

**EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**  
**Public Authority 2008 - 2009**  
**Annual Progress Report on Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and**  
**Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order (DDO) 2006**

This report template includes a number of self assessment questions regarding implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties from **1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009**. This template also includes a number of questions regarding implementation of Section 49A of the DDO from the **1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009**. Please enter information at the relevant part of each section and ensure that it is submitted electronically (by completing this template) and in hardcopy, with a signed cover letter from the Chief Executive or, in his/her absence, the Deputy Chief Executive to the Commission by **31 August 2009**.

In completing this template it is essential to focus on the application of Section 75 and Section 49. This involves progressing the commitments in your equality scheme or disability action plan which should lead to outcomes and impacts in terms of measurable improvement for individuals from the equality categories. Such outcomes and impacts may include changes in public policy, in service provision and/or in any of the areas within your functional remit.

Name of public authority (Enter details below)

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Equality Officer (Enter name and contact details below)

S75:

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DDO (if different from above):

**S75 Executive Summary**

- What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations and what outcomes were achieved?

### **Development of a Good Relations Policy**

The Assembly Commission has established a Good Relations Working Group within the Secretariat charged with the development of and consultation on a draft Assembly Policy on Good Relations. Further work on this will be undertaken during 2009 with a view to having a final policy in place by March 2010.

### **Implementation of the Engagement Strategy**

The Assembly Commission have also commenced implementation of the Engagement Strategy with a series of informative roadshow events taking place in various locations throughout Northern Ireland. Following an evaluation of this series of roadshows the Assembly Commission will consider if it is appropriate to roll-out similar events in each of the remaining constituencies in Northern Ireland.

### **Dignity at Work Policy**

The Assembly Commission agreed a “Dignity at Work” policy for all Staff Members and Party Staff deployed at the Assembly.

The policy states that the Assembly Commission is committed to equality of opportunity and to creating and sustaining an environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, free from any form of inappropriate behaviour and one in which all employees can give of their best.

### **Development of Equality Training Plan**

The Assembly Commission also agreed to the implementation of a suite of training sessions that have been developed by the Compliance Unit. The training sessions included:

- Section 75 Awareness Training
- Disability Equality Awareness Training
- Section 75 Policy Screening
- Equality Impact Assessment Training
- Disability Equality Awareness Training for Frontline Staff
- Policy Development and Integration of Equality for Directors and Senior Managers

Following a public tender process an experienced training provider was engaged to deliver the programme of training. As part of the training package the training provider will provide train the trainer sessions on Section 75 and DDA to Assembly Secretariat staff in order that this training can be carried forward to all new staff being recruited to the organisation in the future.

## **Diversity Training**

The Training Unit have also devised a Diversity Training session for all staff and a pilot session was held at the Mount Business Centre on 27 March 09. The aim of the session was to support the NIA's Dignity at Work policy by facing the discomfort of highlighting personal prejudices and where they come from to generally raise awareness of promoting diversity in the work place. Following a successful evaluation of the pilot session it planned to roll out the programme to all staff in the coming year.

Further details are provided at Section 4 of this report.

- What are the main initiatives planned in the coming year to ensure the authority improves outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75?

As the Assembly has been operational for a relatively short period we have been actively engaged with embedding the principles of Section 75 across the organisation. A full policy screening exercise has been undertaken and the results continue to be analysed. Due to the many changes that have been implemented at both staff and organisational levels we intend to undertake a further review of policies in the near future prior to the publication of and consultation on a final screening report and timetable for undertaking Equality Impact Assessments.

- Please give examples of changes to policies or practices which have resulted in outcomes. If the change was a result of an EQIA please tick the appropriate box in column 3:

	Outline change in policy or practice which have resulted in outcomes	Tick if result of
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		EQIA
Persons of different religious belief	•	
Persons of different political opinion	•	
Persons of different racial groups	•	
Persons of different age	•	
Persons with different marital status	•	
Persons of different sexual orientation	•	
Men and women generally	•	
Persons with and without a disability	•	
Persons with and without dependants	•	

### **Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties**

- Please outline evidence of progress made in developing and meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2008-09

The Assembly Commission continues apace with its drive to implement its Corporate Plan for the period 2008-2011. Targets have been incorporated to:

- Increase public engagement with the Assembly;
- Develop a Good Relations Strategy by March 2010;
- Have a Language Policy in place by March 2010;
- Have continued compliance with Equality and DDA duties throughout the period to 2011.

Whilst each of the targets are currently at different stages of development all are expected to be completed within the timeframe.



please provide details of the factors responsible for delay and details of the timetable for re-scheduling the EQIA/s in question.

**(Enter text below)**

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2008- March 2009

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased

2009-10 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2009 – March 2010	Existing or New policy?	Please indicate expected timescale of Decision Making stage i.e. Stage 6

**Section 4: Training**

- Please outline training provision during the year associated with the Section 75 Duties/Equality Scheme requirements including types of training provision and conclusions from any training evaluations.

During 2008/09 the Assembly Commission agreed to undertake a suite of training programmes aimed at effectively addressing the statutory duties.

**Section 75/Disability Awareness**

As of 31 March 2009, 18 sessions on Section 75 and Disability Awareness have taken place with 267 staff attending, with a further 123 yet to attend. Further sessions are planned during 2009/10 to facilitate the remainder of staff yet to complete the programme. A specific session aimed at Directors and Senior Managers was also undertaken in February and March 2009. It

is intended to undertake a further session for Members of the Assembly Commission during 2009 as part of a programme in support of their wider corporate governance obligations.

### **Front Line Staff - Equality/Disability Workshops**

This programme is to be delivered to all staff who will have direct contact with the public. As at 31 March 2009 we have delivered 2 events with 23 staff attending. A further 3 further events are scheduled to be delivered during April and it is expected that the majority of front line staff will be trained in that period.

Initial feedback from this programme has been very positive, with staff feeling that the practical skills taught will be beneficial to their roles within the organisation.

### **Diversity**

To support the Dignity at Work Policy we have designed a ½ day workshop based on the NICS Diversity programme. We piloted the session “Embracing Diversity” on Fri 26 March with 17 staff from across the Secretariat.

The workshop is very interactive, with lots of activities and discussion to help staff understand the importance of respecting diversity. We have included a session on the Northern Ireland Assembly values, to encourage participants to discuss their understanding of them and identify appropriate behaviours to assist with embedding the values across the Assembly. It is our intention to gather constructive feedback from the participants to establish if the training does support the policy and identify any improvements/amendments which need to be made.

Following any redesign work, this training will roll-out across the Secretariat and it is hoped that this will be completed by the end of July 2009.

### **Section 5: Communication**

- Please outline how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the Section 75 Duties during the year and evidence of the impact/success of such activities.

Following the consultation on the draft Disability Action Plan during 2007/08 the Assembly Commission agreed a detailed response to the issues raised during the consultation phase. A number of amendments were made to the Action Plan and a final plan was agreed and issued to a wide range of organizations and individuals. The revised action was also uploaded on to our website in HTML format together with our responses to the issues raised during the consultation.

To date there has been little comment or correspondence on both the Equality Scheme and the Disability Action Plan. We will, in 2009/10 explore further opportunities for disseminating this information and working with interested parties to try to identify more effective means of communication. As a starting point, the redesign and development of the website will be crucial to this and we hope that the website will become more interactive and user friendly.

A further consultation on a policy screening exercise and draft EQIA timetable is planned for 2009/10 where a further assessment of the impact of communication methods can be undertaken. In addition it is planned to initiate a consultation exercise on the content of the Engagement Strategy. As this strategy will be the key vehicle for how we as a Public Authority interact with our customers and the general public this exercise will contribute significantly to

### **Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis**

- Please outline any systems that were established during the year to supplement available statistical and qualitative research or any research undertaken/commissioned to obtain information on the needs and experiences of individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75.

As part of the Corporate Plan, the NI Assembly will be developing new customer service standards and we will be exploring more practical arrangements for the collection of Section 75 data. There are already a number of systems in place that address quantitative monitoring requirements in relation to Section 75 but further work will be required to effectively develop a more formal reporting structure. The implementation of the Engagement Strategy and a future policy on Good Relations will allow the Assembly to develop more effective systems.

- Please outline any use of the Commission's Section 75 Monitoring Guide.

As the Equality Scheme was only approved in February 2008 the main focus to date has been on embedding the knowledge and importance of Section 75 and other Equality duties within the organization. More effective use of the guide and the importance of establishing effective monitoring systems will be a key consideration during 2009/10. We now have established formal channels with and discussions have taken place with the Equality Commission, Community Relations Council and other organisations and we hope that this work will enable us to enhance existing systems. A key focus for us will be to identify best practice in this area in the hope that a comprehensive system for monitoring can be put in place.

### **Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services**

- Please provide details of any initiatives/steps taken during the year, including take up, to improve access to services including provision of information in accessible formats.

The Assembly Commission has undertaken a programme of improvements to some of the facilities available within Parliament Buildings. Upgrades to the Chambers include provision of disabled access to the floor of the Assembly and improved access to the viewing galleries and toilet facilities. In addition further improvements have been made to signage within the curtilage of Parliament Buildings which we hope will improve the visitor experience at the Assembly. Work has also been completed on disabled parking facilities in the upper car parks.

The development and implementation of the Engagement Strategy has allowed the Assembly Commission to initiate a number of roadshow events in an attempt to broaden public knowledge of the work of the Assembly. Details of the events were issued to all groups on our Section 75 database as well as advertisements in the local press. Members of our Disability Advisory Group facilitated further dissemination of the literature to their member groups. The literature was made available in alternative formats including Braille and large fonts.

The Assembly Commission provided interpretation facilities including sign language at most of the events and hopes to further improve access to services. The Engagement Strategy provides for a full review of our website and this aspect of the service will be comprehensively reviewed in

due course. At a recent meeting of the Disability Advisory Group, Members agreed that they would assist in the development of any initiatives designed to improve access to information and services.

### **Section 8: Complaints**

- Please identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:
  - received and resolved by the authority (including how this was achieved);
  - which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
  - which were referred to the Equality Commission.

No complaints were received during the period of this report.

### **Section 9: Consultation and Engagement**

- Please provide details of the measures taken to enhance the level of engagement with individuals and representative groups during the year.

As part of the wider Engagement Strategy the Assembly Commission agreed to host a number of roadshow events in different locations throughout Northern Ireland. The venues for the roadshows were:

No	Town	Venue	Date
1	Coleraine	University of Ulster	18 March 2009
2	Ballymena	Ballymena Town Hall & Museum Arts	19 March 2009
3	Newry	Canal Court Hotel	23 March 2009
4	Enniskillen	Killyhelvin Hotel	24 March 2009
5	Armagh	Armagh City Hotel	25 March 2009
6	Londonderry	Millennium Forum, Derry	26 March 2009
7	Omagh	Strule Arts Centre	30 March 2009
8	Lisburn	Island Arts Centre	6 April 2009
9	Belfast	Baby Grand Opera House	7 April 2009

The purpose of these events was to highlight the work of the Assembly and provide an opportunity for the public to become better informed on the work of the Assembly. It is hoped that these events will help to improve the public's perception of the role and importance of the Assembly and provide for greater accessibility for the public in highlighting the issues that are of importance to them. Ultimately this will lead to greater participation in the

wider democratic process. The Assembly Commission hopes to roll-out further events in the coming year.

Details of the events were issued to those organisations and individuals on our Section 75 contact list and members of our Disability Advisory Group facilitated the dissemination of the literature in alternative formats. Following the success of these roadshows further similar events are planned for the coming year.

A consultation, later in 2009, on the content of the Engagement Strategy will provide the Assembly Commission with some constructive feedback on the appropriateness of the strategy to meet the many varied needs and expectations of its customers. The results of this consultation will provide some further useful feedback to inform the stage 2 of the EQIA process should this be deemed appropriate.

### **Section 10: The Good Relations Duty**

- Please provide details of additional steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

The Assembly Commission has been actively considering how best to fulfil its duty under Good Relations. As part of this process, the Assembly Commission has established a Good Relations Working Group made up of representatives from each of the business areas within the Secretariat. The terms of reference for the Group were agreed at the first meeting in March 2009, and include the development of and consultation on a draft Assembly Policy on Good Relations. It has been agreed that a consultation seminar will be arranged in Autumn 2009 bringing together interested organisations and stakeholders to further inform the progression of the Good Relations Policy/Strategy. The initial Policy is scheduled for completion under the targets outlined in our Corporate Plan by March 2010.

- Please outline any use of the Commission's Good Relations Guide.

As we have only recently been in a position to actively address the development of a Good Relations Policy there has been little use of the guide other than as a mechanism to inform the Assembly Commission on the importance of developing a policy on this issue. We now have established contacts with both the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council and we will be undertaking further

consultations with both bodies as we progress towards meeting our commitments under the duties.

### **Section 11: Additional Comments**

- Please provide any additional information/comments

This has been a transitional year for the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat. A full recruitment programme has been initiated at all levels within the Secretariat from Chief Executive/Director General down through all grades in the organisation. We expect that the coming year will bring a period of stability and the full impact of the implementation of the Equality Scheme, Disability Action Plan and the development of the Good Relations Policy will be further evidenced in the work of the Assembly.

Annual Report 1 April 2008 / 31 March 2009  
'Disability Duties' Questions

**1. How many action measures for this reporting period have been?**

5

Fully  
Achieved

4

Partially  
Achieved

3

Not  
Achieved

2. Please outline the following detail on **all actions that have been fully achieved** in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs <sup>1</sup>	Outcomes / Impact <sup>2</sup>
National <sup>3</sup>			
Regional <sup>4</sup>			
Local <sup>5</sup>			

<sup>1</sup> **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

<sup>2</sup> **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

<sup>3</sup> **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments

<sup>4</sup> **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level

<sup>5</sup> **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
8.3.2	Review Induction process to promote positive attitudes of people with disabilities.	Induction process reviewed and updated in line with new duties.	As part of the induction process training on Section 75 and Disability Awareness will now be mandatory requirements for all new staff.

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1			
2			
3			
4			

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others**’ to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1			
2			
3			
4			

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
8.1.1	The Assembly Commission will establish an informal group consisting of representatives of people with disabilities, to assist with the consultation process.	<p>Informal group established.</p> <p>Consultation Strategy developed.</p> <p>Consultation Strategy</p>	<p>Informal Group has now been established and the first meeting took place in March 2009.</p> <p>Assembly Commission approved the strategy and this was implemented for both consultations carried out</p>

		approved by Assembly Commission.	in 2007.
8.2.1	Ensure that disability duties are incorporated into planning, policies, processes and practices and that these are adequately resourced.	Staff training on disability awareness delivered to all secretariat staff.	A comprehensive training programme has commenced for all Secretariat staff. As at 31 March 2009 267 staff have received training on Section 75 and Disability Awareness.
8.4.1	Ensure disability issues are taken into account in all recruitment procedures.	Specialised training where required provided to staff dealing with recruitment matters.	A major recruitment drive has taken place during 2008/09 and all necessary steps have been taken to facilitate those with disabilities in the process.
8.4.2	Ensure that job opportunities are available to applicants with disabilities.	All applicants invited to identify assistance required as a result of their disability.	Information Packs and forms designed to facilitate those requiring assistance.

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones <sup>6</sup> / Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
8.2.6	Ensure that Parliament Buildings is accessible to all Members, visitors and staff with disabilities.	Development of Customer Feedback system.	System will allow for specific issues to be identified by service users and appropriate action taken if required.	Following the publication of a new corporate plan for 2008-2011, specific targets have been included to develop customer service standards at an organisational level. The Action Measure is regarded as a continuous process and as such will continue to be reflected in this category.
8.3.1	Provide all staff with awareness training in duties and responsibilities under the DDA 1995 and update as	Training completed for all staff.	Training to be completed by March 2009.	Training for all staff commenced at beginning of 2009 due to requirement for undertaking public

<sup>6</sup> **Milestones** – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved.

	required.			procurement exercise. As of 31 March 2009 267 staff have completed the required training and remainder to be completed in due course.
8.3.3	Develop the AssISt intranet system as an information and training tool to improve disability awareness.	Development of dedicated pages on intranet relating to disability issues.  Copies of articles and information posted on the intranet system.		A specific page has been developed on the intranet to provide for information relating to all compliance areas including DDA.  As the working group was only established in March it is hoped that this tool can be further utilised in the coming year.
8.6.2	Ensure that, where possible, disability monitoring information is collected in respect of users of the Assembly's services.	Monitoring system established.	Applications for events and/or visits to Parliament buildings ask for any specific requirements to be	This Action Measure will be referred to our Disability Advisory Group and further advice and guidance will required in order

			identified and this allows us to provide resources to meet such requests.	to effectively complete this.

**4. Please outline what action measures have not been achieved and the reasons why?**

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
8.3.5	Use the Assembly's internal communication strategy, to raise awareness of disability issues.	Following a review of the internal communication process it was decided to completely revamp the Assembly's internal magazine. "Life on the Hill" has been recently established as the new internal magazine. Following the establishment of the disability Advisory Group contributions and articles will be provided by interested organisations and/or individuals.
8.5.4	Include in the Assembly's External Communications Strategy, an objective to specifically communicate to individuals with disabilities and their representatives, information about the operation of the Assembly.	This Action Measure can now be addressed by the new Engagement Strategy. The first meeting of our Disability Advisory Group took place in March 2009 and some information on developments was communicated to them at that point. Further consideration of this will be undertaken at future meeting of the group.
8.6.1	Review the operation of existing services in	It is expected that the Advisory Group will play

	<p>conjunction with people with disabilities and their representatives to identify any barriers to access for this group.</p>	<p>an active part in any review of services. Members of the group have already suggested the possibility of “mystery shopper” exercises to help inform this process. In addition they will assist in the development of the website and information processes.</p>
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5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

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(b) Quantitative

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6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions, has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes.

Please delete: Yes

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
8.3.5	<p>Use the Assembly's internal communication strategy, to raise awareness of disability issues.</p> <p><i>This Measure has been rewritten from that provided in the original draft Action Plan as it referred to a previous version of the staff magazine.</i></p>	Inclusion of articles on disability awareness matters included in future communiques.	Annually

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisations annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

No further changes are planned at this stage but the Plan will be kept under review.