

EQUALITY COMMISSION RESPONSE TO CAJ REPORT **'UNEQUAL RELATIONS'**

“The Equality Commission is an independent public body. As part of its statutory remit, it has a role in relation to public authorities to ensure that they comply with their obligations under S75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This includes the provision of advice and also powers to undertake investigations of alleged breaches of Equality Schemes, to ensure effective application of the duties.

The Commission actively carries out these responsibilities and does so in an open and transparent way, seeking to actively collaborate with others in order to best promote equality of opportunity.

We have been disappointed by the position paper ‘Unequal Relations?’ prepared by the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ). We have provided extensive material to the author and provided commentary to address inaccuracies and misunderstandings throughout the time of its preparation. The published paper, in our view, has unfortunately not developed beyond the expression of opinion, which in many places is set out as fact.

In particular, we must reject its finding that: “equality initiatives and the purpose of the Section 75 duty and Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) are being undermined by the present interpretation and application of the good relations duty”. We do not believe the evidence supports this claim.

Although the CAJ commenced this work some time ago, it is coincidentally a timely opportunity to consider policy and practice on good relations, given the recent publication of OFMdFM’s strategy ‘Together: Building a United Community’ which envisages an enhanced role for the Commission on good relations.

We welcome the opportunity to attend the event tomorrow (Tuesday June 11, 2013) with public authorities and other bodies interested in the statutory equality duties and to hear their views.”