



REGIONAL BALANCE BILL CONSULTATION

**NIPSA RESPONSE
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**NIPSA HQ
Harkin House
54 Wellington Park
BELFAST
BT9 6DP**



1. INTRODUCTION

This response is on behalf of NIPSA, the largest trade union in Northern Ireland representing over 44,500 members employed across the whole of the public services in organisations such as the Northern Ireland Civil Service and its Agencies, Local Government, Education Authority, the Health Trusts, the NI Housing Executive as well as a host of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs). NIPSA also represents a significant number of members in the Voluntary Sector.

2. REGIONAL BALANCE BILL

NIPSA welcomes the objectives of the Regional Balance Bill and supports measures aimed at reducing inequalities between different regions of Northern Ireland.

As a trade union representing workers across the public sector, Arms-Length Bodies and the Voluntary and Community Sector, NIPSA believes that where people live should not determine their access to quality healthcare, education, public services, employment opportunities or infrastructure. Regional disparities can have a significant impact on communities, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas.

NIPSA supports the proposal to place a duty on the Executive to develop a framework to address regional disparities and welcomes the requirement for all departments to consider regional impacts when developing policies and plans.

The union believes that public services play a vital role in supporting regional economies and communities. Decisions including the delivery and location of services should take full account of the impact on local populations, accessibility and equality of opportunity.

NIPSA particularly welcomes the inclusion of indicators relating to health, education, deprivation, income, employment and public expenditure. These measures provide a more realistic picture of how people experience inequality in their daily lives.

Health inequalities and access to healthcare services are of particular importance. Recent concerns regarding the future configuration of services at the South West Acute Hospital highlight the need for government decisions to consider the impact on rural communities, including travel times, accessibility and wider social and economic consequences.

The requirement for annual reporting and regular review of the Framework is also welcome. Transparent monitoring will be important in assessing whether actions are

delivering real improvements for communities and reducing regional inequalities. However, any reporting and review mechanisms should be designed to avoid creating unnecessary bureaucracy or additional administrative burdens for workers. Appropriate training, guidance, and resources should be provided to support implementation, ensuring that staff are equipped to meet requirements without creating additional workload or taking time away from their core responsibilities.

NIPSA would emphasise that the success of the Bill will depend on meaningful action, adequate resources and meaningful engagement with trade unions and local communities. Reducing regional disparities is not simply about economic performance; it is about ensuring that everyone, regardless of where they live, have access to fit-for-purpose public services.

Overall, NIPSA supports the aims of the Bill and welcomes its focus on ensuring a fairer balance of investment, opportunity and public service provision across all regions of Northern Ireland. We will continue to defend public services and ensure they deliver for all, are fit for purpose and appropriately funded. Public services must never disadvantage based on locality but must deliver to all equally, according to their need.