



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**Northern Ireland Assembly
Commission
Gender Action Plan 2016-18**

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Foreword by the Speaker

As Speaker, I have been vocal about the need for the Assembly to reflect the composition of the diverse community it represents. Not only should the Assembly show respect to our wider society but the more perspectives the Assembly contains the better it can exercise its role in scrutinising the Executive and making legislation. With only 23 of 108 MLAs being female, the Assembly has a long way to go before it reflects the fact that the majority of the population is female. The report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee in May 2014 on 'Women in



The Speaker

Politics' was a positive start. I have encouraged parties to be aware that female representation will only increase if they are mindful of it as they select candidates for the next Assembly elections, but this is an area which will require sustained effort.

However, while encouraging progress at a political level in the Assembly itself, the Assembly Commission and Secretariat must also set a lead in addressing gender equality issues. I am proud that the political representation on the Assembly Commission is currently 50% male and 50% female, but we have work to do to ensure the same levels of gender balance in the management structures of the organisation. Experience shows that bringing about organisational and cultural change is not easy, particularly when you are not starting with a blank page. However, this Action Plan acts as a significant statement of intent to start addressing this issue, including by being conscious of gender in our decision-making processes and providing more pro-active support.

Working in a parliamentary environment provides many privileges and opportunities, but it also brings additional pressures and demands on both elected Members and Secretariat staff. Any legislature is required to respond to political developments and will therefore require additional flexibility in some business areas of the Assembly Commission more than others. Supporting the work of elected representatives will

never be a nine-to-five business, but the culture of later hours is much greater in the Northern Ireland Assembly compared to some of our counterparts. Ultimately achieving political agreement to change some of those working practices would act as a further boost to the goals of this Gender Action Plan.

Addressing the issues which impact on gender balance should be of interest to all of us, not just women. Long and unpredictable hours may be difficult for mothers with young families, but achieving working practices which promote better work-life balance is in the interests of all of us, women and men, those with children and those without. Similarly, just as in the Assembly, it is of benefit to all of us to have a range of perspectives and backgrounds in the decision-making processes of the Secretariat. I therefore encourage everyone to take this action plan forward as an important opportunity but I have no doubt that our approach is something which will have to be regularly monitored, reviewed and returned to in the years ahead.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin McLaughlin'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

“Respect – A First Step”

Foreword by the Clerk/Chief Executive

The commitment to equality is central to the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and its Secretariat, and fundamental to that commitment is the need to ensure equality for men and women in the workplace. This Gender Action Plan places a strategic and long-term focus on addressing gender issues within the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat, recognising the importance of tackling unconscious gender bias and of ensuring that we promote a culture of participation, learning and accountability.



The Clerk /
Chief Executive

This commitment to promoting gender equality reflects the Assembly Commission's wider commitment to equality, as outlined in its corporate strategy, which aims "to have equality and corporate governance arrangements in place which command confidence and which facilitate compliance with statutory responsibilities."

In addition, the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme sets out how the Commission plans to fulfil its duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act, including between men and women generally.

Alongside these statutory obligations is an awareness of the benefits that a focus on gender equality can bring for the organisation as a whole. A workplace in which men and women feel valued and in which they can participate and progress is a workplace that is more efficient and productive. Through this action plan, we aim to build on the positive measures that are already in place and address the particular challenges for the Secretariat, including tackling barriers to progression for women and increasing availability and uptake of training, professional development and mentoring.

Underpinning the action plan is a recognition of the importance of high-level leadership in the effective delivery and monitoring of the gender action plan. I have supported the good work that has already been done to promote gender equality within the Secretariat, but I recognise that more remains to be done. This action plan is an important step towards the goal of achieving gender equality, and it is one which I am pleased to promote.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Healey'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

1) Background and Context

In 2013, as a proactive step reflecting its commitment to gender equality, the Assembly Commission asked that consideration be given to gender issues in relation to the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat. In June of that year, at the request of the Clerk/Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly, a number of senior staff came together to examine the existence of any barriers, perceived or actual, in relation to gender equality in the Secretariat, and to consider what actions might be necessary to address any identified issues. This marked the beginning of an exploration of gender issues in respect of the Secretariat, a process which has culminated in the development of this Gender Action Plan.

Following this initial meeting, a Gender Action Steering Group was established to progress phase 1 of a gender action project, working to the following terms of reference:

- a. examine gender action plan models used by other Parliaments/Assemblies and organisations;
- b. oversee research to investigate whether there were issues which were having a detrimental effect in terms of gender equality within the Secretariat and, if necessary, to develop a Gender Action Plan to address such issues; and
- c. to set clear objectives and a methodology for developing a Gender Action Plan, for approval by SMG and Commission.

In March 2014, a report on the research overseen by the Steering Group entitled 'Perceptions of barriers to gender equality in the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat' was produced. This report presented findings of a survey on perceptions of barriers to gender equality amongst Secretariat staff.

While the majority of staff felt they were treated equally and had not experienced any issues because of their gender, a number of issues for consideration by the Group were identified around the gender balance of the organisation, behaviours and attitudes and caring responsibilities. The Group also considered a Briefing Note

produced by the Research and Information Service (RaISe) in May 2014 on the 'Gender composition of the NIA Secretariat workforce.' Using statistical data held by Human Resources, this Note confirmed that the majority of staff working in the Secretariat at grades 1-3 were male and there is no female representation on the Secretariat Management Group (SMG).

The Steering Group examined the gender composition of staff deputising or presenting to SMG and to the Assembly Commission ("the Commission") and found that both males and females made a valuable contribution to decision-making (see Annexe 3). The Group also examined the gender composition of internal panels and found that, broadly speaking, males and females were fairly well represented on these groups with appointments to panels made according to expertise i.e. because someone has responsibility for a particular work area. The Steering Group produced a Findings Report, which was approved by the Assembly Commission on 10 December 2014 (see Annexe 7).

Following Commission approval of the findings report, a Gender Action Working Group, comprising members of the Steering Group to ensure continuity, came together to progress phase 2 of the project, the development of a Gender Action Plan. The Group's terms of reference were as follows:

1. Develop an action plan based on results of research and identified models of best practice.
2. Examine gender action plans used by other Parliaments/Assemblies and organisations.
3. Establish subgroups based on the themes raised in the published research.
4. Hold one speaker-led event to gather information on best practice in other sectors.
5. Develop a draft gender action plan.
6. Consult with staff and Trade Union Side on the draft gender action plan.
7. Monitor progress on the development of the gender action plan every quarter.

At its first meeting on 28 January 2015, the Group agreed to establish subgroups based around key themes identified in the research findings report. In February 2015, five project subgroups (comprising members of the Working Group) were established in order to identify options for addressing the key themes:

- Caring Responsibilities subgroup
- Decision-making Structures subgroup
- Flexible Working subgroup
- Gender Identity subgroup
- Learning and Development Opportunities subgroup

Each subgroup considered matters relevant to their particular area, including research, best practice and priorities for action, and this work was fed back to the full Gender Action Working Group.

On 27 March 2015, the Group held a gender workshop to discuss information gathered at subgroup level. The Group considered creative and practical ways to address issues and agreed actions for inclusion in the draft action plan. These actions were identified following consideration of subgroup findings, the staff survey, relevant research, policies of other organisations, and best practice.

As part of the work of the Learning and Development subgroup, RaISe also produced a paper on 'Improving the gender balance at senior levels through learning and development,' which was considered by the Group (see Annexe 4). This paper considered the role of coaching and mentoring and networking in improving the gender balance at senior levels of organisations.

In developing the Gender Action Plan, the Group also considered the findings and research contained in the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's (AERC) 'Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly' to identify any overlapping issues; specifically where identified issues may affect Secretariat staff – for example, the Group has noted the Committee's recommendations around mentoring and coaching, and communication and engagement.

On 1 May 2015, the Group held an informal guest speaker session at Parliament Buildings, with the aim of learning about how gender issues are addressed in other organisations. The session was attended by Trevor Reaney, Clerk/Chief Executive, and Group members, and the guest speakers shared their expertise in specific areas. The presentations and discussions covered a wide range of issues, including approaches to mentoring; flexible working; cultural barriers in organisations; progressing gender equality in the face of budget cuts; practical considerations when implementing change; and gender targets. Information on the speakers and the subjects discussed is provided below:

- Deborah McConnell, Business in the Community (BITC) – The Gender Challenge: Finding Solutions
- Imelda McMillan, Law Society: Law Society Mentoring Scheme
- Professor Yvonne Galligan, Queen’s University Belfast: Queen’s Gender Action Plan
- Judith Gillespie, JKG Strategies, former Deputy Chief Constable of PSNI: Changing Culture in Organisations



Deborah McConnell, Business in the Community

Deborah leads the Workplace 20:20 campaign which helps businesses improve their employee engagement through developing strategic initiatives around health and wellbeing, diversity and inclusion in employment, with a particular focus on gender balance and age. Deborah has been advising businesses on Corporate Responsibility for almost seven years, engaging with both private and public sector organisations to develop their employee engagement strategies.



Judith Gillespie, JKG Strategies

Judith Gillespie was accepted into the Royal Ulster Constabulary in 1982, having previously been turned down twice. In May 2004 she became the first woman in the history of the RUC/PSNI to become an Assistant Chief Constable. She became Deputy Chief Constable in June 2009 and was for a brief period temporary Chief Constable before the appointment of Matt Baggott in September 2009. She was awarded an OBE in the Birthday Honours list in June 2009, an Honorary Doctorate from Queen's University in July 2012, and a CBE in the Birthday Honours in June 2014. She retired from the PSNI in March 2014 and is now pursuing a career as an independent adviser on police leadership, both nationally and internationally.



Professor Yvonne Galligan, Queen's University Belfast

Professor Yvonne Galligan is Director of the Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, at Queen's University Belfast. Her research interests include women and politics, democratic decision-making, the politics of Britain and Ireland, and the European Union. Her publications include '*States of Democracy: Gender and Politics in the European Union*' (Routledge, 2015). She received an OBE in 2014 for services to higher education in Northern Ireland.



Imelda McMillan, Law Society

Imelda McMillan is a Director at O'Reilly Stewart Solicitors and is currently Staff Director within the firm. Imelda is also the vice chair of Women in Business and is due to take over the chair in January 2016. She is also a Trustee of Lloyds Charitable Foundation for Northern Ireland and a non-executive director of Law Society Financial Services Company. She has been a member of the Council of the Law Society of NI for over 10 years and is the chair of the Conveyancing and Property Committee within the Society. An Ex-President of the Law Society and the founder of the Women in Law networking group, she also founded the mentoring programme currently in place for Solicitors and Barristers in Northern Ireland

In March 2016, to encourage women's participation and representation in public life and to coincide with International Women's Day, the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly hosted an 'Assembly Women's Week' in Parliament Buildings. Events included panel discussions on female representation on public and private boards, female leadership, and female presence in the media. While this week focused on women in public life, many of the challenges and issues that were explored are relevant to the work of the Secretariat Gender Action Working Group, which will monitor any outcomes and learning arising from it. Assembly staff were given the opportunity to attend during the week.

2) Literature Review

In developing the draft Gender Action Plan, the Group reviewed a wide range of local, European and International literature on gender equality. The purpose of this review was to identify current and best practice in addressing any inequalities that might exist in the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat.

Gender Action Plans of other organisations:

The Group reviewed the Gender Action Plans of a number of other organisations such as the Queen's University Gender Initiative, the Bar Council gender equality scheme, the Women in Councils Draft Action Plan template, local and central Government action plans and strategies and the Gender Action Plans of other legislatures. The Group used this information to develop measures to address the inequalities identified by the Group and in the research conducted by RaISe on 'Perceptions of barriers to gender equality in the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat' and the 'Gender composition of the NIA Secretariat workforce.'

Assembly and Executive Review Committee Review of Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly:

At its 6 May 2014 meeting, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee agreed to undertake a Review of Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly¹ was published on 09 March 2015 and included recommendations for Political Parties, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive. The Group considered the background research and the findings of this review, particularly those relevant to the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat as these will impact on the draft Gender Action Plan.

¹ Assembly and Executive Review Committee (March 2015) Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/reports/assem_exec_review/women-in-politics.pdf

European Commission’s Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy:

In June 2008, the European Commission launched the European Network of Women in Decision-Making in Politics and the Economy to provide a European platform for debate, exchange of information and good practices and for identifying the best strategies to make progress on this issue.² Across the EU, women are underrepresented in decision-making positions, particularly in politics and business, even if the situation varies between EU countries. The Group considered research and information published by the Network such as a Working Paper on ‘How to engage senior men to promote women to senior decision-making positions in their organization.’³ This paper discusses the role of senior men as gatekeepers and provides good practice examples in organisations. The paper concludes that:

“Women and men need to work together as allies in tackling this important gender gap in organizations.

Commitment of the leadership, in words and actions, to the change process is not enough. Structural measures are needed in order to ensure continued engagement from all men to appoint women to senior positions.”

Opportunity Now:

The Group considered information from Opportunity Now, the campaign on gender diversity from Business in the Community which aims to increase women's success at work.⁴ The Opportunity Now website contains lots of useful information which has been useful in developing the draft Gender Action Plan including research, tools, case studies, awards and benchmarking.

² European Commission’s Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy <http://www.afaemme.org/european-commissions-network-promote-women-decision-making-politics-and-economy>

³ European Commission’s Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy (September 2012)
How to engage senior men to promote women to senior decision-making positions in their organizations http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_balance_decision_making/working_paper_engage_men_promote_women_en.pdf

⁴ Business in the Community, Opportunity Now <http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/>

The Group received a presentation from Business in the Community on Project 28-40.⁵ This is a research project which seeks to identify the hidden tensions within workplace cultures that may explain why UK employers are struggling to create a more gender-balanced workforce.

Opportunity Now case studies and Awards highlight the advances being made by organisations in creating inclusive workplaces and the work of entrants and winners provided evidence in support of a number of proposed actions, for example, around the role mentoring can play.

The Benchmark Survey⁶ covered areas such as leadership and management, recruitment, engagement, networks, bullying and harassment, training and development, flexible working, equal pay, leave, procurement. These areas have been examined and discussed in detail by the Group and subgroups.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development:

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)⁷ is the professional body for Human Resources and people development that produces independent research and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development. The Group considered the findings of research from the CIPD such as the results of a survey of 452 HR professionals drawn from the CIPD's membership in December 2014.⁸ This survey explored HR practitioners' perspectives on gender diversity in the boardroom and practical strategies for improving female representation at the top of organisations. The survey found that HR professionals think there is a whole raft of organisational approaches that have the potential to support the career progression of women at work. Coaching and mentoring for women, female sponsorship and advocacy schemes and leadership

⁵ Opportunity Now and PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2014) Opportunity Now Project 28-40 http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/system/files/research/project_28-40_the_report_2.pdf

⁶ Opportunity Now, Benchmark Survey <http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/awards-benchmarking/benchmark-survey-2015>

⁷ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development <http://www.cipd.co.uk/>

⁸ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2005) 'Gender diversity in the boardroom: Reach for the top' http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/gender-diversity-boardroom_2015-reach-for-the-top.pdf

development programmes aimed exclusively at female employees are all rated positively by respondents. The authors of the report concluded that this indicates that there is no 'quick fix' to boosting senior female representation in organisations and that employers need to take a holistic approach to building a strong and sustainable female talent pipeline to secure future senior appointments for women.

Transgender issues:

The Group considered a number of reports on issues around gender identity, including transgender issues such as:

- The Workplace and Gender Reassignment: A Guide for Staff and Managers⁹ – which provides a general guidance and advice to staff and managers about transsexualism and gender reassignment issues that are relevant to civil service employees.
- Factsheet on Transgender Worker Rights¹⁰
- NIPSA LGB&T Branch Representatives Toolkit¹¹

Transgender issues have been included in the draft Action Plan.

Other research and information:

The Group considered a range of other local and international literature including:

- Information on the Politics Plus Women in Public Life and Women in Politics Programmes¹²

⁹ a:gender (November 2013) The Workplace and Gender Reassignment: A Guide for Staff and Managers. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/308050/The_Workplace_Guide_Nov_2013.pdf

¹⁰ UNISON (May 2015) Transgender Worker Rights. <https://www.unison.org.uk/search/transgender+worker+rights/>

¹¹ NIPSA (August 2015) NIPSA LGB&T Branch Representatives Toolkit. <http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA-in-Action/LGBT/Branch-Representatives-Toolkit>

¹² Politics Plus <http://politicsplus.com/>

- An investigation of gender equality issues at the Executive level in Northern Ireland Public Sector Organisations¹³
- A report by the STEM Business Group¹⁴ which addresses the gender imbalance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics businesses in Northern Ireland where the ratio of male to females employed in STEM-related industries is 3 to1.
- The 'Women, Peace and Security: Women's Rights and Gender Equality: Strategic Guide and Toolkit'¹⁵
- A presentation on 'Women in Leadership: Issues, Challenges, & Supports' by Dr. Jane Henrici Institute For Women's Policy Research & The George Washington University, March 2015
- Articles from the Harvard Business Review such as "The Art of Giving and Receiving Advice" by David A. Garvin and Joshua D. Margolis, January 2015 Issue
- Articles in the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and Newsletter on gender equality.

¹³ Ballantine, Prof J., Banks, Dr G., Haynes, Prof K., Manochin, Dr M. & Wall, T. (2014) An investigation of gender equality issues at the Executive Level in Northern Ireland Public Sector organisations.

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/gender-equality-in-ni-public-sector-report-october-2014.pdf>

¹⁴ STEM Business Group (November 2013) Addressing Gender Balance - Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Project funded by the Department for Employment and Learning.

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/STEM-Report-Addressing-gender-balance-in-STEM.pdf>

¹⁵ Hinds, B. & Donnelly, D. (June 2014) Women, Peace and Security: Women's Rights and Gender Equality – Strategic Guide and Toolkit.

http://www.wrda.net/Documents/Toolkit_Booklet.pdf

3) Consideration of Data

In March 2014, the Northern Ireland Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) produced a report entitled 'Perceptions of barriers to gender equality in the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat.' This paper presented findings of a survey on perceptions of barriers to gender equality amongst Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat staff. The key findings are as follows. The full report is available and has been attached to this report.

In total, 192 respondents participated in the survey, 104 females, 86 males, 1 transgender and 1 unknown. The response rate for females (63.8%) was higher than that for males (39.8%). 89.6% of respondents worked full-time while 10.4% worked part-time. Staff at grades 1-5 were more likely to respond than those at grades 6-8.

The majority of respondents (71.4%) reported that they either completely agree or mostly agree that staff are treated equally regardless of gender in the Secretariat.

94.6% of respondents reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to recruitment or promotion because of their gender.

90.8% of respondents reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat in carrying out their duties because of their gender.

97.3% of respondents reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to training and learning activities because of their gender.

95.5% of respondents reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to opportunities for development (i.e. going on external visits, being involved in working groups/project teams/project boards) because of their gender.

95.0% of respondents reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to flexible working because of their gender.

When those who responded 'not applicable' were excluded, 92.7% of respondents reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to maternity or paternity arrangements because of their gender.

When those who responded 'not applicable' were excluded, 88.5% of respondents reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to balancing working and caring responsibilities because of their gender.

9.8% of respondents reported that they had been subjected to unacceptable behaviour (as set out in the staff handbook) in the NIA because of their gender.

The main barriers or difficulties reported were:

- The lack of females at senior management level and in decision-making;
- The gender imbalance in certain business areas, namely HR, Ushering and Assembly Clerks in the Business Office and Bill Office;
- Unacceptable behaviours and particularly inappropriate comments and attitudes relating to gender (experienced by both males and females);
- Balancing working and caring responsibilities, including negative attitudes towards those with caring responsibilities;
- Carrying out duties because of stereotyping and gender roles; and,
- Paternity provision.

The Group considered these issues and how to address them in developing the Draft Gender Action Plan.

Gender composition of the NIA Secretariat

Using statistics provided by Human Resources, in May 2014, a RaISe Briefing Note on the 'Gender composition of the NIA Secretariat workforce' supported the findings of the survey regarding the gender imbalance at senior management levels and in certain business areas. The research found that the majority of staff working in the NIA Secretariat at grades 1-3 were male. This remains the case with no female

representation on Secretariat Management Group. The below table provides a breakdown of Secretariat staff by grade and gender as at 04 August 2015.

NIA Secretariat staff by grade and gender, as at 04 August 2015

Grade	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
1-3	13	81.3	3	18.8
4	18	50.0	18	50.0
5	20	44.4	25	55.6
6	30	45.5	36	54.5
7	56	57.1	42	42.9
8	79	70.5	33	29.5

Source: HR

However, these figures underplay the role of females in decision-making in the Assembly Secretariat. The Gender Action Plan Steering Group examined the gender composition of staff deputising or presenting to SMG and Commission and found that both males and females made a valuable contribution to decision-making in the Secretariat. The Group also examined the gender composition of internal panels and found that, broadly speaking, males and females were fairly well represented on these groups with appointments to panels made according to expertise i.e. because someone has responsibility for a particular work area.

4) Consultation

The draft Gender Action Plan was issued to all Secretariat staff and Trade Union Side (TUS) to give staff the opportunity to comment on the action plan. The consultation ran for eight weeks, from 12 November 2015 to 8 January 2016. No comments were received from staff. However, as the Gender Action Working Group was made up of staff from across business areas as well as TUS, there was an opportunity in the development of the plan to address issues concerning staff.

A copy of the draft action plan was sent to the Equality Commission for comment. In addition, at the request of the Assembly Commission, the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland was invited to comment on the draft action plan. Although this is an internal action plan, the Assembly Commission was keen to hear the Commissioner's view as her office had undertaken some work around gender diversity.

The Equality Commission noted that it is important to acknowledge that unconscious gender bias may exist and to take steps to limit any effect on internal processes and procedures to deliver a level playing field for all. It also highlighted the importance of development of training around such areas as personal development, confidence building, leadership skills, networking skills and transitioning to flexible working, perhaps carried out in conjunction with other public sector bodies. Another recommendation was that the Assembly could build stronger networks and relations with gender organisations to enable greater insight into national and local initiatives.

The Commissioner for Public Appointments remarked that achieving better gender balance in the management structures of any organisation will result in a higher performance, and she suggested that the Assembly's senior management team should set the standard in encouraging more female representatives into decision-making groups. She noted the imbalanced senior management team and the strong feeder groups to that team. The Commissioner said that she was encouraged to see this area of work moving forward and was happy to support the initiative in any way she could.

5) Action Plan and Aims

Having reviewed all the available data and research, the Gender Action Working Group has developed an action plan for 2016-18. On the following pages, we have outlined actions we propose to take in the coming years, along with outcomes and measurements. This is a fluid document which will be kept under review and updated as necessary. We are committed to monitoring and reviewing our policies and practices to ensure that we continue to deliver an effective service that contributes to gender equality. Implementation of the Gender Action Plan will be coordinated and monitored by an oversight group, and outcomes will be incorporated into equality updates to the Assembly Commission and reported annually to the Equality Commission.

The aims of the action plan are:

- To develop and implement policies/strategies/actions to remove barriers, actual and perceived, to gender equality within the organisation;
- To increase women's participation at decision-making level in the Secretariat, particularly at a senior level;
- To foster a culture of awareness and understanding of gender issues and gender equality within the organisation;
- To have in place a suite of policies which:
 - are gender-sensitive
 - promote gender equality
 - reflect good practice
 - comply with legislation

The actions are grouped into three broad themes covering ongoing and future work:

- 1) Leadership and Development
- 2) Communication and Engagement
- 3) Life Balance/Health and Well-being

GENDER ACTION PLAN - TABLE OF ACTIONS 2016-18

Theme 1 – Leadership and Development				
Issue Identified	Action	Planned outcome/measurement	Lead	Timeline
Mentoring and Coaching	Seek access to NICS Mentoring Programme aimed at all NIA grades.	Assembly Commission staff are afforded opportunity to participate in the NICS Mentoring Programme. Target uptake five staff.	Human Resources Office	Launch October 2015 – programme duration 9 months.
	Seek access to CO3 (Chief Executive Office Third Generation) mentoring project.	Assembly Commission staff are afforded opportunity to participate in the CO3 Mentoring Programme. Target uptake of five staff.	Human Resources Office	Launch May 2015 – programme duration 12 months.
	Join Business in the Community's Gender Project, which supports organisations to increase gender diversity, shift workplace behaviours and create enabling workplaces for men and women.	Full participation in the Gender Project over its three-year duration, leading to the development of a bespoke action plan as part of a collaborative approach to address unconscious bias and create a truly inclusive workplace.	Human Resources Office and Equality and Good Relations Unit	Project commences October 2015, for 3 years. (year one project plan attached at annexe d)
	Commission staff participation in Women in Public Life Programme.	Assembly Commission staff are afforded the opportunity to participate in programme (five places available).	Politics Plus	October 15-June 2016
Gender balance in presenting to SMG and Commission	Collect data at SMG and Commission level and produce yearly report on findings.	One year of complete data available at reporting year end detailing gender balancing.	Commission and Clerk/Chief Executive's Office (CCEO)	31 March 2017
SMG and	Develop briefing guides/procedures for	Revised submission guide along with	CCEO	1 April 2016

Theme 1 – Leadership and Development

Issue Identified	Action	Planned outcome/measurement	Lead	Timeline
Commission Deputising Guides	deputising at SMG and Commission to ensure that deputies have a full understanding of how SMG works.	revised templates to be published on AsslSt.		
Tabling of Papers at SMG and Commission	Introduce process to enable authors of SMG/Commission papers to present them at meetings.	Revised SMG guidance and communication to include note to Directors on increasing number and range of staff attending and presenting to SMG/Commission	CCEO	1 April 2016
	Make provision for HoBs to attend SMG at least once a year.	Revised SMG guidance and communication to include note to Directors on increasing number and range of staff attending and presenting to SMG/Commission	CCEO	1 April 2016
Gender Balancing on Groups	Develop guidance for HoBs and Directors on staff volunteering and representation on groups/panels.	Guidance presented to SMG following liaison with directors and feedback from Gender Action Implementation Group.	Equality and Good Relations Unit	December 2016
Training	Explore opportunities to partner with organisations where the potential uptake of courses is low.	HR Office will continue to liaise with partner organisations as appropriate.	Human Resources Office	Ongoing
	Continue practice of offering, as far as possible, a range of dates/times for learning events and ensure that this is reflected in learning and development written procedures.	Learning and development written procedures reviewed to reflect practice, which will be applied consistently.	Human Resources Office	Review of procedures by November 2015 – monitor over lifetime of action plan
	Ensure as far as possible that training events are arranged in Northern Ireland	Learning and development written procedures reviewed to reflect practice, which will be applied consistently. 95% of training events will be offered within Northern Ireland.	Human Resources Office	Review of procedures by November 2015. Annual measurement

Theme 1 – Leadership and Development

Issue Identified	Action	Planned outcome/measurement	Lead	Timeline
				at 31 March each year.
	Explore option, where possible, of sharing training materials with all secretariat staff so that staff who are unable to attend training courses can access materials.	Procurement process for learning activities will be developed to include clause consenting to sharing of training materials internally via Moodle (Virtual Learning Environment)	Human Resources Office	March 2016
	Dignity at Work Policy and Equal Opportunities Policy will continue to be kept under review to ensure compliance with legislation and that the interests of all categories, including gender, are addressed.	Policies will be kept under review on an ongoing basis in light of developments in legislation. Policies will be subject to full review by 31 March 2018, if not required before that date.	Human Resources Office	Ongoing and full review by 31 March 2018
Continued focus on equal pay	The Assembly Commission will continue to conduct an equal pay review every two years and address issues arising.	Equal pay reviews will be conducted every two years and gender-related statistically significant differences in pay (as determined by NISRA) will be considered by SMG.	Human Resources Office	By December 2015 and 2017
Implementation of relevant AERC Review Recommendations	Bring AERC recommendations to Women in Politics Working Group and advise Gender Action Implementation Group of any potential impact on Secretariat.	Relevant impact from AERC recommendations is planned for and managed within Assembly Secretariat.	Clerking/Gender Action Implementation Group	March 2016

Theme 2 – Communication and Engagement

Issue Identified	Action	Planned outcome/measurement	Lead	Timeline
Gender Leadership Network	Consider models for a Gender Leadership Network, including model of Assembly Leadership Forum (ALF).	Research paper; identify models of good practice to promote the position of women in the workplace	RaISe	March 2017
Awards	Explore the area of awards as discussed in the Working Paper from the European Commission's Network to Promote Women in Decision-Making in Politics and the Economy (copy circulated).	Research paper; identify models of good practice to promote the position of women in the workplace	RaISe	March 2017
Utilise Existing Assembly Networks	Explore potential for coaching and mentoring opportunities through Assembly Community Connect and the Business Trust, including potential for gender fellowships, where women from NIA shadow the work of women within the Business Trust/CO3. Members of the Business Trust and ACC could also contribute to a Gender Leadership Network, if created.	Female employees are provided with fellowship/shadowing opportunities through Assembly Community Connect and the Business Trust.	Outreach with assistance from Human Resources Office	2017-18

Theme 3 – Life Balance/Health and Well-being

Issue Identified	Action	Planned outcome/measurement	Lead	Timeline
Job Share Register	Implement Job Share register	Job Share register and associated guidance issued to staff enabling them to register interest in job sharing arrangements.	Human Resources Office	March 2016
Caring Responsibilities Guidance	Develop caring responsibilities guidance for managers and staff (subject to formal consultation) and include in staff handbook. Guidance should promote holding of meetings between 10am-4pm as far as possible	Caring Responsibilities Guidance is developed and issued to staff.	Human Resources Office	October 2017
Job sampling	Address job sampling through implementation of Job Shadowing Policy	Job Shadowing Policy is developed and issued to staff.	Human Resources Office	Introduced in October 2015 and will be kept under review throughout lifetime of plan
Childcare Scheme	Consider issues arising from review of childcare scheme	Issues identified and information provided to SMG and Commission as appropriate.	Human Resources Office	June 2016
Gather staff views on life balance	Continue to conduct staff surveys and review questions to ensure that gender aspects are included	Continued measurement of staff opinion and survey outcomes published on AsslSt	Secretariat Management Group (SMG)/Internal Communications Group (ICG)	March 2017
Domestic violence policy	Development of policy for Secretariat staff	Domestic Violence Policy is developed and issued to staff	Human Resources Office	March 2018

Theme 3 – Life Balance/Health and Well-being

Issue Identified	Action	Planned outcome/measurement	Lead	Timeline
Development of a Transgender Policy	Develop a Transgender Policy to address both managing and supporting staff and dealing with visitors to Parliament Buildings	Transgender Policy is developed and issued to staff	Human Resources Office	March 2017
Raise awareness around transgender issues	Provide training to staff on transgender issues once policy developed.	Staff are trained and equipped with knowledge to manage transgender issues in the workplace in accordance with Commission Policy.	Human Resources Office	September 2017

Reporting and Monitoring

Issue Identified	Action	Planned outcome/measurement	Lead	Timeline
Regular monitoring of progress against identified actions	Provide progress update to SMG and the Assembly Commission every six months	Every six months, following liaison with business areas, provide summary of directorate activity to SMG/Commission, charting progress against targets and including any additional actions.	Equality and Good Relations Unit	Every six months from Commission approval of final plan
	Report to the Equality Commission annually on progress	As part of annual report to the Equality Commission, provide full update of directorate activity against action plan targets.	Equality and Good Relations Unit	31 August every year
Central administration and co-ordination of work of Gender Action Implementation Group	Co-ordinate and oversee the roll-out of implementation of the action plan	Co-ordination of meetings and work of the Implementation Group once established; Support provided to business areas where necessary; Progress of business areas tracked against targets; and written updates to SMG/Commission on progress against specific actions every six months.	Equality and Good Relations Unit	Ongoing until 2018

6) Consideration of Issues

In developing the Action Plan, the Gender Action Working Group examined a range of research and best practice, as well as the programme of work already taking place within the Secretariat to address gender issues. Details of research are included in the literature review, and ongoing activity is noted in the action plan. The Group also looked at suggestions and proposals arising from the staff survey. Careful consideration was given to a number of proposals that were ultimately not progressed; these are listed below:

Quotas:

As part of its discussions around positive action, the Gender Group considered gender balance on internal decision-making panels/groups within the Assembly Secretariat. One of the Group's recommendations in the draft action plan is the development of guidance for Heads of Business and Directors in relation to staff volunteering, or being nominated, to represent their directorate on decision-making panels/groups. It is recommended that this guidance should include emphasis on ensuring gender balance.

The issue of using gender quotas was raised for consideration. The Gender Group was aware that, in terms of recruitment, it would be unlawful to reserve a quota of jobs for members of particular under-represented or disadvantaged groups if those groups are defined by reference to sex, religion, community background, race or sexual orientation.

The Group therefore sought confirmation from the Equality Commission on its position regarding the use of quotas in the appointment of internal decision-making groups and for staff. In its response, the Equality Commission outlined the difference between lawful positive action and unlawful positive action, stating that:

“Importantly, the provision for positive action encouragement does not allow an employer to treat a job application from a woman more favourably than one for a man”

As regards the appointment of staff to internal decision-making groups, it stated:

“It would appear to us that it would be unlawful to reserve a quota of positions for members of one sex or the other unless the conditions set out in Articles 48 and 49 of the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 are met. Employees who wish to participate in those groups and who would otherwise be included but for the operation of the quota system and who view their exclusion as a detriment would, in our view, potentially be the victims of sex discrimination. The Assembly Secretariat may wish to give further consideration to whether the working groups could potentially provide mentoring or training opportunities and we would be happy to provide further advice on any proposals, if this would be of value.”

Given the comments from the Equality Commission, the Group therefore decided not to progress the proposal around the use of quotas.

Late-working register:

The Group considered a proposal to establish a late-working register, whereby staff from other directorates would volunteer to work late hours on a rota basis in order to provide support to business areas that are routinely required to do so. It was also thought that this may serve as a voluntary development opportunity for staff.

Business areas, however, raised a number of concerns about the proposal. They highlighted that extensive training may be required to train people to work in a particular business area and that this training commitment may not be worthwhile given that volunteers could be working only occasionally or for short periods of time. It was also noted that it may not be possible to train people adequately to stand in, on an ad hoc basis, for posts that are specialist or require significant experience.

As a result of concerns raised, the Group therefore concluded that the proposal for a late-working register should not be progressed.

Learning and Development Week:

The Group discussed a proposal to hold a learning and development week for all staff. Under the proposal, all training activities would be condensed into one week in order to facilitate business planning, and the dates for the week would be set in advance, most likely during recess periods. Different work patterns could be

accommodated by offering staff specific time slots throughout the week. The training week would bring all staff together once a year, and attendance would be mandatory.

The Research and Information Service (RaISe) reviewed the approaches to learning and development by best practice organisations (see Annexe 4) as well as the recommendations of Opportunity Now from a gender equality perspective and was unable to find evidence of the use of learning and development weeks. In addition, HR had previously investigated the possibility of holding a mandatory training week, and found that, as mandatory training can come on board or be updated at different points throughout the year, co-ordinating all mandatory training to take place in one week may not be possible. The point was made that restricting leave for a training week may not be well received by staff, particularly those in business areas that already operate to a restricted leave policy. The Group was also mindful that contractual obligations around existing working patterns must be taken into account.

In light of the research and the issues raised, the Group concluded that the current system of offering training at various points throughout the year offers greater flexibility to staff and is better able to accommodate flexible working arrangements and different work patterns across the organisation. The proposal for a learning and development week will therefore not be progressed in the Gender Action Plan.

The action plan in the following chapter details the aims of the action plan and the actions that will be taken forward over the next two years, grouped into three broad themes. As well as the actions considered by the Group to date, additional actions can be added to plan over the two-year period as and when required.

7) Next Steps

Once implemented, the action plan will run from 2016-18. It is envisaged that it will develop and change over the two-year timespan as targets are met and new actions are introduced. A group will be established to oversee the implementation of the action plan, working with named leads across business areas and directorates to establish deadlines and targets. Of particular interest to the Implementation Group will be any progress made by the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on recommendations contained in its 'Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly', as some of these recommendations will impact on the Secretariat action plan.

Monitoring and Reporting

Once established, the Implementation Group will report to the Assembly Commission every six months on progress against the action plan. Progress will also be noted in the Assembly Commission's Annual Report to the Equality Commission.

Annex A Membership of Gender Action Working Group

Group Member	Job Title	Directorate
Karen Martin (Chair)	Deputy Head of Human Resources	Corporate Services
Maria Bannon	Equality and Good Relations Manager	Information and Outreach
Tara Caul	Head of Legal Services	Legal and Governance
Gillian Kirk-Lyness	Assistant Assembly Clerk	TUS Representative
Barbara Love	Research Officer	Information and Outreach
Kate McCullough	Assistant Assembly Clerk	Clerking and Reporting
Patrick Marsh	Deputy Editor, Hansard	Clerking and Reporting
Sebastien Mingout	Support Services Manager	Facilities
Roisin Mooney	Assistant Assembly Clerk, Equality and Good Relations Unit	Information and Outreach
John Stewart	Director	Information and Outreach
Dáire Toner	Infrastructure Support Specialist	TUS Representative
Lucia Wilson	Committee Clerk	Clerking and Reporting

Annex B

NIA Secretariat staff by grade and gender, as at 04 August 2015

Grade	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
1-3	13	81.3	3	18.8
4	18	50.0	18	50.0
5	20	44.4	25	55.6
6	30	45.5	36	54.5
7	56	57.1	42	42.9
8	79	70.5	33	29.5

Source: Human Resources Office

Annex C - SMG Representation Gender Balance

The table shows the number/percentage of females in attendance at SMG, either standing in for directors or presenting papers.

Date	Total Present	Stand in	Female stand in	%	In attendance	Female Attendees	%
06/05/2011	6	0	0		5	2	40.0%
20/05/2011	6	0	0		3	1	33.3%
02/06/2011	6	1	0	0.0%	3	1	33.3%
16/06/2011	6	0	0		5	2	40.0%
05/07/2011	6	1	0	0.0%	4	3	75.0%
25/08/2011	5	0	0		3	2	66.7%
15/09/2011	6	1	1	100.0%	7	3	42.9%
30/09/2011	6	0	0		5	3	60.0%
13/10/2011	6	1	1	100.0%	9	2	22.2%
04/11/2011	6	2	1	50.0%	4	2	50.0%
17/11/2011	6	0	0		6	2	33.3%
02/12/2011	6	1	0	0.0%	3	3	100.0%
19/12/2011	6	1	0	0.0%	7	2	28.6%
12/01/2012	6	0	0		2	0	0.0%
10/02/2012	6	0	0		8	1	12.5%
09/03/2012	5	1	0	0.0%	6	1	16.7%
29/03/2012	6	1	0	0.0%	5	2	40.0%
11/05/2012	6	1	1	100.0%	7	2	28.6%
08/06/2012	6	1	1	100.0%	8	3	37.5%
06/07/2012	6	1	0	0.0%	3	2	66.7%
07/09/2012	6	1	1	100.0%	8	1	12.5%
10/10/2012	6	0	0		7	2	28.6%
09/11/2012	6	2	0	0.0%	7	2	28.6%
05/12/2012	6	0	0		6	1	16.7%

Date	Total Present	Stand in	Female stand in	%	In attendance	Female Attendees	%
18/01/2013	6	0	0		4	1	25.0%
08/02/2013	6	1	1	100.0%	4	1	25.0%
08/03/2013	6	1	0	0.0%	9	2	22.2%
01/04/2013	6	1	0	0.0%	6	2	33.3%
15/05/2013	6	0	0		5	1	20.0%
13/06/2013	6	1	0	0.0%	9	4	44.4%
03/07/2013	6	1	1	100.0%	5	1	20.0%
12/09/2013	6	1	0	0.0%	9	3	33.3%
04/10/2013	6	1	0	0.0%	8	1	12.5%
14/11/2013	6	0	0		6	1	16.7%
13/12/2013	6	0	0		6	3	50.0%
16/01/2014	6	0	0		5	0	0.0%
14/02/2014	6	0	0		6	2	33.3%
07/03/2014	6	1	1	100.0%	4	3	75.0%
11/04/2014	6	1	0	0.0%	9	2	22.2%
16/05/2014	6	0	0		3	1	33.3%
06/06/2014	6	1	0	0.0%	4	1	25.0%
04/07/2014	6	0	0		3	2	66.7%
03/09/2014	6	0	0		4	3	75.0%
04/10/2014	6	0	0		4	1	25.0%
14/11/2014	6	2	0	0.0%	7	5	71.4%
05/12/2014	6	1	1	100.0%	2	0	0.0%
09/01/2015	6	1	1	100.0%	3	1	33.3%
Total		30	11	36.7%	256	86	33.6%



Project Plan

Year One

October 2015		Champion's Workshop
November – February 2016		Baselining through the audit tool – initial meeting and development work
December - February 2016		Trio meeting
7 December 2015		Senior management commitment and signing up to the Charter
January – March 2016		SMT/Board Perception survey and employee survey and focus group (optional)
March 2016		CORE Benchmarking
April 2016		Best practice sharing event
April – June 2016		Priorities and action planning
May – June 2016		Trio meeting
September 2016		First year meeting and review



Additional best practice meeting to include senior Champions tbc for 2016



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

Paper 000/00

20 May 2015

NIAR 144-15

Barbara Love

Improving the gender balance at senior levels through learning and development

1 Introduction

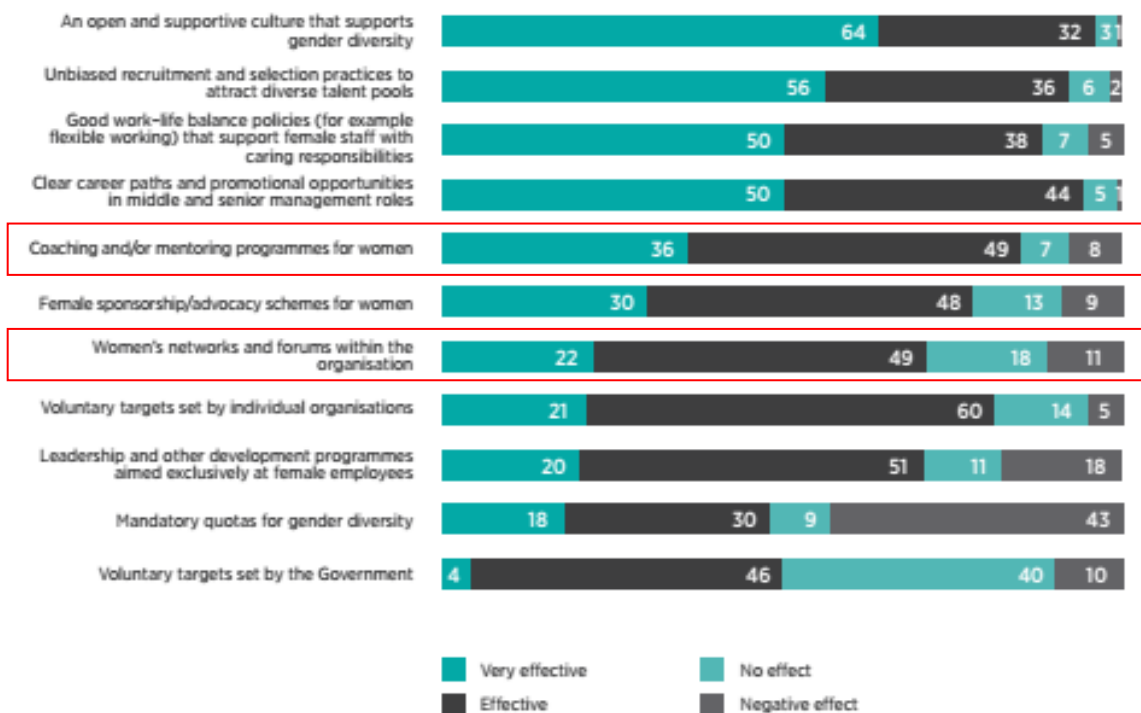
This Briefing Paper considers learning and development approaches to improving the gender balance at senior levels of organisations. It is well documented that women tend to be under-represented at these levels. This gender imbalance can, in part, be addressed through targeted approaches to learning and development.

A recent research report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found the two of the most effective learning and development approaches to improving senior gender diversity to be coaching and/or mentoring programmes for women and women's networks and forums (see Figure 1).¹ A 2010 report by the European Commission² also highlighted, among other things, the role of coaching and mentoring and networking in fostering the leadership potential of women.

¹ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2005) 'Gender diversity in the boardroom: Reach for the top'
http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/gender-diversity-boardroom_2015-reach-for-the-top.pdf

² European Commission (2010) More women in senior positions Key to economic stability and growth
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=4746&langId=en>

Fig. 1 The effectiveness of organisational approaches in improving the gender diversity of boardroom executives³



The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- For both coaching and mentoring (Section 2) and networks (Section 3), the report considers what they are, why organisations use them and how organisations can adopt these approaches. Examples of existing coaching and mentoring schemes and networks are also presented to give a flavour of what some organisations have done to improve the gender balance at senior levels;
- Section 4 presents examples of 2015 Opportunity Now Excellence in Practice Award winners who have implemented these learning and development approaches;
- Section 5 considers the role of organisations, and particularly senior men, in delivering a gender balance at senior levels through learning and development; and,
- Section 6 briefly highlights developments regarding women in politics (a recent research paper by the Assembly's Research and Information Service considered in more detail training and support programmes for women in politics).⁴

³ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2005) 'Gender diversity in the boardroom: Reach for the top', p. 14 http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/gender-diversity-boardroom_2015-reach-for-the-top.pdf

⁴ Potter, M., Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (October 2014) Training and Support Programmes for Women in Politics

2 Coaching and Mentoring

This section considers coaching and mentoring as learning and development approaches to improving the gender balance at senior levels of organisations.

2.1 What is coaching and mentoring

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development defines coaching and mentoring as:

“Development techniques based on the use of one-to-one discussions to enhance an individual’s skills, knowledge or work performance.”⁵

While there are many different models, coaching usually focuses on specific skills and goals and typically lasts for a relatively short defined period of time⁶. Mentoring is similar to coaching but tends to describe a relationship in which a more experienced colleague or professional from another organisation uses his or her greater knowledge and understanding of the work or workplace to support the development of a more junior or inexperienced member of staff. Mentoring programmes tend to be longer than coaching.

2.2 Why use coaching and mentoring

Coaching and mentoring can bring benefits to the mentee, mentor and the organisation. For the mentee, coaching and mentoring can provide impartial advice and encouragement, allow them to develop a supportive relationship with their mentor, assist them with problem solving, improve their self-confidence and offer a professional development opportunity. For the mentor, coaching and mentoring can enhance job and personal satisfaction, allow them to develop a professional relationship and improve their interpersonal skills. At an organisational level, coaching and mentoring can encourage commitment to the organisation and improve communication within the organisation.

An investigation of gender equality issues at the Executive Level in Northern Ireland Public Sector organisations⁷ found that formal mentoring is one of the top enablers or facilitators to progression at an organisational level. The report presents the findings from stage one and two of a research project which investigates gender equality at executive level in the Northern Ireland public sector which was funded by the Office of

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/10714.pdf

⁵ http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/coaching-mentoring.aspx#link_0

⁶ Coaching can also form the basis of an on-going management style

⁷ Ballantine, Prof J., Banks, Dr G., Haynes, Prof K., Manochin, Dr M. & Wall, T. (2014) An investigation of gender equality issues at the Executive Level in Northern Ireland Public Sector organisations.

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/gender-equality-in-ni-public-sector-report-october-2014.pdf>

the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.⁸ The findings of the research were presented at the Assembly's Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series on 21 January 2015. The briefing, presentation and video are available on the Assembly's website at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/research-and-information-service-raise/knowledge-exchange/#f>

The Institute of Leadership and Management asked learning and development professionals in 250 large organisations about the results of their business coaching programmes. Almost all said that coaching benefited both individuals and organisations⁹. Specific coaching benefits included:

- Better communication and interpersonal skills;
- Increased confidence and motivation;
- Improved conflict resolution; and,
- Better management performance.

2.3 Coaching and mentoring - What organisations can do

Opportunity Now¹⁰, the campaign on gender diversity from Business in the Community, partnered with the Government Equalities Office to develop best practice recommendations to improve opportunities for women in the workplace¹¹. Based on the practices of 100 exemplar employers, they recommended the following in relation to mentoring and coaching¹²:

- Follow up training programmes with one-to-one coaching;
- Organise coaching workshops for line managers;
- Participate in a cross-organisation coaching initiative so that participants can benefit from a perspective from outside the organisation and an 'independent' view;
- Establish a coaching programme for female staff, identifying appropriate male and female mentors, writing guidelines for mentors and mentees, and arranging an event to introduce the programme;
- Facilitate and encourage mentoring across all levels of the organisation;

⁸ This is a joint project between University of Ulster, Newcastle University and University of Aston.

⁹ <https://www.i-l-m.com/About-ILM/Work-with-us/coaching-and-mentoring>

¹⁰ <http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/Aboutus>

¹¹ Although this work was carried out in 2007 these recommendations are still relevant today. Not all of these recommendations will apply to all organisations.

¹² <http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/Exemplaremployers/TrainingandDev>

- Set up a mentoring and networking programme to facilitate career development; and,
- Introduce a Senior Women's Mentoring Programme.

2.4 Examples of coaching and mentoring

The following are a few examples of coaching and mentoring schemes which already exist.

Northern Ireland Civil Service

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) People Strategy (2013-2016)¹³ commits to innovative approaches to leadership development including mentoring and coaching programmes. The NICS now runs a mentoring initiative which is led by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The Annual People Plan 2014-15¹⁴ aims to increase uptake of the mentoring initiative which is in place in a number other departments by promoting the initiative to other non-participant departments.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics sector

A report on 'Addressing Gender Balance - Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)'¹⁵ provides best practice examples of mentoring including Queen's University, Northern Ireland Electricity and Schrader Electronics and recommends that organisations in the field:

- Consider the use of mentoring within and outside the organisation; and/or
- Consider partnering a male mentor with a female mentee and the reverse.

This report was produced by the STEM Business Group who are working with the Equality Commission and the Department for Employment and Learning to address gender imbalance in STEM businesses in Northern Ireland. The ratio of male to females employed in STEM-related industries is 3 to1. This is seen as not only a gender equality issue but a broader economic issue which impacts on business growth and development.

¹³ Northern Ireland Civil Service People Strategy (2013-16)

<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/nics-people-strategy-2013-16.pdf>

¹⁴ Northern Ireland Civil Service People Strategy (2013-16) Annual People Plan 2014-15

<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/nics-annual-people-plan-2014-15.pdf>

¹⁵ STEM Business Group (November 2013) Addressing Gender Balance - Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Project funded by the Department for Employment and Learning.

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/STEM-Report-Addressing-gender-balance-in-STEM.pdf>

Focus on the Queen's University Gender Initiative

The Queen's Gender Initiative was launched in October 2000.¹⁶ This initiative aims to:

- Foster an ethos of gender equality across the University;
- Mainstream exemplar equality practices; and,
- Make QUB a recognised leader in equal opportunities for women with men.

The initiative includes a mentoring scheme for female lecturers WHICH focuses on personal development alongside school mentoring¹⁷ and a mentoring drop-in service for all female staff who do not wish to enter mentoring partnership.¹⁸

Other learning and development activities at Queen's include women-targeted workshops on the promotions process, informal advice to women on their profiles and applications, and encouraging ambition and career development. Changes have also been made to policy and practice to address gender inequalities and gender action plans also exist within Queen's.

The University has been awarded the silver Athena SWAN award¹⁹ – an award for higher education institutions across the UK recognising action taken to address gender equality more broadly, as well as barriers to progression that affect women in science.

In terms of success, over the last five years:

- There has been an increase in the success rate of staff who applied for promotion;
- In 4 out of the 5 years female academic staff experienced a higher success rate than male academic staff;
- In 1 out of the 5 years, i.e 2013/2014, the success rate experienced by female and male academic staff was close; and,
- A lower percentage of the eligible female academic staff applied for promotion compared to the percentage of eligible male academic staff²⁰

¹⁶ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/QueensGenderInitiative/>

¹⁷ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/QueensGenderInitiative/Programmes/Mentoring/>

¹⁸ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/QueensGenderInitiative/Programmes/Mentoring/MentoringOptions/>

¹⁹ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/QueensGenderInitiative/SWAN/>

²⁰ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/QueensGenderInitiative/Programmes/Promotions/>

The Law Society of Northern Ireland Mentoring Programme

The Law Society of Northern Ireland have just completed a 12 month Mentoring Pilot and are now moving into the second year of the programme.²¹

They have recruited and trained a number of senior women and are now training senior men all of whom have achieved strong career success within the legal profession.

Everyone involved in the programme has agreed to share their experiences, knowledge and skills to support women to progress their careers in this profession.

Mentors assist mentees in career development, problem solving, building confidence and expanding career enhancing networks. They offer valuable knowledge, empathy and insight gained from their own experience over many years. They also ask questions, offer challenges, give advice, build confidence through support and encourage new networking opportunities.

Mentees are required to take ownership, through a 'Mentor Agreement' which encourages them to be active, curious, open to challenge and willing to stretch their development and learning beyond your current comfort zone.

Feedback from the pilot has been generally very positive, from both mentors and mentees.

²¹ <http://www.lawsoc-ni.org/news-events-and-media/news/item/1084/mentoring-programme-2015/>

3 Networks

This section considers networks as a learning and development approach to improving the gender balance at senior levels of organisations.

3.1 What is a network

A network is any forum that puts professionals in regular contact with one another to share experiences and offer advice and support. This could be a group of single or mixed gender focusing on gender specific issues. In the context of improving the gender balance at senior levels, such networks typically focus on the barriers women face in progressing to the top of organisations and how these barriers can be overcome, be they organisational barriers or personal ones.

3.2 Why develop networks

At a collective level, networks can empower organisations to take steps to address the gender imbalance at senior levels. At an individual level, they can empower women by allowing them to build their confidence, learn from and be inspired by role models. They can also serve as an important support network and are not necessarily restricted to only the most senior women.

3.3 Networks - What organisations can do

Based on the practices of 100 exemplar employers as mentioned in the previous section, Opportunity Now and the Government Equalities Office recommended the following in relation to networks²²:

- Hold a Network Annual Conference to involve more people and to debate key issues with a view to informing the organisation's policy-making;
- Use Senior Women's Networks to support activities by local management, such as, providing contacts and exposure to senior leaders, enabling cross communication, learning and mobility;

²² Opportunity Now website, Exemplar Employers Best Practice Recommendations Training and Development <http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/Exemplaremployers/TrainingandDev>

- Senior managers should engage with networks to hear about concerns and ideas for improvements in organisational management and decision making, and to understand women's experiences of, eg, promotion procedures or retention;
- Allow Women's Networks to feed back into the organisation's management through the Gender Champion;
- Use the Women's Network to host workshops on presentation skills, negotiation skills, networking skills, mind mapping, mentoring, care and the career (balancing work and family), career planning and work/life balance;
- Use networks to raise the profile of senior women in the organisation as role models for junior colleagues;
- In a larger organisation, bring together women managers to build local networks or liaise with women working in similar organisations;
- Consider cross-organisation/industry networking;
- Allow representatives of women's networks to attend external events to broaden their own experience and raise the profile of the organisation;
- Organisers should promote networks by attending other events across the organisation; and,
- Develop a brand identity for women's programmes and networks, using the intranet and branded email communications to consolidate this.

3.4 Examples of networks

The following are a few examples of networks which already exist.

Northern Ireland Civil Service

As part of its People Strategy (2013-2016)²³ the Northern Ireland Civil Service has established a senior women's network.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics sector

The report 'Addressing Gender Balance - Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)'²⁴ provides best practice examples

²³ Northern Ireland Civil Service People Strategy (2013-16)
<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/nics-people-strategy-2013-16.pdf>

²⁴ STEM Business Group (November 2013) Addressing Gender Balance - Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.
 Project funded by the Department for Employment and Learning.
<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/STEM-Report-Addressing-gender-balance-in-STEM.pdf>

of networks including Ulster Bank women's network 'Women in Touch' (WIT) and Atkins' women's network, the Women's Professional Network (WPN). It recommends that:

- Utilising existing networks for women which address work issues; and/or,
- Establishing a women's network, if none exists in your business or industry.

Focus on the Women in Business Northern Ireland

Women in Business (WIB) is a network for female entrepreneurs and business leaders in Northern Ireland. The Mission of Women in Business is to:

*"Equip women with the skills they need to start, and grow, their own business or develop their careers, rising into senior manager and leadership positions. By positively impacting all its members, WIB aspires to Create a New Economy; whereby all females in Northern Ireland significantly contribute to the economic success of our society."*²⁵

WIB facilitates women's positive contributions to the economy and society of Northern Ireland by developing every member's professional skills, connections and confidence to achieve their ambition. WIB promotes the fact that women are an integral and invaluable part of every business, and we celebrate women's professional achievements.

They deliver programmes and events ranging from masterclasses delivered by industry experts to formal networking events, conferences and an Awards ceremony with inspirational, global speakers. At their monthly events, WIB provide the skills to help business women grow their business, make lasting connections and be inspired by women from across all industry sectors. WIB also provides resources and support to corporate members hoping to acquire clients, expand into new markets or encourage development for female employees.

WIB is a non-profit organisation run by a voluntary Board of Directors.

²⁵ <https://www.womeninbusinessni.com/about-us.aspx>

4 Opportunity Now Excellence in Practice Awards 2015

The Opportunity Now Excellence in Practice Awards highlight the advances being made by organisations in creating inclusive workplaces, where women are able to progress and reach their full potential. The Awards process also includes entry into the Times Top 50 Employers for Women annual list process. The following are a few examples of Opportunity Now Award winners that have introduced coaching and mentoring and/or networks to improve the gender diversity of their organisation.

Advancing Women Award - for initiative/intervention which aids the recruitment, retention, development and/or progression of women and can encompass women at all levels.

Winner: PepsiCo, Strategies for Success (S4S)²⁶

S4S is a female talent acceleration programme and comprises diagnostics and 1:1 coaching with an external coach, engagement sessions for line managers, a programme to build skills and share tools, facilitated peer learning sets, 'Engaging the Stakeholder' sessions, ongoing mentoring and an alumni network.

Since attending the programme, 89% of 2011 and 2012 participants have moved roles or been and 91% of participants said S4S had made a difference in the way they navigate their careers. In 2009, there were no women in Supply Chain senior management – now 50% of manufacturing sites are led by women The UK executive leadership team is now 60% female.

Female FTSE 100 Award – recognises UK business with the most women on its board as listed in the index.

Winner: Diageo²⁷

All Executive Committee members are individually responsible for realising Diageo's diversity goals and are directly responsible for mentoring emerging female talent to ensure a balanced leadership pipeline. There must be at least one female internal candidate on all shortlists at Director level and an external review is triggered if there is not. All external resourcing partners must also have women on their shortlists for Director level roles.

At the most senior level, Diageo runs a leadership programme over 12 months combining individual development and a global learning event, supported by external

²⁶ <http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/tools-case-studies/case-studies/awards-2015-advancing-women-pepsico>

²⁷ <http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/tools-case-studies/case-studies/awards-2015-female-ftse-100-award-diageo>

and internal coaching. Mid-career offerings are managed regionally and include coaching and mentoring to accelerate individuals' development.

Diageo has also women's networks in several countries including Spirited Women, which has over 1,000 members in North America, the UK and Ireland. In Ghana, the Women's Wing supports members' development and raises funds for local charities, and the Women's Association in Cameroon promotes empowerment, commitment and advancement for women through educational, charity and networking events.

Diageo has increased female representation at board level from 10% in 2010 to 45.45% in 2015. 40% of the Executive Committee is now female and 28% of senior management positions are filled by women, with a goal to increase this number to 30% by 2020.

Female FTSE Progress Award – recognises progress at Executive Committee level

Winner: Old Mutual²⁸

Between 2010 and 2015, Old Mutual has increased its female board members from zero out of 11 to five out of 13 (38.5%) and has gone from 98th to 6th in the Female FTSE 100 over the same period. The number of women at Executive Committee level stands at 27%.

In 2013, OWN (Old Mutual Women's Network) was created in South Africa. OWN is an interactive platform which allows people to share, connect and create meaningful relationships with one another as they grow and continue to do great things. There are now women's networks in the UK and at Group head office, and plans are in place to make the network available to all employees.

Increased diversity at Board and Executive Committee level has brought new and valuable viewpoints to the table and Old Mutual believes this will result in better decision making and higher performance. It is also an advantage in attracting and retaining top talent.

Directing Diverse Talent Award – recognises an exceptional HR director or senior HR practitioner who has demonstrated a real commitment to inclusive management of talent

Winner: HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) Judy Greevy (Deputy Director, Talent, Diversity & Engagement)²⁹

²⁸ <http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/tools-case-studies/case-studies/awards-2015-female-ftse-progress-award-old-mutual#>

²⁹ <http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/tools-case-studies/case-studies/awards-2015-directing-diverse-talent-award-hm-revenue-customs-hmrc>

Judy joined HMRC in 2007 and has led the diversity, engagement, culture change and talent agendas, ensuring that HMRC uses the skills and knowledge of its diverse workforce to achieve business objectives and financial goals. Judy led the development of a revised Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) strategy that sets out the vision for a forward thinking organisation that seeks to improve performance and staff engagement. Judy led HMRC's participation in Opportunity Now's 18-month Inclusive Leadership research project, including master classes, action learning groups and workshop with leadership teams in key business units. An active champion of HMRC's diversity networks, Judy regularly lends her support by participating in events and coaches a number of employees who are primarily from under-represented groups.

Engagement among women at HMRC continues to rise – an average 6% margin with male employees. Representation of women among promoted staff (57%), new entrants (45%) and on talent development programmes (average 56%) has also increased. In-roads are also being made to address the gender imbalance in HMRC's lead technical profession graduate scheme.

5 Delivering a gender balance at senior levels

Last year, Opportunity Now published a report on “*Project 28-40*” a study of women’s ambitions. The project surveyed 25,000 women and men to examine why the rate of progression slows for women aged 28-40 compared to their male counterparts, and to develop solutions for employers to develop and retain their talented female staff whilst enabling women and men to balance their careers with life outside work.

Recommendations from the Opportunity Now Project 28 – 40³⁰ include:

- If you are serious about change, you as CEOs and senior leaders need to take the lead on women’s progression, moving this from a diversity initiative to a core business priority.
- Set aspirational targets for the numbers of women you want to see at each level in your organisation.
- Prioritise the development of excellent managers at every level of your organisation.

In terms of the learning and development approaches discussed in this paper, a 2012 report by the European Commission’s Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy³¹ suggests that men:

- Actively mentor women to better prepare them for senior roles; and,
- Display a willingness to learn from women’s networks meetings and conferences about issues women value.

In considering these approaches, it is important that they are carefully designed and implemented to ensure they are effective. For example, in developing a mentoring scheme, it is important that mentors have the necessary skills and experience or are training in this technique. The mentee must be committed to the programme and be clear about their expectations for the programme to work. Networks must be relevant and meaningful to participants and have the buy-in of both participants and senior management. There is also a cost to these approaches both financially and in terms of time which needs to be taken into account during their development.

³⁰ Opportunity Now and PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2014) Opportunity Now Project 28-40
http://opportunitynow.bitc.org.uk/system/files/research/project_28-40_the_report_2.pdf

³¹ European Commission’s Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy (September 2012)
How to engage senior men to promote women to senior decision-making positions in their organizations
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_balance_decision_making/working_paper_engage_men_promote_women_en.pdf

6 A note on women in politics

While the current paper examines ways of improving the gender balance at senior levels of **organisations** through learning and development, the Northern Ireland Assembly's Research and Information Service has also recently produced a report which considers Training and Support Programmes for Women in Politics.³² This paper summarises some general principles of training and support programmes for women in politics. It also gives an overview of relevant programmes that have been used in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This includes initiatives taken forward by the Equality and Diversity Group which is facilitated by the Local Government Staff Commission. This Group supports Women in Local Councils events each year around International Women's Day and there is a network of party and local government staff equality and diversity champions across the local councils of Northern Ireland.

It is also worth noting that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's 'Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly'³³ recommended that:

*“Political parties should strive to **develop mentoring programmes** for aspiring politicians both at local government and within the Assembly.”*

*“Assembly should **facilitate the creation of a women's parliamentary caucus.**”*

This further supports the importance of coaching and mentoring and networks as approaches to addressing the gender imbalance.

³² Potter, M., Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (October 2014) Training and Support Programmes for Women in Politics
http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/10714.pdf

³³ Assembly and Executive Review Committee (March 2015) Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly
http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/reports/assem_exec_review/women-in-politics.pdf



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

Paper 000/00

13 May 2014

NIAR 344-14

Barbara Love

Gender composition of the NIA Secretariat workforce

This short paper considers the gender composition of the NIA Secretariat workforce and is part of a wider project conducted by the Gender Action Plan Steering Group.

1 Gender composition of NIA Secretariat by grade

As at 30 April 2014, the majority of staff working in the NIA Secretariat at grades 1-3 were male (80.0%) whilst a minority (20.0%) were female. There was also a higher proportion of males than females at grades 7 (56.4% compared to 43.6%) and 8 (69.3% compared to 30.7%). There was a higher proportion of females than males at grades 4 (52.8% compared to 47.2%), 5 (52.8% compared to 47.2%) and 6 (54.1% compared to 45.9%), although these gender differences are less marked.

Table 1: NIA Secretariat staff by grade and gender, 30 April 2014

Grade	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
1-3	12	80.0	3	20.0
4	17	47.2	19	52.8
5	17	47.2	19	52.8
6	34	45.9	40	54.1
7	57	56.4	44	43.6
8	79	69.3	35	30.7

Source: HR

2 Analysis of SMG, Directorates and business areas

Senior management, Directorates and business areas were also examined and it was found that:

- SMG (Senior Management Group), which comprises the Clerk/Chief Executive (Chair) and 5 Directors, are all male;
- Staff in Facilities Directorate (and particularly ushering) and in ISO are predominantly male; and
- Staff in Human Resources are predominantly female.

Table 2: NIA Secretariat staff by Directorate and gender, 30 April 2014

	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Chief Executive Office*	7	53.8	6	46.2
Clerking & Reporting	59	48.0	64	52.0
Information & Outreach	42	51.9	39	48.1
Facilities	83	84.7	15	15.3
Corporate Services	19	43.2	25	56.8
Legal & Governance*	6	35.3	11	64.7

* Please note that the numbers of males and females in these Directorates are very low

Source: HR

3 Representation of males and females

To assess whether males and females are fairly represented within the NIA Secretariat, the proportion of male and female staff members in each Standard Occupation C Category has been compared to the Northern Ireland working age population (Source: 2011 Census).

As can be seen from tables 3 and 4, there is a higher proportion of males in SOC 1 (Managers, directors and senior officials), SOC 3 (Associate professional and technical occupations), and SOC 9 (Elementary occupations) in the NIA Secretariat when compared to the Northern Ireland workforce.

There is a higher proportion of females in SOC 2 (Professional occupations) and SOC 4 (Administrative and secretarial occupations) in the NIA Secretariat when compared to the Northern Ireland workforce.

Table 3: NIA Secretariat staff by SOC Category and gender, Article 55 review

	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Managers, directors and senior officials	41	47.7	45	52.3
Professional occupations	21	42.9	28	57.1
Associate professional and technical occupations	24	57.1	18	42.9
Administrative and secretarial occupations	68	51.5	64	48.5
Elementary occupations	63	88.7	8	11.3

Source: HR

Table 4: Usual Northern Ireland residents, aged 16-74, in employment by gender and SOC, Census 2011

	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Managers, directors and senior officials	23,625	37.0	40,275	63.0
Professional occupations	78,320	57.4	58,086	42.6
Associate professional and technical occupations	28,617	41.7	40,086	58.3
Administrative and secretarial occupations	79,683	71.2	32,158	28.8
Elementary occupations	38,943	45.3	46,932	54.7

Source: Northern Ireland Census 2011



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Research Paper

31 March 2014

Barbara Love

Perceptions of barriers to gender equality in the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat

NIAR 008-14

This paper presents survey findings on perceptions of barriers to gender equality amongst Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat staff.

Paper XX/XX

31 March 2014

Research and Information Service briefings are compiled for the benefit of MLAs and their support staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public. We do, however, welcome written evidence that relates to our papers and this should be sent to the Research and Information Service, Northern Ireland Assembly, Room 139, Parliament Buildings, Belfast BT4 3XX or e-mailed to RLS@niassembly.gov.uk

Key Points

Most staff reported that they agree that staff are treated equally regardless of gender in the Secretariat. The majority of staff also reported that they have not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat because of their gender.

While most staff reported that they have not experienced any issues, the main barriers or difficulties highlighted by the research were in relation to:

- The lack of females at senior management level and in decision-making;
- The gender imbalance in certain business areas, namely HR, Ushering and Assembly Clerks in the Business Office and Bill Office;
- Unacceptable behaviours and particularly inappropriate comments and attitudes relating to gender (experienced by both males and females);
- Balancing working and caring responsibilities, including negative attitudes towards those with caring responsibilities;
- Carrying out duties because of stereotyping and gender roles; and,
- Paternity provision.

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1 Introduction

In late 2013, a Gender Action Plan Steering Group was established to consider how the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat might examine the existence of any barriers, whether perceived or actual, in relation to gender equality within the Secretariat and to consider what actions might be necessary. This report presents the findings of a survey carried out by RaiSe in late February/early March 2014 into perceived barriers or difficulties regarding gender equality experienced by Secretariat staff. These findings will help inform the work of the Gender Action Plan Steering Group.

2 Methodology

A questionnaire was developed by the Gender Action Plan Steering Group in consultation with the Equality Commission and the Internal Communications Group. The questionnaire was also sent to SMG for information. On 17 February 2014 this questionnaire was administered electronically to Secretariat staff with a closing date of 3 March 2014. Reminders were issued on 24 February and 03 March 2014. Staff on long-term sick and maternity leave were also invited to participate in the online survey.

After the closing date, the responses were analysed by RaiSe. In total, 192 respondents participated in the survey, 104 females, 86 males, 1 transgender and 1 unknown. The response rate for females (63.8%) was higher than that for males (39.8%). In total, 89.6% of respondents worked full-time while 10.4% worked part-time. Staff at grades 1-5 were more likely to respond than those at grades 6-8.

No. of responses by gender

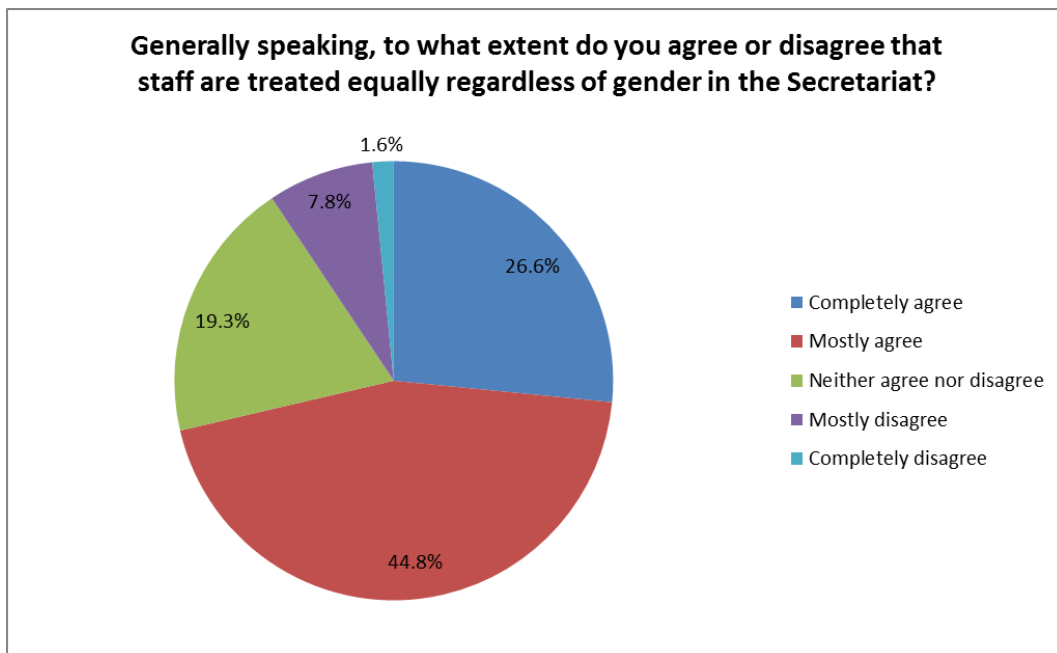
	No.	%	Response rate within gender
Female	104	54.2%	63.8%
Male	86	44.8%	39.8%
Transgender	1	0.5%	-
Not reported	1	0.5%	-

No. of responses by grade

	No.	% within grade
AG 1-3	11	73.3%
AG 4	25	69.4%
AG 5	28	77.8%
AG 6	40	53.3%
AG 7	52	51.5%
AG 8	36	31.0%

3 Treatment of staff

The survey found that the majority of respondents (71.4%) reported that they either completely agree or mostly agree that staff are treated equally regardless of gender in the Secretariat. Almost a fifth of respondents (19.3%) said that they neither agree nor disagree with this statement while 9.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed.



Fifteen respondents¹ provided feedback on why they disagreed that staff are treated equally in the Secretariat regardless of gender and comments included that:

- Staff are afforded equality of opportunity - this isn't always exactly the same thing as being treated equally (1 respondent);
- There is a lack of understanding of what equality is/lack of transparency (1 respondent);
- There is a lack of women in senior management or decision making roles (3 respondents);
- They have experienced or heard of evidence of staff being treated differently on the grounds of gender (3 respondents);
- Some people view 'career women' with suspicion (1 respondent);
- There is a gender imbalance in some business areas (2 respondents);
- It depends on which Directorate you work in (1 respondent);

¹ Some respondents made more than one comment.

- Inappropriate language is used or comments are made (4 respondents); and,
- The cash payment for people with dependents is perceived as discriminatory (1 respondent).

Suggestions for improving gender equality in the Secretariat from one respondent were:

- More part-time jobs, job sharing and job rotation;
- More opportunities for males to participate in caring roles;
- Training following maternity; and,
- Gender specific training (for females).

Another respondent suggested that there should be more females at senior management level.

4 Recruitment and Promotion

94.6% of respondents (n = 185) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to recruitment or promotion because of their gender.

Seven respondents provided feedback on this area. One respondent felt that they had experienced barriers/difficulties with regards to recruitment/promotion because of their background in a male dominated environment. Four respondents, consisting of both males and females, felt that they were not allowed to move or were not considered for promotion because of their gender.

Suggestions for addressing these barriers or difficulties were:

- A gender audit to see if there are genuine hidden barriers which need to be addressed;
- Management fully investigate the gender imbalance within HR;
- Treat women who disrespect men the same as we would treat men who disrespect women (sack them); and,
- For certain departments, the Assembly put in a quota to ensure that there are enough males and females within the department.

5 Carrying out duties

90.8% of respondents (n = 185) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat in carrying out their duties because of their gender. A higher proportion of females (11.5%) reported barriers or difficulties in carrying out their duties when compared to males (4.7%), although caution should be exercised when drawing inferences from this due to the low number of respondents reporting barriers or difficulties.

Fifteen respondents provided feedback on this area. The main issues with regards to carrying out duties raised were:

- Gender stereotyping people, approaches and tasks (5 respondents consisting of both males and females);
- Inappropriate comments (1 respondent);
- Difficulties with male managers and staff taking advice/direction from females (3 respondents);
- Positive discrimination (1 respondent); and,
- Balancing work with child caring responsibilities (2 respondents).

It was suggested that the culture of the organisation needs to be one of non-acceptance of inappropriate behaviours from the top down.

6 Training and Learning activities

97.3% of respondents (n = 185) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to training and learning activities because of their gender. Only two comments were received and these were in relation to the timing and location of training and learning activities which the respondents could not attend either because they were residential or on Thursdays and Fridays when the respondent does not work. It was suggested that the target of 3 days training per year should be on a pro rata basis.

7 Opportunities for development

95.5% of respondents (n = 179) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to opportunities for development (i.e. going on external visits, being involved in working groups/project teams/project boards) because of their gender.

- Two members of staff felt that they had not been given the same opportunities as other staff members of the opposite gender (1 male and 1 female);
- One respondent commented that they have experienced male counterparts suggesting that they have been working whilst their female counterparts have been off on maternity leave and so they believe that they deserve the development opportunities more than their female counterparts; and,
- One respondent reported that they cannot leave home overnight due to caring responsibilities.
- One respondent reported that they are aware that a number of working / project groups had been set up within the Assembly and have not been gender proofed and therefore find that some are not gender balanced.

It was suggested that there should be a more transparent process regarding these opportunities for development (1 respondent).

8 Flexible working

95.0% of respondents (n = 179) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to flexible working because of their gender. Twelve respondents commented on this. Comments included that:

- Men with caring responsibilities are treated less favourably than women with caring responsibilities (4 respondents);
- There are barriers to flexible working due to nature of work (3 respondents);
- Meetings are scheduled after 4pm when member of staff working flexibly is unavailable (1 respondent);
- Some work areas seem to benefit from 'Unofficial term time leave' (1 respondent);
- Single women with no children are expected to work longer or stay later than those with children (1 respondent); and
- There was no part-time post available to a respondent who was on phased return (1 respondent).

9 Maternity and paternity arrangements

In total, 83 respondents indicated that maternity and paternity arrangements were not applicable to them and 13 respondents did not answer this question.

When those who responded 'not applicable' were excluded, 92.7% of respondents (n = 96) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to maternity or paternity arrangements because of their gender.

A higher proportion of males (5.8%) reported barriers or difficulties with regards to maternity or paternity arrangements when compared to females (1.0%), although caution should be exercised when drawing inferences from this due to the low number of respondents reporting barriers or difficulties.

Three respondents commented on the level of paternity pay/leave, feeling that it was insufficient. One respondent felt that the childcare policy is applied in a discriminatory fashion as a female employee who is on maternity leave for their 2nd/3rd child cannot claim the childcare allowance in respect of their 1st/2nd child who is attending nursery while their male counterparts can.

10 Balancing work and caring responsibilities

In total, 46 respondents indicated that balancing working and caring responsibilities were not applicable to them and 15 respondents did not answer this question.

When those who responded 'not applicable' were excluded, 88.5% of respondents (n = 131) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to balancing working and caring responsibilities because of their gender.

A higher proportion of females (9.6%) reported barriers or difficulties with regards to balancing working and caring responsibilities when compared to males (4.7%), although caution should be exercised when drawing inferences from this due to the low number of respondents reporting barriers or difficulties.

Thirteen respondents commented on this. The main difficulties/barriers reported were:

- Difficulties in getting time off to fulfil caring responsibilities e.g. because leave can only be taken during recess (3 respondents);
- Negative attitudes towards both males and females needing time off to fulfil caring responsibilities (3 respondents);
- Limited opportunities to balance work and home responsibilities (e.g. job share) at more senior positions (1 respondent);

- Having to take annual or unpaid leave to take children to non-emergency hospital appointments (1 respondent); and,
- Perception that those with caring responsibilities are able to take more time off than those who don't – people without dependents have to cover for them (1 respondent).

Suggestions to address this included that:

- The Assembly needs to take a more progressive approach to working from home which would provide some flexibility (2 respondents);
- The Assembly Commission could usefully consider further the availability of measures such as term time working in this regard (1 respondent); and,
- Childcare vouchers or payments should be made directly to childcare providers should be providing instead of the current system where people with children can automatically claim a cash payment (1 respondent).

11 Unacceptable behaviour

9.8% of respondents (n = 174) reported that they had been subjected to unacceptable behaviour (as set out in the staff handbook) in the NIA because of their gender. This behaviour was reported to include:

- Inappropriate comments from staff e.g. sexist comments, remarks about physical appearance, inappropriate emails and text messages (12 respondents);
- Inappropriate comments from a Member (1 respondent);
- Aggressive/abusive/sexist/negative behaviour (4 respondents); and,
- Victimisation.

A higher proportion of females (13.5%) reported being subjected to unacceptable behaviours when compared to males (2.3%), although caution should be exercised when drawing inferences from this due to the low number of respondents reporting being subjected to unacceptable behaviours.

Of the 17 respondents who had reported that they had been subjected to unacceptable behaviour (as set out in the staff handbook) in the NIA because of their gender, only one respondent said that they had used the policies and procedures in place for addressing unacceptable behaviour. Those who had experienced unacceptable behaviour but did not use the policies and procedures in place gave the following reasons for not doing so:

- They felt it would not be taken seriously;
- They believed no harm was intended;
- They did not feel comfortable approaching the senior member of staff;
- They were concerned that it would have a negative impact on their reputation, work life or career;
- They have not seen much evidence of perpetrators being disciplined;
- If you complain, especially if you are female, then you are seen as a problem and are moved onto another area/office; and
- They raised the issue with their line manager but it wasn't taken forward as it was thought formal HR procedures would cause bigger issues team wide.

One respondent expressed the view that 'Dignity at work does not extend to MLAs.'

12 Other gender related issues

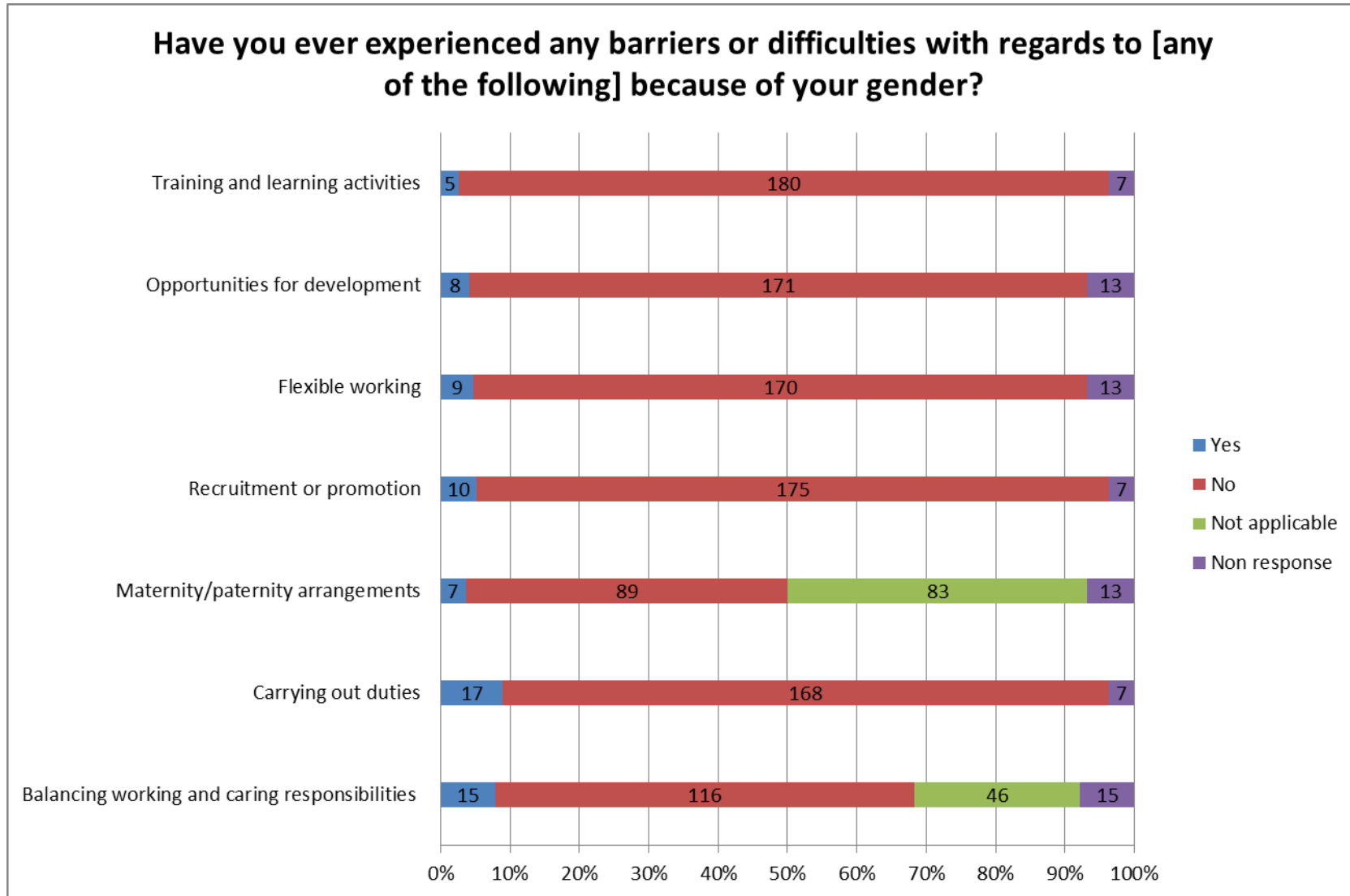
The main issues raised by staff were the lack of women in senior management and in decision-making roles and gender imbalances in some business areas such as HR, Ushering and Assembly Clerks in both the Business Office and Bill Office.

Two respondents raised the issue of dress code in the Assembly.

One respondent raised a number of issues regarding transgender people in the NIA that the organisation:

- Must ensure that it's workplace environment is welcoming to Trans* employees/visitors;
- Have HR policies with provision of sufficient special leave for the transition phase and provide better workplace support;
- Should add a specific reference in its policies to transphobia as being considered gross misconduct; and,
- Cannot address gender in isolation without addressing gender and sexual orientation in combination.

ANNEX A





Northern Ireland
Assembly

Gender Action Plan Steering Group

Report Findings

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 - 2.0 Methodology
 - 2.1 Northern Ireland Assembly Questionnaire Findings
 - 2.2 Northern Ireland Assembly Workforce Composition
 - 2.3 Themed responses to Questionnaire Findings
 - 2.4 Northern Ireland Assembly Decision Making Structures
 - 3.0 Proposal for a Gender Action Plan
-
- Annex 1 Members of the Gender Action Plan Steering Group
 - Annex 2 Documents Review
 - Annex 3 Questionnaire Survey
 - Annex 4 Gender Action Plan Steering Group Scheduled Timetable
 - Annex 5 Secretariat decision-making Groups

1.0 Background to Gender Action Plan Steering Group

On 12 June 2013, at the request of the Clerk/Chief Executive, a group of senior staff (male and female) met to discuss how the Secretariat might examine the existence of any barriers, whether perceived or actual, in relation to gender within the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat and to consider what actions might be necessary.

Following this meeting Directors were asked to nominate senior members of staff to form a Gender Action Plan Steering Group. Membership can be found at Annex 1. From June 2013 to May 2014 the group met 9 times.

At its first meeting the Gender Action Plan Steering Group developed the aims to¹:

- Examine gender action plan models used by other Parliaments/Assemblies and organisations.
- Oversee research to investigate whether there are issues which are having a detrimental effect in terms of gender equality within the Secretariat and, if necessary, develop a Gender Action Plan to address such issues.

The Gender Action Plan Steering Group's scheduled timeline, covering its agreed activities, can be found at Annex 4.

2.0 Methodology

The Gender Action Plan Steering Group used a questionnaire and desk based research to inform the findings of this report.

Desk Based Research

¹ Gender Action Plan Steering Group minutes 20 January 2014.

- An analysis of the relevant policies, procedures and plans of the Northern Ireland Assembly was carried out;
 - Statutory monitoring returns were considered;
 - In addition, Gender Action Plan models used by other organisations and Parliaments were reviewed to inform findings and recommendations.
- A full list of the documents reviewed is included in Annex 2.

Questionnaire Survey

- An online questionnaire was carried out with the staff of the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat. A copy of the survey questionnaire used is included at Annex 3. The survey was completed by 192 staff members.
- The findings from this exercise were compiled into a report (available on request) which was used to inform this final report.

The information gathered from the exercises above was used to inform the overall findings of this report.

Secretariat Focus Groups

The Gender Action Plan Steering Group had originally considered conducting focus groups with Secretariat staff following the receipt of questionnaire findings, and had timetabled this activity into the group timeline. However, when the Group considered the findings of the questionnaire survey, which included both quantitative and qualitative feedback, overall the feedback was positive with most staff reporting that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties because of their gender. Only a small number of staff reported barriers or difficulties. The written qualitative feedback was also very clear in identifying issues perceived by this minority of staff. For these reasons, the Steering Group concluded that focus groups were not required and would add little to the research findings.

2.1 Northern Ireland Assembly Questionnaire Findings

In order to inform the work of the Gender Action Plan Steering Group, research on '*Perceptions of barriers to gender equality in the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat*' was carried out by RaISe and considered by the Gender Action Plan Steering Group. This section summarises the methodology and key findings of the research. The full report and findings of the research, including all of the comments made by staff, have been carefully considered by the Gender Action Plan Steering Group. All responses submitted regarding the questionnaire were anonymous.

Methodology

A questionnaire was developed in consultation with the Equality Commission and the Internal Communications Group. On 17 February 2014 the questionnaire was administered electronically to Secretariat staff with a closing date of 3 March 2014. Reminders were issued on 24 February and 3 March 2014. Staff on long-term sick and maternity leave were also invited to participate in the survey.

After the closing date, the responses were analysed by RaISe. In total, 192 respondents participated in the survey, 104 females, 86 males, 1 transgender and 1 unknown. The response rate for females (63.8%) was higher than that for males (39.8%). In total, 89.6% of respondents worked full-time while 10.4% worked part-time.

Most staff reported they agree that staff are treated equally regardless of gender in the Secretariat. The majority of staff also reported that they have not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat because of their gender.

Key Findings

While most staff reported that they have not experienced any issues, the main barriers or issues highlighted by the research were in relation to:

- The lack of females at senior management level and in decision-making;
- The gender imbalance in certain business areas,
- Unacceptable behaviours and particularly inappropriate comments and attitudes relating to gender (experienced by both males and females);
- Balancing working and caring responsibilities, including negative attitudes towards those with caring responsibilities;
- Carrying out duties because of stereotyping and gender roles; and,
- Paternity provision.

Treatment of staff

The survey found that the majority of respondents (71.4%) reported that they either completely agree or mostly agree that staff are treated equally regardless of gender in the Secretariat. Almost a fifth of respondents (19.3%) said that they neither agree nor disagree with this statement while 9.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Recruitment and Promotion

94.6% of respondents (n² = 185) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to recruitment or promotion because of their gender.

Carrying out duties

90.8% of respondents (n = 185) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat in carrying out their duties because of their gender.

Training and Learning activities

97.3% of respondents (n = 185) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to training and learning activities because of their gender.

Opportunities for development

95.5% of respondents (n = 179) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to opportunities for development (i.e. going on external visits, being involved in working groups/project teams/project boards) because of their gender.

Flexible working

95.0% of respondents (n = 179) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to flexible working because of their gender.

² N refers to the number of respondents who answered the question.

Maternity and paternity arrangements

In total, 83 respondents indicated that maternity and paternity arrangements were not applicable to them and 13 respondents did not answer this question.

When those who responded 'not applicable' were excluded, 92.7% of respondents (n = 96) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to maternity or paternity arrangements because of their gender.

Balancing work and caring responsibilities

In total, 46 respondents indicated that balancing working and caring responsibilities were not applicable to them and 15 respondents did not answer this question.

When those who responded 'not applicable' were excluded, 88.5% of respondents (n = 131) reported that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to balancing working and caring responsibilities because of their gender.

Unacceptable behaviour

9.8% of respondents (n = 174) reported that they had been subjected to unacceptable behaviour (as set out in the staff handbook) in the NIA because of their gender.

2.2 Northern Ireland Assembly Workforce Composition

This section considers the gender composition of the NIA Secretariat. It was found that there is an under-representation of females at the most senior grades of the NIA Secretariat (AG1-3). Most notably, there are no females at Board level (Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors). The gender composition at AG4, on the other hand, is much more balanced. In accordance with Assembly Commission Policy, all staff appointments are based purely on merit. The recruitment competitions at Board level were conducted by an external service provider and information on number of applications submitted by each gender is not available.

It was found that there is also a gender imbalance amongst Usher/Control Room Operative group, the majority of whom are male. Excluding the Usher/Control Room Operative group, AG8 is fairly balanced. When recruiting for Assembly Ushers and Assembly Security Officers (now the Usher/Control Room Operative group) in 2010, steps were taken by the HR Office to attract applications from under-represented groups, including females. Security/ushering type work is traditionally male dominated and the gender composition in the NIA Secretariat reflects the wider security/ushering sector in Northern Ireland.

The HR Management Team (AG5, AG4 and AG3) was recruited through open competition and appointments made on merit. All members of the Team are currently female. This is a pattern observed in other organisations as HR has traditionally been female dominated.

Gender composition of NIA Secretariat by grade

As at 30 April 2014, the majority of staff working in the NIA Secretariat at grades 1-3 were male (80.0%) whilst a minority (20.0%) were female. There was also a higher proportion of males than females at grades 7 (56.4% compared to 43.6%) and 8 (69.3% compared to 30.7%). There was a higher proportion of females than males at grades 4 (52.8% compared to 47.2%), 5 (52.8% compared to 47.2%) and 6 (54.1% compared to 45.9%), although these gender differences are less marked.

Table 1: NIA Secretariat staff by grade and gender, 30 April 2014

Grade	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
1-3	12	80.0	3	20.0
4	17	47.2	19	52.8
5	17	47.2	19	52.8
6	34	45.9	40	54.1
7	57	56.4	44	43.6
8	79	69.3	35	30.7
TOTAL	216	57.4	160	42.6

Source: HR Office

Analysis of SMG, Directorates and business areas

Senior management, Directorates and business areas were also examined and it was found that:

- SMG (Senior Management Group), which comprises the Clerk/Chief Executive (Chair) and 5 Directors, are all male;
- Staff in Facilities Directorate (and particularly ushering) and in the IS Office are predominantly male; and
- Staff in Human Resources are predominantly female.

Table 2: NIA Secretariat staff by Directorate and gender, 30 April 2014

	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%

Chief Executive Office*	7	53.8	6	46.2
Clerking & Reporting	59	48.0	64	52.0
Information & Outreach	42	51.9	39	48.1
Facilities	83	84.7	15	15.3
Corporate Services	19	43.2	25	56.8
Legal & Governance*	6	35.3	11	64.7

** Please note that the numbers of males and females in these Directorates are very low*

Source: HR Office

Representation of males and females

To assess whether males and females are fairly represented within the NIA Secretariat, the proportion of male and female staff members in each Standard Occupational Classification Category has been compared to the Northern Ireland working age population (Source: 2011 Census).

As can be seen from tables 3 and 4, there is a higher proportion of males in SOC 1 (Managers, directors and senior officials), SOC 3 (Associate professional and technical occupations), and SOC 9 (Elementary occupations) in the NIA Secretariat when compared to the Northern Ireland workforce.

There is a higher proportion of females in SOC 2 (Professional occupations) and SOC 4 (Administrative and secretarial occupations) in the NIA Secretariat when compared to the Northern Ireland workforce.

Table 3: NIA Secretariat staff by SOC Category and gender, Article 55 review

	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Managers, directors and	41	47.7	45	52.3

senior officials				
Professional occupations	21	42.9	28	57.1
Associate professional and technical occupations	24	57.1	18	42.9
Administrative and secretarial occupations	68	51.5	64	48.5
Elementary occupations	63	88.7	8	11.3

Source: HR Office

Table 4: Usual Northern Ireland residents, aged 16-74, in employment by gender and SOC, Census 2011

	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Managers, directors and senior officials	23,625	37.0	40,275	63.0
Professional occupations	78,320	57.4	58,086	42.6
Associate professional and technical occupations	28,617	41.7	40,086	58.3
Administrative and secretarial occupations	79,683	71.2	32,158	28.8
Elementary occupations	38,943	45.3	46,932	54.7

Source: Northern Ireland Census 2011

2.3 Themed responses to Questionnaire Findings

In responding to the Gender Questionnaire, staff noted comments on a range of issues. Those comments related to a broad range of themes. While responses to

individual comments will not be provided, a general response under each of the themes identified is provided below.

Dignity at Work

The Assembly Commission's Dignity at Work Policy establishes the Commission's commitment to equality of opportunity and to creating and sustaining an environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, free from any form of inappropriate behaviour, and one in which all employees can give of their best. Where complaints are made under the Dignity at Work Policy, they are addressed in accordance with the provisions of the Policy and in a timely manner. Those complaints upheld following investigation are referred for consideration under the Disciplinary Policy.

Training in the Dignity at Work Policy has always been mandatory for all staff and was usually provided within a short time of taking up post. In the previous two staff surveys (2010 and 2012), some respondents noted concerns regarding the prevalence of unwelcome/inappropriate behaviours.

In response to the 2010 survey findings, an external facilitator was engaged to explore concerns raised in more detail through working groups and meetings with staff. An action plan arising from this work was agreed and implemented.

Similarly, following the 2012 survey, steps have been taken to address the responses received. These include:

- Development and issue of the Corporate Values of Public Service, Professionalism and One Team. The example behaviours underpinning the Values reflect the standards of behaviour required of our staff and the way in which they should interact with colleagues and stakeholders. The Values have been embedded in the new Performance Management System and line managers are required to manage and comment on the level to which they have been demonstrated, as part of normal review of performance;

- Roll out of a new interactive Dignity at Work training programme, with attendance mandatory at all levels in the organisation. The training was based around role play and discussion. Feedback from attendees was universally positive;
- Further exploration of behaviours in one area of the business – the Positive Working Relationships Initiative.

In addition to the steps outlined above, the Human Resources Office has implemented a number of measures to ensure that the Dignity at Work Policy remains current, is clearly understood by staff, and that there are adequate mechanisms in place to support those affected by inappropriate behaviours and to deal with these behaviours. These measures include:

- The Dignity at Work Policy is subject to ongoing review to ensure that it reflects good practice and is further developed in light of “lessons learned” from real complaints/investigations;
- A Dignity at Work reminder postmaster is issued approximately quarterly to ensure that staff are aware of the Policy and their responsibilities under it;
- Having in place a team of trained Harassment Contact Officers (HCOs) to support those who wish to raise a concern (either informally or formally) and ensuring that the identity of the HCOs is communicated to all staff;
- Having in place a fully trained internal Mediator who, with agreement of both parties to a complaint, may assist in finding early resolution to a relationship problem. The Human Resources Office will also consider engaging the services of an external mediator where necessary/appropriate.

Secretariat Staff/Member Relations

An Assembly Staff/Member Protocol has been implemented to provide a fair, equitable and effective means of attempting to resolve a situation of conflict or dispute in which an MLA or a member of Secretariat staff, considers that they have been treated in an inappropriate or unfair manner. The Protocol is intended to deal with complaints at an early stage thereby supporting a prompt return to positive and constructive working relations. The Assembly Commission will aim to resolve any issues raised under the Staff/Member Protocol as quickly as possible.

Childcare Scheme

The Assembly Commission's Childcare Scheme for staff is intended to assist parents with the cost of childcare while they are at work. The Scheme is open to all staff, irrespective of their gender, with eligible children (eligibility is verified by the Human Resources Office).

Learning and Development Opportunities

The majority of corporate learning and development activities are organised to take place in or close to Parliament Buildings and during the normal working day. However, there may be job/post specific learning events that are only available outside of Northern Ireland and perhaps requiring an overnight stay. As far as reasonably possible, attendance at this type of event should be voluntary.

Caring Responsibilities

The Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures and Special Leave Policy are intended to support staffs that have caring responsibilities outside of work. These are open to all staff, irrespective of their gender or the nature of their caring role. Special leave with pay is available for a wide range of circumstances

but there are situations where staff are required to use annual leave or unpaid special leave.

While every effort is made to support staff in their responsibilities outside of work, the needs of the business must be met and this can require, for example, late working to support Plenary or a committee meeting. It is accepted that this is more common in specific areas of the business such as in the Clerking and Reporting Directorate.

Flexible Working

The Assembly Commission recognises that flexible working can benefit everyone: employers, employees and their families. Under the Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures, all Assembly Commission staff who have completed 26 weeks continuous service by the date of their application can apply to vary their contract. The Procedures outline the most common ways of working flexibly and the process to be followed for those making or considering a flexible working application.

At present, 14.1% of Assembly Commission employees work flexibly or have partially retired. Of these, 65.5% are female and 34.5% are male.

When a member of staff has varied their hours of work under the Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures, there should not be an expectation that they are readily available outside of their new working pattern.

Maternity/Paternity Entitlement

Maternity and paternity entitlement (leave and pay) is set out in the Staff Handbook and is intended to support all of our staff. There should be no detriment to any member of staff (irrespective of gender) for example in relation

to learning and development, arising from them availing of their maternity/paternity entitlement.

Gender Equality in Recruitment and Selection

The Assembly Commission's Recruitment and Selection Policy Statement confirms the Commission's commitment to the principle that recruitment to positions in the Assembly Secretariat is based on merit, providing equality of employment to all eligible persons, irrespective of gender, marital or family status, religious belief, political opinion, disability, race, sexual orientation or age. The Policy Statement also commits to the use of welcoming statements and affirmative action in recruitment, as and when required.

Compliance with the Policy Statement is underpinned in the External Recruitment Procedures contained in the Staff Handbook. As part of the procedures for every external recruitment competition, before a post is advertised the Human Resources Office considers the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Code for the post and whether a welcome statement is required in the advertisement.

The Assembly Commission has previously used welcome statements to invite applications from under-represented gender and community background groups. Affirmative actions have also been used where appropriate, for example by using voluntary groups to publicise vacancies and encourage applications.

Other measures already in place to ensure equality of opportunity in employment are:

- Proper training of those involved in the recruitment/selection process;
- As far as reasonably possible, all interview panels are reflective of gender and community background;
- Each recruitment/selection scheme includes development of an application pack, including a job specification, guidance of applicants and

- a structured application form. When a candidate declares a disability, reasonable adjustments will be made as required;
- The Assembly Commission operates a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) for candidates with disabilities or long term impairments/health conditions which mean they cannot demonstrate shortlisting criteria. Provided candidates applying under the GIS meet the essential criteria for the post, they will be offered a guaranteed interview;
 - External recruitment competitions are advertised in suitable media to attract applications from the wider community.

2.4 Northern Ireland Assembly Decision Making Structures

At the Gender Action Steering Group's meeting on 11 December 2013, the group discussed at what level decision-making structures should be examined for gender imbalance throughout the organisation and which groups and/or panels should be included. The group defined a strategic decision-making group as one that had a level of influence in which to make changes that affected staff and how the Assembly is operated.

At the group's meeting on 15 January 2014, it was agreed to issue an email to SMG, Heads of Business and Directors asking them to detail any current working groups, project teams or project boards which are strategic, have influence and have decision-making capacity within their Directorate.

It was also important to examine the gender composition of decision-making structures in order to review the criteria used when appointing staff members to groups and whether or not this led to a gender imbalance. A total of 26 groups (listed in annex 5) were returned and a gender breakdown was recorded for each of the groups, with the following results:

- 16 of the groups were dominated by male representation

- 2 of the groups were dominated by female representation
- 3 of the groups had no female representation
- 1 of the groups had no male representation
- 8 of the groups had an equal number of males and female representation (allowing for an odd number of members)

In light of these findings, several recommendations have been made in respect of the structure and composition of decision making groups.

3.0 Proposal for a Gender Action Plan

Based on the evidence outlined above, the Gender Action Plan Steering group propose that a Gender Action Plan is established for the Assembly Secretariat in order to implement the recommendations identified within this report.

It is further proposed that a Gender Action Plan should be a fluid document to allow for additions throughout its lifespan in order to accommodate and pay cognizance to any organisational changes which may impact on gender equality.

In line with the Gender Action Plan Steering Group's agreed schedule, this report (which includes a list of recommendations for inclusion in a gender action plan) will be tabled at the 4 July 2014 SMG meeting and forwarded on to the Assembly Commission for agreement. Following this the Report (and recommendations for inclusion in a gender action plan) will be issued to Secretariat staff for a period of consultation. The Final Report (post consultation) will be presented to the Assembly Commission in October 2014. An additional working group will be established in October 2014 in order to develop and equality screen a Gender Action Plan, based on the Final Report's final recommendations.

Based on the work undertaken to date, suggested areas for inclusion in a Gender Action Plan are as follows:

Area for Action	Future Suggested Action
Dignity at Work Policy	Review findings of the 2014 staff survey, by which stage any benefits of the recent Dignity at Work training and the Positive Working Relationships Initiative may be evident.
Gender Identity	Comments were submitted regarding the extent to which the full spectrum of gender identity is addressed in people management policies. It is suggested that these comments should be referred to the Employee Relations Policy Sub Group for consideration.
Assembly Staff/Member Protocol	It is proposed that the Human Resources Office should keep the Protocol under review and consider further refinement in light of lessons learned through its application.
Childcare Scheme	Gender related comments regarding the Assembly Commission's Childcare Scheme have been referred to the HR Office for consideration.
Learning and Development Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Human Resources Office should consider the scheduling of corporate learning and development activities and endeavour in the first instance to deliver training in Northern Ireland; • To explore opportunities to partner with organisations where the potential uptake of courses are low; • To develop guidance for event/training organisers to consider the scheduling of events to provide for the participation of those on flexible working arrangements; • To ensure in procurement contracts, where training is included, that training provision is within Northern Ireland where possible.
Caring Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidance for Managers/Heads of Business to remind them of issues in relation to caring responsibilities and issue guidance on a six-monthly basis. • In areas where late working is more prevalent, and through fair workload allocation, consideration could be given to having a team of volunteer staff who are willing /available to work late evenings. If necessary, additional training could be provided to the volunteer staff to increase flexibility in their development. This could be developed as a job sampling scheme

Area for Action	Future Suggested Action
	which would also promote cross-directorate team working.
Flexible Working	<p>It is proposed that the Human Resources Office should keep the Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures under review to ensure that they remain legislatively compliant and reflective of accepted good practice. Consideration could also be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-issue Flexible Working and Partial Retirement Procedures. Advice and guidance on the Procedures should be provided to management and staff by the HR Office. • Introducing a “Job Sharing Register” to allow staff to formally record their interest in this type of working arrangement, and to enable the Human Resources Office to proactively seek potential job sharing partners from elsewhere in the business. • Introducing a formal practice that meetings should, as far as reasonably practicable, be arranged during core hours of 10.00am to 4.00pm each day. • For very busy times e.g. end of the mandate approaching, consideration could be given to innovative ways of working to support areas of the business.
Maternity/Paternity Entitlement	Maternity and paternity entitlement is currently under discussion at the Employee Relations Group Pay and Policy Sub Groups. The comments made in response to the gender questionnaire should be referred to both Sub Groups to inform their discussions.
Gender Equality in Recruitment and Selection	In accordance with procedures, the Human Resources Office will consider use of welcome statements and affirmative actions for external recruitment competitions, when appropriate. For internal and external recruitment competitions, care should be exercised in developing job descriptions and job specifications to avoid use of language that may discourage applications from either gender. In addition, inclusion of terms of employment that may discourage applications from either gender should be limited as far as possible, whilst maintaining the ability to meet the needs of the business.

Area for Action	Future Suggested Action
Decision Making Structures	<p>In order to achieve a greater gender balance, the group suggest that consideration is given to a number of future actions, these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider developing senior female staff by offering exposure to decision-making structures; • Consider options for the involvement of senior female staff in the work of SMG; • SMG should be mindful of creating a greater gender balance when composing membership of any new working/decision-making groups • The establishment of a personal development/coaching programme for AG3/senior grades so that a greater range of experience can be gained and knowledge shared. • Develop guidance on project groups and membership to ensure, where possible, there is a greater gender balance.

Annex 1 Members of the Gender Action Plan Steering Group

Group Member	Job Title	Directorate
Maria Bannon (Chair)	Equality Manager	Clerk/Chief Executive's Office
Patricia Casey	Assembly Bill Clerk	Clerking and Reporting
Tara Caul	Head of Legal Services Office	Legal and Governance
Alice McKelvey (Deputising for Tara Caul)	Legal Advisor	Legal and Governance
Gillian Kirk-Lyness	Assistant Assembly Clerk	TUS Representative
Daire Toner	Infrastructure Support Specialist	TUS Representative
Tony Logue	Head of Commission/Chief Executive's Office	Clerk/Chief Executive's Office
Barbara Love	Research Officer	Information and Outreach
Karen Martin	Deputy Head of HR	Corporate Services
Sebastien Mingout	Support Services Manager	Facilities
Richard Stewart	Director	Corporate Services
Caroline Moore (Secretary)	AG6	Clerk/Chief Executive's Office

Annex 2 Documents Review

The following documents and policies were reviewed in order to inform this report.

Northern Ireland Assembly Collated Primary Research

1. Questionnaire Report;
2. Workforce Data.

Relevant Northern Ireland Assembly Policies

1. Dignity at Work Policy
2. Positive Working Relationships Initiative
3. Secretariat Staff/Member Protocol
4. Childcare Scheme
5. Learning and Development Policies
6. Flexible Working Policy
7. Partial Retirement Procedures
8. Special Leave Policy
9. Maternity Policies
10. Paternity Policies
11. Recruitment and Selection Policies
12. Guaranteed Interview Scheme

External Documents/Reports

1. Belfast City Council Gender Action Plan 2012-2015
2. Submission to the Committee on the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Shadow Report Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, December 2013
3. Statutory monitoring returns to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
4. The Queens University of Belfast Athena Programme and SWAN Silver Award 2011
5. Women in Local Councils Gender Action Plan
6. Department for International Development Gender Equality Action Plan 2010
7. Cross-Departmental Gender Equality Action Plan for Women, 2008-2011
8. Cross-Departmental Gender Equality Action Plan for Men, 2008-2011
9. Business in the Community Gender and Race Benchmarking Survey, 2013
10. The Bar Council Gender Equality Scheme 2009-2010
11. Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB) Gender Equality Scheme Action Plan, 2007-2010

Annex 3 Questionnaire Survey

Assembly Secretariat Gender Equality Survey 2014



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

The Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat is conducting a survey of gender equality within the organisation to identify any issues or barriers that might exist within the organisation. I would be very grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. Please be advised that the information you provide is anonymous and is for research purposes only. A report on the findings will be produced and may include your comments. If you wish to raise a specific issue or concern, you must do so using the policies and procedures in place. For more information, please refer to the staff handbook.

1. What is your gender?

2. What is your grade?

AG 1-3

AG 4

AG5

AG6

AG7

AG8

3. Do you work full-time or part-time?

Full-time

Part-time

4. Generally speaking, would you agree or disagree that staff are treated equally regardless of gender in the Secretariat?

Completely agree

Mostly agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Mostly disagree

Completely disagree

If you disagree, please explain and how could this be addressed

5. Have you ever experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat with regards to any of the following because of your gender?

a. Recruitment or promotion Yes No

If yes, please explain and how could this be addressed

b. Carrying out your duties Yes No

If yes, please explain and how could this be addressed

c. Training and learning activities Yes No

If yes, please explain and how could this be addressed

d. Opportunities for development ie going on external visits, being involved in working groups/project teams/project boards

Yes No

If yes, please explain and how could this be addressed

e. Flexible working Yes No

If yes, please explain and how could this be addressed

f. Maternity or paternity arrangements Yes No Not applicable
If yes, please explain and how could this be addressed

g. Balancing working and caring responsibilities Yes No Not applicable
If yes, please explain and how could this be addressed

h. Anything else not covered in above Yes No
If yes, please explain and how could this be addressed

6. In the past year, have you been subjected to unacceptable behaviour (as set out in the staff handbook) in the NIA because of your gender?

Yes No

If yes

- a. What was the general nature of the behaviour? Please do not name individuals involved. Please note if you wish to raise a specific issue or concern, you must do so using the policies and procedures in place.

- b. Were you aware of the policies and procedures for addressing the unacceptable behaviour?

Yes No

- c. Did you use them?

Yes No

7. Are there any other gender related issues you would like to raise and do you have any

suggestions as to how these could be addressed?

Thank you for taking time to participate in this survey

Annex 4

Gender Action Plan Steering Group Scheduled Timeline

Step 1	Establish a steering group	Mid November 2013
Step 2	Review composition of the workforce and decision making structures	End December 2013 – end March 2014

Step 3	Discuss possible research questions and methodology e.g. qualitative questionnaire, interviews or combination	Mid January 2014
Step 4	Agree questions and methodology	Early February 2014
Step 5	SMG and Internal Communications Working Group to have sight of Questionnaire before distribution to staff (for informational purposes)	Early February 2014
Step 6	Arrange data collection by agreed methodology	Mid February 2014
Step 7	Qualitative data collection and focus groups (if required).	End March 2014
Step 8	Report on composition of the workforce and decision making structures	Start April 2014
Step 9	Examination of the questionnaire's themes and comments against policies to make a determination whether there is a policy or implementation issue.	End April 2014
Step 10	Consider draft report on findings and take decision on whether a gender action plan is required	End April 2014
Step 11	Agree final report which is to include a list of recommendations for inclusion in a gender action plan	Mid June 2014
Step 12	Final report (pre-consultation) to be agreed and approved by SMG	End June 2014
Step 13	Final Report to be presented to the Assembly Commission	October 2014
Step 14	Working Group set up to develop a Gender Action Plan based on the Final Report's recommendations	December 2014
Step 15	Gender Action Plan developed and finalised.	April 2015
Step 16	Consultation with staff commences (8 weeks)	May 2015

Step 17	Final report to be table at Assembly Commission meeting	September 2015
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Annex 5 Secretariat decision-making Groups

Bill Template (procurement) Board & Team
Business Continuity Crisis Management
Business Continuity Emergency Response
Business Efficiency Planning (Steering group)
Digital First
Effective Financial Scrutiny Project Group
Effectiveness Working Group
Electronic Committee Pack
Employee Relations Group
Engagement Strategy Project Board

Health and Safety Sub Committee
Health and Wellbeing – Employee support for volunteering
HRMS Project Board
Information Security Group
Internal Communications
IS Office Management Team
IT Prioritisation group
Learning and Development Coordinator Group
Members Survey Group
Ombudsman Bill Project Board and Team
Organisational Development Strategy Group
Purchase to Pay Board & Team
RaISe Management Team
Roof Project Board
Roof Project Support group
Secretariat Management Group