social gatherings as a way to develop professional working relationships and encourage communication. WSN would recommend that LRA gives consideration to whether social gatherings offer exchange of information in a non discriminatory way. For example social gatherings outside office hours may impact on those with childcare/caring responsibilities, particularly women who predominantly bear childcare/caring responsibilities.

## **Conclusion**

WSN welcomes this opportunity to respond to this Consultation and has offered some constructive suggestions as to how the Communication Policy can be improved. We hope that LRA will take these into consideration. WSN would contend that these suggestions will further promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

## Appendix 1

### **WSN Member groups**

Ardoyne Women's Group  
ATLAS  
Al Nisa Women's Group  
Ballybeen Women's Centre  
Ballymurphy Women's Group  
Belfast Travelers' Support Group  
Carrickfergus Women's Forum  
Carew II Newtownards Road Women's Group  
Causeway Women's Aid  
Clan Mor Women's Group  
Derry Women's Centre  
Falls Women's Centre  
First Steps Women's Group  
Footprints Women's Centre  
Foyle Women's Information Network  
Greenway Women's Centre  
Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative  
Lesbian Line  
Lenadoon Women's Group  
Ligoneil Family Centre  
Markets Women's Group  
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation  
NIWEP (NI Women's European Platform)  
Newry & Mourne Women  
Older Women's Network  
Shankill Women's Centre  
Strabane & Lifford Women's Centre  
Windsor Women's Centre  
Women's Aid  
Women's Aid Federation  
Women into Politics  
Women's Information Group  
Women's News  
Women's TEC  
WRDA

#### ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Ballymena Community Forum  
EBCEC  
Newtownabbey Community Voice  
Parents Advice Centre  
WEA  
Rasharkin Women's Group