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## **Meeting of the Joint Committee on Education and Science**

**Presentation by the National Consultative  
Committee on Racism and Interculturalism  
(NCCRI)**

**BRIEFING PAPER**

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## Introduction

Education is one of the most important ways of combating racism and developing a more inclusive, intercultural society in Ireland.

In recent years a debate has emerged about the function and role of education in an increasingly diverse Ireland. If one assumes that the purpose of education is to prepare children for the reality of a multicultural world, then now is the time to strategically plan the implementation of such an approach in Ireland. There are many very valuable initiatives already in progress in Ireland, in both the governmental and non-governmental sectors, but these approaches have tended to be piecemeal. In order to fully realise the goal of an intercultural education system it is necessary to start 'joining the dots'.

The key priority is to develop an intercultural education framework at all levels within education, which seeks to build on existing initiatives, which seeks to remove existing barriers to access and which makes reference to statutory equality policy

The National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR) which arose from commitments undertaken at the Durban World Conference Against Racism in 2001, is currently being finalised by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. This Plan could provide Ireland with an opportunity to implement such an approach.

This presentation will seek to demonstrate the context in which an intercultural educational framework is emerging. This context is not just about the increasing diversity in Ireland, but also the experiences of minority ethnic groups including the Traveller community.<sup>1</sup> Despite a lack of data evidence is emerging that minority ethnic groups suffer from disadvantage and discrimination in the Irish education system.

The NCCRI advocates a holistic approach to intercultural education which recognises the need to support diversity in all sectors of the education system. This presentation proposes a ten-step framework in order to fully implement an intercultural approach to education.

The NCCRI welcomes this first opportunity to address the Joint Committee on Education and Science, and looks forward to stimulating and productive interaction and discussion in the future.

This presentation will be divided into 7 main parts:

1. Minority ethnic groups in Ireland
2. Racism in Ireland
3. Interculturalism
4. Evidence of discrimination in education
5. Education policy in context
6. Anti-discrimination legislation and the Equality Bill 2004, and finally
7. Implementing intercultural education

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<sup>1</sup> Here after the terms 'minority ethnic group' is used.

## 1. Minority Ethnic Groups in Ireland

There has always been cultural diversity in Ireland, despite the widely believed myth that Ireland has been and still is a homogeneous and a mono-cultural society or the defining of diversity solely along religious grounds (Protestant and Roman Catholic). However

The 2002 Census demonstrated that 5.8% of the population are non-nationals, while 2.7% are UK nationals.

there has been a significant broadening of cultural diversity in recent years, both in terms of numbers of people, and national or ethnic origin. In Ireland there are now more visible populations of black Irish and other EU and non-EU citizens.

There are now approximately 160 different nationalities living in Ireland. According to the 2002 census there were 224,261 non-Irish people usually resident in Ireland. 133,436 of which are EU nationals, 23,105 are nationals of other European countries, 20,981 are African, 21,779 are Asian, and of the remainder the vast majority are from North America and Australia. The 2002 Census of population indicates that non-nationals make up 5.8 percent of the population, of which almost half were UK nationals (2.7 percent).

### *Traveller Community*

The 2002 Census indicates that there are 23,681 Irish Travellers, representing approximately 0.65 percent of the population. Traveller access and participation in education, as indicated by enrolment, continues to be very mixed. The education report submitted to the Monitoring Committee of the Task Force of the Traveller Community in November 2002 stated that:

It is to be acknowledged that the drop out rate for Traveller children has been unacceptably high. Greater efforts will be made with the assistance of the Education and Welfare Board in particular to encourage Traveller children to remain in school until they meet the statutory age requirement.

The ECRI second report on Ireland refers to the fact that ‘Traveller children have in the past faced extreme marginalisation as regards access to education in Ireland, often being entirely excluded from the schools system, placed in segregated classes, or dropping out of the system early’. These conclusions are supported by data which has recently become available from the 2002 national census on the educational achievements of members of the Traveller community. The majority of members of the Traveller community do not progress beyond primary level education.

Education Level	Total	Total whose full-time education has ceased	Primary (incl. no formal education)	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Third level: Non-degree	Third level: Degree or higher
Population							
Persons	13680	11035	7491	1444	338	81	116
Males	6620	5423	3786	632	138	33	62
Females	7060	5612	3705	812	200	48	54

**Table 1: Irish Travellers aged 15 years and over, classified by highest level of education completed and sex, 2002. Source: CSO**

### *Other Minority Ethnic Groups*

In the 10-year period from 1994-2003, some 5,700 people, have been recognised as refugees in Ireland.<sup>2</sup> There were 7,483 asylum applications in Ireland in 2003, compared with 11,598 in 2002. This decrease exceeds the 16 percent decrease worldwide noted by UNHCR.

Age	No. in Direct Provision
0-4	1,067
5-12	418
13-18	290
19-25	879
26-35	2,016
36-45	611
46-55	147
56-55	22
66+	6
Total	5,456

**Table 2: Age Profile of Asylum Seekers in Direct Provision as of 30 September 2003, Source: RIA**

Despite recent concern regarding economic growth the numbers of migrant workers has continued to increase. In 2003 21,956 new work permits were issued, and 25,039 renewed, to nationals from 140 different countries. The top ten countries from which the new work permits originated were Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Philippines, South Africa, Romania, China, Brazil and Australia.

Nationality	Number	% of total non-nationals
United Kingdom	3,304	35.3
Nigeria	775	8.3
USA	580	6.2
Spain	547	5.9
Germany	541	5.8

**Table 3: Top five nationalities amongst non-national students in secondary education in Ireland**

## **2. Racism**

Racism is a specific form of discrimination and exclusion based on the false belief that some 'races'<sup>3</sup> are inherently superior to others because of different skin colour, nationality, ethnic or cultural background. Racism deprives people of their basic human rights, dignity and respect.

There are different forms of racism in Ireland including the racism experienced by:

- Travellers on the basis of their distinct ethnic identity and nomadic tradition
- Migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers
- Minority ethnic groups, including black people on the basis of their skin colour and ethnic and/or national identity, regardless of their legal status.

It is also important to emphasise the connection between racism and other forms of discrimination including gender, disability and sexual orientation.

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<sup>2</sup> Integrating Ireland, Sanctuary, January 2004, available at: [www.integratingireland.ie](http://www.integratingireland.ie)

<sup>3</sup> The term 'race' has been used in the past in an attempt to rank people according to physical and biological criteria. Nowadays 'race' is often written in inverted commas to underline the difficulty in defining that term.

### **3. Interculturalism**

The concept of interculturalism is one that sees cultural diversity as a strength that can enrich society. Interculturalism recognises that racism exists and needs to be challenged. An intercultural approach is the development of strategies, policies and practices that encourage interaction, understanding, and respect between different cultures and ethnic groups. It is the opposite to assimilation (the absorption of minority ethnic groups into the dominant culture) and goes beyond multiculturalism which tolerated minority groups culture with no acknowledgement of the need to change the negative attitudes and practices of the majority population.

### **4. Discrimination in Education**

There are no baseline figures to assess the outcomes for minority ethnic groups from the Irish education system. There is, therefore, no quantifiable means of assessing the extent to which existing education strategies are benefiting minorities or to effectively evaluate new strategies.<sup>4</sup> Beyond enrolment figures very little is known about the experience of minority ethnic groups. Though there is no direct monitoring of racist incidences and discrimination in the Irish education system, the nature of the both direct and indirect discrimination can be analyzed with reference to those incidents which are recorded, and through anecdotal evidence and qualitative research.

#### *ODEI – The Equality Tribunal*

The ODEI – The Equality Tribunal issues a decision on 28 May 2003 regarding nationality discrimination in the third level grant system. The Equality Officer found that the nationality clause in the administration of third level grants was in contravention of the Equal Status Act 2000, and that:

in the interests of preventing future unlawful discrimination, that the Department annul the relevant clause completely. He also recommended that the Department, in designing the grant schemes in future, should take full account of the provisions of the Equal Status Act 2000.<sup>5</sup>

See below for a discussion of the impact of the Equality Bill 2004 on this judgment.

#### *The Equality Authority*

In 2002 the Equality Authority dealt with 40 cases in the education area, of which seven invoked the race ground and 4 involved members of the Traveller community.<sup>6</sup> There have been a number of high profile cases regarding the access of Traveller children to schools.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Department of Education and Science has recognised the need to review the outcome and the experiences of Traveller children within the education system for some time and has stated that it is currently examining ways to obtain more specific information in this area without individualising the statistics.

<sup>5</sup> Date of Issue 28 May 2003, available at: [www.odei.ie](http://www.odei.ie) (17.07.03).

<sup>6</sup> Equality Authority, Annual Report 2002, p.39. It should be noted that these are instances of casework by the Equality Authority and consequently do not necessarily refer to legal cases.

<sup>7</sup> Holmquist, K. (2003) Making a Case for Equality in Education, in: The Irish Times.

### *NCCRI Racist Monitoring*

In its Racist Incidents Monitoring Reports the NCCRI has recorded a number of incidences which relate to the education system.<sup>8</sup> In the report for the period November 2002 – April 2003 the following incidences were recorded:

- A South African teenager was subjected to racist verbal abuse by four of his classmates over a period. His mother approached the principal of the school who reprimanded the classmates in question. The students were asked to apologise to the victim and write a letter of apology. The racial taunts ceased.
- A list of students names posted in Trinity arts building was removed, covered with white-supremacist graffiti and pinned to the notice board of the MPhil in Ethnic and Racial Studies. This incident highlights the need for the administration in universities and bodies such as the Union of Students in Ireland to continue to monitor and condemn racist incidents especially considering the alleged rise in extreme right-wing groups in universities that was reported to our office during this six-month period.

In the May-October 2002 report the NCCRI noted the following cases:

- A Nigerian national was subjected to racist comments and jokes at an academic institution based in Dublin. He contended that when he complained to the principal of the institution, his complaint was ignored.<sup>9</sup>
- In September 2002 a school bus driver in Dundalk was convicted under the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989 for using words that could stir up hatred and for the use of threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour towards a 12-year-old boy (media report).<sup>10</sup>

### **5. Education Policy Context**

There are already a number of significant policy initiatives taking place which are relevant to building an intercultural dimension into education policy, broadly these include:

- *Curricula revision:* The curriculum at both primary and second level has undergone extensive revision in recent years and is now being phased in.
- *Additional resources and supports.* Additional resources are provided to schools at both primary and second level for the teaching of non-nationals and Travellers, including additional teachers and capitation payments
- *Increased awareness:* Through the publication of guidelines, resource materials, conferences and departmental statements, there is increased awareness of the need to develop intercultural education strategies and greater awareness of schools and colleges arising from the Equal Status Act.<sup>11</sup>
- *Whole school planning:* For some time, the Department of Education and Science has promoted a 'whole school planning' in order to create optimum learning

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<sup>8</sup> In May 2001 the NCCRI established a complementary procedure for reporting racist incidents in Ireland. Incidents are compiled into six-monthly reports, which aim to identify key issues arising from incidents logged and to make recommendations to the government. The reports are available from the NCCRI website, [www.nccri.com](http://www.nccri.com)

<sup>9</sup> NCCRI (2002) Racist Incidences May-October 2002, available at [www.nccri.com](http://www.nccri.com) (17.07.03)

<sup>10</sup> NCCRI (2002) *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Department of Education and Science, Equality Authority (2003). Schools and the Equal Status Act.

environments at both primary and second levels. The school plan is a statement of the educational philosophy of the school, its aims and how it proposes to achieve them. It deals with the total curriculum and with the organization of all the schools resources, including staff, space, facilities, equipment, time and finance.<sup>12</sup>

- *Youth Services*: A number of national and local youth organizations have been active in developing strategies to combat racism and to raise awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity, including the Youth Against Racism and Discrimination joint initiative. The National Youth Work Development Plan covers the period 2003-2007 and includes a commitment to ‘play a part in building a mutually enriching multicultural society’.<sup>13</sup>

Further detail on recent policy initiatives is contained in Annex 2.

## 6. Anti-Discrimination Legislation

The Employment Equality Act 1998 prohibits discrimination in relation to employment on nine distinct grounds: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community. The legislation applies to public and private sector employment and consequently has applicability to employment in the education sector.

The Equal Status Act 2000 prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods, services, disposal of property and access to education, on any of the nine grounds referred to under the Employment Equality Act 1998. Provisions within the Equal Status Act, 2000 cover all educational institutions. While there are certain exemptions, the basic premise is that educational institutions should not discriminate in terms of admission, access, terms or conditions, and expulsion.

### *Equality Bill 2004*

The recently published Equality Bill 2004 amends a number of provisions of the Employment Equality Act and the Equal Status Act to give effect to a number of EU Council Directive including Council Directive 2000/43/EC on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin (otherwise known as ‘The Race Directive’), Council Directive 2000/78/EC on establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation; and Council Directive 76/207/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women.

### **Employment Equality Act 1998, §37(10)**

A religious, educational or medical institution which is under the direction or control of a body established for religious purposes or whose objectives include the provision of services in an environment which promotes certain religious values shall not be taken to discriminate against a person for the purposes of this Part or *Part II* if—

- a) it gives more favourable treatment, on the religion ground, to an employee or a prospective employee over that person where it is reasonable to do so in order to maintain the religious ethos of the institution, or
- b) it takes action which is reasonably necessary to prevent an employee or a prospective employee from undermining the religious ethos of the institution.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Education and Science, (1999). Circulars, on School Development Planning.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Education and Science, (2003). Challenges for Youth Work-National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007.

The Bill leaves section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act in force. This section allows a religious, educational or medical institution under the direction or control of a religious body to discriminate in order to maintain its religious ethos. This subsection does not contain any requirement that where difference in treatment based on a person's religion or belief, that religion or belief should constitute a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement. Such as is required by Article 4.2 of Council Directive 2000/78/EC.

Section 7 of the Equal Status Act is amended with the addition of a subsection which states that the Minister for Education and Science does not discriminate where he/she requires grants to be restricted to nationals of a member state of the EU. A submission by the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) on the Equality Bill 2004, concludes that it is very disappointing that rather than take into account the recommendations of the ODEI- The Equality Authority, discussed above, the government has chosen to approach the matter by amending the Equal Status Act.

## **7. Implementing Intercultural Education**

Recent policy statements and initiatives have recognised that what is needed is an education system which fully reflects the diverse composition of contemporary Irish society. The NCCRI advocates a holistic approach to intercultural education which recognises the need to support diversity in all sectors of the education system. In other

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words interculturalism should underpin all aspects of education including, though not limited to, pedagogical approaches, curricular content, school structures and administrative procedures.

Intercultural education would serve both to undermine racism and discrimination, as well as promote a broader understanding of and respect for diversity in Irish society.

Universities and other third level institutions also have a very clear part to play in providing developmental research and delivering services for an intercultural and anti-racist society. All universities now target fee-paying non-EEA nationals but need also to respond to the specific needs of non-EEA national already resident in Ireland as well as the specific needs of the Traveller community and other minority ethnic groups long since part of Ireland.

Given her experience at NUI Maynooth the Chair of the NCCRI, Anastasia Crickley is particularly conscious that this matter requires the whole organization approach already discussed. A clear correlation exists between quality excellence and equality concerns. It also requires targeted initiatives and resources and supports for the students, their communities and their families. Such initiatives can be successful both for the individual and in terms of the precedence and role models it establishes.

### *Challenges*

There are four key challenges which will need to be effectively and successfully addressed in order to lay the foundations for a holistic approach to intercultural education in Ireland.

1. Promoting respect for diversity and challenge prejudice and discrimination
2. Reasonably accommodate cultural and ethnic diversity
3. Reflect a statutory equality policy, which refers to all levels of the education system
4. Promote an intercultural strategy within the informal youth sector

#### **Key measures for the development of an intercultural approach to education in Ireland**

1. Develop an intercultural education strategy with reference to equality/diversity policy
2. Develop an inclusive, intercultural school environment through whole school planning
3. Accommodate cultural and ethnic diversity within the curricula
4. Develop an intercultural implementation strategy within youth work
5. Enhance access and education service delivery to Travellers
6. Enhance the participation of refugees and long-term residents in education provision
7. Enhance access and education service delivery to women and unaccompanied minors
8. Enhance provision of English as a second language
9. Evolve education related data to provide a comprehensive picture of diversity
10. Strengthen the participation of key stakeholders

### *Implementation measures*

#### **1. Develop a national intercultural education strategy with reference to equality/diversity policy**

Based on the recommendations of the Department of Education and Science report 'Promoting Anti Racism and Interculturalism in education' an overall programme aimed at the reasonable accommodation of cultural diversity at all levels of the Irish education system should be implemented through a national intercultural education strategy, with reference to broader equality policy in Ireland.

#### **2. Develop a more inclusive and intercultural school environment through the whole school planning process**

The school plan provides the most effective way of ensuring that there is reasonable accommodation of cultural diversity within individual schools. School policies have a key role to play in the development of a more inclusive school environment as part of the whole school planning process, including policy related to:

- Admissions and Enrolment
- Reception/induction of new students
- Curriculum, including civic/social/religious education
- Learning supports
- Bullying
- Child protection
- Home/school liaison
- Employment and Human Resource Management

Schools will need support and guidance to ensure that they have the skills to work in an increasingly intercultural environment both within the school or in the broader community context in which the school is located.

### **3. Accommodate cultural and ethnic diversity within the curricula**

The curricula at both primary and second level have a key role in ensuring that students appreciate the richness of a diversity of cultures and are able to challenge prejudice and discrimination where they exist.

### **4. Develop an intercultural implementation strategy within youth work**

Building on the commitments in the National Youth Work Development Plan and the work of existing national umbrella and local youth work organisations, an intercultural implementation strategy should be developed for the youth service, which would seek to take on board the ‘whole system’ approach, including mainstreaming and targeted strategies to combat racism and to make reasonable accommodation of cultural and ethnic diversity.

### **5. Enhance access and education service delivery to Travellers**

Some of the key issues related to Traveller participation in education can be summarised as follows:

- High levels of participation by Travellers at preschool and primary level
- Poor participation of Travellers at second level, (by year four only 6% of those Travellers progressing from primary to second level remain)
- Participation at third level is probably less than five Travellers per annum
- Poor participation at adult/further education level
- Literacy levels improving, but a very high proportion of Travellers still unable to read or write

The enhancement of access to education service delivery to Travellers is a multifaceted issue that takes into account living circumstances, parent/pupil/teacher expectations and the wider marginalisation/social exclusion experienced by Travellers. This will require a multifaceted response, including review of existing education provision and supports at all levels within the education system.

### **6. Enhance the participation of refugees and long-term residents in education provision**

Some of the key issues related to refugee and long-term residents participation in education includes:

- Insufficient English language proficiency among some refugees
- The need for additional teaching supports within the classroom
- Lack of recognition of qualifications
- The requirement on most non-EU residents to full economic fees at third level, no matter how long their residency in Ireland
- Supports needed for specialised teachers

### **7. Enhance access and education service delivery to women and unaccompanied minors**

Many women from cultural and ethnic minorities experience additional barriers in accessing education provision, including lack of access to childcare, and lack of

education provision that makes reasonable accommodation of cultural and ethnic diversity, including sensitivities on gender issues. Unaccompanied minors are a particularly vulnerable group of young asylum seekers/refugees who need additional supports in educational placement.

#### **8. Enhance provision of English as a second language**

Language and literacy proficiency has long been recognised as playing a key role in the integration process. There is considerable linguistic diversity and ability to communicate in English among people who are recent migrants to Ireland, but there are also a significant number of people who need to improve their English language skills. Many primary and second level schools are also faced with the challenges of teaching pupils who need additional language supports.

#### **9. Evolve education related data systems to provide a comprehensive picture of diversity and policy progress**

At present there is limited availability of data related to pupil/student diversity in the Irish education system beyond enrolment of non-nationals and Travellers at primary and second level. The broadening of existing statistical and administrative data systems at all levels will provide a more comprehensive picture of ethnic and cultural diversity within the education system will assist in the process of benchmarking both individual student and general policy progress.

#### **10. Strengthen the participation of key stakeholders in the development of an intercultural approach to education**

Key stakeholders in the development of an intercultural approach to education include the Department of Education and Science, education bodies, specialised and expert bodies, teacher bodies including trade unions, parent bodies and representatives from cultural and ethnic minorities. Participation involves a range of strategies at different levels, including participation at a policy level, administrative level and school/college level. In particular there is a need for on going coordination within the Department of Education and Science, which involves a range of key stakeholders.

## **Annex 1: NCCRI and Education**

To date the NCCRI has been and continues to be active in promoting anti-racist and intercultural education.

1. Submission to the Education Disadvantage Committee to assist development of a Traveller Education Strategy (January 2003)
2. Activity Pack for Schools and Youth Workers: This pack was produced in partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. This activity pack aimed to provide a range of ideas for those working with young people in schools or more informal education settings who are interested in exploring cultural diversity and raising awareness about racism (2001)
3. Racist Incident Monitoring: in its monitoring of racist incidences the NCCRI plays an important role in monitoring racism and discrimination in educational environments
4. CDVEC Resource Book: The City of Dublin VEC, Curriculum Development Unit in partnership with the NCCRI, provided a practical resource book to help schools promote interculturalism through the Civic Social and Personal Education Curriculum
5. Submission to the Expert Group on the Content and Duration of Post-Primary Teacher Education: This submission focuses on the need for teachers to receive anti-racism and intercultural training within both pre-service and in-service training programmes and that they adopt an intercultural approach in their method of teaching (July 1999)
6. The NCCRI is represented on key bodies in the field of education, including:
  - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Steering Committee on Interculturalism and the curriculum
  - Advisory Committee to CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit
  - Curriculum Development Unit of the CDVEC
  - CDU/Department of Education Committee on Lifelong Learning
  - Eist Steering Group, Pavee Point
  - Advisory Group to the National Childcare Co-coordinating Committee (NCCC)
  - National Children's Advisory Council
  - CECDE, Advisory Committee
  - Department of Education and Science Working Group on Anti-Racism and Interculturalism

## **Annex 2: Policy developments relevant to intercultural education**

Over the last decade there has been significant policy progress with regard to accommodating cultural diversity in the education system, although these are at a relatively early stage of development. This section will attempt to elucidate key areas in a broadly chronological approach, thus encompassing both general initiatives and those targeted specifically at the Traveller community.

The White Paper on Education (1995) has been the most significant public statement on education policy in recent years, and a key focus for the revision and restatement of vision of the Irish education system. The White Paper highlights concerns about a resurgence of racism and xenophobia, and stressed that educational policy should be framed in terms of, 'human rights, tolerance and respect/understanding for cultural identity'.<sup>14</sup>

In line with its commitment to improving the situation of Ireland's Traveller community, the Government set up the Task Force on the Travelling Community in 1993. The report of the Task Force contained 341 recommendations on a variety of issues. In particular the Report recommended that anti-racism and intercultural curricula should be implemented, and that this ethos should underpin policy and practice. The report also recommended the establishment of a Traveller Education Unit within the Department of Education and Science. In 1998, the Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community was convened. The forthcoming second Monitoring Committee Report (2002) is expected to be critical of the pace of progress in the area of education, and urged speedier implementation of the Task Force recommendations.

The Refugee Act, 1996, states that refugees shall 'have access to education and training in the State in the like manner and to the like extent in all respects as an Irish citizen and shall have the same freedom to practice his or her religion and the same freedom as regards the religious education of his or her children as an Irish citizen'. This is a commitment, which Ireland has made as a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention.

The Universities Act, 1997 contains an aspirational posit that the governing authority of a university shall 'respect the diversity of values, beliefs and traditions in Irish society'. The government is currently completing an audit of university diversity policies in line with the provisions of the 1997 Act. However there is no equivalent legislation for the Institutes of Technology; the Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992 refers only to gender equality. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland Act, 1999 states that providers of education and training should 'promote diversity'.

The Education Act, 1998 was enacted to make provision for the education of every person in the state and to ensure respect for diversity. In specific sections of the act the term 'diversity' is applied to the established ethos and traditions of (denominational) schools, and the place of the Irish and English languages in the school system. However, 'diversity' within the Act is not restricted by an explicit definition and in the light of

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<sup>14</sup> Ireland, Department of Education and Science (1995) White Paper on Education, Charting our Education Future, p. 212

other policies and the equality legislation, the understanding of the term can be broadened.<sup>15</sup>

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education, 1999 reiterated the need for consultations with Traveller organisations on a range of issues affecting pre-school provision for Travellers. However it does not contain any explicit commitment to incorporate anti-bias, anti-racism or respect for diversity into early childhood education.

An intercultural approach is encouraged in the Revised Primary School Curriculum (1999) this document states that ‘the curriculum has particular responsibility in promoting tolerance and respect for diversity in both the school and the community’.

A Green Paper on Adult Education was published in November 1998 and followed by the White Paper in 2000. The White Paper reiterated a commitment to ‘promote quality of access, participation and outcome for participants in adult education, with pro-active strategies to counteract barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability’.

A key objective of the National Children’s Strategy (2000) is that ‘children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children including Travellers and other marginalised groups achieve their full potential’. The strategy recommends:

- a whole school approach to interculturalism and anti-racism
- the recognition of diversity in all policy and service delivery
- English language tuition for children whose mother tongues are other than English
- provision for unaccompanied children to be in line with best international practice
- implementation of the Task Force Report on Travellers.<sup>16</sup>

Under the terms of the Education Welfare Act, 2000 schools are obliged to have written codes of practice, which must honour the provisions of the Equal Status Act, 2000 (see below). This provides an education-specific legal basis for anti-racism and intercultural policies and codes of practice. In its ‘Guidelines for Primary Schools’, the Department of Education and Science states that in developing a school plan, individual schools may wish to consider ‘the acceptance of diversity among people’.

In November 2002 the Minister for Education and Science recognized that interculturalism is:

about realizing that ‘one size does not fit all’ that we must plan to welcome diversity and to cater for it, and in doing so we will benefit from the process. It is also about promoting equality and providing positive actions to combat the barriers groups face in accessing and benefiting from education.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ireland, Education Act, 1998, available at: [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) (12.07.2003)

<sup>16</sup> Ireland, Department of Health and Children (2002) National Children’s Strategy, Our Children – Their Lives

<sup>17</sup> Conference in Malahide, Dublin, 2002

In preparing its submission to the forthcoming National Action Plan against Racism (NPAR)<sup>18</sup> the Department of Education and Science launched a national consultation, which resulted in a far-reaching outcome document entitled ‘Promoting Anti-Racism and Interculturalism in Education’. Underlying the report is the assumption that there are distinct and cultural patterns which must be respected and reflected in an educational context, and in a systemic and inclusive way which caters for diversity as the norm.<sup>19</sup>

The Department of Education and Science has established a specific working group to co-ordinate the development of interculturalism and anti-racism at all levels across the education system.

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<sup>18</sup> The NPAR arises from commitments generated at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Ireland, Department of Education and Science (2002) Promoting Anti Racism and Interculturalism. Draft Recommendations, ‘Towards a National Action Plan Against Racism’.