

Membership Renewal 2012

There is no doubt about it, these are very hard times for everyone including those of us who work in the field of equality and diversity but, if you have not already done so, please renew your membership. Your membership fees mean that we can remain a strong and independent organisation, able to represent professionals who advance equality. Please also encourage your colleagues and associates to join us.

Code of Professional Conduct – Sign and return

Please remember to sign and return the Institute's Code of Professional Conduct with your membership fee. Don't forget to keep your own copy. The code sets clear standards of conduct for IEDP members. The Board expects all members to comply with it.

To download the code, go to

<http://www.iedp.org.uk/Become-a-member/Code-of-Professional-Practice.aspx>

Taking Equality Forward: A Seminar, afternoon of 6th February

By Linda Bellos

Many of us were affected by the verdict in the murder trial of Stephen Lawrence. The trial brought back painful memories of how things were in 1993. Doreen Lawrence was right to insist that the issues were not only about the racial hatred of Stephen's killers but also about police assumptions and actions. The Macpherson Inquiry Report into the police investigation of Stephen's murder changed the landscape of equality law and practice, helping the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2010 to come into force.

The current Government has sidelined equality to a disappointing extent, as though we have already achieved a just and fair society. We believe that the Government's approach is wrong. We know that hate crimes are still perpetrated against people because they have a protected characteristic. Sadly, practitioners tell us that some public bodies with a duty to respond and protect victims of hate crimes are still failing to do so. Employees with protected characteristics are faring badly. Harassment and

other forms of discrimination continue to happen in the workplace despite employers' legal duties to eliminate these types of behaviour.

The Seminar will discuss the challenges faced by equality practitioners in the face of austerity measures in all business sectors. They are working immensely hard to tackle equality challenges in these hard times. It is time to bring everyone together to hear from each other what they are doing and how they can support each other. The event is sponsored by the London Borough of Camden.

Booking details for Taking Equality Forward

The Taking Equality Forward seminar will take place on 6 February from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm. If you wish to attend, please send an email to info@iedp.org.uk to request a booking form.

Cost

This is a free event for members. Non-members must pay £50 plus VAT.

Venue

Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

Accreditation: Becoming a recognised, regulated profession

By Kate Hinton

Many members will not know anything about why the Institute started. We think it is important to reiterate what we are about so that we can properly introduce our Accreditation Programme.

There are several forums for equality and diversity practitioners to meet and communicate with each other. Some of us felt that we needed to set and maintain high standards of practice so that being a practitioner means something that can be recognised in the commercial and public sector field in which we operate. Hence accreditation. We looked at many of the accreditation bodies and soon recognised that none had the expertise to know what good equality practice was. This is why, four years ago, we started to create the Institute. Our key objective is to provide the means by which we, as practitioners, make ourselves into a recognised, regulated profession. With the help of an organisation that ran and supported professional associations, we gathered volunteers to join the Board and slowly identified both criteria and process which would test our competences, all of which had to be available for all practitioners who wanted professional status.

The accreditation pilot was run in mid 2011. Evaluations and feedback have now been incorporated into the next rollout. We want to have a number of levels, including that of 'experts by experience'. However, at this stage we have developed criteria and process for two main professional levels. Level 1 is for people who have responsibility for equality but as an additional portfolio to their jobs, not as their main role. These are people like Equality Leads or Champions. Level 2 is for people whose chief or main role is as an equality practitioner, either working for a public or private organisation, or working freelance with their own company or business. We intend to develop a further level of higher membership, to be awarded for outstanding contribution to equality and diversity. This is likely to be a Fellowship level or whatever we name it, but we are not ready yet to reach those heights.

Our task of creating a recognised and accessible accreditation process has not been made easier by the current political and economic climate. Members are losing their jobs. Clients are not using external equality services or they reduce what they demand. So, times are hard for all members. But the case for equality has rarely been stronger. Having argued for and won many battles to extend the provisions of the law which protect people for discrimination because of who they are, we are seeing many organisations misunderstand or ignore their legal duties on equality.

This is why some of us will continue to fight the fight for what we know is right and just. By creating a professional body, we will have both argument and means to support the delivery of equality laws, so we are ploughing ahead despite every attempt to turn the clock back on equality.

We are approaching a number of private sector companies who have made public commitments to equality; they know, as we know, that it makes good business sense to understand and cater for a diverse set of customers and to employ staff who understand and reflect some of that diversity. We hope that many of those we approach will give their financial support to pay for some of the bursaries we wish to offer members who cannot pay the full accreditation fee.

Each year we will increase the number of people who are able to apply for accreditation. At present we must grow only as fast as our resources allow: our process will be devalued without competent people to evaluate the evidence of achievement.

A vital principle of our inclusive approach is to recognise prior training undertaken by those who wish to be accredited. We judge on how knowledge is applied, and not who provided it. The Institute will continue to put on training courses, but we do not see ourselves as a training body.

Accreditation Success: First Registered Members

We were proud to announce its first Registered Members - Pete Coulson, Michelle Taylor, Shearon Williams and Ruth Wilson. Since then the process has been evaluated. The next newsletter piece is the feedback from one of our successful members.

This first round was, of course, a pilot. We have evaluated it carefully and are making changes, especially in the simplification of the documents from which applicants need to work and in reducing the demands for Level 1 membership.

The applicants said they particularly valued:

- being part of a regulated and recognised profession
- being able to produce tangible evidence of their own good practice
- gaining peer recognition as an equality and diversity professional

The assessment panel members were drawn from the IEDP board, universities and a large employer; they did not find the process unduly burdensome and readily reached agreement about the applicants' submissions.

Accreditation: Next Steps

The Board's first priority is to amend the assessment documentation and procedures in light of the pilot. The next group of members undertaking the assessment process will be all of the Board. Once our Board Members have completed their own assessments, it will be open to any other members who wish to become accredited Registered Members.

We are planning to have assessment panels at the end of March and at the end of September 2012. No doubt we could schedule more if there was a great rush of demand! Contact us now if you want your name on the waiting list.

Additional panel members will be recruited from employers, universities and our registered members.

We have already started promoting the accreditation scheme with large employers and will be using other communication networks, such as LinkedIn, to inform members of the profession. Please do what you can to spread the news.

We are, of course, very aware that this is a difficult time for such an initiative, with colleagues losing their jobs, independent work hard to come by and parts of the agenda under attack from the government. Because of this, it is even more important to demonstrate that we are a recognised, regulated profession with something real to offer to individuals and society.

From small acorns, oak trees grow. Watch out for the tree and nurture it when you can!

Accreditation Fees

The pilot has enabled the Institute's Board to set accreditation fees. In view of the pressures on our profession, we have kept the assessment fees as low as possible.

Fees are set at the rates shown below:

£350 + VAT for accreditation at Level 1

£850 + VAT for accreditation at Level 2

We offer a 10% group discount if five or more applicants come from one organisation and apply at the same time.

My experience of the accreditation process

By Pete Coulson

I signed up for Level 2 accreditation with the Institute while the process was still in pilot form. This was in response to an article in Newsletter 7 in May 2011, asking for volunteers.

I think it's always interesting to test yourself and see how you measure up, and I was also intrigued by the possibility of having a shorthand way of telling potential clients that I know at least something of what I'm talking about.

Up to this point, that would have meant a choice between a lengthy, and possibly academic, university qualification and an even lengthier list of recommendations on LinkedIn. I recognised that operating a national accreditation system gives the IEDP one of its main selling points. We are all working in separate areas, often with people who don't understand or particularly value what we do. So, just as potential clients need a quality assurance "mark" to look for, E & D practitioners need a "mark" to advertise.

One or two items did puzzle me. For one thing I would have expected the Institute to keep a list of all its "members", so I found it surprising that someone can only be Registered at level 2. That means anyone can be registered as a member, but only some can be registered as a Registered Member.

I was delighted to see that the process depended on a competence-based approach, rather than a job description-based approach. In other words, it is about an individual's knowledge, skills, experience etc rather than the job they do or the

qualification they hold. The competences were clearly laid out for candidates to match themselves against.

Some of the requirements for different kinds of evidence appeared a little complicated at the time. Fortunately they have since been streamlined in the light of our feedback. Not every kind of evidence can be equally appropriate to everyone, and some I took to more readily than others, but the balance did require a decent amount of reflection.

I submitted my application in July 2011 and received pretty swift feedback, with a letter and a smart certificate. How long you would have to wait depends, I now understand, on how close you are to the end of a particular accreditation cycle.

Support your Professional Body as a Volunteer

By Juliette Brown

Many of our members are facing the effects of redundancy or a reduction in earnings accompanied by more job responsibilities. In these challenging economic times, membership is an important support mechanism. It can help you to keep your professional skills up-to-date as well as keeping you in touch with developments in our field.

Any professional life coach will advise that one of the best ways to ride the wave of economic downturn and to help to maintain a positive outlook is to keep active and to help or support others. Volunteering can be an effective way of doing this. Don't become isolated – start to take an active role in supporting your professional body. We always need one-off support on different areas of our activities so please volunteer your skills. It may be just what you need!

Employment Tribunal Reforms: Are they balanced?

By Marlene Ellis

Contrary to the view of many employers', the Tribunal Services Statistics for 2010/11 indicates that discrimination claims in sex, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, age and equal pay, do not favour the employee. If we look only at cases that were decided after a full hearing, 19.9% of claims were successful and 80.1% of claims failed. Do we infer from this that employees are poorly advised with insufficient independent legal advice either prior to their claim, or due to poor legal advocacy representation? Alternatively, perhaps there are too many vexatious claims cluttering up the Employment Tribunal and Appeal Courts in order to have that unnecessary proverbial 'day in court'? We obviously need to know more but if these statistics

reflect the former, we must be concerned with the level of support available to employees who feel they are being discriminated against. In which case, it is very disappointing to learn that funding for that very purpose will be withdrawn from April 2012 under reforms to the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Many of these *types* of claimants are not eligible for legal aid and can at best, hope for pre-tribunal advice only. Because of the low success rates and low compensation levels, no win, no fee opportunities, also make such claimants unattractive. Thus, we can certainly assume there will be less claims under the Equality Act 2010 in the very near future.

However, if these statistics reflect the latter, the current employment tribunal process makes vexatious or weak claims under the Equality Act 2010 possible because they can be made without cost. I would argue nevertheless, that this single perspective deeply undermines the level of terror that going to court can cause to many claimants. However, it has to be considered. In fact, the Government consultation paper for reforming employment tribunals, makes it clear that this has very much occupied their minds over the last twelve months. Whilst a stretched legal system makes it absolutely right to reform employment tribunals, the decision to (1) increase the current period of service required for employees to be able to bring a claim for unfair dismissal from one to two years, and (2) to introduce fees for the lodging of employment tribunal claims may not necessarily be fair or balanced.

A further government consultation opened from 14 December 2011 to 6 March 2012. It is called, 'Charging Fees in Employment Tribunals and the Employment Appeal Tribunal' and offers two options as to how we should go forward.

My initial thoughts are that the suggested fees are far too high with (1) An issue fee - £150 and (2) A hearing fee - £250. When one is facing the possible loss of employment, it is unlikely that a surplus £400 will be available. It needs more consideration so please take a look at the documents on the link below.

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/et-fee-charging-regime-cp22-2011.htm>

Finally, lest you think would-be claimants have not been considered at all, the Government is going to strengthen the emphasis upon mediation and conciliation through ACAS. So, have they got it right with:

- funding removed for legal support;
- low compensation rates;
- unfair dismissal claims limited; and
- fees suggested to make a claim?

Long term, what incentives will be left for employers to behave 'right'? It looks as if the Equality Act 2010 is being blocked through the *procedural back door* but I will leave you to decide. Let the IEDP know what you think.

Board Members

We are pleased to announce new Board members recruited in November are:

Marlene Ellis
Pete Coulson
Ruth Wilson

Who join:

Juliette Brown
Paul Carswell
Linda Bellos
Kate Hinton
Mary-Ann Nossent

We are saddened to lose Dianna Yach is has relocated to South Africa.

Finally...

Please send us your letters and stories for inclusion in the newsletter. I also welcome your ideas for future editions.

Don't forget to circulate this newsletter to anyone who may be interested in our work or who may wish to join the Institute. Thank you!!

Best wishes
Linda Bellos OBE, Chair

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