

**EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
LAUNCH OF NINTH SOCIAL ATTITUDES REPORT**

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Introduction ad lib

I am very pleased, indeed, to have been invited to launch this, the Ninth Social Attitudes Report. Many of the issues are fundamental to the work that we do in the Equality Commission. It is so important that we know what people think, what they need, what they feel and what they fear. It is important that we know and understand these things as we work for change and move to an ever more equal and fair society.

- This report provides us with a useful tool in this era of consultation and exchange between policy and decision makers and the people those decisions affect. Public attitudes research is a very real support for our unique mechanism, Section 75, which is based on that exchange. And so it contributes to good decision making and better policies. And it is interesting that the report urges employers to involve employees more effectively in the running of their organisations in order to rekindle employee commitment and revitalise work effort! We cannot over-emphasise the

importance and the usefulness of involving people in the things that matter in their lives.

- I know that an earlier update on findings from the Life and Times Survey on What Women Want caught international attention and sparked a debate which has caught the public's interest. This is wonderful because not only does it widen the discussion, but it allows us to share the good news stories, the models of good practice from Northern Ireland.
- It reminds us that we must not be complacent and there is much work still to be done. Protestant communities are more polarised than before and racist attitudes more marked.
- And it is continually being refreshed with this year having a chapter on the new area of culture.

Importantly it puts particular issues into a wider context

- The chapter on lifelong learning provides insights into different attitudes towards education among those who have acquired higher education qualifications and those who have not. This helps us look at two current debates – the future of the 11+ and university funding – in a wider context.
- Sections on political attitudes, community relations and race – all indicators of how we live together – will be
 - the measure of the impact of significant developments – ceasefires, devolution, the Agreement
 - the indicators of what we need to do in the future
 - the benchmark for judging our good relations and anti-racism work (and recent events give a very clear message of the vital importance of getting that right)

- Consideration of family and kinship networks, the changing role of men and our relationship to the health service all show that there isn't a one size suits all. We must be aware of Northern Ireland's difference in order that we can deliver the best possible, appropriate services for our community.
- It is invaluable in helping us to consider issues in those wider contexts. And in helping us look at people as individuals – many faceted, diverse individuals with all the challenges that brings for creating the right society for them.

Finally, I would like to congratulate all of the people involved in the Life and Times Survey and the Report's contributors and editors. You work undaunted in the face of a project which is immense in scale and is not always heartening in itself as it does not always find that we are moving quickly to equality and justice in society and comfort and enjoyment for all our citizens. I thank you all for your careful work, your scholarly analysis and your clear, honest and objective reflection of where we are now. We know there is work still to be done in creating a just and equal society. The report and the work it reflects – monitoring and evaluating what is done externally – is an important use of resources in measuring the implementation of the spirit of the Agreement for all of us but especially for policy makers in fulfilling their Section 75 requirements. We know that it is important that we all put this report to good use by listening to what it tells us and building its lessons into our work. I commend it to you as essential reading for all those concerned with social and political debate here.

Dame Joan Harbison
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