



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25: For Public Consultation

Accessibility Statement

Any requests to receive this document in an alternative language or format will be considered. Please contact equality@niassembly.gov.uk

Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	What is the Assembly Commission?	3
3.0	Equality Scheme Commitments	4
4.0	What do we mean by Good Relations?	4
5.0	Good Relations in the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (<i>What we have achieved so far</i>)	5
6.0	How the draft plan was developed (<i>How we reviewed our last plan and developed our draft current plan</i>)	7
7.0	Reviewing the Plan	9
8.0	Next Steps	10
Annex 1	Overview of Consultation Stages	11
Annex 2	Draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25	13

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's ("the Assembly Commission") commitment to Good Relations and provides information on its draft Good Relations Action Plan for the 2022 to 2025 period.
- 1.2 The draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 contains a number of actions about how the Assembly Commission will meet its obligations under Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act, 1998 as described in the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme. The draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 also supports and contributes to the Assembly Commission's [Corporate Strategy 2018-23](#).
- 1.3 In order to develop the Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25, a consultation plan has been developed. A brief overview of the consultation phases to be undertaken, and their corresponding timeframes, are provided at Annex 1 for your information. We are currently at phase 3 of consultation process.
- 1.4 As part of this consultation we need to establish whether the actions which have been included in the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 need to be amended or whether there are additional actions that need to be considered. Therefore, we wish to consult with the public and our section 75 consultees in order to obtain your views.

2.0 What is the Assembly Commission?

- 2.1 The Assembly Commission finds its statutory basis in Section 40 and Schedule 5 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. As a body corporate, it is responsible for providing the property, services and staff required for the Northern Ireland Assembly's purposes. 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.
- 2.2 The Assembly Commission employs staff to support its work. The Secretariat Management Group leads and directs the work of Assembly Commission staff

and comprises the Clerk / Chief Executive, the Director of Parliamentary Services, the Director of Corporate Services and the Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services.

3.0 Equality Scheme Commitments

- 3.1 Under Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Assembly Commission has a statutory duty ***‘to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group’***.
- 3.2 The [Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme](#) is both a statement of its arrangements for fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties and a plan for their implementation.
- 3.3 This draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 sets out how the Assembly Commission proposes to fulfil the Good Relations duty and its Equality Scheme commitments in relation to its staff and those who may visit or use Parliament Buildings (either physically or virtually).

4.0 What do we mean by Good Relations?

- 4.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires all public authorities designated for the purposes of the Act, including the Assembly Commission, to comply with two statutory duties. The first duty is the **Equality of Opportunity duty**, 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 between the nine ‘equality categories’. The second duty, the **Good Relations duty**, requires that public authorities in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland have **regard to the desirability** of promoting good relations between persons of different: -
- religious belief;
 - political opinion; and
 - racial group.

4.2 While Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 does not define ‘good relations’, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland’s (ECNI) 2007 review of the effectiveness of Section 75¹ found that public authorities tended to focus on the equality of opportunity duty rather than the good relations duty when addressing their commitment to Section 75. The ECNI suggest that given that Section 75(2) is a legal requirement, it is vital that the good relations duty is taken seriously. It is important that its integration and implementation can be demonstrated and reported upon.

4.3 The Assembly Commission is committed to equality of opportunity and good relations. On the 10 December 2009, the Assembly Commission approved its Good Relations commitment and stated:

“The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission is committed to the promotion of good relations between persons of differing religious belief, political opinion or racial group and is committed to challenging sectarianism and racism.”²

This commitment was made in the context of the Assembly Commission further stating that it will aim to ensure that the entire community can have full and fair access to, and participate in, the operations of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

5.0 Good Relations in the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (*What we have achieved so far*)

5.1 When approved, the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 will be the fourth Good Relations Action Plan that the Assembly Commission has submitted to the ECNI to show how it plans to fulfil the Good Relations duty. [Previous Good Relations Action Plans and six-monthly monitoring reports can be accessed on the Assembly website.](#)

¹ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007). Keeping it Effective: Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

² [Assembly Commission Minutes of Proceedings 10 December 2009](#)

5.2 Some measures which have been accomplished so far in relation to the Good Relations duty are as follows:

- ✓ Conducted a Good Relations and Accessibility **Visitor Survey** a number of times each year and utilised findings to help inform the Assembly Commission's work;
- ✓ Completed an **Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)** on the flying of the Union Flag at Parliament Buildings;
- ✓ Held **inclusive events** to mark anniversaries within the 'Decade of Centenaries' as part of the Assembly Commission's 'Perspective on' series;
- ✓ **Increased engagement with minority ethnic communities** through the Assembly Community Connect Programme and increased their participation on the programme;
- ✓ Conducted an **Equality and Good Relations Survey** with Assembly Commission staff which helped to inform our work;
- ✓ Disseminated mandatory online **staff training in Equality and Good Relations**;
- ✓ Delivered 'Get Involved' **conferences with Minority Ethnic groups**;
- ✓ **Increased access to information in Irish**, through the Assembly Commission's Education Service, by the provision of an **Irish language champion** and delivery of the **Assembly's education programme in Irish**;
- ✓ Held **Speaker's**, and other events, to include external guests and organisations to highlight their work in the wider community and to increase their participation and inclusion in events held at Parliament Buildings;
- ✓ **Improved access opportunities for people** to contribute to policy development and legislative scrutiny processes through the advertisement of committee stage of Bills in each of the main daily newspapers offering opportunities to all sections of the community to submit evidence.

6.0 How the draft plan was developed (*How we reviewed our last plan and developed our draft current plan*)

6.1 During research on the 5-Year review of the application of the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme 2016-21, additional equality issues were identified as requiring future actions to be developed, some of which related to the area of Good Relations.

To address these issues, an Equality Scheme Audit of Inequalities Action Plan is currently being developed to sit alongside the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme 2022-26, which is also currently being reviewed. The good relations issues that were identified through this research are now included in the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25.

6.2 A closure report has also been completed on the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21 and this has also informed the development of the current draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25. The aim of this closure report was to:

- ✓ review implementation to assess whether the stated aims of the plan were achieved;
- ✓ assess performance against the plan actions;
- ✓ identify and recognise achievements;
- ✓ identify the challenges and lessons learnt; and
- ✓ identify the next steps.

6.3 In addition, the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 aligns with the Assembly Commission's Corporate Strategy 2018-23 which integrates Equality and Good Relations actions. The Corporate Plan 2019-23 sets out key projects and priorities the Assembly Commission intends to deliver in carrying out the role of providing support and advice to the Assembly.

6.4 In developing the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 policy leads/Heads of Business from across the Assembly Commission's Directorates, who were responsible for the delivery of the previous Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21, were asked to complete a questionnaire in relation to the previous action plan's operation, implementation and impact.

Questions were also included in relation to the identification of new sources of equality and good relations data and/or any lessons learned from previous Good Relations Plans or actions which should be included when developing the new Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25. We conducted this review as part of phase-one of the Good Relations Consultation Plan.

- 6.5 We have recently completed phase-two of the consultation by seeking internal feedback from Assembly Commission staff through face to face meetings.
- 6.6 As part of phase-two of the consultation, we hosted an online meeting with approximately 10 representatives from minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland, including members of the North West Migrants Forum and The Executive Office (TEO) sponsored Race Equality sub-group. The meeting discussed issues and perceived barriers concerning the participation of minority ethnic communities with the work of the Assembly; in particular, language-related concerns.
- 6.7 As a follow-up to the online meeting with minority ethnic groups, an online survey was issued to the same representatives as part of the development process of the Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25. The TEO also issued the survey link to approximately 40 of its minority ethnic member organisations. Those who received the link were encouraged to pass it on to other minority ethnic individuals in their local community. The survey was designed to ascertain if: -

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

The survey was conducted between July and August 2021. A total of 109 valid responses were received. The largest single ethnic group was White (22.9%), followed by Arab (15.6%), Black African (14.7%) and Indian (9.2%). Nearly a third of respondents (29.4%) declared they were from 'other' ethnic

groups. In total, the survey was completed by individuals from 20 different ethnicities or countries of origin.

Respondents came from across Northern Ireland, with 16 of the 18 constituencies represented in the survey. Only Newry and Armagh and Strangford were absent. The largest number of respondents were based in East Antrim and North Antrim (13.8%), followed by Belfast South (11.9%), Belfast North (11.0%) and Foyle (10.1%). We analysed this data in detail when developing the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25.

6.8 We now are seeking your views as part of phase 3 of our Consultation on what we propose to do in the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25.

7.0 Reviewing the Plan

7.1 Following the phase 3 public consultation, progress on the implementation of the Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 will be monitored on a six-monthly basis and reported to the Secretariat Management Group. Six-monthly monitoring progress updates will be published on the Assembly website. As the Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 is a 'living' document, opportunities to amend the plan, should this be necessary, will be available during each six-monthly monitoring cycle.

7.2 Each year progress made on the implementation of the Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 will be included in the [Assembly Commission's Annual Equality Progress Report](#), which will be submitted to the ECNI and published on the Assembly website.

7.3 The actions contained within the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 aligns with the Corporate Strategy and Corporate Plan, this will ensure that equality and good relations continue to be addressed at a strategic level and are integrated throughout the organisation.

8.0 Next Steps

- 8.1 When information is received from the current phase 3 of consultation (public consultation), we will use this information to update the development of the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 and submit a paper to the Secretariat Management Group in October 2022 detailing your suggestions and how these may be turned into actions for inclusion in the new Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25.
- 8.2 If no further action is required and the Action Plan is approved, the Assembly Commission's Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 will be published on the Assembly website in November 2022, submitted to the ECNI and issued to consultees on the Assembly Commission's section 75 consultee list.

Annex 1 Overview of Consultation Stages

Phase 1

Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 Development / Consultation	Consultees	Aims	Timeframe
Action Plan Development: Feedback and identification of emerging issues from the Good Relations Action Plan 2016-21.	Internal Stakeholders: Policy Leads/ Heads of Business named on the 2016-21 Good Relations Action Plan	To obtain views on lessons learnt from the previous plan, what worked, what didn't work, barriers to engagement, potential extension of existing actions and identification of new actions.	March 2021 (Policy Development). Questionnaire completion by Policy Leads.

Phase 2

Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 Development / Consultation	Consultees	Aims	Timeframe
Action Plan development: Pre-consultation with targeted external section 75 groups/user groups and Assembly Commission staff.	Targeted user groups/section 75 groups. Assembly Commission staff.	To obtain views from minority ethnic user groups and Assembly Commission staff on any issues or actions for inclusion and reasons for preferred options and preferences.	October 2021

Phase 3

Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25 Development / Consultation	Consultees	Aims	Timeframe
Draft action plan issued for formal public consultation.	General public, Assembly Commission staff, Members, Party Support Staff and building users.	To obtain views from specified groups and individuals on the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25.	Summer 2022 12 weeks consultation period.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Draft Good Relations Action Plan 2022-25

Actions to Promote Good Relations

Summary of Good Relations Aims

1. Training and Development

1. Identify an e-learning good relations package for staff.
2. Provide ongoing training and support to policy authors in relation to the requirements of equality and good relations policy screening.

2. Representation

1. Analyse recruitment data for ethnic minority applicants and appointees and the community background of applicants and appointees.

3. Promotion of Good Relations and Dialogue

1. Update the Events tour script to include the artefacts and images in Parliament Buildings.
2. Publicise the Assembly 'Quiet Room' as a space for visitors and staff with/without faith for prayer and reflection.
3. Scope out, and where appropriate, procure new technologies to support self-guided tours.

4. Participation and Engagement

1. Deliver awareness raising and capacity-building seminars specifically for minority ethnic communities.
2. Establish an external minority ethnic stakeholder group.
3. Hold a planned series of cultural events with minority ethnic groups.
4. Scope out, and where appropriate, procure new technologies to support visitor feedback on the Assembly website and at Parliament Buildings.
5. Conduct research to discover how other legislatures accommodate the language needs of minority ethnic communities on their websites.

Corporate Strategy Theme – Investing in the development, expertise and well-being of our people

1	Good Relations Aim (1) Training and Development Actions	Desired Outcomes	Performance Indicators	Lead
1.1	Identify an e-learning good relations package for staff.	Staff better understand good relations and its relevance to them in their roles within the Assembly Commission.	<p>Year 2 (March 2024) Identification and implementation of a Good Relations E-Learning programme for staff.</p> <p>Year 3 (November 2024) Staff have been trained in good relations.</p>	Lead – Learning and Development Team and Equality and Good Relations Unit
1.2	Ongoing training and support to policy authors in relation to the requirements of equality and good relations policy screening.	Assembly Commission policies are screened for equality and good relations as per the Assembly Commission’s Equality Scheme and Equality Commission guidance.	<p>Over the Lifetime of the plan:</p> <p>Support and advice is provided by Equality and Good Relations Unit to Policy Authors on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Monitoring information is collected by Learning and Development Team in relation to policy screening training.</p> <p>Quarterly Screening Reports are shared with Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and published on the Assembly website.</p>	<p>Lead – Equality and Good Relations Unit</p> <p>Learning and Development Team</p>

Corporate Strategy – Building excellence and innovation in our services “Ensuring high standards in equality, governance and regulatory compliance through effective and efficient processes.”

2	Good Relations Aim (2) Representation Actions	Desired Outcomes	Performance Indicators	Lead
2.1	<p>Analyse recruitment data for minority ethnic applicants and appointees and, community background of applicants and appointees, against 2021 census data and take appropriate action(s) to address any under-representation issues arising e.g. welcoming statement in recruitment advertising etc.</p>	<p>Staffing is reflective of the Northern Ireland working age population in relation to ethnicity and community background i.e. religious belief/political opinion.</p>	<p>Year 1 – 3 In May of each year produce an annual written review of monitoring data against 2021 Census data.</p> <p>Year 1 – 3 Positive steps used where necessary in external recruitment to attract more applicants from minority ethnic communities and from persons of a community background that is under-represented.</p>	<p>Lead: Human Resources</p>

Corporate Strategy – Building excellence and innovation in our services “Ensuring high standards in equality, governance and regulatory compliance through effective and efficient processes.”

3	Good Relations Aim (3) Promotion of Good Relations and Dialogue Actions	Desired Outcomes	Performance Indicators	Lead
3.1	Update the Events tour script to include the artefacts and images in Parliament Buildings.	To enhance the visitor experience.	Year 1 (October 2022) Tour Script updated.	Lead: Events
3.2	Publicise the Assembly ‘Quiet Room’ as a space for visitors and staff with/without faith for prayer and reflection.	The shared space for prayer and reflection for visitors, service users and staff of all faiths, and none, is publicised.	Year 1 (March 2023) Quiet Room is publicised on the Assembly website.	Lead: Head of Building Services
3.3	Scope out, and where appropriate, procure new technologies to support self-guided tours .	To enhance the visitor experience, increase the number of visitors and make information more accessible.	Year 1 (March 2023) Scope out what is possible in terms of self-guided tour technology. Year 2 (March 2024) If appropriate, procure suitable technologies.	Lead: Events

Corporate Strategy - Strengthening engagement with the public “Building connections with target groups”

4	Good Relations Aim (4) Participation and Engagement Actions	Desired Outcomes	Performance Indicators	Lead
4.1	Deliver awareness raising and capacity-building seminars specifically for minority ethnic communities .	Increased participation by minority ethnic communities in the work and activities of the Assembly.	Year 1 (March 2023) Host a series of awareness raising and capacity-building seminars.	Lead: Engagement
4.2	Establish an external ethnic minority stakeholder group .	Improved targeting of, access to, and participation in, Assembly Commission services and activities by BME communities.	Year 2 (March 2024) Ethnic minority stakeholder group is established.	Lead – Engagement, Equality and Good Relations Unit and Assembly Committees
4.3	Hold a planned series of cultural events with minority ethnic groups.	Raise awareness of Assembly services with minority ethnic communities and also raise the awareness of staff about minority ethnic cultures.	Year 1 – 3 A series of events is held over the lifetime of the plan.	Lead: Engagement and Clerking

4	Good Relations Aim (4) Participation and Engagement Actions	Desired Outcomes	Performance Indicators	Lead
4.4	Scope out, and where appropriate, procure new technologies to support visitor feedback on the Assembly website and at Parliament Buildings.	Improving the visitor experience.	<p>Year 2 (March 2024) Scope out what is possible in terms of technology to support visitor feedback.</p> <p>Year 3 (March 2025) If appropriate, procure suitable technologies.</p>	Lead: RaISe and Equality with support from Good Relations Unit
4.5	Conduct research to discover how other legislatures accommodate the language needs of minority ethnic communities on their websites.	To gain greater reach and to raise awareness of the services and operations of the Assembly with minority ethnic communities via the Assembly website.	Year 1 (March 2023) Working with RaISe to conduct research to identify how other UK and Irish legislatures accommodate the language needs of minority ethnic communities on their websites and identify solution options.	Lead: RaISe with support from Equality and Good Relations Unit