



PRESS RELEASE

Education Sector Joint Consultative Forum

Date: Monday 1 December 2014

Joint Consultative Forum for Education celebrates a decade of 'open engagement'

A decade of “open engagement” between the education sector and community, voluntary and trade union sectors was celebrated on Monday 1 December 2014, at a special conference to mark 10 years of the Education Sector’s Joint Consultative Forum (JCF).

The event, at Ashfield Girls’ High School in Belfast, brought together over 70 delegates from across all four sectors to mark the breaking down of inequalities in education over the past 10 years. The conference was opened by Shane McCurdy, Chief Executive of the North Eastern Education and Library Board, who hailed the common goal of the Forum which was established in 2004, to provide a formal working link between public authorities in education and the community, voluntary and trade union sectors.

“There have been a number of mutual benefits arising from the establishment of the Forum, but to my mind the most significant has been the opportunity to openly engage, to be able to put faces to the names, to listen and learn from each other, and to realise that we all have a common goal, the removal of educational inequalities,” said Mr McCurdy, speaking on behalf of the five Education and Library Boards’ Chief Executives.

The conference was addressed by Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and Mrs Patricia Lewsley-Mooney, NI Commissioner for Children and Young People. Dr Wardlow said ***“Education plays a key role in determining a person’s life chances and opportunities. Unfortunately, there are still real inequalities in the educational experiences of many in Northern Ireland. Unless these issues are confronted and put right, for all the young people who are disadvantaged by them, they will impact on continuing generations and on the families and communities of which they are part.”***

This was followed by the NICCY Commissioner in her final address of her term as Commissioner. ***“During my term as Commissioner, I have actively promoted the voice of the child in all educational matters,”*** said Mrs Patricia Lewsley-Mooney. ***“Pupils’ voices were central to the work I did for example, on the transfer test, school councils and shared education, but I believe more work is required by Government to truly embed pupil participation in decision-making about educational issues.***

“As I reflect on my term as Commissioner, it is important to recognise the many positive developments in educational provision. However, there remains an urgent need to address continuing gaps in provision and the current challenges facing education which are impacting many pupils.”

The conference was closed by Aine Owens, MENCAP Youth Ambassador, who highlighted the positive experiences, help and support she received in her local school which has assisted her and how she now ***“loves to go to school.”***

ENDS

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Caption:

Members of the Joint Consultative Forum for Education who attended the 10 yrs. anniversary event in Belfast cut the cake.

(L – R) Patricia Lewsley-Mooney (NICCY), Nicky McBride (SEELB), John Curran (CMSU), Aine Owens (Mencap Young Ambassador), Paschal McKeown (Mencap), Shane McCurdy (NEELB) and Dr Michael Wardlow (Equality Commission).

Notes:

The Joint Consultative Forum, established by the Boards/Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards in partnership with NICEM, is an important lynchpin in ensuring effective engagement with the community, voluntary and trade union sectors.

The Forum provides a formal working link between public authorities in the education sector and the community and voluntary and trade union sectors and statutory equality authorities namely the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Community Relations Council, the Human Rights Commission and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.