

Racial Equality Strategy (RES) Consultation

This document is a user-friendly synopsis of the larger NIE Racial Equality Strategy document, drafted by Bernadette McAliskey, STEP, for the benefit of groups and organisations to make a response to the consultation.

www.stepni.org



RES- The Racial Equality Strategy (2014-2024)

What is this?

The N. Ireland Executive is responsible for protecting people in N. Ireland against discrimination, exclusion, and victimisation.

RES is a government document that tells us how the government ministers expect the Executive to carry out its responsibility in relation to race and ethnicity over the next ten years. It plans to:

1. Tackle Racial Inequalities
2. Eradicate Racism
3. Promote good race relations and social cohesion.

The government is asking the public to look at their proposals and tell them if you think the strategy will work.

Why ask us?

- The government has a duty to consult the public which includes you.
- You suffer most when these three things do not happen
- The government fails in its duty when it does not protect you.

Will our voices be heard and our opinions count?

There is no guarantee that you will get what you want but the best chance that your opinion will count is to make your voice heard. Take part in the consultation and give your opinion on what would work to change things.

How will my opinion be relayed to Government?

The range of opinions expressed at the consultation meetings will be recorded and sent to Government before the consultation period ends. You can also respond, in English, on-line: www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/racial-equality-strategy

Tackle Racial Inequalities

What does the government mean by ‘Tackle Racial Inequalities’?

The government knows from research that people from minority ethnic backgrounds in N. Ireland do not always enjoy equal protection their rights; equal access to public services; enjoy equal access to opportunities that exist in N. Ireland. The government has a responsibility to take action to reduce the inequality and change the experience of minority ethnic members of N. Ireland society for the better. This document should set out how they propose to carry out that responsibility that over the next ten years.

What do you think the government should do to tackle racial inequalities?

How would reducing inequality make things better for your everyday life?

How can government make sure their plan is actually carried out?

How can they be sure it really does tackle racial inequality?

Facilitator’s note: The need for change is a given. Facilitated discussion should encourage focus on what needs to happen to reduce inequalities, while ensuring the example/ experience is recorded.

Eradicate Racism

What does the government mean by ‘eradicate racism’?

For the purposes of this Strategy, the government have identified the following manifestations of racism:

- Racist harassment (including abusive language, assaults, racist graffiti, threatening behaviour, and incitement);
- Discrimination (treating people less favourably because of racial prejudice or the person’s racial/ ethnic origin)
- Stereotyping; (attributing general characteristics based on racial perceptions to individuals)
- Systemic or “institutional” racism [*“The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people”.*]

Questions to consider:

1. What do you think the government should do to stop these things happening?
2. How would eradicating racism improve your everyday life experience?
3. How can government make sure their plan is actually carried out?
4. How would they know that racism was being effectively reduced/ eradicated?

Promote Good Race Relations and Social Cohesion

N. Ireland racism is, to an extent, shaped by sectarianism and the context for racism here different to that in Britain or the Republic of Ireland e.g. existing residential segregation and heightened territorial awareness - that now impact upon minority ethnic communities- and that we cannot hope to tackle one without tackling the other. RES proposes a holistic approach to tackling racism and sectarianism, and promoting good relations & social cohesion.

What does the government mean by social cohesion?

The document does not provide a definition but UK Cities (2007) defines social cohesion as ‘the thread that holds the fabric of community together’. It sets out key features of social cohesion:

- **Adequate material conditions:** housing, employment, healthcare, education and income.
- **Good passive relationships:** tolerance; respect; peace and freedom from fear.
- **Good active relationships:** networks; exchange; interaction and people support each other.
- **Social/economic inclusion:** belonging; welcoming; embracing of difference and choice.
- **Equality:** ensuring everyone has equal access to all of the above.

Questions to consider

1. What do you think the government should do to promote good relations and social cohesion?
2. How would this improve your everyday life experience?
3. How can government make sure their plan is actually carried out?
4. How would they know that good relations and social cohesion existed?

The Vision for the Future

“A society in which racial equality and diversity is supported, understood, valued and respected and where people of minority ethnic backgrounds have a sense of belonging which is acknowledged and valued by people from all backgrounds.”

To make this vision of belonging a reality the government has identified six aims to be shared by government and society in working together to achieve the three strategic goals. These aims are:

- Elimination of Racial Inequality
- Combating racism and hate crime
- Equality of Service Provision
- Participation
- Social Cohesion
- Capacity Building.

The three additional aspects here are:

Participation: To increase participation, representation and a sense of “belonging” of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in all aspects of public, political, economic, social and cultural life.

Social Cohesion: To strengthen social relations, interactions and ties between different faiths and cultural backgrounds, both long standing within Northern Ireland and recent arrivals to these shores, guided by overarching human rights norms.

Capacity building: To support and enable minority ethnic communities develop leadership and collective capacity at local and regional level, contributing to fulfilling these shared aims.

Questions to consider:

1. Does this vision seem like a good one to you? What, if anything, would you add?
2. Do you think the Vision should extend beyond minority ethnicity to faith-based minorities?
3. Do you think that asylum seekers and refugees also belong within this strategy?
4. How important is retaining your own cultural identity to you?
5. Should there be a seventh shared aim: to retain one's own cultural identity?
6. How can your retention of your cultural identity be supported?
7. If this vision was real – would you feel welcome, valued and at home here?

The Holistic Approach

The government recognises:

- Individuals have their own unique identity. It is shaped by many things beyond their ethnicity. The government recognises that inequalities, prejudice, exclusion victimisation and 'hate' crime exist beyond racial inequalities. These include on gender; disability; sexual orientation; political opinion; religion and age – from all of which the government have a legal duty to protect people. The same individual can therefore fit into several categories of people vulnerable to such inequality, suffer greater hardship as a result, and require greater support and protection of their rights.
- The impact of other social and economic factors: educational background; employment status; with/ without care duties for children/ adult dependents.
- The impact of the political, cultural and sectarian divisions within the 'majority' communities in N. Ireland

It proposes to link the Racial Equality Strategy closely with the key Strategies of 'Delivering Social Change (addressing poverty and exclusion) and Towards Building United Community (addressing the legacy of conflict in N. Ireland)

Questions to consider:

1. Is this a good approach? What are its strengths and weaknesses for racial equality and eradication of racism?
2. Are there other strategies, intersections / legal obligations RES should also link with? E.g. disability; gender; religion; immigration?

Some of the issues which are acknowledged in the RES document

'Tackling inequalities'

General problems in ensuring equal treatment and equal access to services are identified as:

- Apathy [in the public service]
- Poor understanding by public authorities,
- Failure by public authorities to get information to the people who need it
- Lack of resources
- The language barrier
- Lack of information
- Training needs of public sector staff
- The cultural needs of individuals and groups

Employment:

- Low grade, low paid employment appears commonplace, despite many individuals having high qualifications
- In-work and child poverty is problematic
- Access to and uptake of benefit entitlements unclear
- Access to professional training and skills development limited

Housing

- Poor management by landlords
- High costs
- Overcrowding

Health

- Not enough information on Health Outcomes

Education

- Not enough information on Education Outcomes

Eradicating Racism

- Minority ethnic groups have experienced racism as service users, employees and pupils,
- Mixed responses from organisations, employers and schools in response to this reality

Good relations and social cohesion

- Impact of legacy of sectarianism on racial equality and racist behaviour.

Questions to consider

1. What other issues need to be acknowledged here?
2. Should access to Arts & Leisure be included?
3. Should opportunities for advancement be included?
4. Should Children's rights / protections be specifically included?

The Nuts and Bolts of the Matter: Making it Happen

The government sets out in the proposals that it expects the strategy to be delivered through action by:

- Existing Government Departments
- Existing Public agencies
- Racial Equality Unit;
- Racial Equality Panel;
- Racial Equality Forum;
- Voluntary and Community organisations representing; Minority ethnic communities; wider community

The government does not expect to make additional financial resources available beyond that which already exists, but Government departments can bid for finance to support ethnic monitoring to measure improvements.

The government currently provides approx. £1.1 million through the Racial Equality Unit for community actions

Questions for consideration?

1. Are you interested in participating in the Panel; Forum or community actions?
2. How do you think these should be supported and resourced?
3. What needs to be done to build capacity in the community?
4. What can the community do at local and neighbourhood level?

Finally...

Is there anything else you wish to say?