



Five-year Review Report (2021-2025) on the Application of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Equality Scheme

Report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

December 2025

This review report is available online at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/policies/equality-policies/>

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This report template includes a number of self-assessment questions, which relate to the twelve key elements of an equality scheme. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) sets the questions. Submission of this review to the ECNI is made electronically and in writing, with a signed cover letter from the Chief Executive.

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Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

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Executive Summary

- a) To what extent has your public authority's approved scheme provided a workable basis for mainstreaming the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations into policy-making over the past five years?

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's (the 'Assembly Commission') Equality Scheme was last reviewed and submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) in February 2023. The previous 5 year Review Report on the application of the Equality Scheme covered the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2021. The current 5 year Review Report covers the period 1 April 2021 to 1 December 2025.

The Equality Scheme has provided a framework for mainstreaming equality issues into service provision and new and existing policies.

Progress on meeting the commitments made in the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme has been monitored over the review period and equality considerations have been mainstreamed into corporate and operational plans. Throughout the period of review, the Assembly Commission endeavored to integrate all aspects of equality into its policy and decision making processes.

Communication with staff over the review period has ensured that all staff were aware of the statutory equality duties and were provided with the necessary expertise and assistance to implement them effectively. All screening and equality guidance is available on the Assembly Commission's intranet site for all staff, and in particular for those responsible for policy development. The provision of equality training was available and regularly highlighted to keep staff aware of the statutory obligations outlined in the Assembly Commission's equality scheme.

The use of informal discussions (and pre-consultation) with section 75 representative groups has also proved of value in informing policy development and screening.

- b) What key lessons have been learnt over the past five years in terms of effectively implementing the approved equality scheme?

- The benefit of continued senior level commitment to the implementation and management of the Equality Scheme and equality commitments.
- The benefits of early engagement and consultation with stakeholders regarding policy-making and policy revision.

- The benefits of a dedicated Equality Unit to provide ongoing advice and support to assist integration of equality considerations across Directorates.

c) **What more needs to be done to achieve outcomes for individuals from the nine equality categories?**

- Continue the provision of equality training programmes and focused training for staff associated with the implementation of the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme.
- Continue the identification of any additional issues to further improve the implementation of actions which contribute to outcomes.
- Continue to increase understanding of the equality obligations and how to apply these to day to day work and decision making.
- Continue to develop, when appropriate, further data monitoring systems to enable assessment of policy impacts and outcomes.

Introduction

An Equality Scheme describes certain arrangements that a public authority has established, and which it is obliged to apply and follow, as a means of fulfilling the duties imposed on it by section 75(1) and (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 i.e. the duty to have:

- due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity; and
- regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.

This includes arrangements, for example, for (a) training staff; (b) assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity; and (c) monitoring any adverse impact of those policies that have been adopted.

Public authorities who have section 75 Equality Schemes are obliged to review those schemes periodically:

‘A public authority shall, **before the end of the period of five years** beginning with the submission of its current scheme, or the latest review of that scheme under this subparagraph, whichever is later, review that scheme and inform the [Equality] Commission of the outcome of the review.’¹

The purpose of a 5-year review is to examine how Equality Scheme arrangements have been applied, and to assess how effective they have been in assisting public authorities to comply with the section 75 duties.

This report represents a five-year review of the Assembly Commission’s Equality Scheme, covering the period 1 April 2021 to 1 December 2025. Progress on the implementation of Equality Scheme commitments can be viewed via the Assembly Commission’s Annual Equality Progress Reports to the ECNI which can be accessed [here](#).

1. A general introductory statement specifying the purpose of the scheme and the public authority’s commitment to the statutory duties

Schedule 9.4 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 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 of the 75 Northern Ireland Act, 1998 in relation to its relevant functions.

¹ Northern Ireland Act 1998, Schedule 9, paragraph 8(3).

During the period of the review equality continued to be mainstreamed into the Assembly Commission's activities, and senior management took the lead in ensuring that equality was an integral part of Assembly Commission business. The Assembly Commission remained committed to the fulfilment of its section 75 obligations in all parts of its work.

Responsibility for the effective implementation of the Equality Scheme lies with the Clerk / Chief Executive who 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 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Equality Unit provides support to the Assembly Commission to assist in its compliance with all the statutory requirements of section 75(1) and 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and section 49A and 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006).

1a) To what extent were senior management involved in ensuring scheme compliance over the five-year period and what further steps could be undertaken to ensure effective internal arrangements?

Equality papers were regularly tabled at Senior Management Team (SMT) meetings and annually at Assembly Commission meetings. SMT members were involved in ensuring compliance with the Equality Scheme in a number of ways, namely by:

- Providing a scrutiny function in relation to equality plans, their progress and direction setting;
- Considering and taking action on Equality Scheme issues within the organisation, when appropriate;
- Supporting the Assembly Commission's Equality Unit in engagement with external bodies;
- Ensuring equality screening continued throughout the organisation;
- Ensuring mechanisms were in place to enable staff to comply with Equality Scheme commitments; and
- Agreeing and supporting new projects, which underpinned or furthered equality within the organisation.

Heads of Business played an important role by:

- Contributing to equality action plans and annual equality progress reporting by identifying and monitoring relevant initiatives in their area of responsibility and supplying feedback and analysis to the Equality Unit;
- Undertaking quality assurance of quarterly equality screening reports;
- Supporting the Equality Unit by supplying relevant research and audit findings;
- Liaising with the Equality Unit when consideration of policy issues may have included equality elements; and
- Ensuring the attendance of relevant staff at equality training.

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

The [Corporate Strategy 2018-23](#), Corporate Plan 2019-23 and the successive [Corporate Strategy 2023-28](#) and Corporate Plan 2023-2028 were developed following a comprehensive engagement process with staff during the period of the review.

The Corporate Strategy 2018-2023

The Corporate Strategy 2018-2023 contained two aims of specific relevance to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations:

- Under the aim of ‘Building excellence and innovation in our services’ was ‘Ensuring high standards in equality, governance and regulatory compliance through effective and efficient processes.’
- Under the aim of ‘Strengthening engagement with the public’ was ‘Building connections with target groups’ including for example, support for greater female participation and the delivery of a Youth Assembly.

The Corporate Strategy 2023-2028

The Corporate Values which underpin the Corporate Strategy 2023-2028 are Excellence, Positivity, Integrity and Collaboration. The Strategy includes two priorities with specific relevance to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, which are:

- ‘The public will understand and value the role of the Assembly and be engaged in its work’ which contains an objective to ‘make the work of the Assembly more accessible’; and

- ‘Our staff will be a motivated, resilient and expert team’.

Both Corporate Plans set out key projects and priorities the Assembly Commission intended and intends to fulfill, for example:

- Developing and implementing a Public Engagement Strategy including recruitment for the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly;
- Making the work of the Assembly more accessible by ensuring that the public will be able to connect with the Assembly through better information provision in a range of formats and in ways that are easy to understand and through services that are user-friendly;
- Creating more opportunities to engage with Committees through wider, innovative and more inclusive engagement practices including a package of measures to reduce barriers to participation such as the provision of sign language and interpretation;
- Providing staff with learning and development opportunities to help support their role and professional development;
- Developing and implementing a range of health and wellbeing activities that support staff in their work and personal lives; and
- Creating opportunities to include groups representing sections of the wider community within a yearly programme marking specific days or recurring annual events.

In addition to the Corporate Strategy and Corporate Plan, the Assembly Commission sought to ensure that:

- All relevant equality plans and monitoring reports were tabled at SMT meetings and Assembly Commission meetings;
- The Equality Scheme, Disability Action Plan, Audit of Inequalities, Good Relations Action Plan and Gender Action Plan were published on the Assembly website;
- Policy screening arrangements were in place, including a protocol for the sign off of screening forms and collaboration arrangements with the Assembly’s Research and Information Services (RaISe) in relation to ‘data mining’ arrangements²;
- The screening template was kept under continuous review and screening guidance and data updated as appropriate;
- Applicable policies submitted (new and revised) to SMT and the Assembly Commission had to include a screening form (this was a requirement of the SMT/ Assembly Commission cover paper template);

² “Data mining is the process of discovering potentially useful, interesting, and previously unknown patterns from a large collection of data” - <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science-and-technology/computers-and-electrical-engineering/computers-and-computing/data-mining>

- Completed policy [screening forms](#) were published on the Assembly website on a quarterly basis;
- Public consultations were held, when appropriate, on action plans in order to engage with the public and seek their views;
- Training on equality issues was incorporated into the staff training schedule; and
- Over the review period, the Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors met with the Equality Manager on a regular basis to discuss equality issues.

1b) Outline annual direct expenditure of resources to ensure that the statutory duties were complied with, in terms of staff and money over the past 5 years, and comment on the extent that all necessary resources were allocated.

TABLE 1: YEARLY SPEND IN THE EQUALITY UNIT

Year	Spend
2021/22	£177k
2022/23	£116k
2023/24	£106k
2024/25	£122k

Over the period under review, the Equality Unit consisted of two members of staff, which included a part-time Equality Manager and a full-time Assistant Assembly Clerk.

Table 1 above outlines expenditure within the Equality Unit which includes both salary and programme/delivery costs.

It should be noted that the costs provided above were not the total cost in meeting the Equality Scheme commitments. For example, senior staff provided significant time in mainstreaming equality i.e. in the implementation of equality action plans, the completion of equality screening, in the assessment of web communication, access maintenance, research provision, and in the collection, analysis and provision of data to the Equality Unit.

In addition to the expenditure associated with the above activities, the Assembly Commission also incurred other costs arising from the provision of learning and development activities for staff (see Annex 1). For example, equality training was supplied for new staff and refresher training was provided for existing staff by the Assembly Commission’s Learning and Development Team. All costs arising from this training were met by a central HR budget and are not included in the amounts above.

Whilst the Assembly Commission does not have a definitive cost for the activity provided, it has increased over the last five years as mainstreaming equality commitments has become more successful.

2. An outline of how the public authority intends to assess its compliance with the section 75 duties and for consulting on matters to which a duty under that section is likely to be relevant.

2a) Outline impacts and outcomes (for the public authority and/or individuals from the nine equality categories) over the past five years and what further steps could be undertaken to build on these or address underreporting?

Prompt – Were annual progress reports critically reviewed before or after submission to the Commission? What examples of good practice from other public authorities could be adopted?

The Assembly Commission’s Equality Scheme provided the basis for the assessment of equality implications as related to, for example, strategies, policies³ and programmes. Equality screening assessment was an integral part of the policy development process and details on policies screened during the review period can be accessed [here](#) or at Annex 3.

During the review period a range of actions were undertaken in relation to the implementation of four⁴ equality action plans. These action plans were:

1. [Gender Action Plan](#) 2019-2023;
2. [Good Relations Action Plan](#) 2022-2025 and the continuing [Good Relations Action Plan](#) 2025-2030;
3. [Audit of Inequalities Action Plan](#) 2022-2026; and
4. [Disability Action Plan](#) 2022-2025 and [Disability Action Plan](#) 2025-2030.

Detailed progress against planned outcomes for each of the action plans across individual reporting periods is included in the Assembly Commission’s Annual Equality Progress reports, these reports can be accessed [here](#).

³ As detailed at Chapter 4, 4.1, of the Assembly Equality Scheme, the term ‘policy’ is very broadly defined and it covers all the ways in which the Assembly Commission carry out or propose to carry out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland. The term is used for any proposed/amended/existing strategy, policy initiative or practice and/or decision, whether written or unwritten and irrespective of the label given to it.

⁴ The final GAP 2019-2023 concluded in 2023.

Table 2 below details the number of actions each year over the period of the review.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF ACTIONS PER YEAR ACROSS EQUALITY ACTION PLANS

Equality Action Plan Title	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Gender Action Plan	13	13	-	-	-
Good Relations Action Plan	11	11	11	11	13
Audit of Inequalities	8	8	8	8	8
Disability Action Plan	39	39	39	39	23
Totals	71	71	58	58	44

Note: the number of activities recorded for each year recur annually.

Examples of outputs related to plan actions are included at Annex 2 by section 75 category. Examples of programmes and events delivered are also included.

Annual Equality Progress Reports to the Equality Commission

Annual Equality Progress Reports to the ECNI were produced by the Equality Unit, which co-ordinated input from all business areas. Heads of Business and/or Directors approved returns prior to inclusion in the draft reports. Equality Action Plan data, included in the Annual Equality Progress Report, was reviewed by SMT on a six-monthly basis and the Assembly Commission on an annual basis. Annual Equality Progress reports were scrutinised and reviewed by SMT, prior to final approval by the Assembly Commission. These reports provided an annual source of information to enable dissemination of on-going equality activity and examples of good practice. Following submission of the Annual Progress Report to the ECNI, a meeting was held with the ECNI each year to review content prior to the report being published on the Assembly website.

Examples of good practice in working with other bodies.

Throughout the period under review the Equality Unit participated in several cross-sectoral groups which provided valuable opportunities for discussion, and the sharing of information on equality related matters, these included:

Equality Practitioners Group (EPG)

The cross-departmental Equality Practitioners Group (EPG), Chaired by The Executive Office (TEO), met quarterly and was an important forum for discussing issues of mutual concern and the sharing of information and good practice. This forum discussed the statutory duties and their implementation.

ECNI/NICS Statutory Duties Forum

This group is separate to, but met sequentially alongside, the EPG. This group aimed to improve the quality of section 75 screening and Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) and to improve the quality of Disability Action Plan (DAP) action measures. Work plans were developed and the Equality Unit inputted into a number of areas.

Inter-parliamentary Equality Group

This group consists of the Equality Managers from each of the four UK legislatures.

External Disability Advisory Group (EDAG)

This group was established in 2009 and consists of representatives from various disability groups. The group meets twice a year. Information on the group can be found [here](#). During the review period the group contributed to policy development and provided advice and input on the development and implementation of the Assembly Commission's Disability Action Plan.

- 2b) Outline the number of equality scheme related consultation exercises undertaken by your authority over the past five years. Set out the number and percentage related to screening exercises and to EQIAs and indicate the extent that your scheme helped you to engage with external stakeholders.**

Over the period of review, the Assembly Commission carried out 14 equality screening exercises which are detailed at Annex 3. Table 3 below details the policy screening decisions. Written correspondence was the main method of consultation, however other methods of communication were undertaken in some instances including, for example, informal meetings with stakeholders and engagement with formal forums involving representative bodies and individuals affected by policies. The majority of equality screenings related to internal policies.

- 2c) Indicate if your list of consultees was amended during the five-year period and what further steps could be taken to develop your level of engagement and consultation?**

The Assembly Commission's list of consultees was routinely updated on a quarterly basis following the issuing of equality screening reports, and consultees could be added to the list at any time upon receipt of requests from both interested individuals and organisations. During the review period, the Commission reviewed records in line with the commitment to

data subject rights under the UK GDPR and were content that all data subjects were aware of their rights under the legislation.

While the majority of the Assembly Commission's consultations adopted direct written communication as the principal method of consulting with stakeholders, as described above, some consultation exercises adopted other methods. For example, in some cases pre-consultation discussions with stakeholders helped to pre-empt potential equality issues early, before policies or equality plans were further developed.

2d) To what extent did your authority consult directly with directly affected individuals as well as with representative groups, particularly in relation to young people and those with learning disabilities, and was this sufficient?

During public consultation exercises, the Assembly Commission sought to elicit the views of both individuals and stakeholder groups affected by its policies under review. The Assembly Commission held pre-consultation and formal consultation exercises, which included stakeholder groups such as [The Executive Office Racial Equality Subgroup](#), the [Migrant Centre NI](#) and those represented on the Assembly Commission's EDAG. With regards to decisions and policies impacting staff, the Commission undertook engagement and consultation with affected staff on issues.

3. The authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

3a) Outline and discuss the number of policies your authority subject to screening over the past five years, setting out the number and percentage of 'policies screened in' on the basis of equality considerations and the percentage 'screened in' on the basis of the good relations duty.

Over the five-year review period, the Assembly Commission screened a total of 14 policies. Annex 3 provides a policy list of equality screenings.

TABLE 3: POLICY SCREENING DECISIONS

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Screened in ⁵	0	0	0	0	0	0
Screened out with mitigation ⁶	1 (7%)	3 (21%)	3 (21%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	9 (64%)
Screened out ⁷	1 (7%)	2 (14%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	5 (36%)
Total no of policies screened	2	5	4	1	2	14

Note: percentages may not sum due to rounding.

The Assembly Commission screened 14 policies from 2021-2025, screening decisions indicated that 5 policies were screened out, 9 policies were screened out with mitigation and no policies were screened in. Three of the policies screened out (with mitigation) were on the basis of the good relations duty. All of the screened policies can be viewed on the Assembly website [here](#).

Equality screening has become well established as an integral part of policy development. The Equality Unit has been consulted by colleagues seeking assistance and advice on the completion of screening forms.

Key factors contributing to equality screening progress over the review period included:

- ✓ section 75 training for relevant staff.
- ✓ availability of specialised resources on screening developed by the Equality Unit.
- ✓ one-to-one support and advice provided by the Equality Unit.
- ✓ one-to-one screening training for policy leads provided by the ECNI.

3b) To what extent did your authority’s consideration of the screening criteria **not identify equal opportunity implications on any of s75 categories, but for which consultees then highlighted problems?**

Prompt –Identify the extent the collection of quantitative and qualitative data informed screening processes. Outline the extent consultations with representative groups produced data to inform the screening process, which was not otherwise available to your

⁵ Screened in means that the likely impact is major and the policy will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

⁶ Screened out with mitigation means that the likely impact is minor and measures will be taken to mitigate the impact or an alternative policy will be proposed.

⁷ Screened out means that the likely impact is none and no further action is required.

authority. Outline any difficulties in identifying policies and equality implications using the definition of policy set out in the Guide to the Statutory Duties.

In general, the section 75 screening form helped staff to appropriately identify equality implications. However, staff undertaking screening cited the limited availability of up to date quantitative data in relation to some of the section 75 categories. The Assembly Commission has put in place actions to address any data gaps, for example, staff data collection via a periodic staff survey to ensure information remains robust.

Staff conducted research over the review period, both quantitative and qualitative, and this assisted in identifying equality of opportunity implications and meant that any issues could be addressed early in the policy development process. Research conducted, and seminars provided, relating to section 75 issues can be found at Annex 4.

It was also noted that where pre-consultation discussions with stakeholders took place, that this method of engagement helped to pre-empt potential equality issues which were addressed early on, before policies were further developed.

Equality screening forms were published on the Assembly website as part of quarterly screening reports and issued to consultees on the Assembly Commission's consultee list. During the review period the Assembly Commission received few comments from consultees. Mainly, consultee requests were for further information rather than equality of opportunity implications.

3c) Outline over the past five years how many EQIAs your authority commenced as a result of i) initial screening and ii) as a result of screening new/revised policies subsequently, and discuss the extent that your authority has become more effective at identifying equality of opportunity dimensions in its policies.

The Assembly Commission did not undertake any EQIAs during the five-year review period.

3d) Outline over the past five-year period the percentage of your authority's initial EQIA timetable that reached i) stage 6 of the EQIA process i.e. decision making, and ii) stage 7 of the EQIA process i.e. annual monitoring & publication of results, and indicate the extent that your authority has become more effective at progressing EQIAs. N/A

4. The authority's arrangements for monitoring any adverse impact of policies adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

4a) To what extent were sufficient arrangements put in place to collect data relating to the nine equality categories to monitor the impact of policies and what could your authority do in future to develop monitoring arrangements?

Regular monitoring processes were well established throughout the period under review and the Assembly Commission's Annual Equality Progress Reports evidenced that monitoring was undertaken. During the review period, SMT agreed to extend the equality categories from which data collection is drawn in recruitment competitions from applicants and to the collection of data from staff via a staff survey.

5. The authority's arrangements for publishing the results of equality impact assessments and of monitoring any adverse impact of policies adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

5a) Indicate the number of reports published outlining the results of EQIAs and monitoring over the past five years, and outline what your authority could do in future in relation to improving the publication of EQIA results and monitoring.

N/A

6. A commitment that in making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted by it, that the public authority shall take into account any equality impact assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy.

6a) In terms of the number of EQIAs that reached stage 6 i.e. decision making to what extent were mitigation measures and alternative policies adopted?

N/A

6b) To what extent did consideration of EQIAs and consultations contribute to a change in policy, as opposed to policy decisions which would probably have been made in any event by your authority?

No EQIAs were undertaken during the review period. However, with regard to consultations, the Assembly Commission regularly published screening reports on a quarterly basis and a number of public consultations were undertaken during the period under review. Public consultations were held on the Disability Action Plan and the Good Relations Action Plan. The Assembly Commission noted where responses had resulted in changes or amendments to action plans and these reports were published on the Assembly website.

7. The authority's arrangements for training staff on issues relevant to the duties.

7a) To what extent were sufficient arrangements put in place to develop and deliver a training programme in accordance with scheme commitments?

The Assembly Commission is committed to training and to ensuring that sufficient arrangements are in place to develop and deliver training programmes and awareness events aligned with its responsibilities under its Equality Scheme.

The Corporate Strategy 2023-2028 sets out the following objective: *'Maximising the potential of our people through a longer term focus on learning and development opportunities'*. This is deliverable through the planned outcome of the development and implementation of a 4-year Learning and Development Strategy, which was underway during the review period.

A training plan was developed and agreed by SMT each year of the review period, and in consultation with the Equality Unit, to ensure continued learning and development for staff in relation to equality.

During the five-year review period, a range of training events were delivered, examples are included at Annex 1.

In addition to open courses, the HR Learning and Development (L&D) team facilitated the training and development of a range of corporate volunteer groups including, Mental Health First Aiders, Autism Champions and

Harassment Contact Officers. These groups were routinely added to each consecutive L&D training plan to ensure their skills and knowledge were kept up to date.

The L&D team proactively networked with a range of training organisations and developed key partnerships.

Staff were routinely advised of any updates by the Equality Unit and updated on relevant policy. Guidance and information resources were also held on the Assembly's Intranet for staff to access.

In addition to obtaining input from staff surveys, the L&D team sought evaluations for each training event. The results of feedback were then fed into the annual monitoring of activities to highlight satisfaction levels and propose ideas/solutions for future delivery.

7b) Have all staff received awareness training and what could your authority do in future to deliver an effective training programme?

Prompt – Does the authority have evidence that over the past five years' staff understood their role in implementing the scheme? What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to communication and training?

Relevant section 75 training was provided to all staff involved in the delivery of the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme and staff were encouraged to update and refresh their knowledge through the uptake of training opportunities and attendance at relevant events, such as external seminars and conferences.

Section 75 refresher training to all staff was delivered via e-learning where completion was mandatory.

The HR Office (Learning and Development Team) delivered a blended approach to raising awareness of equality matters throughout the five-year period. New staff received awareness training on equality as part of their formal induction and on-boarding programme. This included information on both the Equality Scheme and relevant policies. Staff were required to complete awareness training and this was delivered in a range of ways over the period of this review.

The HR Office found that the most effective method for delivering awareness on the requirements of section 75 (including screening and EQIAs) was through the use of e-learning packages, supplemented by access to guidance and resource documentation.

In raising awareness of the issues affecting section 75 groups, the HR Office was of the view that direct 'classroom' style events were the most useful with key speakers and relevant organisations highlighting 'their story'.

8. The authority's arrangements for ensuring and assessing public access to information and to services provided by the authority.

8a) To what extent were sufficient arrangements put in place to ensure and assess public access to information and to services provided by the authority?

During the review period the Assembly Commission took a number of steps to ensure equality of opportunity was in place for people accessing information and services:

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY WEBSITE

Since the introduction of The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations the Communications Office has taken a number of steps to improve the accessibility of the Assembly website. This included:

Audit

Website content was reviewed to ensure that it is as accessible to as many people as possible and has continued to monitor the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 making mitigations where possible and if this is not the case, advising users of alternative formats. All staff involved in web publishing have been provided with training on how to create more accessible content and extensive user guides have been published alongside training sessions for users.

Website Accessibility

The current Assembly website front-end design does not satisfy obligations to meet website accessibility standards and the scale of historical material on the site adds to that problem. An end user review by external consultants was undertaken during this reporting period and this will help shape the Assembly's new website under a three-year project. Web publishing training continues on a regular basis and tips on accessibility issues are published on our intranet.

Accessibility Guidance

Upon review of the [guidance published by gov.uk on website accessibility for public sector websites](#), a new guidance section was created on the AsslSt intranet to inform staff of the new website accessibility regulations and what it meant for the content they produce. The guidance will be expanded upon over time as business need requires.

Accessibility Checks

Content added to the Assembly website by members of the Communications Office web team was checked in accordance with the [website accessibility guidance on gov.uk](#) (and other resources). Online tools were also used to help evaluate the accessibility of web pages.

Use of Alt Text on Social Media

Increased attention has been given to improving the descriptive nature of Alt Text on social media published photographs and this has received positive feedback from end users.

Easy Read Version of 'Accessing Parliament Buildings' Webpage

An easy read version of Accessing Parliament Buildings ([Easy Read Guide - How to visit Parliament Buildings](#)) has been published on the Assembly and included in social media promotion of visiting arrangements.

Access Video

The Accessing Parliament Buildings video ([Planning your Visit to Parliament Buildings | Northern Ireland Assembly](#)) showing how to get to Parliament Buildings, what the security check involves and what to expect during your visit was updated in June 2024.

INTERPRETATION, TRANSLATION AND TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

The Department of Finance's Construction and Procurement Delivery unit (CPD) put in place a framework for the provision of interpretation, translation and transcription services for the Northern Ireland public sector, which the Assembly Commission had access to over the review period. Over the review period a number of requests were made through the framework. A number of guides are available for staff, including an 'Inclusive and Accessible Events: Guide and checklist' and 'Sign Language Guidance'.

EXAMPLES OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SERVICES AT DIRECTORATE LEVEL

Accessible Formats and Sign Language Interpretation

The work of the Assembly has been made more accessible by ensuring that the public will be able to connect with the Assembly through better

information provision in a range of formats and in ways that are easy to understand and through services that are user-friendly. Sign language interpretation in British and Irish Sign Language is provided for at least one Northern Ireland Assembly Question Time per week, with Question time to The Executive Office (TEO) always to be interpreted, and that certain special events, such as the first sittings in a new mandate, are sign language interpreted. More opportunities have been created to engage with Committees through wider, innovative and more inclusive engagement practices including a package of measures to reduce barriers to participation such as the provision of sign language and interpretation.

Northern Ireland Youth Assembly Recruitment

The Communications Office ensured that in the recruiting campaign for the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly all material was fully accessible and featured young people with a disability who had previously engaged with the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.

Committee for Communities - How the Assembly Works Event

The Committee for Communities held a special event at Parliament Buildings on 27 June 2024 for members of the local deaf community to learn more about how the Assembly works. This was an opportunity to make members of the deaf community welcome at Parliament Buildings. The event, which included a session on the legislative process, familiarisation with committee rooms and a tour, was organised in preparation for the introduction of a new Sign Language Bill. A video was produced to explain how evidence could be submitted using video. This was the first occasion on which the Assembly had engaged with the local deaf community in this way, and more than 60 participants visited Parliament Buildings on the day.

9. The authority's timetable for measures proposed in the scheme.

9a) Outline the extent to which measures set out in the original timetable have been implemented. Any detailed information should be included as an appendix to the report.

The Assembly Commission has met its commitments as set out in its Equality Scheme timetable. This has included, for example, to provide an Annual Equality Progress Report to the ECNI, to conduct an Audit of Inequalities, to implement its training plan relating to equality and to communicate the commitments as set out in its Equality Scheme. Information related to the Assembly Commission's commitments can be found on the [equality page](#) of the Assembly website.

9b) If your authority was to be reconstituted in the next five years what would be the main scheme actions/equality considerations that an incoming authority should address?

It would be recommended that continued mainstreaming in the following areas of scheme implementation should take place:

- screening and EQIAs;
- data collection and interpretation;
- activities to further mainstream equality; and
- monitoring.

10. Details of how the scheme will be published.

10a) Were scheme commitments in this section delivered and what evidence supports this view?

The Assembly Commission's list of consultees were notified of the draft and final versions of the Equality Scheme, which were published on the Assembly's website and made available on request from the Equality Unit. Staff were also informed of the availability of equality scheme and its content.

11. The authority's arrangements for dealing with complaints arising from a failure to comply with the scheme.

11a) Outline the number and nature of complaints received by your authority, and what your authority could do in future to develop its complaints handling process and learn from complaints.

The Assembly Commission's equality scheme sets out the procedure for dealing with complaints arising from a perceived failure to comply with the equality scheme. No complaints were during the period of the review.

12. A commitment to conducting a review of the scheme within five years of its submission to the Equality Commission and to forwarding a report of this review to the Equality Commission.

12a) What has been your authority's experience of conducting this review? To what extent has the Commission's guidance been useful in undertaking the review?

This review was conducted with input from Assembly Directorates, and in line with the ECNI's guidance. The process has provided a helpful overview of achievements and an opportunity to reflect on current plans.

EXAMPLES OF STAFF TRAINING DURING THE REVIEW PERIOD 2021-2025

TABLE 1

2025 Examples of Staff Training

Master classes	Master classes	Formal Training	E-Learning
Inter-parliamentary Inclusion Month 2025 series of workshops	Wellness Toolbox Webinar	Breaking Barriers: Inclusive Communication Training	
Menopause Cafe			

TABLE 2

2024 Examples of Staff Training

National Inclusion Week 2024	LGBTQ+ History Month 2025	Formal Training	E-Learning
Neurodiversity in the Workplace	LGBTQIA+ Awareness Lunch and Learn	Mental Health First Aider Training	Positive Mental Health Toolkit for Staff and Line Managers
Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter in the Public Service	Creating Safe Spaces for LGBTQ+ People at Work	Mental Health Awareness	Introduction to Section 75
Managing Menopause at Work: Confident Managers			Workplace Bullying

TABLE 3

2023 Examples of Staff Training

National Inclusion Week 2023	Formal Training	Formal Training	E-Learning
Race Equality First	Reasonable Adjustments: Accessing the Untapped Potential of Disabled Candidates and Employees	British Sign Language Level 2	Dignity at Work
Mental Health and Me	Developing SEND – Inclusive Learning with Confidence	Disability Awareness Training	Unconscious Bias

National Inclusion Week 2023	Formal Training	Formal Training	E-Learning
Inclusive Recruitment		Improving Mental and Emotional Wellbeing in the Workplace	Managing Personal Stress and Resilience

TABLE 4

2022 Examples of Staff Training

National Inclusion Week 2022	National Learning at Work Week 2022	Formal Training	E-Learning
LGBTQI+ Awareness Workshop with Cara-Friend	Lunch and Learn with Business Disability Forum on Nuerodiversity	Mental Health First Aid Training	Unconscious Bias
Caring Conversations at Work with VOCAL (A Carers Support Organisation)	Racial Equality: Working More Cohesively with Diverse Communities	RNIB Training for Tour Guides	Positive Mental Health Toolkit for All Staff and Line Managers
DeafBlind Awareness	Live in the Moment – An Introduction to Mindfulness	British Sign Language Level 1	Introduction to Section 75

TABLE 5

2021 Examples of Staff Training

Formal Training	Formal Training	E-Learning	E-Learning
People Manager Programme: Building Resilience	Parenting Seminars	Unconscious Bias	Managing Personal Stress and Resilience
Mindfulness 6-week Course	Ways to Wellbeing	Positive Mental Health Toolkit (Staff & Line Managers)	Domestic Abuse
Mental Health Week			

OUTPUT EXAMPLES FOR SECTION 75 EQUALITY CATEGORIES

Section 75 Equality Categories	Examples of Actions undertaken during the review period
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of the 2019-2023 Gender Action Plan (and related outcomes) and publication of the Gender Action Plan Closure Report. • Research was conducted over the review period, for example, a paper entitled ‘Supporting Women in the Workplace – Models of Good Practice’. • A Menopause Policy was developed and issued to staff. • Equal pay reviews conducted every two years. • Participation in the QUB PhD project ‘Gender equality in the UK and Germany: HR Management in the light of conflicting constitutional logistics’. <p>Provision of events related to gender during the review period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Assembly's Engagement team facilitated a special sitting of the Women's Parliament which took place on 28 February 2025.
Age	<p>During the period of review there was continued engagement with young people through the education service, engagement services and Committees. Examples of actions are detailed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Education Service conducted focus groups on behalf of Assembly Committees, and the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) developed a framework for selecting a broad cross-section of the youth populations, thereby ensuring that children from all sectors, including those attending special schools and in Irish-medium education, could take part in these consultations. • In the review period, work was carried out with CCEA to update and create new resources for the Education Service website. This included a number of short films, which aimed to explain the work of the Assembly to young people and encourage them to engage with its work. http://education.niassembly.gov.uk/video-gallery/how-laws-are-made-northern-ireland-assembly. • The Education Service online resources continue to be up to date in terms of technology and content which supports

Section 75 Equality Categories	Examples of Actions undertaken during the review period
	<p>the curriculum. http://education.niassembly.gov.uk/video-gallery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Northern Ireland Youth Assembly was established in June 2021, comprising 90 members aged between 13 and 17 years old, appointed for a two-year period. In June 2023, the first 90 members completed their mandate and a new cohort of 90 members aged 12-16 took up their roles in October 2023. <p>Provision of programmes and events related to age during the review period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Assembly's Engagement Team facilitated meetings of the Older People's Parliament. The events saw older people from across Northern Ireland taking the opportunity to have their say on issues and decisions that affect their lives. • In partnership with the National Children's Bureau and the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum, a special debate chaired by the Speaker was held to mark Anti-Bullying Week.
Dependants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the review period staff could claim Childcare Vouchers or apply for a Tax free scheme if using registered childcare. • Support for staff was in place for those who incurred additional childcare costs as a direct result of the need to attend or remain in their place of employment outside of their normal working pattern to facilitate Assembly business. • Support for staff was in place for staff whose children have a disability that are unlikely to be accommodated within usual childcare arrangements.
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Five Year Review of Disability Action Plans was submitted to ECNI (March 2023). • A range of actions under Disability Action Plan 2022–2025 and 2025-2030 were implemented. • A Disability Access Audit of Parliament Buildings was conducted in March 2025 to identify accessibility issues in the building.

Section 75 Equality Categories	Examples of Actions undertaken during the review period
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on updating the 'Accessing Parliament Buildings' video on the Assembly's website was completed in June 2024. • An annual disability survey of staff was conducted each year of the review period. • Maintenance of the Assembly's quiet room, changing places facility, tactile 'tour map' of Parliament Buildings, iPad with subtitled version of the Assembly tour, Braille signage and other signage in Parliament Buildings including pictorial signage images continued during the review period. • RNID's 'Louder than Words' accreditation is no longer offered but the Assembly Commission's Building Services continues to work with partners including RNID to ensure that Parliament Buildings is accessible for service users who are deaf or with hearing loss. • Accreditation to the National Autistic Society's Autism Friendly Award was achieved in April 2023 and has been maintained. Further training of our Autism Champions has been carried out. • 'Mental Health First Aiders' were in place. • The web page entitled 'Autism and the Assembly' continued to be maintained to provide information to the public on access arrangements when visiting the Assembly. • A further Parliament Buildings Video was made available showing how to access Parliament Buildings. This video was created for visitors on the autism spectrum, but others have also found this useful with planning their visit. (A subtitled version of the video was also available as was a printable version to download). • During this reporting period, sign language guidance for staff was developed. <p>Physical works in Parliament Buildings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refurbishment work was completed on Committee Rooms including a new layout and furniture that will help provide better access for wheelchair users. • A Disability Access Audit of Parliament Buildings was conducted in March 2025 to identify accessibility issues in the building. • Signage in Parliament Buildings has been reviewed to reflect current available services and facilities for visitors

Section 75 Equality Categories	Examples of Actions undertaken during the review period
	<p>with disabilities, including provision of additional signage in some areas of the building.</p> <p>Example of events held:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The inaugural Disabled People’s Parliament took place on 3 December 2021. The event was organised in conjunction with a range of disability rights groups and organisations and participants had the opportunity to speak on a range of issues. Representatives from the disability sector helped to plan the event, selecting the topic for debate, coordinating speakers and participants and deciding on the name of the parliament.
Good Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ‘Perspectives On’ series of events was established as part of the approach and principles agreed by the Assembly Commission in 2012 to govern how centenaries would be marked within Parliament Buildings and continued until 2022. Events marked since this time have included the Ulster Covenant, Female Suffrage, the Dublin Lockout, the Outbreak of World War 1, the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme, the 100th anniversary of the Dáil Éireann and the 100th anniversary of the Government of Ireland Act which established Northern Ireland. An Informal Group of officials met on a number of occasions to consider the Identity and Language Act 2022 and the potential implications of the legislation for the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. Research was completed by the Assembly’s Research and Library Services into language provision in other legislatures and an audit of current language provision and potential future requirements was carried out by the Equality Unit. Good Relations Action Plans 2022–2025 and 2025- 2030 were published to set out the Assembly Commission’s commitment to good relations and provide action plans.

EQUALITY SCREENINGS FROM 1 APRIL 2021 - 1 DECEMBER 2025

	Title of Policy	Screening Quarter
1	Learning and Development Strategy and Action Plan	April –June 2021
2	Standards of Conduct Policy	October –December 2021
3	Internal Communications Strategy	January–March 2022
4	Closed Circuit Television Policy	April –June 2022
5	Special Leave and Career Break Policies	July–September 2022
6	Secondment Policy	July-September 2022
7	Sign Language Interpretation of Plenary and Committee Business	October –December 2022
8	Menopause Guidance for Staff and Managers	January–March 2023
9	Salary Supplements Policy	April-June 2023
10	Transgender Policy	July -September 2023
11	The Approach Agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission to accept the donation of, and erect a 'Centenary Stone'.	October-December 2023
12	Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy	October-December 2024
13	Disability Action Plan 2025-2030	January-March 2025
14	Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2030	January-March 2025

Annex 4

RELEVANT RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN DURING THE 2021-2025 REVIEW PERIOD

	Title of research	Year
1	Statistics for Youth Assembly (All Section 75 categories).	2021
2	Research Support for Good Relations Action Plan	2021
3	Analysis of feedback from Engagement Unit events	2021
4	Low income and Disability figures for N. Ireland	2021
5	Analysis of Census figures for Northern Ireland (Census 2021)	2021
6	Survey of Minority Ethnic Groups	2021
7	Issues Paper in respect of minority ethnic groups and disabled persons for Good Relations Action Plan	2021
8	Equality Unit Survey of Assembly Commission Staff	2021
9	Profile of Living Wage in Northern Ireland by Gender	2022
10	Update Paper on Migration in Northern Ireland	2022
11	Fair Employment in Northern Ireland	2022
12	Staff Survey (analysis of text-based responses)	2022
13	Profile of Living Wage in Northern Ireland by Gender (update)	2023
14	Analysis of key indicators from Census 2021	2023
15	Statistics for Youth Assembly (All Section 75 categories)	2023
16	Minority Language Provision in UK/Ireland Legislatures	2023
17	Section 75 Staff Survey	2023
18	Analysis of Feedback from a Pre-consultation exercise, BME groups, June 2024	2024
19	Analysis of Feedback from a Pre-consultation exercise, Disability groups, June 2024	2024
20	Summary of information in the 2024 Staff Survey relating to issues of leadership and management	2024
21	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Annual Monitoring Return	2025
22	Preparatory data for Audit of Inequalities (and related research) 2026-2031	2025

Annex 4

EXAMPLES OF EQUALITY RELATED ASSEMBLY RESEARCH AND INFORMATIONS SERVICES (RAISE) PRODUCTS 2021-2025

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Published research papers	Shared Parental Leave, Maternity Leave and Flexible Working in Northern Ireland	Income inequality in the UK Age Discrimination covering Goods, Facilities and Services	Who runs Northern Ireland? A summary of statistics relating to gender and power in 2024	Disability Legislation in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland	
Research Matters blog articles			Income and inequality: how does Northern Ireland compare to the UK as a whole?	Closing the gap: the state of gender pay equality in Northern Ireland Happiness in the spotlight: Happiness across the UK and Northern Ireland	Living longer, living better? Men's health in Northern Ireland
Support to Committees	Work Life Balance Bill: key potential financial implications for the public purse		Core issues discussion paper for the Executive Office Committee	Comparative study of equality legislation in the UK and Republic of Ireland	Trauma-informed approaches
Other publications	CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention: A comparative view on transposition and implementation in domestic law and practice	Paper considering possibility of Age Discrimination (Goods, Trades, Services) legislation for NI.	Statutory cooperation duties relating to deprivation, inequality and community issues		

Annex 4

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Support to other bodies of the Assembly		Presentation to the Youth assembly rights committee on human rights and children rights			Topical Digest for Older People's Parliament