

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties

Annual Progress Report 2021-22

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/policies/equality-policies/>

Signature:

This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission. It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans. This report reflects progress made between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

1

In 2021-22, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved. *Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.*

1 (a)
Corporate
Strategy

During this reporting period, the Corporate Strategy 2018-23 and the Corporate Plan 2019-23 were in place.

The Corporate Strategy contains two aims of specific relevance to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, which are:

Under the aim of “Building excellence and innovation in our services.”

“Ensuring high standards in equality, governance and regulatory compliance through effective and efficient processes.”

Under the aim of “Strengthening engagement with the public.”

“Building connections with target groups including for example, support for greater female participation and the delivery of a Youth Assembly.”

The Corporate Plan 2019-23 provides the detail of key projects and priorities the Assembly Commission intends to deliver over the four

years of the plan to underpin the Corporate Strategy 2018-23. The Corporate Strategy can be accessed [here](#).

In order to command confidence and facilitate compliance with the statutory duties, a number of measures are also in place:

- All equality plans and monitoring reports are tabled at Secretariat Management Group (SMG) meetings;
- The Equality Scheme, the Audit of Inequalities, the Disability Action Plan, the Good Relations Action Plan and the Gender Action Plan are published on the Assembly website (and can be accessed [here](#));
- Policy screening arrangements are in place, including a protocol for the sign-off of screening forms;
- The screening template is kept under regular review and screening guidance is updated as appropriate;
- Applicable policies (new and revised) submitted to SMG and the Assembly Commission must include a screening form (this is a requirement of the SMG/Assembly Commission cover paper template);
- Policy screening forms, which can be accessed [here](#), are published on the Assembly website quarterly and stakeholders are sent a notification email;
- Public consultations are held on action plans, equality impact assessments (EQIAs), etc., in order to engage with the public and seek their views;
- Training on equality issues is incorporated into the staff training schedule; and
- The Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors meet with the Equality Manager on a regular basis to discuss equality issues.

**1 (b)
Disability
Action Plan
2016-2021**




The Disability Action Plan (DAP) sets out how the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (“the Assembly Commission”) is fulfilling its statutory obligations under Section 49 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Section 49A of the Act says that the Assembly Commission must:

- **promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and**
- **encourage participation by disabled people in public life.**

DAP 2016-2021

A Closure Report on the Assembly Commission’s DAP 2016-2021, which details progress made against the actions, and covers the remainder of the current reporting period, 1 April 2021 to 8 February 2022, can be accessed [here](#).

Table 1 overleaf summarises the final status of DAP 2016-2021 actions. This details the number of actions completed, not completed or suspended over the period of the 2016-21 DAP. A final status narrative update for each of the individual actions can be accessed via the link provided above.

Table 1 – Disability Action Plan 2016-21 Final Status of Actions			
Status Key		No of actions	% of actions
	Complete	49	90.7%
	Not Completed	2	3.7%
	Action Suspended	3	5.6%
Total actions		54	100.0%

DAP 2022-2025

During the reporting period, a 12-week public consultation was held from 16 August 2021 to 5 November 2021 on the draft DAP 2022-2025. On the 9 February 2022, the Assembly Commission approved

the final DAP for the 2022-25 period, which can be accessed [here](#).
The DAP 2022-25 post consultation responses can be found [here](#).

**1(c) Good
Relations
Action Plan
2016-2021**

Under section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Assembly Commission is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The Good Relations Action Plan (GRAP) sets out how the Assembly Commission proposes to fulfil this duty in relation to the functions for which it is responsible.

GRAP 2016-2021

During the reporting period a Closure Report was prepared on the GRAP 2016-21 which covers the full period of the action plan, 2016-2021.

Table 2 – Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 Final Status of Actions			
Status Key		No of actions	% of actions
	Complete	33	80.4%
	Not Completed	4	9.8%
	Action Suspended	4	9.8%
Total actions		41	100.0%

Due to the prevailing public health situation, and in discussion with the ECNI, the AoI Action Plan 2016-21 was extended until a successor plan could be put in place in 2022. This extension has allowed additional time for a new Audit of Inequalities to be drafted. The purpose of this report is to:

- ✓ review implementation to assess whether the stated aims of the plan were achieved;
- ✓ assess performance against the plan actions;

- ✓ identify and recognise achievements;
- ✓ identify the challenges and lessons learnt; and
- ✓ identify the next steps.

This report provides a final status update and narrative against each action contained within the 2016-21 action plan.

GRAP 2022-2025

Work to develop the draft GRAP 2022-25 began during the reporting period as detailed below:

- In developing the draft Good Relations Action Plan (2022-2025) policy leads/Heads of Business from across Assembly Commission Directorates, who were responsible for the delivery of the previous Good Relations Action Plan (2016-2021), were asked to complete a questionnaire in relation to the previous action plan's operation, implementation and impact. Questions were also included in relation to the identification of new sources of equality and good relations data and any lessons learnt from previous Good Relations Plans or actions which should be included when developing the new Good Relations Action Plan (2022-2025). This review was conducted as part of phase-one of the draft Good Relations pre-consultation plan.
- Phase two of the pre-consultation plan sought internal feedback from Assembly Commission staff through face to face meetings and also surveyed a number of external agencies. In July 2021 an online meeting was held with representatives from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland.
- As a follow up to the online meeting with ethnic minority groups, an online survey was issued to the same

representatives as part of the development process of the GRAP 2022-2025. The Executive Office (TEO) also issued the survey link to approximately 40 of its minority ethnic member organisations. Those who received the link were encouraged to pass it on to other ethnic minority individuals in their local community. The survey was designed to ascertain if: -

- (i) any barriers or obstacles existed which might prevent or limit engagement with the Assembly Commission; and
- (ii) how these barriers could be overcome.

The survey was conducted between July and August 2021. A total of 109 valid responses were received. Respondents came from across Northern Ireland, with 16 of the 18 constituencies represented in the survey. This data was analysed in detail when developing the draft GRAP (2022-2025).

- The draft GRAP 2022-25 will be tabled at the June 2022 Assembly Commission meeting seeking approval to allow for public consultation to commence on the actions proposed to be undertaken over the 2022-25 period.

**1 (d) Gender
Action Plan
2019-2023**

The Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2019-23 is a continuation of the 2016-18 Gender Action Plan, and it sets out actions and measures to promote gender equality within the Assembly Commission. Progress against targets in the action plan is overseen by the Gender Action Plan Implementation Group, which meets regularly throughout the year. It reports on progress to SMG every six months and to the Assembly Commission annually.

During the reporting period, two six-monthly updates were prepared (October 2021 and March 2022). Updates are available [here](#). Both reports detail progress made against each of the actions contained within the plan.

The March 2022 GAP summary of progress update is available at Table 3 overleaf:

Table 3 – Gender Action Plan 2019-23 Summary of Progress (March 2022)			
Status Key		No of actions	% of actions
	Complete	9	64.3%
	In progress	2	14.3%
	Not Completed	3	21.4%
Total actions		14	100.0%

**1 (e)
Audit of
Inequalities**

The purpose of an audit of inequalities is to provide a strategic picture of inequalities relevant to the role and functions of an organisation. This audit informs the development of an audit of inequalities (Aol) action plan, which aims to address inequalities and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Aol Action Plan 2016-2021 Closure Report

The Aol Action Plan 2016-21 is published on the Assembly website as an appendix of the Equality Scheme 2016-21 and can be accessed [here](#).

Due to the prevailing public health situation, and in discussion with the ECNI, the Aol Action Plan 2016-21 was extended until a successor plan could be put in place in 2022. This extension has allowed additional time for a new Audit of Inequalities to be drafted.

During the reporting period a closure report on the Aol 2016-2021 was prepared. The purpose of this report was to review the implementation of the Aol Action Plan 2016-21, to help identify any learning and to establish if the outcomes contained within the Action Plan have been achieved.

Table 4 below summarises the number of actions completed, not completed or suspended over the period of the Aol action plan (2016-21). A status update for each action is available on the equality section of the Assembly website and provides the final status and narrative update for each of the individual actions.

Table 4 – Aol 2016-21 Final Status of Actions			
Status Key		No of actions	% of actions
	Complete	25	92.6%
	Action Suspended	2	7.4%
Total actions		27	100.0%

Aol Action Plan 2022- 2026

During the reporting period work continued on the development of an Aol Action Plan for the 2022 – 2026 period.

An assessment to identify the key inequalities has been carried out across the nine section 75 categories alongside an assessment of the functions and services the Assembly Commission delivers in order to provide a strategic picture of inequalities.

It was considered that a four-stage approach was appropriate to review the Assembly Commission’s Equality Scheme, and to develop an Aol Report and an Aol Action Plan.

- **Stage One: Review of the Assembly Commission’s Equality Scheme.** The Equality scheme has been reviewed, revised, and will be publicly consulted upon alongside the Aol following approval by the SMG and the Assembly Commission.
- **Stage Two: Review of information/data.**
 In conducting the Aol, the Equality Unit examined an extensive range of information sources, both external (through relevant desk top research and engagement with stakeholders) and internal (through user feedback, statistical information, workforce monitoring, complaints, strategies, programmes, research etc.).
- **Stage three: Review of the current Audit of Inequalities.**
 A review has been conducted of the Assembly Commission’s previous Aol and Aol Action Plan (2016-2021). This review has produced an Aol Action Plan closure report (2016-2021). The closure report:

 - reviewed implementation to assess whether the stated aims of the Plan were achieved;
 - assessed performance against the Plan’s actions;
 - identified and recognised achievements;
 - identified the challenges and lessons learnt; and
 - identified the next steps.
- **Stage four: Consultation and Engagement.**
 As part of pre-consultation in developing the draft Aol (2022-2026) a range actions were undertaken in order to gather data this included:

- Analysis of the Assembly Commission Heads of Business (HoB) data supplied for the Audit of Inequalities Closure Report 2016 – 2021.
- Questionnaires issued to HoB to gather information about equality data in their respective areas.
- Questionnaire issued to Government Departments to gather data on web accessibility.
- In July 2021 an online meeting was held with representatives from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland.

The draft Aol Action Plan will be publically consulted on during the next Annual Progress Report reporting period.

1(f) Speaker's Events

During this reporting period, Parliament Buildings was closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic for a significant period. A range of events and initiatives were therefore hosted virtually and in person.

Saturday 6 November 2021 and Saturday 5 March 2022 – The Speaker presided over plenary sittings of the Youth Assembly in Parliament Buildings

Thursday 11 November 2021 – The Speaker held an Act of Remembrance in the Senate to mark Armistice Day.

Friday 3 December 2021 – To mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the Speaker hosted the first Disability Parliament with participants debating issues of concern to those with disabilities in the Assembly Chamber.

Tuesday 7 December 2021 –The Speaker launched a Giving Tree in Parliament Buildings in support of the St Vincent de Paul and

Salvation Army Christmas Family Appeal to provide support to those facing hardship.

Friday 4 March 2022 –The Speaker launched an Assembly Commission exhibition for display in Parliament Buildings. The exhibition recognised Women Parliamentarians of Northern Ireland in institutions connected to Parliament Buildings over the past hundred years.

Friday 4 March 2022 –To mark International Women’s Day, the Speaker hosted a Women’s Parliament in the Assembly Chamber with participants debating issues of concern for women.

Monday 14 March 2022 –The Assembly Commission approved a request from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to plant a tree to mark Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth’s Platinum Jubilee. A Speaker’s event was held to hosted to plant the tree and mark Commonwealth Day.

Wednesday 16 March 2022 – The Speaker hosted an event to mark Seachtain na Gaelige (Irish Language Week) which provided the opportunity for MLAs, and Assembly staff to learn some parliamentary phrases in Irish.

Wednesday 23 March 2022 - To mark the Marie Curie International Day of Remembrance, the Speaker led the Assembly in observing a minute's silence to remember all those who lost their lives during the pandemic and to show support for the many thousands of people who mourned the loss of their loved ones.

Wednesday 23 March 2022 – Launch of New Display of Artefacts in Parliament Buildings. The Assembly Commission agreed proposals for a new display of items and images within Parliament Buildings. The proposals emerged from the report of the Assembly Commission’s working group on the review of the display of artefacts in Parliament Buildings. The new display reflects the full

history of the parliamentary institutions connected to the building and ensures a balance of all political perspectives. It also increases the representation of women and takes greater account of the experience of visitors.

1 (g)
Education
Service

The role of the Assembly's Education Service is broadly to support young people's understanding of the Northern Ireland Assembly and democracy. The Education Service delivered a programme of activities during the reporting period to a wide range of groups, including schools from all sectors (primary, secondary, maintained and controlled, voluntary grammar, special, integrated and Irish medium), pupils from Key Stages 1 to 5, universities, general youth groups and teachers (see **Annex 1** for figures by group type).

All areas of delivery are designed to raise awareness and understanding of the work of the Assembly through relevant educational curriculum streams and to encourage young people to participate in the democratic process.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Education Service operated differently during this reporting period and numbers participating in the education programme were lower compared with previous years. Parliament Buildings was closed to the public from April to September 2021. When it re-opened, it remained subject to a 2-metre social distancing rule for visitors. The social distancing restriction became 1-metre at the end of February 2022. Under the 2-metre rule, the Education Service could accommodate groups in Parliament Buildings of up to 6 people. In effect, this meant that the schools programme remained online for most of the reporting period. Schools began to return to the building in March 2022 when restrictions had been further eased, permitting groups up to 20 in size. Bookings for visits to the building increased at this time.

The 'physical' outreach programme to schools and other organisations remained suspended throughout the year. Therefore, for the most part, the education programme was delivered virtually. MLAs continued to participate in the programme: 36 virtual MLA sessions were facilitated by the Education Service and 4 meetings with MLAs in Parliament Buildings. The Education Service continued to develop new online resources for schools. (See 'Resources' below).

Most of the groups that participated in the programme during the period were school groups from across Northern Ireland, drawn from most school sectors (see table at Annex 1).

The Education Service also caters for youth groups, university groups and schools from other places, including Ireland and Europe. Following the re-opening of the building for visitors, the first groups were from Trinity College, Dublin (Belfast Campus), Rutgers University, New Jersey and a school from the Netherlands.

In addition, the Education Service delivered a number of presentations, which included:

- a presentation to Ulster University's Transitional Justice Institute/School of Law (virtual).
- a programme for Ulster University students of Planning, Regeneration and Development, which involved talks by, and Q & A sessions with, the Chair of the Assembly's Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and a specialist Assembly researcher (virtual).
- a full-day YMCA 'Youth in Government' debating event (25 students from 6 schools) in Parliament Buildings (with the Speaker in the Chair for one of the motions).

- a ‘Politics in Action’ event with 2 schools (cross-community), in Parliament Buildings, including Q & A sessions with MLAs.

For teachers and students of Government and Politics, the Education Service organised virtual presentations by invited speakers, including the Chair of the Assembly’s Committee for Health.

The Education Service continues to offer its regular programme through the medium of Irish. It also offers special programmes for school councils, eco councils and rights respecting schools.

Resources

The Education Service produced 4 new animations in partnership with CCEA: ‘Assembly Committees’ and ‘Making Laws’ for Key Stage 4 & 5 students of Government & Politics, and Learning for Life and Work (Democracy and Active Participation); and ‘Devolution’ and ‘Work of an MLA’ for primary pupils and Key Stage 3 students of Learning for Life and Work (Democracy and Active Participation). Subtitling is provided for all video resources.

In lieu of face-to-face conferences, the Education Service recorded talks by guest speakers and recordings were posted online.

<https://education.niassembly.gov.uk/video-gallery>.

To further improve accessibility, the Education Service commissioned signing of 5 videos: ‘How do we elect MLAs (STV)’; ‘What happens when an Assembly election is called?’; ‘The Assembly and Executive’ (formation of the Executive and relationship between the Assembly and Executive); ‘Committees’; and ‘Making Laws’.

The primary-school section of the Education Service website in Irish was published in December 2021 and initial translation of the Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 pages was completed.

Engagement

In addition to its core visits programme for schools and other groups, activities carried out by the Education Service during the reporting period included:

- An Education Officer completed school focus group workshops on behalf of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights and attended a Committee meeting on 6 May 2021 to report on the outcome of the consultation exercise. School focus groups, involving 110 young people, were drawn from 14 schools across Northern Ireland in all school sectors, including special and Irish-medium schools and through Springboard Opportunities, young people not in formal education were also consulted. Focus group sessions for Irish-medium participants were delivered in Irish.
- On behalf of the Committee for Education, the Education Service consulted school pupils on the issues of 'The impact of lockdown and restart on the mental health and emotional well-being of children and young people'. Twenty-one focus group sessions were held with pupils from 19 schools from across Northern Ireland and all education sectors, including 2 special schools and an Irish-medium school. On 30 June 2021, an Education Officer attended a meeting of the Education Committee to give evidence on the findings.
- At the request of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Education Service organised a special virtual event to mark the COP 26 meeting in Glasgow in November 2021. This event involved approximately 70 young people from 3 schools who presented their views on climate

change and the COP 26 agenda to the Committee and put questions to the Committee on its work in this area.

- Education Officers met with colleagues from Westminster, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Parliament and Dáil Eireann to discuss and share good practice on approaches to engagement when services were affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

Disability

The Education Service has committed to increasing the participation of special schools in the Assembly's Education Programme and to holding a conference for special-school teachers by June 2022.

The Education Service engaged with 2 special schools in 2021-22 as part of its core programme. This is a lower number than usual, due to the preference of special schools to visit the building rather than participate in a virtual programme. The Education Service engaged with a further 4 special schools as part of its focus group work on behalf of Committees.

1 (h) Engagement & Outreach

The Engagement Office is responsible for advancing and encouraging the public's awareness and understanding of the Assembly. It provides the business community, voluntary sector and delegations from across the world with the opportunity to engage with and learn more about the legislature.

Assembly Connects Programme

The Assembly Connects programme works to enhance connections between the Assembly and the community through education and outreach. It provides free training, information and support to local community groups, businesses and individuals.

Due to the changing public health situation, training has been delivered virtually, in-person and, new in 2021-22, in a hybrid

format. Consultation and co-design has taken place with a wide range of section 75 groups in this reporting period including those with a disability, older people, women, LGBTQ, disability, BAME, Asylum seekers and young people outside of education. This work has led to 52 training programmes being successfully delivered to just under 900 people during this time period.

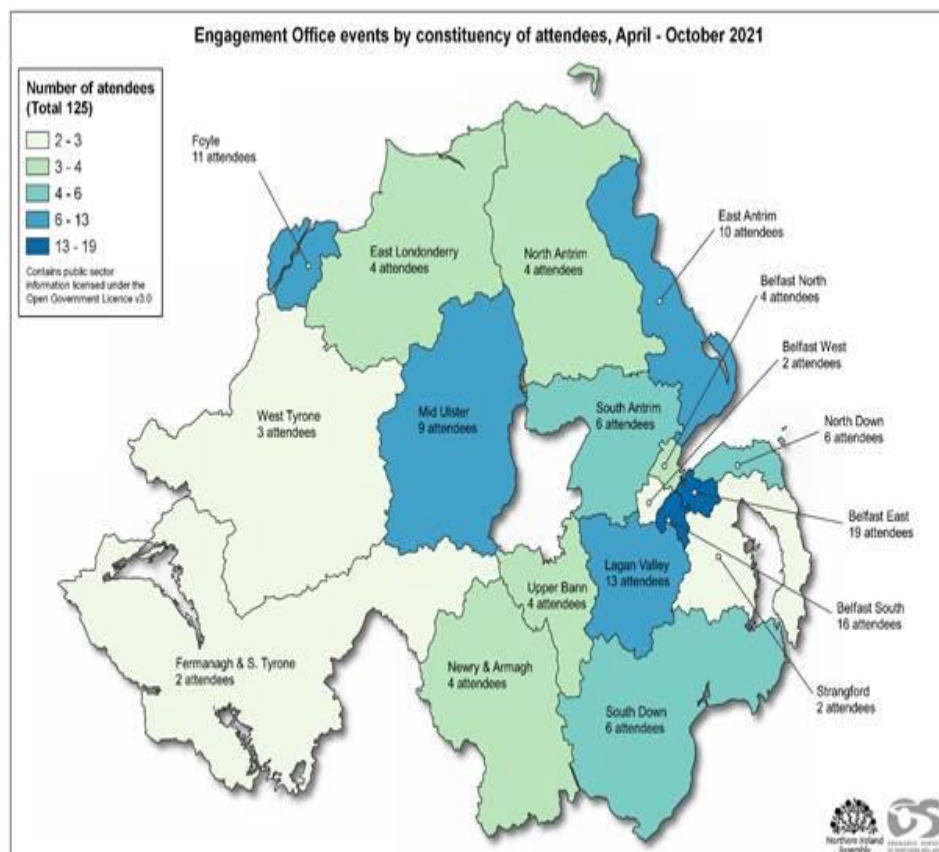
Section 75 data has been collated for each Assembly Connects event and is assessed on a six monthly basis via a Bi-Annual Engagement Report. Associated strategies are being developed to ensure increased participation where required. Below are the results for April 21 – October 21.

Table 5: Profile of Respondents (pre-event surveys) April 21 – October 21

Category	Number	Percentage
AGE		
Under 25	2	1.5
25 – 39 years	38	28.6
40 – 59 years	80	60.2
60 + years	13	9.8
GENDER		
Male	48	36.1
Female	85	63.9
Other	0	0.0
DISABILITY		
Physical	12	9.0
Sensory	6	4.5

Learning	1	0.8
No disability	114	85.7
RACE		
White	125	95.4
Black African	4	3.1
Other Asian	2	1.5

Diagram 1: Engagement Office Events by Constituency of Attendees (April – October 2021)



Committee Engagement Support

During this period, the Engagement Office supported Assembly Committees to increase participation and witness diversity. In conjunction with the Communications Office, the Engagement Team

have used alternative methods to gather views, including virtual stakeholder events and online surveys, to ensure equality of access.

They delivered over 30 virtual stakeholder events, led on the delivery of the Citizen Space platform, supported the production of seventeen accessible online 'Calls of Evidence' and produced a range of creative projects which gathered views to inform Committee business. Where appropriate, events have been co-designed with relevant third parties, particularly for young people or those with a disability.

Events/Projects

During 2021/22 the Assembly hosted a series events to engage a range of stakeholders. Activities included:

- A series of Diversity Parliaments for older people, women and those with a disability. The Disabled Peoples Parliament was the first in the UK, and possibly further afield, and received significant coverage on TV and radio and had the highest social media engagements of any project to date, with the top tweet seen more than 50,000 times.
- The first joint session of the Committee was arranged with Members of the Disabled People's Parliament to receive briefings and question the Minister of Health and Department of Health officials.
- The first hybrid capacity building event for rural women was held in Parliament Buildings. Held in conjunction with NIRWN (Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network), the conference focused on how to get involved with the Northern Ireland Assembly and the importance of women in public life, with 45 delegates in the Long Gallery and others joining remotely.
- Support was provided to the Central Committee Office to engage the Deaf community to help co-design the delivery of the Assembly's Sign Language project.

1(I)
Communications
Office

The Communications Office provides information about the work of the Assembly to the media, public, government departments, and other key stakeholders. It has a team of communications professionals who focus on the Northern Ireland Assembly website, digital communications, social media and broadcasting. The Communications Office is at the centre of the strategy for engaging the wider public in the life of the Assembly.

The Communications Office has continued to review website content to ensure that it is as accessible to as many people as possible and has continued to monitor the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 making mitigations, and where that isn't possible, advising users of alternative formats. All staff involved in web publishing have been provided with training on how to create more accessible content and extensive user guides have been published alongside training sessions for users on the intranet.

The Communications Office has continued to provide additional personal screens for Members who need help with lip reading to enable participation in Committee meetings where witnesses and other Members are participating remotely. The audio from all virtual meetings has been incorporated into our induction loops to allow Members and Witnesses attending in person to be able to better participate in meetings.

New broadcasting projects that will upgrade the audio and video equipment in Committee Rooms and the Assembly Chamber will include updated facilities for disabled users such as microphones and better screens for virtual and audio visual presentations. The use of sign language and subtitling for Questions to the Executive

Office Ministers in Plenary meetings has also been introduced for broadcast. It is likely that these services will expand to other types of business and procedural output over the next period.

1 (j)

**Northern
Ireland Youth
Assembly**

The Education Service is responsible for the delivery of the Assembly Commission-supported Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. The Youth Assembly's primary function is to give young people a voice and allow and encourage them to participate directly in the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly and its Committees.

The Youth Assembly was established in June 2021 and has 90 members aged between 13 and 17 years old, who have been appointed for a two-year period. Three plenary sittings, which are usually held in Parliament Buildings and chaired by the Speaker, have been held to date.

The Youth Assembly has established four committees covering Education, Health, Environment and Rights and Equality, and a Business Committee. Ten Committee meetings have taken place during the reporting period. Youth Assembly members also participate in youth consultations in partnership with third parties, including Government Departments.

Recruitment

The recruitment process took account of, socio-economic status, geographic location, those with experience of the care system and all Section 75 categories (Section75+). Its development involved establishing a Co-Design Panel of young people who helped the Youth Assembly Team prepare recruitment proposals. Additionally, an Advisory Group, chaired by the Speaker, was established to provide advice and guidance from the youth sector and other relevant stakeholders in relation to the arrangements needed to

establish, implement and review the operation of the Youth Assembly.

The Youth Assembly Team commissioned the Assembly's Research and Information Services (RaISe) to produce a report to establish the estimated demographic of the Northern Ireland youth population in the core age range of 13 to 17. That was essential to ensure that the membership of the Youth Assembly would be fully inclusive and representative of all the Section 75+ categories in that demographic.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) was consulted on the proposed recruitment process and was content with the proposals. In addition, the proposals were equality screened, the result of which was that they were screened out. The proposed recruitment process was unanimously endorsed by the Advisory Group, which in turn was agreed by the Assembly Commission. Recruitment went live on 26 April 2021 and closed on 21 May 2021 and nearly 1200 applications were received.

The outcome of the recruitment process was the appointment of a fully inclusive and representative cohort of young people. The Youth Assembly Team has taken measures to promote good relations between the members of this diverse group. During the first plenary meeting, Youth Assembly Members took a pledge, which stated that they would "show respect and tolerance for the views of all its members".

Similarly, the Youth Assembly Code of Conduct emphasises the importance of developing positive working relationships with all Members of the Youth Assembly. Respecting the rights and dignity of others, whether you agree with them or not is another key aspect of the Code of Conduct. In the interests of further increasing cohesion across the Youth Assembly's membership, the Youth Assembly Team holds monthly online drop-in sessions that provide an opportunity for informal catch-up and promotion of good

relations. The Youth Assembly is an environment where good relations are promoted through young people listening to people with different views, giving their views, and having them respectfully challenged.

- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2021-22 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).
- a) A progress report on the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 is prepared every six months. All updates, including the most recent from October 2021, are available on the Assembly website at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/policies/good-relations-action-plan/>.
 - b) An update on the Disability Action Plan 2022-25 is available at Part B of this Annual Progress Report.
 - c) A progress update on the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan is prepared every six months (April and November 2021). The updates can be found on the Assembly website or at this link <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/policies/equality-policies/audit-of-inequalities/>.
 - d) A progress report on the continuing Gender Action Plan is prepared every six months (October 2021 and March 2022). All documents relating to the GAP, including six monthly updates, are available on the Assembly website at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/policies/equality-policies/gender-action-plan/>.

3 Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2021-22 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No (go to Q.4) Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples: see 3a below

3a With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

Not applicable.

3b What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? (*tick all that apply*)

As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy (*please give details*):

As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise (*please give details*):

As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact (*please give details*):

As a result of changes to access to information and services (*please specify and give details*):

Other (*please specify and give details*):

Not applicable.

**Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures
Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)**

4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2021-22 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Job descriptions within the Assembly Commission are generic in nature and may not make specific reference to Section 75. However, the list of duties reflects compliance with the Assembly Commission policies which inherently include Section 75 duties.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2021-22 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The approach to performance management assesses performance in relation to the work carried out by staff and also in relation to the Assembly Commission's Skills and Behaviours Framework. Within the context of the Framework, staff are required to promote a positive and productive working environment; foster an environment where staff feel respected and valued; and uphold the goals of professionalism, respect, impartiality and integrity as set out in the Corporate Strategy 2018-2023.

6 In the 2021-22 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? (*tick all that apply*)

- Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- Yes, in some departments/jobs
- No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
- No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The Corporate Strategy for 2018-2023 commits staff to demonstrating: **professionalism** in everything we do; **respect** for each other, Members and the public; and **impartiality** and **integrity** in all our work. Within the 'Building Excellence and Innovation in our Services' element of the strategy, the Assembly Commission commits to ensuring high standards in equality, governance and regulatory compliance through effective and efficient processes.

The Assembly Commission also has a Behaviour Code in place which reminds those working in or visiting Parliament Buildings on how they should be treated and how they should treat others. Six behaviours are promoted:

1. Show respect to and value everyone. Bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct will not be tolerated;

2. Be aware of your power, influence and authority and don't abuse them;
3. Think about how your behavior affects others and always strive to understand their perspective;
4. Act professionally towards others;
5. Speak up about any unacceptable behaviour that you experience; and
6. Display the highest ethical standards of integrity, courtesy and mutual respect.

Equality action plans/measures (Audit of Inequalities Action Plan)

- 7 Within the 2021-22 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of: (**27 Actions in total**)

Actions completed:	25	Actions not completed:	0	Actions superceded:	2
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- 8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2021-22 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

Not applicable.

- 9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2021-22 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

- Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
- Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

10 Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)*

All the time

Sometimes

Never

11 Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2021-22 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

As described at 1(b), 1(c) and 1(e) above, public consultation and pre-consultation exercises were undertaken with consultees to help inform policy development and to better understand any issues or barriers to service provision.

12 In the 2021-22 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: *(tick all that apply)*

Face to face meetings

Focus groups

Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing

Questionnaires

Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation

Internet discussions

Telephone consultations

Other *(please specify)*:

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

Please refer to 1(b), 1(c) and 1(e) above.

13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2021-22 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No Not applicable

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2021-22 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

Please see relevant links below:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/publications/equality-screening-and-equality-impact-assessments-eqias/>

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/policies/equality-policies/>

15 Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*):

4

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2021-22:

4	Policy consultations conducted with screening assessment presented.
	Policy consultations conducted with an equality impact assessment (EQIA) presented.
	Consultations for an EQIA alone.

17 Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

Consultation was noted as related to the four equality screening forms for the reporting period. No issues were raised as regards differential impact on the section 75 categories. The four policy consultations were as follows:

1. Standards of Conduct Policy (political activities section only)
2. Learning and Development Strategy
3. Establishment of a Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland
4. Internal Communications Strategy

18 Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*tick one box only*)

- Yes No concerns were raised No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

19 Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2021-22 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

20 From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2021-22 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes No, already taken place
 No, scheduled to take place at a later date Not applicable

Please provide any details:

21 In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

22 Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2021-22 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

Not applicable

- 23** Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

Monitoring arrangements are built into our equality action plans. For example, six-monthly progress updates on the Gender Action Plan, Disability Action Plan, Audit of Inequalities and the Good Relations Action Plan are provided to SMG. Monitoring is also carried out informally on an on-going basis. In addition, information arising from monitoring is considered when reviewing service delivery, existing action plans and when developing policies.

An example regarding service delivery planning is provided below:

The Education Service

Over the last 5 years, the Education Service has sought to increase the number of special schools participating in the Assembly's education programme. Prior to COVID-19 restrictions, there was a year-on-year increase. The number of bookings has fallen over the last couple of years for all schools, including special schools. The Education Service looks forward to welcoming all schools back to Parliament Buildings, including special schools. It also looks forward to reinstating the outreach programme in schools. However, the Education Service will continue to offer a virtual option in addition to inward visits and outreach visits to schools, and will continue to raise awareness of the programme amongst special schools through separate mailshots. The Education Service has committed to holding special professional development events for teachers from special schools and aims to hold the first of these events in June 2022, subject to COVID-19 guideline restrictions.

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

- 24** Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2021-22, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

A list of relevant learning and development activities attended by staff during the reporting period is provided in the table below.

Title of Course	Staff Attendance	Start Date
People Manager Programme Module 11: Building Resilience	8	12/05/2021
Mindfulness 6-week course	10	14/05/2021
Planning for Retirement	21	19/11/2021

A list of relevant learning and development activities launched and completed on the LInKs/Moodle platform for the reporting period is provided below.

Title of Training	Number of Staff Completions
Unconscious Bias (e-Learning)	70
Introduction to section 75 (NIA) (e-Learning)	49
Positive Mental Health Toolkit for All Staff (e-Learning)	4
Positive Mental Health Toolkit for Line Managers (e-Learning)	3
Managing Personal Stress and Resilience - NI Assembly (e-Learning)	4
Domestic Abuse (e-learning)	1

A list of Internal Briefings/Workshops and Link & Learn Events attended by staff during the reporting period is provided below.

Title of Event	Staff Attendance	Start Date
Lunch and Learn – Mental Health Week	10	13/05/2021
Lunch and Learn – Parenting Seminars (x4)	17	09/09/2021
Link and Learn – The Importance of Financial Wellbeing in the Workplace	6	26/01/2022
Let's Talk Ways to Wellbeing	27	03/02/2022

- 25 Please provide any examples of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives.

This reporting period continued to see a different way of delivering learning activities due to the continuing health pandemic with much more online delivery than physical delivery of activities. The majority of feedback received via our evaluation forms has been positive in relation to the delivery of learning activities. It appears that the sessions are of an appropriate length and the topics are of interest to staff. All learning activities delivered are evaluated by means of questionnaires using the Assembly's e-learning Moodle platform. Staff members are asked to respond to a range of questions, one of which is to detail the aspects of the training they had found most beneficial. A selection of qualitative comments provided as part of the evaluations are provided below.

Mindfulness 6-week course

- This was a really positive and beneficial course and I would recommend to others.
- This course was excellent. Very beneficial overall.
- Most liked elements of the event: Workbooks to read through in advance of each session (and refer back to afterwards). Links to audio clips to help keep practice going during the week and after the course. The facilitator was very knowledgeable and created a safe space in a virtual environment, which is not easy to do.

People Manager Programme: Module 11: Building Resilience

- Most liked elements of the event: Style of trainer. Knowledge and expertise of trainer.

Planning for Retirement

- Listening to other members of staff and their views on retirement etc.
- Being able to chat with others in the same position.
- The number of useful online links provided in the workbook.
- Learning about planning for retirement, financial matters, advice on investments.

Lunch and Learn - Parenting Seminars

- Tips and hints on parenting - liked the theory behind it all.

Link and Learn – The Importance of Financial Wellbeing in the Workplace

- The content of the event - provided good advice and links to support organisations that could be highlighted within the workplace.

In relation to future planning and delivery in collaboration with activities highlighted in equality action plans, further awareness/information short courses have been scheduled. The L&D team will continue to support and provide relevant training to the organizational champions, namely Mental Health First Aiders, Autism Champions and Harassment Contact Officers.

- 26** Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2021-22, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

Examples regarding access to information and services are provided below:

The Communications Office (access to information)

Within the reporting period, a new Assembly Style Guide was introduced for written communication. The new Guide provides guidance to all Assembly Commission staff on writing for different audiences and gives examples of how to write clearly. It also makes explicit reference to how staff should address groups of people, including those with disabilities and other Section 75 groups. In addition, the Guide includes links to information on making documents and presentations accessible for a wide range of people with disabilities, including the use of colour, alternative text for photographs and graphs.

Engagement Office (access to information and services):

During 2021-22 a number of initiatives were put in place to improve access to information and services including:

- The use of virtual meetings and training events continued as COVID-19 regulations were elevated. It has been identified that the virtual nature of the activities allowed for greater access to information particularly for those with dependants, disabilities or who live in rural areas.
- The Engagement Team hosted 5 hybrid events from September 2021 to March 2022 to provide access to events people were unable to attend in person. This included the Rural Women's Network Conference, the launch of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (AERA) report on 'Breaking the Grass Ceiling' and the co-design meeting with the Sign Language Project Group to create accessible presentations for the Deaf community.
- The Engagement Team co-designed and delivered an accessible training session for the Deaf community.
- The Assembly hosted a series of Diversity Parliaments for older people, those with a disability and women. All the Parliaments were signed in BSL (British Sign Language) and ISL (Irish Sign Language) to ensure the events were accessible to those from the Deaf community and extra descriptive speaking notes were added to the Speakers brief to provide more detail of what was happening during the proceedings for those with sight impairments.

Assembly Commission's Complaints Policy (addressing access to services)

In addition, the Assembly Commission's Complaints Policy remained in place making it easy for members of the public to notify the Assembly regarding any complaint relating to the delivery of services by Assembly staff and/or perceived failures in complying with the Assembly's Equality Scheme. There is a Complaints Officer to deal with issues raised by the public and to log complaints on a Complaints Register.

SMG receives reports from the Complaints Officer including data on the nature and volume of complaints received. These reports are published on the Assembly website, in line with our Publication Scheme.

The Assembly Commission also receives an annual summary report detailing the numbers and categories of complaints received in the previous year. The report will include any improvements made to the policy or procedures.

The Complaints Policy and Procedure is published on the Assembly's website at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/policies/complaints-procedure/>

As discussed at Section 1(b) above, examples are provided which aim to further improve public access to information and services, this also includes:

1. The provision of access information
2. An accessibility webpage
3. An 'Autism and the Assembly' webpage
4. Continuation of physical works to Parliament Buildings to improve access
5. Maintenance of signage and access items used by the public, for example, the changing places room, a braille tour map.

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

27 How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2021-22?

Insert number here:

0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Section 3: Looking Forward

28 Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:
March 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resourcing issues, the ECNI has granted an extension to the current equality scheme until such times as a new scheme can be put in place. The 2022-26 equality scheme will be subject to public consultation during the next reporting period.

29 Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

During the next reporting period we will continue to implement the actions in our Disability Action Plan. Areas on which we will focus over the next reporting period will also include:

- Conducting public consultations on the Assembly Commission’s Equality Scheme, Audit of Inequalities Action Plan and Good Relations Action Plan;
- Approval and implementation of the Assembly Commission’s Equality Scheme, Audit of Inequalities Action Plan and Good Relations Action Plan; and
- Approval and implementation of a Transgender Policy.

30 In relation to the advice and services that the Assembly Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2021-22) reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

- Employment
- Goods, facilities and services
- Legislative changes
- Organisational changes/ new functions
- Nothing specific, more of the same
- Other (please state):

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

Note: A closure report on the Assembly Commission’s Disability Action Plan 2016-2021, which details progress made against plan actions, and covers the current reporting period can be found at the following link <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/equality-and-good-relations/disability-action-plan->

[2016-21/disability-action-plan-2016-21-november-2021-final-status-update-and-closure-report/](#)

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Annex 1

Schools participating in the education programme 2021-2022

Report by School Type	Total no of groups	Total no of participants
Controlled Grammar	7	296
Controlled Primary	44	1636
Controlled Secondary	9	272
Integrated Primary	3	120
Integrated Secondary	1	30
Maintained Primary	45	1212
Maintained Secondary	25	522
Special Primary	1	38
Special Secondary	1	15
Voluntary Grammar	20	1121
Voluntary Primary	1	28
Grand Total	153	5292