



**Study on Racism in the Northern Ireland  
Further Education Sector**

**Executive Summary**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

1. In the following paragraphs we set out the key findings from our research into Racism in the Further Education (FE) sector. The broad aim of the research is to improve our understanding of the extent and nature of racism within the FE sector in Northern Ireland. The terms of reference also called for an assessment of the current policies and procedures within the FE sector with regard to racial equality, essentially their fitness for purpose, and to consider in light of the research and our review of the literature what other steps could be taken to tackle this issue.

### Methodology

2. The research methodology involved a combination of qualitative<sup>1</sup> and quantitative approaches. The first element on the qualitative side was a review of the literature to identify both the types of problems that had been identified elsewhere and the forms of intervention that had been adopted to deal with them.
3. The qualitative elements of our research also included a wide consultation process with key stakeholders including representatives of ethnic minority groups to gather their views on our research approach and survey tools. In addition, these consultations also provided them with an opportunity to give us their views on the nature and extent of racism within the FE sector.
4. The final qualitative element of our approach involved cases studies of 6 Colleges of Further Education including focus groups with current and potential students from ethnic minority backgrounds, however the latter proved difficult to arrange. The case studies were intended to provide us with a picture of the current policies with regard to racial equality within FE Colleges and, through our student focus groups, a more personal assessment of the nature and extent of racism in the Colleges to complement the more quantitative findings from our staff and student surveys.
5. To provide the quantitative perspective we undertook a survey of students both indigenous (n=893) and ethnic minority (n=200) to get their views on the College environment, attitudes to race and ethnicity (indigenous only) and the incidence and experiences of racial harassment in College. We also undertook a survey of FE College staff both teaching (n=116) and non-teaching (n=105).

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<sup>1</sup> Lists of our key stakeholder consultees, case study colleges and focus groups attendances are set out in Appendix 1 of the main report.

## KEY ISSUES

### *Literature Review*

6. The purpose of our literature review and the key stakeholder interviews was to identify and explore issues in relation to the nature of racism in the FE sector, the current policy responses within FE Colleges and the wider context with regard to race and ethnicity in Northern Ireland. The existing literature includes very few studies on racism in FE. However, it does provide some idea of the issues faced by ethnic minorities in accessing public services generally and in other elements of the NI education system. The main issues raised by our review included the following;

#### *Context*

- The rapidly changing demographic picture in Northern Ireland due to the major influx of people from the newly joined EU member states in Eastern Europe, particularly: Poland; Lithuania; Slovakia; and the Czech Republic. It is worth noting that this influx has not been evenly spread geographically with particular concentrations in urban areas and areas where the food processing industry is concentrated.
- A concurrent and dramatic increase (five fold) in the level of racially motivated attacks in Northern Ireland.

#### *Literature on racism in education and in NI generally*

- Connolly, P. (2002)<sup>2</sup> carried out research on race and racism in Northern Ireland which raised a number of interesting points in relation to access to public services. These were as follows:
  - For those members of ethnic minority groups where English is not their first language the language barrier can be a major obstacle in accessing services;
  - There was generally a lack of information available in accessible formats to inform ethnic minorities about the services available and their entitlements;
  - It was felt that there was a lack of understanding of cultural sensitivities amongst public sector staff and that training was required to improve this;
  - There was a lack of facilities to cater for cultural sensitive needs especially in relation to diet and religious observance.
- Connolly, P. and Keenan, M. (2000) carried out a study on ethnic minority experiences of education, training and employment in NI. Their key findings included the following:

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<sup>2</sup> Full references set out in the Bibliography at Appendix 5 of the main report.

- Racial harassment was a common experience for ethnic minority children in schools;
  - Harassment tended to take place in the more informal areas of the school, including corridors and the playground;
  - The perpetrators tended to be older, male and were more likely to engage in harassment when part of a bigger group;
  - The response of schools to incidents of racial harassment tended to vary enormously. While some schools dealt with specific incidents reasonably successfully, the majority tended to respond inappropriately, generally by ignoring or minimising the incident.
- The most relevant study is that undertaken by the Institute of Conflict Research (2005) in association with East Tyrone College into the “New Migrant Communities in East Tyrone” which included a survey of FE students. The main findings were as follows:
    - Community background did not seem to affect attitudes to race;
    - Males were more likely to hold negative attitudes;
    - While 86% of students were willing to accept someone from a different ethnic background or nationality into their class, only 40% evidenced positive attitudes towards ethnic minorities;
    - Fifty-four percent of students felt that it was the responsibility of ethnic minorities to integrate into the NI culture;
    - Fifty-four percent had witnessed some form of racism, mainly verbal abuse (50%) although 21% had witnessed physical violence.
7. Our literature review therefore highlights that there have been major changes in the nature and size of ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland. Previous research studies have all identified racism and racial harassment as a problem in our society; the East Tyrone study is particularly graphic and relevant in highlighting these problems. The studies have also thrown up a number of generic problems that face ethnic minorities in accessing public services with language being a key barrier.

#### *Equality Legislation*

8. Our literature review also reviewed the current equality legislation within Northern Ireland highlighting the statutory duties that it imposed on all public bodies including FE colleges. The main legislation includes the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. They place the following requirements on FE Colleges, to:
- Eliminate unlawful race discrimination;

- Promote equality of opportunity; and
- Promote good relations between people from different racial groups.

The legislation also specifies a number of duties for public bodies:

- Prepare and maintain a written race equality policy;
  - Assess the impact of its policies on students and staff from different racial groups through screening and equality impact assessment;
  - Monitor the admission of students and the recruitment and career progress of staff by racial groups;
  - Report to the Equality Commission on their arrangements for and progress in ensuring compliance with the legislation.
9. This is an important context for our research on College policies in relation to racial equality given that race is one of the 9 categories specified under the Section 75 legislation and as set out above that legislation already places a number of requirements and duties on Colleges.

## STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

10. The purpose of our key stakeholder interviews, particularly the ethnic minority representative groups, was to help us ensure that our research approach was comprehensive, i.e. that we were aware of all the key issues and secondly to identify specific areas of concern for them. The main issues raised were as follows:
- There was a general consensus that colleges tend to be reactive rather than proactive in dealing with issues of racial harassment and bullying. However, all the stakeholders acknowledged the commitment of colleges in promoting a respect for diversity and in combating racism.
  - A number of our consultees felt that what is currently done in the equality arena is too much paper and compliance-based and that greater practical application is required to impact on racism<sup>3</sup>.
  - A number of consultees suggested that there is a need for colleges to actively promote and publicise ongoing engagement on issues of race and ethnicity at both director and management board level.
  - A number of stakeholders indicated that they felt there was lack of consistency across the sector with some colleges 'doing better' than

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<sup>3</sup> This was a general concern with regard to the implementation of equality legislation across the public sector although as such it clearly applies to the FE sector as well.

others, although to some extent this can be related to the nature and scale of ethnic minorities within the College itself<sup>4</sup>.

- Many stakeholders felt the FE sector could do more to explore issues relating to race and ethnicity across a range of courses with many group specific stakeholders expressing a desire that FE colleges should promote awareness amongst ethnic minority students of their history and culture.
11. Overall, our consultees recognised that all Colleges were making some effort to tackle racism and encourage participation by ethnic minority groups. However, this was qualified by the view that some Colleges were doing it better than others. In general, they would like to see the Colleges be more proactive in developing links with ethnic minority groups and would like to see issues around race, ethnicity and culture more integrated into the mainstream of FE provision.

## FE STUDENT SURVEY FINDINGS

12. Our student survey focused on four main topics: perceptions of the college environment amongst both indigenous white and ethnic minority students; the attitudes of indigenous students to race and ethnicity; the incidence of racial harassment from the perspective of indigenous students; and experiences of racial harassment amongst ethnic minority students. The main findings were as follows;

### *College Environment*

- Indigenous and ethnic minority students were more likely to view staff as “very welcoming” (58.7%) compared with students (33.6%).
- The majority of ethnic minority students are positive about the college environment but to a lesser extent than indigenous students with differences in the range of 5 to 15 percentage points. The main areas of difference were;
  - “Teaching staff are upfront about dealing with incidents of racial harassment and discrimination”, 69.9% agreed compared to 85.9%; and
  - “the Student Union at my college is actively involved in stopping racism on my campus”, 59.5% agreed compared to 72.0%
- Full-time ethnic minority students were much more negative about the college environment than part-time with large differences of between 20 and 40 percentage points in their responses to our questions on the College environment. There was a similar pattern for non-white/white

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<sup>4</sup> More specifically the Colleges that were highlighted as doing a good job tended to be those with large populations of ethnic minority students.

ethnic minority students with the former more negative. The two largest differences were;

- “Non-teaching staff are aware of and sensitive to the problems faced by ethnic minority students” 48.3% agreed compared to 78.1%;
- “The Student Union at my college is actively involved in stopping racism on my campus” 43.3% agreed compared to 70.5%.
- Female ethnic minority students were also less positive in their views about the college environment on average by 15 percentage points. The differences in their views were particularly marked in relation to;
  - “My College is committed to improving relations between people of different races/ethnic origins”; 74.6% agreed compared to 88.5%
  - “The Student Union at my College is actively involved in stopping racism”. 55% agreed compared to 78.6%

### **Personal Attitudes**

- Overall indigenous students were broadly supportive of a multicultural society with large majorities of indigenous students supporting the following statements:
  - “It’s a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures” (87.5%);
  - “I’m alright about being around people of different ethnic backgrounds” (89.5%);
  - “All races of people are equal” (90.0%).
- While the responses to most of these statements by indigenous students are very positive, their response to the statement “Northern Ireland is weakened by people of different ethnic origins sticking to their old ways” is somewhat worrying with 56.9% agreeing with this statement. This would seem to coincide with the East Tyrone Survey with 54% of students feeling that it was the responsibility of ethnic minorities to integrate in to NI culture.
- There was a consistent difference between male and female indigenous students with male students less likely to agree with statements supporting a multi-cultural society. In particular, there was a 13 percentage point difference in the number of positive responses to the statement “It is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures”. This is congruent with other studies which have tended to find higher levels of racism amongst males (Connolly, 2002; NILT, 2005; ICR, 2005).

- Our survey indicated that the vast majority of FE students would not mind having someone from an ethnic minority as a work colleague (81.3%) or a neighbour (77.4%). Similarly, a large, albeit slightly smaller, percentage (69.1%) would not mind a close relative marrying someone from an ethnic minority. However, it is interesting to note how as the relationship becomes closer the percentage who “mind” increases. This pattern was also apparent in the NILT (2005) survey results.

### ***Incidence and Experiences<sup>5</sup>***

- Our survey showed that verbal abuse in its many guises is by far the most prevalent form of racist abuse, with 13.4% of indigenous students claiming to have witnessed such behaviour with a further 14.1% having heard about it.
  - In relation to the types of racial harassment experienced by ethnic minority students the level of incidence varies between 20% and 10% of ethnic minority respondents. Perhaps most worryingly, however, the ratio of reported to non-reported incidents is about 1 to 2.
  - The level of racist incidents experienced by full-time ethnic minority students is roughly 4 times greater than that for part-time ethnic minority students.
  - The difference in full-time and part-time student experiences is reinforced by the fact that full-time ethnic minority students (35.9%) are more than twice as likely to have felt the need to hide elements of their ethnic background in order to be able to “fit-in” at college.
  - This need to conform in order to fit-in is also felt keenly by non-white ethnic minority students with 31.1% indicating that they have felt the need to hide elements of their ethnic background in order to “fit-in”.
- 13.** The most striking finding from our student survey is the extent to which full-time ethnic minority students are subjected to racial harassment with 45% having experienced some form of harassment at College whilst 1 in 5 experience it on a weekly basis. In addition some 35.9% of full-time ethnic minority students have felt the need to hide elements of their ethnic background to fit-in.

### **FE STAFF SURVEY**

- 14.** Our staff survey involved teaching (n=105) and non-teaching staff (n=116) and covered similar ground to the student survey. The topics covered included: the college environment; attitudes to race and ethnicity and

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<sup>5</sup> The term incidence in this context refers to racial harassment witnessed or heard about by indigenous students while experienced refers to the responses by ethnic minority students to questions about their own experience of racial harassment.



awareness of incidents of racial harassment. In addition we asked staff whether they had received training in equality or good relations.

### ***College Environment***

- In general, staff had a more positive view of the college environment than indigenous and ethnic minority students. The gap is generally larger with respect to the views of ethnic minority students and is in the region of 10 to 20 percentage points. The largest differences related to:
  - “my college is committed to improving relations between people of different ethnic origins” 97.8% compared to 78.5%;
  - “Teaching Staff are up front about dealing with incidents of racial harassment and discrimination” 94.7% compared to 69.9%
- These gaps are even larger for full-time ethnic minority students by on average 10 percentage points.
- Full-time ethnic minority students are twice as likely to state that teaching and non-teaching staff discriminate against ethnic minorities but on the other hand are less likely to state that students are nasty to people from ethnic minorities 38.3% compared to 52.7% for staff.
- However, the most striking difference relates to the statement “racism is a problem at my college” with full-time ethnic minority students 3 times more likely to agree with this statement than FE staff, 26% and 8.5% respectively.
- These gaps are of some concern suggesting that staff are unaware of the extent of discrimination and harassment that ethnic minority students experience. However, earlier research by Connolly (2000), albeit related to experiences in schools, suggests that most harassment takes place in the more informal areas of school such as corridors or playgrounds where teachers are less likely to observe it.

### ***Staff Attitudes to Ethnic Minorities***

- In relation to staff attitudes, their responses indicate that the vast majority of them don't have an issue with regard to the presence of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. However, it is worth noting that there is a small minority (10.2%) who feel that some ethnic minority groups don't fit into Northern Ireland society.

### ***Staff Training***

- While it is a minority there were still approximately 30% of staff who had received very little or no training in the areas of equality law, statutory duties and good relations. In particular 36.4% of staff stated

that they had received very little or no training with regard to the good relations duty.

15. The overall picture for FE staff shows low levels of racist attitudes. However, it should be noted that there is a small minority some 10.2% with racist views who feel that there are ethnic minority groups that do not fit in to NI Society.

## **POLICY REVIEW**

16. Our review of the current policy regime in relation to racial equality in colleges is based on our six College case studies and a review of the written policy documents available to us. The case studies provide an overview of the current activities of colleges while the policy documents allow us to look at more specific policy issues.

## **Case Studies**

### *Overall*

- Across our case studies of FE colleges it appears that colleges are well beyond a mere 'tick box' mode in complying with statutory obligations with respect to race and good relations. All colleges have chosen to actively address racism and good relations.
- All colleges evidenced a willingness to learn from the evaluation of their own activities. With the aim of further developing good practice throughout the FE sector, all our case study colleges showed an active willingness to share experiences and good practice between colleges.

### *Recruitment and Marketing*

- All case study colleges stated that recognition of ethnic and racial diversity was a key consideration in the development and dissemination of promotional materials such as leaflets and posters. These were made available in a number of languages. Although from our visits it was clear that these materials were more accessible in some Colleges than others.

### *How are the specific needs of ethnic minority pupils addressed?*

- None of the case study colleges were able to cite substantial resources devoted to translation services. Limited resources were consistently cited as the constraint in expanding services in this area. Nonetheless some colleges did report that specific actions were taken to provide translation services to those ethnic minority students wishing to access student support services. There was little evidence of specialist advice or support services targeted specifically at or for ethnic minority students.

### *Incidences of Racism*

- Amongst the six case study Colleges only one College reported a complaint of a racist nature. All College staff interviewed felt ethnic minority students felt safe in the College environment. This level of reported incidence seems low compared to our student survey results above.

### *Dissemination of policies on racial harassment?*

- All case study colleges had explicit policies with respect to bullying and harassment by either students or staff. Generally these policies addressed a range of categories including, race/ethnicity, religious belief and political opinion, gender and disability. In all case study colleges the induction process for full-time students includes explicit signposting to policies on harassment bullying within the wider ambit of policies on equality, diversity and good relations.

### *Staffing: Training and Awareness*

- All colleges state that as part of the induction process for full-time staff, both teaching and support staff, training and awareness sessions regarding equality, good relations and cultural diversity are provided within the wider commitment to staff training under equality schemes approved by the Equality Commission. However, many colleges have developed and delivered innovative diversity training for staff well beyond that required by Equality Schemes.
- There is, however, a recognised gap in relation to the provision of such training for part-time staff. There is a similar issue in terms of induction for part-time students.

### **Review of policy documents**

- The first thing to say is that the main policy areas (see Table 7.1 in main report) that are likely to impact on racial equality are already subject to a rigorous review process in compliance with the requirements of Section 75. Also of note in this context is the issue of mainstreaming and the consequent need to ensure that equality is not treated as a separate policy entity but is considered in the development of all policies.
- That said, we welcome the draft race equality strategy produced by ANIC in conjunction with the Colleges. It pulls together the relevant issues and sets out the requirements under the statutory duties and the roles and responsibilities of staff and students within Colleges in a very clear and accessible way.
- However, we also understand why the Colleges have decided to use this information as a basis to develop their own local policies. It is clear

to us from our experiences with the case studies that the circumstances faced by each College are different with regard to ethnic minorities and their related issues. It is our conclusion that a “one size fits all” approach is simply not appropriate.

- The second point we would make is that while policies themselves may be well drafted and considered it is the implementation of that policy on the ground which influences the outcomes. In this case reductions in racial harassment and greater opportunities for ethnic minorities to participate and progress in FE.
- There are a number of specific points that are made which may help to improve services to ethnic minority groups:
  - Colleges might consider where appropriate the referral of ethnic minority students to a BACP<sup>6</sup> accredited counselling service with the capability to provide services in the first language of the student.
  - Colleges should ensure that, in particular, marketing or informational material relating to student services and counselling is readily available in a range of languages.
  - College’s policies on electronic communications already include a reference to the effect that “obscene, inappropriate or offensive material must not be accessed or distributed”. However, we feel that it might be helpful if this was more specific in relation to equality related issues stating that messages which contained material viewed as derogatory or discriminatory on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, religion, political opinion, race or disability could be considered as bullying or harassment.
  - A key issue in terms of access to FE for many ethnic minority groups is qualification equivalences. Where this is an issue Colleges should consider using the National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) the UK wide Agency under the Department for Education and Skills which claims that it is “the only official information provider on the comparability of international qualifications from over 180 countries world wide.

**18.** In broad terms Colleges are already working to try and eliminate racial inequality and any forms of racial bullying or harassment. There are areas where they can look to improve but these need to take into account local circumstances and needs.

## CONCLUSIONS

**19.** The most striking finding from our study is the extent to which full-time ethnic minority students are subjected to racial harassment with 45% having

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<sup>6</sup> British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

experienced some form of harassment at College whilst 1 in 5 experience it on a weekly basis. In addition some 35.9% of Full-time ethnic minority students have felt the need to hide elements of their ethnic background to fit-in.

20. However, In general ethnic minority students are relatively positive in their assessment of the college environment, although in line with their greater experience of harassment full-time and non-white ethnic minority students tend to be more negative in their assessment of the college environment.
21. There is also a large gap between the perceptions of staff with regard to the college environment for ethnic minority students and those stated by the ethnic minority students themselves particularly full-time and non-white ethnic minority students. Clearly if the problem is to be addressed staff need to recognise that there is a problem.
22. In responses to our questions there is limited evidence of racist attitudes amongst both FE Staff and indigenous FE students, with slightly higher levels of racist attitudes amongst students. However even the racist attitudes that are exhibited by a very small number of staff are a concern and show that there is no room for complacency in tackling racism within further education.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

23. In relation to the way forward we feel that a prescriptive approach is not appropriate for a number of reasons:
  - Each of the Colleges operates within a different community structure and dynamic in relation to the incidence and extent of particular ethnic minority groups. It is therefore important the Colleges identify approaches that work for them; there is no “one size fits all” solution in this context.
  - All of our case study Colleges were already engaged in initiatives to deal with this issue and in a number of cases we have highlighted their current activities as best practice. It would therefore not be appropriate to use a prescriptive recommendation style when some Colleges are already engaged in this way.
  - When trying to tackle a problem like racism, with its associated adverse effects of discrimination and harassment on racial grounds, it is often not the quality of the written policies and procedures that matters but rather the way in which they are implemented. With an issue of this type it is as much the spirit of the intervention as the nature of the intervention itself that makes the difference. This is illustrated well by

the following quote by Jewson (1990)<sup>7</sup> in relation to race equality in employment

*“Our case studies do not suggest that there is a single formulator employment practice which can be said to guarantee the fair and equal operation of procedures or equality of distribution of members of different ethnic categories in the workforce. The effects of formalisation are equivocal. The existence of formal procedures in itself is no guarantee of fairness. The principles on which formalisation is built may themselves be unfair. Even when fair, formal procedure may not be implemented. Even when implemented it may be subject to manipulation and circumvention. It may, moreover, be merely token” (Jewson et al., 1990 p 12)”*

24. We have therefore attempted both through the examples of best practice listed in Section 8 and in our anti-racism check list to encourage Colleges to think about the issue of racism in new ways and identify new and more inclusive approaches to tackling it.
25. The questions set out in our check-list can all be viewed as recommendations, albeit that we feel that it is up to the Colleges to identify which areas they should act on based on what they are currently doing and what they perceive the needs to be in their local area.
26. In terms of implementation and reporting we feel that Colleges should provide the Department with a short narrative in relation to each policy area in the check list setting out what steps they intend to take and their expected outcomes.
27. However, there are some recommendations which are universal and while we recognise that Colleges may already have done or are in the process of doing some of these activities it is nonetheless useful to reiterate them.
  - Colleges need to ensure that they establish strong two-way communications with leaders and representatives of ethnic minority groups in their locality. They need to be proactive in seeking their views and ensure that they know who to contact within the College if any issues do arise. This approach is the best way to avoid problems and encourage greater participation by ethnic minority groups.
  - It is important that the College’s policies and procedures in relation to diversity and good relations are communicated to all stakeholders. It is particular important that all students and staff should be aware of the procedures for reporting and dealing with incidents of racial harassment.

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<sup>7</sup> Jewson, N, Mason, D, Waters, S and Harvey, J (1990) Ethnic minorities and employment practice: a study of six organisations. Employment Department Group Research Papers No.76. London: Department of Employment.

- A senior member of staff, at Director level, should be allocated responsibility for ensuring a whole college approach to diversity and race issues. It is important that policies on racial diversity and good relations are given visible and enthusiastic support at a senior level within the College.
- Further Colleges should implement steps in staff training and student induction to ensure that all students are fully supported and given the confidence to report all incidents of harassment, abuse or racist behaviour in light of the high level of unreported incidents of racial harassment with only one in three being reported.
- Ethnic and racial diversity should be a key consideration in the development and dissemination of promotional materials such as leaflets and posters. Through the use of positive and inclusive images of ethnic minority staff and student images.
- Colleges should look to be innovative in designing provision to meet the varied needs of ethnic minority groups. In addition where particular barriers have been identified for specific ethnic groups they should look to develop approaches to dismantle these barriers.
- Policies and practices should be in place to ensure that the college is fully equipped to respond to personal and pastoral care needs of all its students taking account of religious, ethnic and cultural concerns and backgrounds. The provision of such advice services to ethnic minority students, whose first language is not English, in their own language should also be considered. Although we recognise that this may not always be practicable due to the possible cost implications it may be possible working in partnership with local ethnic community groups to identify cost effective ways of delivering such a service.
- We would lastly stress the importance of monitoring in ensuring that the College is able to react quickly to any issues which arise with regard to participation or achievement amongst ethnic minority groups.