To: HSC Agencies and Special Bodies; HSC Board
Public Health Agency
Patient and Client Council

From: Equality Unit, Business Services Organisation

Title: Do You Mean Me? Summary of Key Messages

Equality Awareness Survey 2011
Equality Commission NI

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Do You Mean Me?
Equality Awareness Survey 2011

Introduction
Every 3 years the Equality Commission NI carries out an equality awareness survey exploring trends in public attitudes towards particular groups in society; personal experiences of discrimination and knowledge of rights and practices. In addition the survey explores who is most likely to express negative feelings and who is most likely to be the target of prejudice. The most recent survey conducted in 2011 also included a question in relation to equality and the economy.

Purpose of this paper
The findings from the 2011 survey were launched on 13th June 2012. The full report extends to 146 pages in total. The purpose of this paper is to provide a summary of the key messages emerging from the survey results in order to make the findings more accessible.

Key messages
• Attitudes towards different groups in specific social scenarios including: as work colleague; as a neighbour or married to a family relative, have hardened.
• 33% of respondents said they were the subject of some form of harassment or treated unfavourably because they belonged to a particular group. This reflects an increase of 16% since 2008 when the last survey was conducted.
• 91% of respondents agreed with the need for equality laws and 77% agreed that they should be strengthened in line with those in Great Britain.
• In relation to the economy respondents’ confidence in the ability to keep their jobs is lower than the rest of the UK and the European average.
• Groups in relation to which the most negative attitudes were expressed included Travellers, transgender people, Eastern European migrant workers, and people experiencing mental ill-health.
The 2011 Equality Survey
The 2011 survey measured attitudes towards specific groups; perceptions and experiences of unfair treatment; and awareness of a range of equality related issues amongst the general public in Northern Ireland.

The sample size was 1000 face to face interviews conducted with members of the public across Northern Ireland during September 2011. The sample was stratified by age, gender, religion, social class and geography. This survey reflected similar questions asked in previous surveys with an extra question to explore the equality impacts of the recent down turn in the economy.

The survey also looked at General attitudes towards specific groups. This question focused on the extent to which respondents felt positive or negative attitudes towards each group.

What did the survey find?

General
- In the main attitudes towards the different groups were generally positive
- Negative attitudes existed towards Travellers (30%) Transgender Persons (22%) and Eastern European Migrant Workers (21%).
- Only 7% viewed those from a different religion in an unfavourable light.
- Negative attitudes remained similar to the 2008 survey.

Social distance
This looked at the extent to which respondents felt comfortable with varying degrees of closeness to a member of a different group. It was explored in the context of work, community and family life.

As with the 2008 survey results the most negative attitudes were towards Travellers.

Respondents indicated:
- 35% would mind having a Traveller as a work colleague 54% would mind having a Traveller as a neighbour while 55% would mind having a Traveller as an in-law.
• Negative attitudes were also displayed towards transgender persons. 35% would mind having a transgender person as a work colleague; 40% would mind having a transgender person as a neighbour while 55% would mind having a transgender person as an in-law.

• In the area of disability, mental health evoked the greatest number of negative comments in the context of all 3 social situations (work 26%, as a neighbour 24% and as an in-law 37%). Negative attitudes towards those experiencing mental ill-health increased in all three situations since 2008.

• Respondents were least likely to mind having some one of a different religion or with a learning or physical disability as a work colleague, (8-11%), 8-15% as a neighbour or 17-18% as an in-law. (Both groups were reported similarly).

Who is treated unfairly in Northern Ireland?

In response to this general question the most common answers were people over 70 years, lesbian gay or bisexual people and disabled people, all 24%.

Specifically and in descending order the following groups were perceived to be treated most unfairly

• People over 70 years (15%)
• Lesbian, gay or bisexual people (13%)
• Roman Catholics (13%)
• 8% reported Protestants to be most unfairly treated and only a small proportion reported men and woman as the answer 1%

The types of unfair treatment is worth noting, for older people this was in relation to public services, for gay, lesbian and bisexual people it was most likely to be harassment and Roman Catholics were viewed as most likely to be treated unfairly at work.

Attitudes towards equality and diversity

The survey explored attitudes towards equality and diversity including the importance of diversity in elected political positions, employment and public life, specifically in relation to addressing under representation of a number of groups.

For most people the 2011 survey reflected a similar perception of the level of importance of equality issues (50%) but for 1 in 3 people (29%) this issue had become more important.
More than two fifths (or 42%) said that religion is the most important equality issue, followed by age (39%) and gender (27%).

In comparison to the previous survey fewer people reported that they thought enough was being done to fight all forms of discrimination in Northern Ireland (45%, down from 55% in 2008) while 35% indicated that they were not satisfied.

Whilst respondents were comfortable with a male or female in the highest elected position respondents were most uncomfortable with having a Traveller, followed by a transgender person followed by a person experiencing mental health issues.

In terms of under representation a high number of respondents would like to see more women in management positions and as Members of the Local Assembly (MLAs) and more disabled people in the workforce generally. Less support was offered for having older people in companies.

Support was offered for the view that public bodies should be more representative of both Roman Catholic and Protestant communities (77%). In terms of the police service 66% suggested that a better police force is the result of better representation of both communities.

In terms of affirmative action 52% responded that they would be more likely to apply for a job if a company particularly welcomed applicants from their communities or had evidence of practical steps taken to develop contacts within their communities.

Overwhelming support (91%) was expressed on the need for equality laws with 77% also indicating that equality laws in Northern Ireland should be strengthened in line with those in Great Britain.

**Personal experiences of discrimination and harassment**

Personal experience of discrimination or harassment, and willingness to seek redress, including using the Equality Commission was also a key area explored by the survey. One in 3 (or 33%) respondents said that they had been subject to some form of harassment or unfair treatment because they belonged to a specific group. This showed an increase from previous surveys.
In terms of unfair treatment respondents indicated that those most likely to experience it were:

- Minority ethnic groups (61%)
- Lesbian, gay or bisexual people (53%)
- Those with limiting long term illness (40%).

In terms of experience of harassment:

- 14% felt they were not able to express their own culture
- 10% reported to being treated unfairly at work
- 10% reported unfair treatment when buying or renting property or land.

Over half (58%) of respondents indicated that they would contact the Equality Commission if they had a problem; this had increased since the previous survey. 18% indicated they would not seek support from the Equality Commission mainly because of lack of awareness about what support the Equality Commission can offer, or that they would prefer to go to a solicitor or elsewhere.

Just under a quarter (24%) indicated that they were aware of their rights if they were a victim of harassment or discrimination, which was a substantial decrease from 26% in 2008.

**Impacts of the economic downturn**

Given the situation in relation to the economy the 2011 survey explored the issue across equality grounds. Questions focused on employment effects, confidence in retaining jobs and prospects of finding a job in the event of being made unemployed.

Respondents indicated that 1:14 had lost their job in the last four months as a result of the economic downturn.

Of those in employment (585) almost one quarter had been affected by reduced hours. Those most likely to be affected were those who had Limiting Long Terms Illness or those living in the East of Northern Ireland.

In addition 32% of those in employment were affected by a pay freeze.

66% of those in employment were fairly confident of keeping their job but 245 were not.
In general public confidence in Northern Ireland is lower than in the rest of the UK or the European Union.

**Conclusion**
This short paper provides a summary of the key findings from the 2011 Equality Commission study on public attitudes in Northern Ireland. For more detailed findings please refer to the full report entitled