



Bernie Duffy

09/12/02 10:36

To: CBJmpomb@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk, JMPO.London@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk,
privateofficelondon@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk,
privateofficebelfast@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk,
charlotte.crew@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk, hocs@ofmdfmni.gov.uk,
will.haire@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, mary.bunting@ofmdfmni.gov.uk,
edgar.jardine@ofmdfmni.gov.uk,
robert.hannigan@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk,
stephen.grimason@ofmdfmni.gov.uk,
john.mckervill@ofmdfmni.gov.uk,
alan.whysall@ofmdfmni.gov.uk, *helen* nio
gerry.mulligan@ofmdfmni.gov.uk,
chris.stewart@ofmdfmni.gov.uk,
denis.ritchie@ofmdfmni.gov.uk
Subject: URGENT · REPORT RELEASE

Please see attached documents with regard to release of UU report today



Ministerial submission.c KEY FINDINGS.doc UU Press release.doc

Ms Bernie Duffy
OFMDFM
Equality Directorate Research Branch
Tel: 028 90 523 254

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

EQUALITY UNIT, RESEARCH BRANCH
Block E, Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast BT4 3SG
Tel: 02890 523284 Fax: 02890 523272
Email: Stephen.Donnelly@ofmdfmi.gov.uk

FROM: Stephen Donnelly (Dr) **cc:** Distribution list attached

DATE: 9 December, 2002

TO: PS/Mr Browne (OFMDFM & L)

SUBJECT: PUBLICATION OF RESEARCH REPORT BY UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Summary

Issue: Publication of "Relational Communication between Catholics and Protestants in the Workplace: A Study of Policies, Practices and Procedures"

Timing: Urgent

Presentational Issues: The report is being released by the University of Ulster on 9 December, 2002. Media questions are being fielded by the University. If approached, a suggested line to take is given below.

Recommendation: Ministers are invited to note: the publication of this report; the summary of key findings and background information about the research (Annex 1) and the content of the attached Press Release (Annex 2).

Detail

The report, funded jointly through the Physical Social and Economic Programme (PSEP) and the OFMDFM Community Relations research budgets, is the culmination of a three-year research project by the report's authors, Dr David Dickson and Professor Owen Hargie of the University of Ulster.

Report

The report examines relationships between Protestants and Catholics in the workplace and covers: levels of communication and levels of cross-community contact and relationships within the organisations under study; staff's knowledge of informal and formal procedures for raising grievances of a sectarian nature; and staff's interpretation of in-house policies and procedures relating to the organisation's respective Flags and Emblems policies.

Staff also identified what they perceived to be the key issues in cross-community communication in their respective workplaces. Managers and TU representatives took part in detailed discussion about their personal experiences of dealing with critical incidents of sectarian harassment that had occurred in their respective organisations.

Recommendations

The authors make a number of recommendations for action for each participating organisation and also at a general level for employers throughout Northern Ireland. These recommendations relate to levels of communication within organisations, cross-community contact and relationships, and knowledge of policies and procedures for dealing with issues such as sectarianism (see Annex 1 and 2).

Line to take

If approached, a suggested line to take is as follows:

The report will be a helpful and timely contribution to the current review of community relations policy which is about to enter into consultation phase and will also be of interest to public authorities with regard to their obligation to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations under Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

Dissemination

A copy of the full report is available from Dr David Dickson or Professor Owen Hargie at the University of Ulster. Alternatively the report can be accessed from the OFMDFM Research Branch website link to an electronic copy on the University of Ulster website.

STEPHEN DONNELLY (Dr)

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KEY FINDINGS

RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION AMONG CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS IN THE WORKPLACE: A STUDY OF POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

Background

This research project examined communication patterns and patterns of interaction between Catholics and Protestants in the workplace, and their respective experiences of, and how they dealt with, incidents of sectarian violence. The research was carried out by two leading academics from the University of Ulster – Dr David Dickson and Professor Owen Hargie.

Methodology

Two public sector and two private sector organisations took part in the research. The anonymity of these participating organisations was guaranteed at the outset of the project, hence they are known in the report as organisations A-D. Their respective profiles, including their religious breakdown, was as follows:

Public sector

Organisation A: local Government body (81% Protestant/19% Catholic)

Organisation C: healthcare organisation (85% Protestant/15% Catholic)

Private sector

Organisation B: production company (36% Protestant/64% Catholic)

Organisation D: caring organisation (63% Protestant/37% Catholic)

A total of 98 employees were randomly selected from across all of the organisations to take part in the research. They each completed:

- a communication audit questionnaire – where they rated actual versus ideal levels of communication within their respective organisations;
- an audit of cross-community contact and relationships – where they rated levels of satisfaction with cross-community contact and relationships within the workforce; and
- an analysis of their knowledge of informal and formal anti-sectarian policies and procedures, including those relating to their respective organisational Flags and Emblems policies.

There were also:

- 16 focus groups involving members of staff from 3 of the organisations – the purpose of these was to encourage discussion and generate from staff themselves the key issues relating to cross-community communication in the workplace; and
- 22 in-depth interviews with Managers and TU representatives across all 4 organisations – looking at their personal experiences of handling incidents of sectarian harassment that occurred in their respective workplaces.

Key findings of the research

General organisational communication

Across the organisations employees said they would like:

- more information on the organisation's operations and a greater insight into organisational developments/decisions and how they were reached;
- more information on staff development issues, including decisions that affected jobs, development opportunities, and pay and promotion; and

- less reliance on the “grapevine” and more use of audio-visual/ in-house publications, notice boards and the Intranet as a means of disseminating information.

Cross-community contact and relationships

The survey found evidence of considerable day-to-day contact and interaction between Catholic and Protestant employees, with employees socialising and having lunch/coffee breaks together. Staff actively sought the introduction of more social functions, particularly outside of normal working hours, to further mixing of the two groups.

Employees expressed a preference for a neutral working environment, and leaving discussions about differences or diversity outside of the workplace.

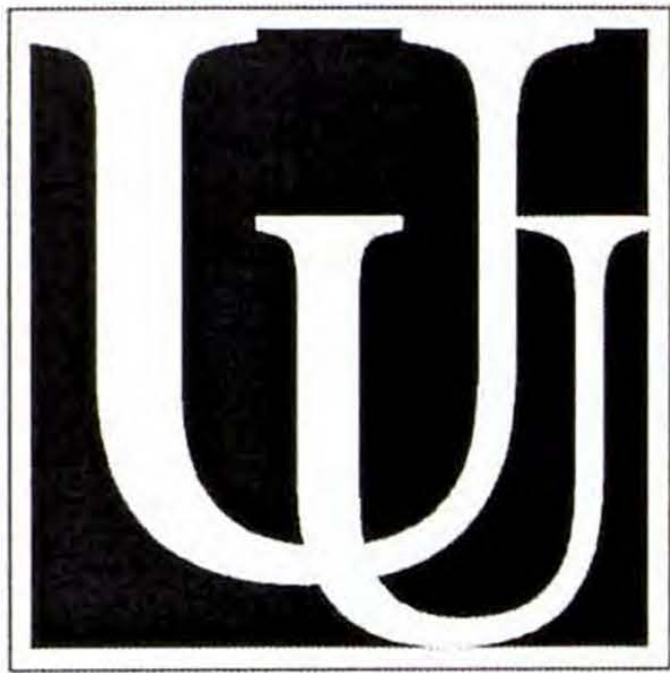
Sectarian incidents

In each of the organisations there remained some degree of ambiguity around items which were prohibited under their respective Flags and Emblems policy. This was often because of the lack of formal listing of all banned items, or because managers did not challenge the individuals concerned or alternatively they used their discretion in resolving matters, resulting in inconsistencies.

Sectarian incidents had not been completely eradicated from the workplaces under study. A number of incidents were reported, including graffiti on walls, notes left on desks and the inappropriate use of “black” humour or banter. Members of the minority group of staff affected by these types of incidents expressed a reluctance to bring them formally to the attention of their manager for fear of being branded trouble-makers.

Key recommendations

- employers should keep their workforce better informed on all aspects of their operation, via formal channels (team briefing, use of the Intranet, in-house publications etc) and with less reliance on the informal “grapevine”;
- employers should set targets to measure the success of inter-group relations and monitoring in the workplace;
- organisations should actively promote inter-group relations by organising social events outside of work hours, or have a social club or similar facilities that could be used by all;
- training for staff should be put in place to increase understanding of policies and procedures to deal with sectarianism;
- organisations should provide a neutral working environment, where markers of communal separateness and sectarianism are removed;
- members of staff should be trained as Harassment Officers to deal with incidents of sectarian and other harassment as appropriate;
- where policies do not exist in organisations ones should be put in place to ensure consistency of practice;
- organisations should develop and regularly update an integrated policy for managing cross-community issues to ensure greater cohesion amongst the workforce.



**UNIVERSITY of
ULSTER**

news release

Press Office
Department of Public Affairs

Newtownabbey County Antrim BT37 0QB Northern Ireland
T: (+44) 028 9036 6178 F: (+44) 028 9036 6872 pressoffice@ulst.ac.uk

December 9 2002

Communication Between Catholics and Protestants in the Workplace-UU Report

Relationships between Catholics and Protestants in the workplace have improved, with employees wanting to leave sectarian conflict behind them, according to University of Ulster research.

A report, commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, reveals that the vast majority of employees wish to leave political conflict outside the factory gate or office door.

Co-author of the report Dr David Dickson said: "We found that there was a general feeling of the cross-community situation at work having improved, together with a strong desire for this trend to continue.

"We also found evidence of supportive, friendly and trusting associations in all organisations involved in the study."

However, the researchers found that there is still room for improvement and that employers could do more to overcome problems that emerge.

Co-author, Professor Owen Hargie said: "It was strongly believed that organisations could do significantly more to relieve the tensions that do exist. This sentiment was shared by both religious groups and was not restricted to the minority section of the workforce in any organisation.

"Neutralising the workplace, as a strategy for managing difference, received a very strong endorsement from the workforce. There is a clear preference for creating a 'sanctuary of neutrality' in organisations.

"Another reoccurring theme was the need for organisations to introduce social functions or events where staff could socialise together outside of the work environment. Despite contact between Catholics and Protestants on a daily basis in the workplace, there is little extension of this relationship outside the working environment. Many employees are leaving work and returning home to segregated areas where they have no contact with people from other communities. Employees expressed a strong desire to socialise with colleagues from different religious backgrounds in an environment in which they would all feel safe."

The Report concludes that the task of creating closer ties between the two sections of the workforce is one that must be given greater attention. Organisations should set internal targets to measure the success of inter-group relations and monitor these regularly. While ensuring the neutrality of the workplace, management should also aspire to the greater development of respect for diversity and avail of changing opportunities to bring this about through, for example, training.

-ends-

For further information contact: Trina Porter, Press Officer, University of Ulster, 028 90366178/ 077 89 75 77 84

Note to editor:

The report is entitled: Relational Communication Between Catholics and Protestants in the Workplace: A Study of Policies, Practices and Procedures

The report was commissioned and funded by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

The report authors are Dr David Dickson, Professor Owen Hargie and Ms Seanenne Nelson from the School of Communication, University of Ulster.

The full report can be accessed on:

<http://www.socsci.ulst.ac.uk/research/comms/reports/report1.pdf>