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Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission **Draft Equality Scheme 2022 - 2026**



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## Foreword

We, the Speaker and the Clerk / Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly, are pleased to present this draft Equality Scheme, which sets out how the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission ('the Assembly Commission') intends to continue to fulfil its Section 75 duties across all its functions.

The draft Scheme demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that equality and good relations are promoted in everything that we do. This includes providing the public with access to information and services we provide; the monitoring and equality screening of policies; staff training; and consultation with staff and external organisations.

In particular, we recognise the role that the community and voluntary sector play in helping to shape and influence the work that we do. Consultation and engagement with this sector forms an important part of delivering on our equality commitments outlined in this Scheme. To that end, we encourage you to respond to this consultation.

**The Speaker**

**To be inserted**

**Clerk/Chief Executive**

**Lesley Hogg**



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## Chapter 1 — Introduction

### 1.1 **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ('the 1998 Act') requires that the Assembly Commission complies with two statutory duties:

#### **Section 75 (1)**

In carrying out our functions relating to Northern Ireland, we are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without;
- persons with dependants and persons without.

#### **Section 75 (2)**

In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland we are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

"Functions" includes the powers and duties of a Public Authority<sup>1</sup>. This includes our employment and procurement functions.

Please see below under "Who we are and what we do" for an explanation of our functions.

1.2 How we propose to fulfil the Section 75 duties in relation to the relevant functions of the Assembly Commission. Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (1) to the 1998 Act requires the Assembly Commission as a designated Public Authority to set out in an Equality Scheme how it proposes to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75 in relation to its relevant functions. This Equality Scheme is intended to fulfil that statutory requirement. It is both a statement of our arrangements for fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties and our plan for their implementation.

1.3 The Assembly Commission is committed to the discharge of its Section 75

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<sup>1</sup> Section 98 (1) of the 1998 Act.

obligations in all parts of our organisation and we will commit the necessary available resources in terms of people, time and money to ensure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that our Equality Scheme can be implemented effectively.

**Who we are and what we do**

- 1.4 The Assembly Commission finds its statutory basis in Section 40 and Schedule 5 to the 1998 Act. As a body corporate, it is responsible for providing the property, services and staff required for the Northern Ireland Assembly's purposes. The Assembly is the devolved legislature for Northern Ireland. It is responsible for making laws on transferred matters in Northern Ireland and for scrutinising the work of Ministers and Government Departments.

**Membership**

- 1.5 Membership of the Assembly Commission comprises the Speaker to the Northern Ireland Assembly as Chair and five other Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) appointed by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

**Clerk to the Assembly/Chief Executive**

- 1.6 The Clerk to the Assembly/Chief Executive is a full-time Assembly Commission official. This dual role confers the following responsibilities:
- As Clerk to The Assembly, she is the principal adviser to the Speaker and the Assembly on procedural matters;
  - As the Chief Executive, she leads and manages the Assembly Commission's staff, co-ordinates the essential procedural and corporate support services and acts as Accounting Officer for the Assembly Commission's budget.

## Chapter 2 — Our arrangements for assessing our compliance with the Section 75 duties (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (2) (a))

- 2.1 Some of our arrangements for assessing our compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties are outlined in other parts of this Equality Scheme, for example arrangements for monitoring, equality impact assessments (EQIAs), complaints, review and access to information and services.

In addition, we have the following arrangements in place for assessing our compliance:

### **Responsibilities and reporting**

- 2.2 The Assembly Commission remains committed to the fulfilment of our Section 75 obligations in all parts of our work.
- 2.3 Responsibility for the effective implementation of our Equality Scheme lies with the Clerk / Chief Executive, as leader of the Assembly Commission's staff. The Clerk / Chief Executive is accountable to the Assembly Commission for the development, implementation, maintenance and review of the Equality Scheme in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 to the 1998 Act, including any good practice or guidance that has been or may be issued by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI).
- 2.4 If you have any questions or comments regarding our Equality Scheme, please contact in the first instance the Equality Manager at the address given below:

Equality and Good Relations Unit

Room 417

Parliament Buildings

Ballymiscaw

Stormont

Belfast

BT4 3XX

Telephone: 028 9041 8377/ 028 9052 1941

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- 2.5 Objectives and targets relating to the statutory duties are integrated into our strategic and operational business plans and a timetable detailing the implementation of Equality Scheme measures are set out at appendix 5.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.6 Employees' job descriptions and performance plans reflect their contributions to the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties and implementation of the Equality Scheme, where relevant. The personal performance plans are subject to appraisal in the performance review process.
- 2.7 The Equality Team prepares an annual report on the progress we have made on implementing the arrangements set out in this Equality Scheme to discharge our Section 75 statutory duties (Section 75 annual equality progress report). The Section 75 annual progress report will be sent to the ECNI yearly and will follow any guidance on annual reporting issued by the ECNI.
- 2.8 The latest Section 75 annual progress report can be found on the [Northern Ireland Assembly website](#) or by contacting the Equality Manager via the details provided at 2.4.
- 2.9 The Assembly Commission liaises with the ECNI to ensure that progress on the implementation of our Equality Scheme is maintained.

**Action plan/action measures**

- 2.10 The Assembly Commission has developed a Good Relations Action Plan and a separate Audit of Inequalities Action Plan to address equality of opportunity and good relations. We are currently consulting on these action plans. The draft Audit of Inequalities Action Plan can be found at Appendix 3 and the draft Good Relations Action Plan can be found on the Equality section of the [Assembly website](#).
- 2.11 The action measures which make up our action plans are relevant to our functions. The Audit of Inequalities gathered and analysed information from across the Section 75 categories<sup>3</sup> to identify any inequalities that exist for our service users and those affected by our policies.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.12 Action measures are specific, measurable, linked to achievable outcomes, realistic

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 5 'Timetable for measures proposed' and section 2.11 of this Equality Scheme.

<sup>3</sup> See section 1.1 of this Equality Scheme for a list of these categories.

<sup>4</sup> See section 4.1 of this Equality Scheme for a definition of policies.

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and time bound. Action measures include timescales for their achievement.

- 2.13 The Audit of Inequalities Action Plan will cover the period 2022-2026. The Good Relations Action Plan will cover the period 2022-2025. Implementation of the action measures will be incorporated into our business planning process.
- 2.14 We will seek input from our stakeholders and consult on our action plans before we send them to the ECNI, and thereafter when reviewing the plan as per 2.16 below.
- 2.15 We will monitor our progress on the delivery of our action measures on a six-monthly basis, and update action plans as necessary to ensure that they remains effective and relevant to our functions and work.
- 2.16 The Assembly Commission will inform the ECNI of any changes or amendments to our Good Relations or Audit of Inequalities Action Plans and will include this information in our Section 75 annual equality progress report to the ECNI. Our Section 75 annual equality progress report will incorporate information on progress we have made in implementing all of our equality action plans/action measures.
- 2.17 Finalised versions of the Good Relations and Audit of Inequalities Action Plans will be available on our website: [www.niassembly.gov.uk](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk) or by contacting the Equality and Good Relations Unit (for details see 2.4).

If you require action plans in an alternative format please contact us at the details provided at paragraph 2.4.

## Chapter 3 — Our arrangements for consulting

The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (2) (a) - on matters to which a Section 75 (1) or (2) duty is likely to be relevant including details of the persons to be consulted.

The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (2) (b) on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by us on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

- 3.1 We recognise the importance of consultation in all aspects of the implementation of our statutory equality duties. We will consult on our Equality Scheme, action measures, Equality Impact Assessments and other matters relevant to the Section 75 statutory duties.
- 3.2 We are committed to carrying out consultation in accordance with the following principles (as contained in the ECNI's guidance 'Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)').
  - 3.2.1 Consultations will seek the views of those directly affected by the matter/policy. This may include representative groups of Section 75 categories, our staff and their trades unions. Where relevant, we may also seek the views of the ECNI, other Public Authorities, voluntary and community groups, etc. Consultees directly affected (typically drawn from Appendix 2), will be notified (by email or post) of the matter/policy being consulted upon to ensure they are aware of the consultation. Thereafter, to ensure the most effective use of our consultees' resources, we will take a targeted approach to consultation.
  - 3.2.2 Consultation with all stakeholders will begin as early as possible. We will engage with affected individuals and representative groups to identify how best to consult or engage with them. Methods of consultation and pre-consultation could include:
    - Face-to-face meetings
    - Focus groups
    - Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
    - Questionnaires
    - Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/opt out of the consultation
    - Online meetings or
    - Telephone consultations.

This list is not exhaustive and we may develop other additional methods of

consultation more appropriate to key stakeholders and the matter being consulted upon.

- 3.2.3 We are committed to ensuring that the accessibility and format of every method of consultation we use contributes to the removal of barriers to the consultation process. Specific consideration will be given as to how best to communicate with children and young people, people with disabilities (in particular people with learning disabilities) and minority ethnic communities. We take account of existing and developing good practice, including the ECNI's guidance 'Let's Talk Let's Listen – Guidance for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people' (2008). Information will be made available in alternative formats<sup>5</sup>, in a timely manner from the point of receiving a request. We will ensure that such consultees have equal time to respond.
- 3.2.4 Specific training is provided (where appropriate) to those facilitating Section 75 consultations to ensure that they have the necessary skills to communicate effectively with consultees.
- 3.2.5 To ensure effective consultation with consultees<sup>6</sup> on Section 75 matters, we will continue a programme of awareness raising on the Section 75 statutory duties and the commitments in our Equality Scheme through mandatory staff training and regular meetings of the External Disability Advisory Group.
- 3.2.6 The consultation period normally lasts for twelve weeks to allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves as part of the process of forming a view. However, in exceptional circumstances when this timescale is not feasible (for example implementing UK-wide legislation, meeting Health and Safety requirements, addressing urgent public health matters or complying with Court judgements), we may shorten timescales to eight weeks or less before the policy is implemented. We may continue consultation thereafter and will review the policy as part of our monitoring commitments.<sup>7</sup> Where, under these exceptional circumstances, we must implement a policy immediately, as it is beyond our control, we may consult after implementation of the policy, in order to ensure that any impacts of the policy are considered.
- 3.2.7 If a consultation exercise is to take place over a period when consultees are less

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 6 of our Equality Scheme for further information on alternative formats of information we provide.

<sup>6</sup> Please see Appendix 2 for a list of our consultees. All consultees have consented to being consultees as per GDPR regulations and the list will be regularly reviewed to seek their permission to remain as Section 75 consultees.

<sup>7</sup> Please see below at 4.27 to 4.31 for details on monitoring.

able to respond, for example, over the summer or Christmas break, or if the policy under consideration is particularly complex, we will consider the feasibility of allowing a longer period for the consultation.

- 3.2.8 We are conscious of the fact that affected individuals and representative groups may have different needs. We will take appropriate measures to ensure full participation in any meetings that are held. We will consider, for example, the time of day, the appropriateness of the venue, in particular whether it can be accessed by those with disabilities, how the meeting is to be conducted, the use of appropriate language, whether a signer and/or interpreter is necessary, and whether the provision of childcare and support for other carers is required.
- 3.2.9 We make all relevant information available to consultees in appropriate formats to ensure meaningful consultation. This includes detailed information on the policy proposal being consulted upon and any relevant quantitative and qualitative data.
- 3.2.10 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment/consultation carried out in relation to the policy.
- 3.2.11 We provide feedback to consultees in a timely manner. A feedback report is prepared which includes summary information on the policy consulted upon, a summary of consultees' comments and a summary of our consideration of and response to consultees' input. The feedback is provided in formats suitable to consultees. (Please see also 6.3)
- 3.3 A list of the Assembly Commission's equality consultees is included in this Equality Scheme at Appendix 2.
- 3.4 Our consultation list is not exhaustive and is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant to our functions and policies. We welcome enquiries from any person/s or organisations wishing to be added to the list of consultees. Please contact a member of staff at the Equality and Good Relations Unit to provide your contact details and have your areas of interest noted or have your name/details removed or amended. Please also inform us at this stage if you would like information sent to you in a particular format or language.

## Chapter 4 — Our arrangements for assessing, monitoring and publishing the impact of policies. (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraphs 4 (2) (b); 4 (2) (c); 4 (2) (d); 9 (1); 9 (2))

### 4.1 **Our arrangements for assessing the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted on the promotion of equality of opportunity.**

In the context of Section 75, 'policy' is very broadly defined and it covers all the ways in which we carry out or propose to carry out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland. In respect of this Equality Scheme, the term policy is used for any proposed, amended or existing strategy, policy, initiative or practice and/or decision, whether written or unwritten and irrespective of the label given to it, e.g., 'draft', 'pilot', 'high level' or 'sectoral'.

4.2 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment/consultation carried out in relation to the policy, as required by Schedule 9, paragraph 9 (2) to the 1998 Act.

4.3 The Assembly Commission uses the tools of screening and EQIA to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. In carrying out these assessments, we relate them to the intended outcomes of the policy in question and follow ECNI guidance:

- on screening, including the screening template, as detailed in the ECNI's guidance '*Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)*' and
- on undertaking an EQIA as detailed in the ECNI's guidance '*Practical guidance on equality impact assessment (February 2005)*'.

### **Screening**

4.4 The purpose of screening is to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

4.5 Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process. Policies which we propose to adopt will normally be subject to screening prior to implementation, except for those circumstances outlined at paragraph 3.2.6. For more detailed strategies or policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages, we will screen at various stages during implementation.

4.6 The lead role in the screening of a policy is undertaken by the policy decision maker who has the authority to make changes to that policy. However, screening

will also involve other relevant team members, for example, equality specialists, those who implement the policy and staff from other relevant work areas. Where possible we will include key stakeholders in the screening process.

4.7 The following questions are applied to all our policies as part of the screening process:

- What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? (minor/major/none)
- Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equality categories?
- To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (minor/major/none)
- Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

4.8 In order to answer the screening questions, we gather all relevant information and data, both qualitative and quantitative. In taking this evidence into account we consider the different needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 equality categories. Any screening decision will be informed by this evidence.

4.9 Completion of screening, taking into account our consideration of the answers to all four screening questions set out in 4.7 above, will lead to one of the following three outcomes:

1. the policy has been 'screened in' for EQIA;
2. the policy has been 'screened out' with mitigation<sup>8</sup> or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted; or
3. the policy has been 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.

4.10 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'minor' in respect of one, or more, of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we may on occasion decide to proceed with an EQIA, depending on the policy. If an EQIA is not to be conducted we will nonetheless consider measures that might

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<sup>8</sup> Mitigation – Where an assessment (screening in this case) reveals that a particular policy has an adverse impact on equality of opportunity and / or good relations, a public authority must consider ways of delivering the policy outcomes which have a less adverse effect on the relevant Section 75 categories.

mitigate the policy impact as well as alternative policies that might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity and/or good relations. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead and in line with the Assembly Commission's screening guidance.

- 4.11 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'major' in respect of one, or more, of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we will subject the policy to an EQIA. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead.
- 4.12 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'none', in respect of all of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, we will give details of the reasons for the decision taken. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead.
- 4.13 Upon the completion of the screening process, the screening template, signed off and approved by the senior manager responsible for the policy, will be made available on our website each quarter on the [Northern Ireland Assembly website](#) and on request from the Equality and Good Relations Unit as per paragraph 2.4.
- 4.14 If a consultee raises a concern about a screening decision based on supporting evidence, we will review the screening decision.
- 4.15 Our screening reports are published quarterly [see below at paragraphs 4.20 to 4.23 for details].

#### **Equality impact assessment**

- 4.16 An EQIA is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy, whether that policy is formal or informal, and irrespective of the scope of that policy. The primary function of an EQIA is to determine the extent of any impact of a policy upon the Section 75 categories and to determine if the impact is an adverse one. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate the likely positive outcomes of a policy and to seek ways to more effectively promote equality of opportunity and good relations.
- 4.17 Once a policy is screened and screening has identified that an EQIA is necessary, we will carry out the EQIA in accordance with ECNI guidance. The EQIA will be carried out as part of the policy development process, before the policy is implemented.
- 4.18 Any EQIA will be subject to consultation at the appropriate stage(s). (For details see above Chapter 3 "Our Arrangements for Consulting").



## **Publication**

**Our arrangements for publishing the results of the assessments of the likely impact of policies we have adopted or propose to adopt on the promotion of equality of opportunity.**

(The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraphs 4 (2) (d) and 9 (1))

- 4.19 We make publicly available the results of our assessments (screening and EQIA) of the likely impact of our policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.

## **What we publish**

### **4.20 Screening reports**

These are published quarterly. Screening reports detail:

- All policies screened by the Assembly Commission over the three-month period
- A statement of the aim(s) of the policy/policies to which the assessment relates
- Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact
- Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity;
- Screening decisions, i.e.
  - I. whether the policy has been 'screened in' for EQIA,
  - II. whether the policy has been 'screened out' with mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted, or
  - III. whether the policy has been 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted;
- Where applicable, a timetable for conducting EQIAs;
- A link to the completed screening template(s) on our website.

### **4.21 Screening templates**

For details on the availability of our screening templates please refer to paragraph 4.13.

### **4.22 Equality impact assessments**

EQIA reports are published once the impact assessment has been completed. These reports include:

- A statement of the aim of the policy assessed
- Information and data collected
- Details of the assessment of impact(s)
- Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact
- Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity
- Consultation responses
- The decision taken
- Future monitoring plans

#### **How we publish the information**

- 4.23 All information we publish can be made available in alternative formats on request. Please see paragraph 6.3 below.

#### **Where we publish the information**

- 4.24 The results of our assessments (screening reports and completed templates, the results of EQIAs, etc.) are available on [our website](#) or by contacting the Equality Manager as per paragraph 2.4.
- 4.25 In addition to the above, screening reports (electronic link or hard copy on request if more suitable for recipients) which include all policies screened over a 3-month period are also sent directly to our Section 75 consultees on a quarterly basis.
- 4.26 We will inform the general public about the availability of this material through communications such as press releases where appropriate.

#### **Our arrangements for monitoring any adverse impact of policies we have adopted on equality of opportunity**

(The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (2) (c))

- 4.27 Monitoring can assist us to deliver better public services and continuous improvements. Monitoring Section 75 information involves the processing of sensitive personal data (data relating to the racial or ethnic origin of individuals, sexual orientation, political opinion, religious belief, etc.). In order to carry out monitoring in a confidential and effective manner, the Assembly Commission follows guidance from the Office of the Information Commissioner and the ECNI.
- 4.28 We monitor any adverse impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity of

policies we have adopted. We are also committed to monitoring more broadly to identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with ECNI guidance.

- 4.29 The systems we have established to monitor the impact of policies and identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations are:
- The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant primary quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an ongoing basis.
  - The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant secondary sources of quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an ongoing basis.
  - An audit of existing information systems within one year of approval of this Equality Scheme, to identify the extent of current monitoring and act to address any gaps in order to have the necessary information on which to base decisions.
  - Undertaking or commissioning new data if necessary.
- 4.30 If over a two-year period monitoring and evaluation show that a policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, we will ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for relevant equality groups.
- 4.31 We review our EQIA monitoring information on an annual basis, where appropriate.

**Our arrangements for publishing the results of our monitoring  
(The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (2) (d))**

- 4.32 Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (2) (d) requires us to publish the results of the monitoring of adverse impacts of policies we have adopted. However, we are committed to monitoring more broadly and the results of our policy monitoring are published as follows:
- 4.33 EQIA monitoring information is published as part of our Section 75 annual progress report (see paragraph 2.7).
- 4.34 Quarterly updates on policies screened will be published on the Assembly website and will be available in alternative formats.
- 4.35 All information published can be made available in alternative formats on request. Please see below at paragraph 6.3 for details.

## **Chapter 5 — Staff training. (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (2) (e))**

### **Commitment to staff training**

- 5.1 We recognise that awareness raising and training play a crucial role in the effective implementation of our Section 75 duties.
- 5.2 Our Clerk /Chief Executive wishes to positively communicate the commitment of the Assembly Commission to the Section 75 statutory duties, both internally and externally. To this end we have introduced an effective communication and training programme for all Assembly Commission staff and will ensure that our commitment to the Section 75 statutory duties is made clear in all relevant publications.

### **Training objectives**

- 5.3 The Assembly Commission provides training, advice and information for its staff to achieve the following objectives:
- to raise awareness of the provisions of Section 75 of the 1998 Act, our Equality Scheme commitments and the particular issues likely to affect people across the range of Section 75 categories, to ensure that our staff fully understand their role in implementing the Scheme
  - to provide those staff involved in the assessment of policies (screening and EQIA) with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively
  - to provide those staff who deal with complaints in relation to compliance with our Equality Scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to investigate and monitor complaints effectively
  - to provide those staff involved in consultation processes with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively
  - to provide those staff involved in the implementation and monitoring of the effective implementation of the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively.

### **Awareness raising and training arrangements**

- 5.4 The following arrangements are in place to ensure Members of the Assembly Commission and all Assembly Commission staff are aware of and understand our equality obligations.
- We will provide access to copies of the full Equality Scheme for all staff;

ensure that any queries or questions of clarification from staff are addressed effectively.

- Focused training as well as information and advice is provided for key staff who are directly engaged in taking forward the implementation of our Equality Scheme commitments (for example those involved in research and data collection, policy development, service design, conducting EQIAs, consultation, monitoring and evaluation).
- Where appropriate, training will be provided to ensure staff are aware of the issues experienced by the range of Section 75 groups.
- When appropriate, arrangements will be made to ensure staff are kept up to date with Section 75 developments.

5.5 Training and awareness raising programmes will, where relevant, be developed in association with the appropriate Section 75 groups, staff and the Assembly Commission's Learning and Development team. In order to share resources and expertise, the Assembly Commission staff will, where possible, work closely with other bodies and agencies in the development and delivery of training.

#### **Monitoring and evaluation**

5.6 Our training programme is subject to the following monitoring and evaluation arrangements:

- The extent to which training objectives have been met will be reported on as part of the Section 75 annual progress report, which will be sent to the ECNI.
- All Assembly Commission staff are asked to complete feedback forms on completion of training. The feedback data is used to review training on an ongoing basis.
- Assembly Commission staff discuss the extent to which training has met their needs as part of the Assembly Commission's Performance Management System.

## **Chapter 6 - Our arrangements for ensuring and assessing public access to information and services we provide. (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (2) (f))**

- 6.1 The Assembly Commission is committed to ensuring that the information we disseminate and the services we provide are accessible to all parts of the community in Northern Ireland. We keep our arrangements under review to ensure that this remains the case.
- 6.2 We are aware that some groups will not have the same access to information as others. In particular:
- People with sensory, learning, communication and mobility disabilities may require printed information in other formats.
  - Members of ethnic minority groups, whose first language is not English, may have difficulties with information provided only in English.
  - Children and young people may not be able to fully access or understand information.

### **Access to information**

- 6.3 To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, we provide information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable. Where the exact request cannot be met we will ensure a reasonable alternative is provided. The Assembly Commission liaises with representatives of young people and disability and minority ethnic organisations and takes account of existing and developing good practice. We will respond to requests for information in alternative formats in a timely manner, usually within one week of receiving the request.
- 6.4 In disseminating information through the media we will seek to advertise in the press, including specialist press, where appropriate.
- 6.5 The Assembly Commission will also use social media websites and applications to facilitate the dissemination of information.

### **Access to services**

- 6.6 The Assembly Commission is committed to ensuring that all of our services are accessible to everyone in the community across the Section 75 categories. The Assembly Commission also adheres to the relevant provisions of current anti-discrimination legislation.
- 6.7 The Assembly Commission has an ongoing programme of work to improve access to Parliament Buildings.

**Assessing public access to information and services**

6.8 We monitor routinely and regularly across all our functions, in relation to access to information and services, to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.

6.9 To assist in this monitoring, the following are in place:

- MLAs' surveys;
- Assembly Commission staff surveys;
- Article 55 reporting;
- Visitor Surveys; and
- Complaints procedure.

This list is illustrative and is not meant to be exhaustive.

## **Chapter 7 - Timetable for measures we propose in this Equality Scheme. (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (3) (b))**

- 7.1 Appendix 5 outlines our timetable for all measures proposed within this Equality Scheme. The measures outlined in this timetable will be incorporated into our business planning processes.
- 7.2 This timetable is different from and in addition to, our commitment to developing action plans/action measures to specifically address inequalities and further promote equality of opportunity and good relations. We have included in our Equality Scheme, a commitment to develop an Audit of Inequalities Action Plan. Accordingly, this commitment is listed in the timetable of measures at Appendix 5. For information on these action measures please see above at paragraphs 2.10 to 2.17.



## **Chapter 8 - Our complaints procedure (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 10)**

- 8.1 The Assembly Commission is responsive to the views of members of the public and takes any complaint very seriously. The Assembly Commission will endeavour to resolve all complaints made to us.
- 8.2 Schedule 9, paragraph 10 to the 1998 Act refers to complaints. A person can make a complaint to the Assembly Commission if the complainant believes he or she may have been directly affected by an alleged failure of the Assembly Commission to comply with its approved Equality Scheme. If the complaint has not been resolved within a reasonable timescale, the complaint can be brought to the ECNI, in writing, within twelve months of the complainant's first being aware of the alleged compliance failure.
- 8.3 A person wishing to make a complaint that the Assembly Commission has failed to comply with its approved Equality Scheme should contact the Equality Manager as per paragraph 2.4. The Assembly Commission prefers to receive complaints in writing but appreciates that this may not always be possible. Please contact the Equality Manager if you wish to make a complaint through another medium.
- 8.4 We will in the first instance acknowledge receipt of each complaint normally within 3 days of receipt by the Equality Manager.
- 8.5 The Equality Manager will carry out an internal investigation of the complaint and will respond substantively to the complainant within one (1) month of the date of receiving the letter of complaint. Under certain circumstances, if the complexity of the matter requires a longer period, the period for response to the complainant may be extended to two (2) months. In those circumstances, the complainant will be advised of the extended period within one month of making the complaint.
- 8.6 During this process the complainant will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation into the complaint and of any outcomes.
- 8.7 In any subsequent investigation by the ECNI, the Assembly Commission will co-operate, providing access in a timely manner to any relevant documentation that the ECNI may require. Similarly, the Assembly Commission will co-operate with any investigation by the ECNI under Schedule 9, paragraph 11 (1) (b) to the 1998 Act.
- 8.8 The Assembly Commission will make all efforts to implement promptly any recommendations arising out of any Assembly Commission investigation.

## **Chapter 9 - Publication of our Equality Scheme. (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (3) (c))**

- 9.1 The Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme is available free of charge in print form and alternative formats from the Equality and Good Relations Unit as described in paragraph 2.4.
- 9.2 Our Equality Scheme is also available on our website at:  
[Read more about the Equality Scheme](#)
- 9.3 The following arrangements are in place for the prompt publication of our Equality Scheme to ensure equality of access:
- We will make every effort to communicate widely the existence and content of our Equality Scheme. This may include press releases, prominent advertisements in the press, including specialist press, the internet and direct mail shots to groups representing the various categories in Section 75.
  - We will email a link to our approved Equality Scheme to consultees on our consultation lists. Other consultees without e-mail will be notified by letter that the Scheme is available on request. We will respond to requests for the Equality Scheme in alternative formats in a timely manner, usually within one week of a request being received.
  - Our Equality Scheme is available on request in alternative formats and in minority languages to meet the needs of those not fluent in English.

## **Chapter 10 — Review of our Equality Scheme. (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 8 (3))**

- 10.1 As required by Schedule 9, paragraph 8 (3) to the 1998 Act, we will conduct a thorough review of this Equality Scheme. This review will take place either within five years of submission of this Equality Scheme to the ECNI or within a shorter timescale to allow alignment with the review of other planning cycles. The review will evaluate the effectiveness of our Scheme in relation to the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties relevant to our functions in Northern Ireland.
- 10.2 In undertaking this review we will follow any guidance issued by the ECNI. A report of this review will be made public and sent to the ECNI.

## Appendix 1 – Example groups relevant to the Section 75 categories for Northern Ireland purposes

Please note, this list is for illustration purposes only, it is not exhaustive.

Category	Example groups
Religious belief	Buddhist; Catholic; Hindu; Jewish; Muslims, people of no religious belief; Protestants; Sikh; other faiths.  For the purposes of Section 75, the term “religious belief” is the same definition as that used in the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order <sup>9</sup> . Therefore, “religious belief” also includes any perceived religious belief (or perceived lack of belief) and, in employment situations only, it also covers any “similar philosophical belief”.
Political opinion	Nationalist generally; Unionists generally; members/supporters of other political parties.
Racial group	Black people; Chinese; Indians; Pakistanis; people of mixed ethnic background; Polish; Roma; Travellers; White people.
Men and women generally	Men (including boys); Trans-gendered people; Transsexual people; women (including girls).
Marital status	Civil partners or people in civil partnerships; divorced people; married people; separated people; single people; widowed people.
Age	Children and young people; older people.
Persons with a disability	Persons with disabilities as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and subsequent amendments.

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<sup>9</sup> See Section 98 of the 1998 Act, which states: “In this Act...” political opinion” and “religious belief” shall be construed in accordance with Article 2(3) and (4) of the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998.”

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<b>Category</b>	<b>Example groups</b>
Persons with dependants	Persons with personal responsibility for the care of a child; for the care of a person with a disability; or the care of a dependant older person.
Sexual orientation	Bisexual people; heterosexual people; gay or lesbian people.

## Appendix 2 — List of consultees (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (2) (a))

The Assembly Commission reviews its list of consultees annually. However, if mail is not received or is returned, we check with the organisation as to whether they wish to remain on the list.

- Action on Elder Abuse Northern Ireland
- Age NI
- Alliance Party
- Autism NI
- Belfast Islamic Centre
- Care in NI
- Carers NI
- Cedar Foundation
- Chinese Welfare Association
- Christian Action, Research and Education (CARE)
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Commissioner for Older People
- Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)
- Community Relations Council
- Conradh na Gaeilge
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
- Deaf Access NI
- Department for Communities
- Department for the Economy
- Department for Infrastructure
- Disability Action
- Down's Syndrome Association
- Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
- East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA)
- Education Authority

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- Employers for Disability NI
- ECNI
- GMB
- Green Party
- Indian Community Centre
- Inter-Ethnic Forum
- Jordanstown School
- Local Government Staff Commission
- Mencap
- Northern Ireland Civil Service Staff LGBT Network
- Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)
- Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP)
- North West Community Network
- People Before Profit Alliance
- Pobal
- Probation Board
- Rainbow Project
- Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)
- Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)
- Sense
- Sinn Féin
- Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV)
- Ulster-Scots Agency
- Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)
- Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
- Women's Support Network

### Appendix 3 - NIAC Draft Audit of Inequalities Action Plan 2022-26

Num.	Equality Group	Audit of Inequality Findings	Equality Actions	Expected Outcomes	Lead and Timescale
1.	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<p>The majority of Assembly staff have a White ethnicity <b>(98.5%)</b></p> <p>The proportion of Assembly staff from an ethnic minority is two percentage points lower than the comparable figure for the economically active population <b>(3.6%)</b> in Northern Ireland, as drawn from the March 2021 Labour Force Survey (LFS).</p> <p>Ethnic minorities are under-represented in Assembly Commission staff.</p>	HR Office to use a focused welcoming statement on recruitment advertising, targeting a range of ethnic minority groups.	An increase in applications from people from ethnic minority communities.	<b>HR Office</b> Ongoing Yearly
2.	<b>Age (Younger People)</b>	<p>The proportion of Assembly staff aged 34 or under <b>(6.4%)</b> is substantially less than the comparable economically active population <b>(45.2%)</b>.</p> <p>Younger people are under - represented in Assembly Commission staff.</p>	HR Office to monitor the age of applicants applying for jobs with the Assembly Commission and consider findings with the intention of taking steps to address any known problems.	To see an increasing number of applications for employment by the Assembly Commission from younger people i.e. under the age of 35.	<b>HR Office</b> Ongoing Yearly



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Num.	Equality Group	Audit of Inequality Findings	Equality Actions	Expected Outcomes	Lead and Timescale
3.	<b>Age (Younger People)</b>	Please see finds for action 2 above.	To participate in relevant University Recruitment Fairs and relevant Job Fairs.	<b>See Above.</b>	<b>HR Office</b> Ongoing Yearly
4.	<b>Age (Younger People)</b>	Please see finds for action 2 above.	The HR Office to use a focused welcoming statement on recruitment advertising targeting people under the age of 35 years old.	<b>See Above.</b>	<b>HR Office</b> Ongoing Yearly

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Num.	Equality Group	Audit of Inequality Findings	Equality Actions	Expected Outcomes	Lead and Timescale
5.	<b>Gender</b>	<p>There is a slight under representation of women in the Assembly Commission staff. Monitoring figures record that Assembly Commission staff is composed <b>53% Male and 47% female</b>.</p> <p>There are however variations between different grades of staff. So, for example, for staff at Assembly Grades 1 to 4 and Assembly Grades 5 and 6 there is a slight imbalance in favour of females.</p> <p>However, the largest differential is evident at Assembly Grades 7 and 8 in favour of males and that is the largest contributor to the overall figure.</p>	<p>Using the relevant Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) categories, take positive action in recruitment and selection at Assembly Grades 7 and 8 to attract more female applicants to the Assembly Commission.</p>	<p>To see an increasing number of applications for employment by the Assembly Commission from females.</p>	<p><b>HR Office</b> Ongoing Yearly</p>
6.	<b>Gender</b>	<p>Please see above.</p>	<p>To consider new contracts of employment for relevant posts at Assembly Grades 7 and 8 which may appeal to females e.g. not working during Summer Recess.</p>	<p><b>See Above.</b></p>	<p><b>HR Office</b> Ongoing Yearly</p>

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Num.	Equality Group	Audit of Inequality Findings	Equality Actions	Expected Outcomes	Lead and Timescale
7.	<b>Religious Belief</b>	<p>HR data (2021) confirms that <b>56%</b> of the permanent workforce is from the Protestant community and <b>39 %</b> from a Roman Catholic Background.</p> <p>When compared to the economically active population in Northern Ireland at the 2011 census where 52.6% Protestants were economically active compared to 47.4% Roman Catholics.</p>	<p>HR Office to monitor the community background of applicants applying for jobs with the Assembly Commission and consider findings with the intention of taking steps to address any known problems.</p>	<p>Assembly Commission staff are more reflective of the economically active population of Northern Ireland.</p>	<p><b>HR Office</b> Ongoing Yearly</p>
8.	<b>Religious Belief</b>	<p>See Above.</p>	<p>Using the relevant Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) categories, take positive action in recruitment and selection at Assembly Grades 7 and 8 to attract more applicants from a Roman Catholic.</p>	<p><b>See Above</b></p>	<p><b>HR Office</b> Yearly Ongoing</p>

## Appendix 4 — Glossary of terms

### **Action plan**

A plan which sets out actions a public authority will take to implement its Section 75 statutory duties. It is a mechanism for the realisation of measures to achieve equality outcomes for the Section 75 equality and good relations categories.

### **Action measures and outcomes**

Specific measures to promote equality and good relations for the relevant Section 75 and good relations categories, linked to achievable outcomes, which should be realistic and timely.

### **Adverse impact**

Where a Section 75 category has been affected differently by a policy and the effect is less favourable, it is known as adverse impact. If a policy has an adverse impact on a Section 75 category, a public authority must consider whether or not the adverse impact is unlawfully discriminatory. In either case a public authority must take measures to redress the adverse impact, by considering mitigating measures and/or alternative ways of delivering the policy.

### **Affirmative action**

In general terms, affirmative action can be defined as being anything consistent with the legislation which is necessary to bring about positive change. It is a phrase used in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (NI) 1998 to describe lawful action that is aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and fair participation in employment between members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.

### **Article 55 Review**

Under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, all registered employers must conduct periodic reviews of the composition of their workforces and of their employment practices for the purposes of determining whether members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities are enjoying, and are likely to continue to enjoy, fair participation in employment in each employer's concern. These reviews, which are commonly known as Article 55 Reviews, must be conducted at least once every three years.

### **Audit of inequalities**

An Audit of Inequalities is a systematic review and analysis of inequalities which exist for service users and those affected by a public authority's policies. An audit can be used by a public authority to inform its work in relation to the Section 75 equality and good relations duties. It can also enable public authorities to assess progress on the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties, as it provides baseline information on existing inequalities relevant to a public authority's functions.

### **Consultation**

In the context of Section 75, consultation is the process of asking those affected by a policy (i.e., service users, staff, the general public) for their views on how the policy could be implemented more effectively to promote equality of opportunity across the 9 categories. Different circumstances will call for different types of consultation. Consultations could, for example, include meetings, focus groups, surveys and questionnaires.

### **Differential impact**

Differential impact occurs where a Section 75 group has been affected differently by a policy. This effect could either be positive, neutral or negative. A public authority must make a judgement as to whether a policy has a differential impact and then it must determine whether the impact is adverse, based on a systematic appraisal of the accumulated information.

### **Discrimination**

The anti-discrimination laws prohibit the following forms of discrimination:

- Direct discrimination
- Indirect Discrimination
- Disability Discrimination
- Victimisation
- Harassment

Brief descriptions of these above terms follow:

#### **Direct discrimination**

This generally occurs where a public authority treats a person less

favourably than it treats (or, would treat) another person, in the same or similar circumstances, on one or more of the statutory non-discrimination grounds. A decision or action that is directly discriminatory will normally be unlawful unless: (a) in an age discrimination case, the decision can be objectively justified, or (b) in any other case, the public authority can rely on a statutory exception that permits it – such as a genuine occupational requirement exception; or, a positive action exception which permits an employer to use “welcoming statements” or to take other lawful positive action to encourage participation by under-represented or otherwise disadvantaged groups.

### **Indirect discrimination**

The definition of this term varies across some of the anti-discrimination laws, but indirect discrimination generally occurs where a public authority applies to all persons a particular provision, criterion or practice, but which is one that has the effect of placing people who share a particular equality characteristic (e.g. the same sex, or religious belief, or race) at a particular disadvantage compared to other people. A provision, criterion or practice that is indirectly discriminatory will normally be unlawful unless (a) it can be objectively justified, or (b) the public authority can rely on a statutory exception that permits it.

### **Disability discrimination**

In addition to direct discrimination and victimisation and harassment, discrimination against disabled people may also occur in two other ways: namely, (a) disability-related discrimination, and (b) failure to comply with a duty to make reasonable adjustments.

- (a) Disability-related discrimination generally occurs where a public authority, without lawful justification, and for a reason which relates to a disabled person’s disability, treats that person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) other people to whom that reason does not (or, would not) apply.
- (b) Failure to comply with a duty to make reasonable adjustments: One of the most notable features of the disability discrimination legislation is that in prescribed circumstances it imposes a duty on employers, service providers and public authorities to take such steps as are reasonable to remove or reduce particular disadvantages experienced by disabled people in those circumstances.

### **Victimisation**

This form of discrimination generally occurs where a public authority treats a person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) another person, in the same or similar circumstances, because the person has previously exercised his/her rights under the anti-discrimination laws, or has assisted another person to do so. Victimisation cannot be justified and is always unlawful.

### **Harassment**

Harassment generally occurs where a person is subjected to unwanted conduct that is related to a non-discrimination ground with the purpose, or which has the effect, of violating their dignity or of creating for them an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment cannot be justified and is always unlawful.

### **Economic appraisal**

An economic appraisal is a systematic process for examining alternative uses of resources, focusing on assessment of needs, objectives, options, costs benefits, risks, funding and affordability and other factors relevant to decisions.

### **Equality impact assessment**

The mechanism underpinning Section 75, where existing and proposed policies are assessed in order to determine whether they have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity for the relevant Section 75 categories. Equality impact assessments require the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

### **Equality of opportunity**

The prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between people on grounds of characteristics including sex, marital status, age, disability, religious belief, political opinion, dependants, race and sexual orientation.

The promotion of equality of opportunity entails more than the elimination of discrimination. It requires proactive measures to be taken to secure equality of opportunity between the categories identified under Section 75.

### **Equality Scheme**

A document which outlines a public authority's arrangements for complying with its Section 75 obligations. An Equality Scheme must include an outline of the public authority's arrangements for carrying out consultations, screening,

EQIAs, monitoring, training and arrangements for ensuring access to information and services.

### **Good relations**

Although not defined in the legislation, the ECNI defines good relations as: *‘the growth of relations and structures for Northern Ireland that acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society, and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms’*.

### **Mainstreaming equality**

The integration of equal opportunities principles, strategies and practices into the everyday work of public authorities from the outset. In other words, mainstreaming is the process of ensuring that equality considerations are built into the policy development process from the beginning, rather than being bolted on at the end. Mainstreaming can help improve methods of working by increasing a public authority’s accountability, responsiveness to need and relations with the public. It can bring added value at many levels.

### **Mitigation of adverse impact**

Where an EQIA reveals that a particular policy has an adverse impact on equality of opportunity, a public authority must consider ways of delivering the policy outcomes which have a less adverse effect on the relevant Section 75 categories; this is known as mitigating adverse impact.

### **Monitoring**

Monitoring consists of continuously scrutinising and evaluating a policy to assess its impact on the Section 75 categories. Monitoring must be sensitive to the issues associated with human rights and privacy. Public authorities should seek advice from consultees and Section 75 representative groups when setting up monitoring systems.

Monitoring consists of the collection of relevant information and evaluation of policies. It is not solely about the collection of data, it can also take the form of regular meetings and reporting of research undertaken. Monitoring is not an end in itself but provides the data for the next cycle of policy screening.

### **Northern Ireland Act 1998**

The Northern Ireland Act 1998, implementing the Belfast Agreement, received Royal Assent on 19 November 1998. Section 75 of the 1998 Act created the



statutory equality duties.

### **Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission**

A statutory body established under Section 68 of the 1998 Act, which works to ensure that the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland are fully protected in law, policy and practice.

### **Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA)**

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is an Agency within the Department of Finance. It provides statistical and research information regarding Northern Ireland issues and provides registration services to the public in the most effective and efficient way.

### **Policy**

The formal and informal decisions a public authority makes in relation to carrying out its duties. Defined in the New Oxford English Dictionary as ‘a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government party, business or individual’. In the context of Section 75, the term policy covers all the ways in which a public authority carries out or proposes to carry out its functions relating to Northern Ireland. Policies include unwritten as well as written policies.

### **Positive action**

This phrase is not defined in any statute, but the ECNI understands it to mean any lawful action that a public authority might take for the purpose of promoting equality of opportunity for all persons in relation to employment or in accessing goods, facilities or services (such as health services, housing, education, justice, policing). It may involve adopting new policies, practices, or procedures; or changing or abandoning old ones. Positive action is not the same as positive discrimination.

Positive discrimination differs from positive action in that positive action involves the taking of lawful actions whereas positive discrimination involves the taking of unlawful actions. Consequently, positive action is by definition lawful whereas positive discrimination is unlawful.

### **Qualitative data**

Qualitative data refers to the experiences of individuals from their perspective, most often with less emphasis on numbers or statistical analysis. Consultations

are more likely to yield qualitative than quantitative data.

### **Quantitative data**

Quantitative data refers to numbers, typically derived from either a population in general or samples of that population. This information is often analysed by either using descriptive statistics, which consider general profiles, distributions and trends in the data, or inferential statistics, which are used to determine 'significance' either in relationships or differences in the data.

### **Screening**

The procedure for identifying which policies will be subject to EQIA, and how these EQIAs will be prioritised. The purpose of screening is to identify the policies which are likely to have a minor/major impact on equality of opportunity so that greatest resources can be devoted to improving these policies. Screening requires a systematic review of existing and proposed policies.

### **Schedule 9 (to the Northern Ireland Act 1998)**

Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 sets out detailed provisions for the enforcement of the Section 75 statutory duties, including an outline of what should be included in an Equality Scheme.

### **Section 75**

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides that each public authority is required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:-

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status and sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to these obligations, each public authority in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

**Section 75 investigation**

An investigation carried out by the ECNI, under Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, arising from the failure of a public authority to comply with the commitments set out in its approved Equality Scheme.

There are two types of ECNI investigation, these are as follows:

1. An investigation of a complaint by an individual who claims to have been directly affected by the failure of a public authority to comply with its approved Equality Scheme;
2. An investigation initiated by the ECNI, where it believes that a public authority may have failed to comply with its approved Equality Scheme.

## Appendix 5 — Timetable for measures proposed (The 1998 Act, Schedule 9, paragraph 4 (3) (b))

<b>Measure [Equality Scheme paragraph]</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
Section 75 Annual Progress Report [2.7]	Clerk / Chief Executive to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly	31 August (annually)

### Equality Scheme Action Plan

<b>Measure [Equality Scheme paragraph]</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
Conduct Audit of Inequalities	Equality Manager	-
Consultation on draft action plan [2.14]	Equality Manager	TBC
Finalised action plan published [2.17]	Equality Manager	TBC
Arrangements for monitoring progress in place [2.15]	Equality Manager	In place
Consultation list reviewed and updated [3.4]	Equality Manager	September (annually) and ongoing adjustments as required

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<b>Measure [Equality Scheme paragraph]</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
Screening timetable [4.4]	Equality Manager	Screening Reports will be published quarterly and consultees informed.
Screening Reports [4.15]	-	Screening forms are submitted to SMG alongside relevant policy.
EQIA timetable [4.16]	Equality Manager	The Assembly Commission will alert consultees to forthcoming EQIAs and the consultation periods for each.

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<b>Measure [Equality Scheme paragraph]</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
<p>Monitoring</p> <p>Review of monitoring information [4.31]</p> <p>Publication of monitoring information [4.33 and 4.34]</p>	<p>Equality Manager</p>	<p>Policies are systematically monitored to assess their impact on the relevant groups and sub groups within the equality categories. Ongoing monitoring will be reviewed annually. The Assembly Commission will publish the results of this monitoring in the public authorities’ annual review on progress to the ECNI. This will be published on the Assembly website and alternative formats will be made available on request.</p> <p>If the monitoring and analysis of results over a two-year period show that the policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the Assembly Commission will ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups.</p>

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<b>Measure [Equality Scheme paragraph]</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
<p>Training</p> <p>Development of summary Scheme [5.4]</p> <p>Development of overall training programme [5.5]</p> <p>Focussed training [5.4]</p> <p>Update training [5.4]</p> <p>Evaluation of training [5.6]</p>	<p>Equality Manager</p>	<p>On approval, the full Equality Scheme will be available to consultees and staff via the website and the intranet. A summary Scheme will be generated as soon as possible after approval of the Scheme by the ECNI.</p> <p>Dates TBC.</p> <p>All Assembly Commission staff receive mandatory training on the Assembly Commission’s Section 75 responsibilities on joining the Assembly. This content is reviewed when changes in legislation or responsibility are introduced.</p>
<p>Assessing access to information and services [6.9]</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>Review of the uptake of alternative formats, translation and braille services (for example) will be carried out quarterly.</p>
<p>Communication of Equality Scheme [9.3]</p> <p>Notification of consultees [9.3]</p>	<p>Equality Manager</p>	<p>All relevant material regarding the Equality Scheme, consultations, screening and monitoring will be published on the website at the earliest opportunity. Consultees will be alerted by email to any changes or additions to published material.</p>

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<b>Measure [Equality Scheme paragraph]</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
Review of Equality Scheme [10.1]	Equality Manager	As required by Schedule 9, paragraph 8 (3) to the 1998 Act, the Assembly Commission will conduct a thorough review of this Equality Scheme. This review will take place either within five years of submission of this Equality Scheme to the ECNI or within a shorter timescale to allow alignment with the review of other planning cycles.