

Equality & Rights Alliance Public Sector Duty Working Group:

Thursday 3rd March 2016

Present: Orlagh o Farrell (ERA steering group), Shirley Scott (Dublin Rape Crisis Centre), Brid O Brien (INO), Kate Mitchell (Mental Health Reform), Sarah Lennon (Inclusion Ireland), Virginija Petrauskaite (MRCI), Damien Walshe (ERA)

Presentation by Damien Walshe (ERA) on Public Sector Duty, looking at the Duty, the duty in practice and a values-based approach to integrating Equality & Human rights as per the duty and then a discussion on Public Sector Duty as below:

Who is going to be covered by Public Sector Duty?

Given that there has been a consistent strategy for publicly funded services to be delivered by local & national charities & faith-based organisations, there are many Public Services which need to be included (yet might not be traditionally called “public services”), such as disability, mental health and homelessness services and direct provision.

How can civil society message the benefits of Public Sector Duty to Public Bodies?

There needs to be positive buy-in by Public Bodies who need to see the potential positive impacts for them as service deliverers, otherwise we will be met with resistance to change or at best, another “box-ticking” exercise. Presenting a “win/win” for services and clients is vital, we need as civil society to send a positive message of Public Sector Duty. We can do this by messaging:

- When policies, services & internal procedures eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect human rights, Public Bodies can in effect build this in from the start and ensure policies don't have to be altered retrospectively (so reduce inefficiencies & cost)
- Public Sector Duty can be a framework for a rational delivery of service
- It need not be an add-on, but become an integral part of existing service delivery
- It can help Public Bodies do their work better: with better outcomes for staff, organisations and most importantly, clients
- More effective service delivery could help to mitigate cuts to Public Services by allowing more efficient use of resources (not having to constantly face challenges & changing services due to litigation, better morale)
- Public Sector Duty could provide a framework for making the case for proper budgeting to really implement strategies that promote Equality & Human rights

What can Civil Society offer to Public Bodies in relation to Public Sector Duty?

- We can offer a space for all stakeholders, national & locally, to tease out how Public Sector Duty can work.
- We can offer a space for public sector bodies to honestly air fears about PSD - how to do it?
- We can use local structures such as the LCDCs and LECPs to introduce Public Sector Duty from the bottom up rather than waiting for a top-down approach from Government Departments
- We can provide expertise on a range of equality and human rights issues which Public Bodies will not have knowledge of yet will need in order to fulfil their Public Sector Duty. We don't expect Public Bodies to have the expertise in all these issues - and in order to make this work we will be keen to share our knowledge not only of the issues but of best practice and process

- We can demonstrate through evidence - based research and best practice (nationally and internationally) of how to engage, and deliver services to communities across Ireland
- We have links with voices across the spectrum of equality and human rights locally and nationally who can engage with Public bodies in design, implementation and evaluation
- We can bring an analysis of the process of learning from evaluations by engaging with service users - but also a process whereby Public Sector Duty becomes a living process whereby systems adapt and evolve reflective of the equality and human rights needs of the people accessing services
- We can use our expertise to coordinate Public Sector Duty in identifying pilot programmes to learn from the practices developed
- We can build an expectation among service users for a vision for Public Service Delivery in Ireland

What should ERA do?

As a working group, engaging as many ERA members as possible, working on two key areas in parallel:

- Develop a collective vision for Public Services
- Develop collective standards for Public Services
- Develop a collective analysis on the what an ideal process for engaging Civil Society/rights holders/communities of interest in developing a Public Sector Duty

And

Develop a stakeholder space to give Public Sector Duty a focus which may be lacking at the moment, engaging ERA members, public & civil servants, service users to make sure Public Sector Duty is on everyone's agenda. This space would look at:

- What is the Public Sector Duty?
- What should it be (shared vision)?
- How can we use it (civil society groups)?
- What are we responsible for doing/ what are we meant to do? (public sector)