Post Consultation Report

Equality Impact Assessment

Northern Ireland Assembly

Digital First Strategy

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Executive Summary

1. The EQIA ran from 2 July 2015 to 8 October 2015. During the period of the consultation one request was made to receive documentation in hard copy but no responses to the consultation were received.

2. The EQIA consultation report identified a number of mitigating measures to address the differential impact Section 75 groups currently face. These are summarised in a [table]{.underline} later in this document.

3. The EQIA consultation report found no evidence to suggest there would be a negative differential impact on the equality of opportunity or good relations for the following Section 75 categories as a result of this strategy:

    - Religious belief

    - Political opinion

    - Gender (Men and Women generally)

    - Marital status

    - Sexual Orientation

    - Dependants

4. The lack of responses cannot be taken to mean that the current mitigating measures will be sufficient. The Digital First strategy will continue to develop and as new Digital First products and/or services are implemented there is likely to be a need for further consultation with stakeholders.

5. As required, the final stage in the EQIA process is the establishment of a system to monitor any on-going impact. This information will be published in the NI Assembly Commission's (the Commission) annual Section 75 report to the Equality Commission.

6. Should the monitoring and analysis of results over a two year period show that there has been a greater adverse impact than anticipated, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the Commission will take steps to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups.

Introduction

7. The EQIA ran from 2 July 2015 to 8 October 2015. During the period of the consultation one request was made to receive documentation in hard copy but no responses to the consultation were received.

8. When undertaking an EQIA, the Commission follows the guidance issued by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in February 2005[1] which recommends that there should be seven stages in the EQIA process:

> Stage 1: Definition of the aims of the policy
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> Stage 2: Consideration of available data and research
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> Stage 3: Assessment of potential and actual impacts
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> Stage 4: Consideration of measures
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> Stage 5: Formal consultation
>
> Stage 6: Decision and publication of the results of the EQIA
>
> Stage 7: Monitoring for adverse impact.

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[1] Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, Equality Commission for NI, 2005 (pp.3-4)

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9. The consultation report covered the first four stages and this report covers the final three stages of the EQIA process, stage 5, 6 and 7.

Background to the Digital First Strategy

10. The aim of the Digital First Strategy is to use digital platforms and channels to create and provide rich content for external and internal stakeholders enabling them to participate, interact and engage with the Assembly. We will do this by embracing digital activity and increasing skills internally to ensure that we continue to meet the corporate aim of ensuring that the Assembly and its work are accessible to all and communicated widely.

11. The strategy focuses on three corporate aims of:

     - Providing effective and high quality support -
       Using digital solutions and technologies to ensure that data and content created by the Assembly is made available more quickly; in a range of formats; and can be easily shared and re-used.

     - Enabling and delivering change by -
       Exploring and exploiting digital technology to streamline workflows and be more efficient in our content production.

Using digital tools and information to engage, inform, facilitate and improve people's participation and engagement in Assembly business and the wider democratic process.

- Being a progressive and efficient Commission by - Seeking to continuously deliver value for money programmes, review and improve our services and make the Assembly accessible to all.

Objectives

12. The key objectives of the Digital First Strategy are:

  I. To use digital tools and information to engage, inform, facilitate and improve people's participation and engagement in Assembly business and the wider democratic process.

  II. To explore and exploit digital technology to streamline workflows and improve efficiency by maximising staff time and reducing print and associated costs and to improve the Assembly's environmental impact.

  III. To provide MLAs and Assembly staff with the information, support and technology to allow them to carry out their responsibilities effectively, efficiently and professionally.

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Data Collection and Consultation

13. The EQIA used a mix of qualitative and quantitative data from a number of sources.

14. In brief, the following sources were employed:

- Qualitative information:

    o Assembly Questions (both Oral and Written) asked to the Assembly Commission.

    o Feedback from the NI Assembly website and Assembly Information Management System (AIMS) users.

    o Consultation with senior Assembly staff, Web Team and Equality Manager

    o Discussion and feedback from the NIA External Disability Advisory Group

    o External Relations Strategy

    o Good Relations Strategy Consultation Results Report

    o Review of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Audit of Inequalities and Equality Scheme.

    o 5 year review of the Disability Action Plans

    o Other relevant articles and journals.

- Quantitative Information:

    o Census information (2011 Census)

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- o Statistics and Reports from Office of National Statistics (ONS) – 2012 to 2014

- o Public Attitude Survey

- o Ofcom Media Reports (2014)

- o Social media statistics for the NIA, Northern Ireland Assembly website statistics

15. This data and research was analysed to provide an insight into the potential impacts of the strategy on people in the various Section 75 categories.

Key Findings

16. The EQIA consultation report identified a number of mitigating measures to address the differential impact Section 75 groups currently face summarised in the table below. The consultation period ran for 14 weeks and as stated no responses were received.

Summary of Section 75 Categories and Mitigating Measures

Section 75 Category	Issues / Impacts Identified	Mitigating Measures
Religious Belief	Data collected identified that there were no issues to mitigate for those of different Religious Belief.	
Political Opinion	Data collected identified that there were no issues to mitigate for those of different Political Opinion.	
Gender (Men and Women generally)	Data collected identified that there were no issues to mitigate for those of different Genders (Men and Women generally).	
Marital Status	Data collected identified that there were no issues to mitigate for those of different marital status.	
Sexual Orientation	Data collected identified that there were no issues to mitigate for those of different sexual orientation.	
Dependants	Data collected identified that there were no issues to mitigate for those with dependants.	
Age	It is accepted that older people (60 years plus) are less likely to be online than most younger age groups.	The Assembly will make information available in alternative formats including hard copy when requested for those people who are not able to access content online via their PC, Tablet or Smartphone. Through the Assembly Outreach team and the work of

Section 75 Category	Issues / Impacts Identified	Mitigating Measures
		Assembly Community Connect we can partner with organisations who can support engagement with our older and aging population to build their confidence in interacting with us.
Disability		The NI Assembly websites adhere to W3C web usability standards ensuring that it is accessible to people with disabilities. NI Assembly website is now fully responsive and therefore more accessible to all users regardless of the devices being used to access the site. The website includes an accessibility section. The NI Assembly makes information available in alternative formats (braille, easy read, audio, large print etc.) including hard copy when requested for those people who are not able to access content online or who have difficulty accessing information via their PC, Tablet or Smartphone. Discussions with other legislatures and parliaments in the UK who are working on similar digital strategies and initiatives with particular regard to digital accessibility.

Section 75 Category	Issues / Impacts Identified	Mitigating Measures
Racial Group	The Assembly does not currently produce or publish its procedural information in any languages other than English except for sections of Hansard (Official Reports) where Members have used other languages in the Chamber. The NI Census figures show that the proportion of those for who English is their main language do not appear to indicate the potential for differential impacts.	The Assembly Commission does not yet have an agreed Language Policy. However, draft language Guidance has been under consideration by the Assembly Commission.

17.   Following the conclusion of the consultation period a number of follow up calls were made to key stakeholders giving a further opportunity for feedback. As of 24th November 2015 nothing has been received.

18.   Again following the conclusion of the consultation period OFCOM published a new consumer experience research report "Disabled Consumers' use of communications services[2]" The scope of the report:

> *"…compares the profiles of consumers with different types of disability: their households' access to, their use of, and their limitations in using communications services, i.e. landline, mobile, PC/laptop, tablet, games console, TV, DAB (digital audio broadcasting) and internet access."*

Some of the key findings from that report that are relevant to this EQIA are noted below:

19.   The OFCOM report confirmed what had already been found in the research for the consultation report; internet access among disabled consumers is lower than for non-disabled consumers.

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[2] The analysis focuses on consumers with hearing, visual, mobility or learning disabilities only, and consumers with a combination of any of the first three. Disabilities other than those included in the analysis are contained within the total disabled population and are reported only at that level.

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However, the trends identified in the OFCOM report show that internet access, and access to communications and services have been increasing in the recent years for all disabled consumers.

OFCOM Statistics

20. Internet access for disabled consumers is 65% overall whereas access for non-disabled consumers is 88%. Consumers with multiple impairments have the lowest levels of access at 49%, while visually-impaired consumers and those with a learning disability have the highest levels of access among the disability groups (at 75% and 73% respectively).

21. The proportion of disabled consumers with access to a tablet in the home tripled between 2012 and 2014 from 9% to 30%. As with tablets, access to a smartphone in the home since 2012 increased for both disabled (27% to 41%) and non-disabled (48% to 66%) consumers.

22. The majority of internet users (with or without a disability) said they usually accessed the internet at home. However, accessing the internet via a mobile device has increased significantly since 2012 for both disabled and non-disabled consumers. OFCOM have

suggested that this is influenced by the increases in access to connected devices such as smartphones and tablets.

23. Communication and information remained the most popular uses of the internet for both disabled and non-disabled consumers, although neither activity had changed since 2012 for either group.

24. The report also shows that people with particular disabilities face issues that are specific to their disability. For example a fifth of disabled consumers said their disability limited or prevented their use any of communication devices and services. This was highest among visually-impaired consumers (32%) and those with hearing or a learning disability (each at 30%).

25. Six in ten mobility-impaired consumers had internet access, compared to nine in ten non-disabled consumers. Internet access had increased by 13pp (to 60%) since 2012 for this disability group, but remained lower than for non-disabled consumers (up 5pp to 88%). The older age profile of this disability group (over half were aged 65+) explains some of the difference in levels of access, as well as the lower levels of access to computing devices among this group.

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26.   Half of multiple-impaired consumers had internet access, compared to nine in ten non-disabled consumers. This is an increase of 8pp (to 49%) since 2012 for this disability group.

27.   Although the Assembly cannot address all of the barriers that disabled stakeholders may face. We do work with a number of charities and other organisations through our External Disability Advisory Group. We will continue to engage with them as the strategy develops to try and ensure we can mitigate or eliminate impacts.

Conclusions

28.   The lack of responses to our consultation cannot be taken to mean that the [mitigating measures](#) identified will be sufficient. The Digital First strategy will continue to develop and as new Digital First products and/or services are implemented there is likely to be a need for further consultation with stakeholders.

29.   We will continue to engage with other legislatures and Parliaments who are working on similar digital strategies and initiatives with particular regard to digital accessibility. We will talk to them as the

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strategy develops to try and ensure we can mitigate or eliminate impacts.

Monitoring

30. As required, the final stage in the EQIA process is the establishment of a system to monitor any on-going impact. This information will be published in the NI Assembly Commission's (the Commission) annual Section 75 report to the Equality Commission. The monitoring will include:

- Partnerships and Networks - Through active participation in partnerships and networks, the Assembly will seek to improve its understanding of any issues and needs that may impact Digital First. We will look for opportunities to draw upon the expertise and knowledge held by stakeholders and stakeholder groups and share experiences. Regular consultation with and feedback from these partnerships, formal and informal networks will assist the Assembly in assessing and monitoring products and services in relation to equality issues and their impact.

- Compliments and Complaints - Compliments and complaints received about services will also help to identify the impact of good practices and any adverse impact of existing practices. The

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Assembly is committed to providing excellent service to all of its stakeholders and wants to know if any aspect of its service, procedures, products or performance is unsatisfactory. It responds to complaints from customers as quickly and as efficiently as possible and considers their suggestions for improvements. The formal complaints procedure is detailed on the Assembly web site.

31.   Should the monitoring and analysis of results over a two year period show that there has been a greater adverse impact than anticipated, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the Commission will take steps to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups.