



Northern
Ireland
Office

SECTION 75

EQUALITY SCREENING FORM

Relationship & Sexuality Education

SECTION 75 – THE LEGAL BACKGROUND

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the NIO is required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
 - men and women generally
 - persons with a disability and persons without
 - persons with dependants and persons without.
2. In addition, and without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland we are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The NIO is also required to meet our legislative obligations under the Disability Discrimination Order.
3. A list of the main groups identified as being relevant to each of the Section 75 categories is at **Annex A** of this document.

INTRODUCTION

4. This form should be read in conjunction with the Equality Commission's Section 75 guidance "A Guide for Public Authorities" April 2010, available on the Equality Commission's website (www.equalityni.org). **Staff should complete a form for each new or revised policy for which they are responsible (see page 4 for a definition of a policy in respect of Section 75).**
5. The purpose of screening is to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations and so determine whether an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is necessary. Screening should be introduced at an early stage when developing or reviewing a policy.
6. The lead role in the screening of a policy should be taken by the policy decision-maker who has the authority to make changes to that policy and should involve in the screening process:
- other relevant team members;
 - those who implement the policy;
 - staff members from other relevant areas of work; and
 - key stakeholders.
7. A flowchart which outlines the screening process is attached at **Annex B**.
8. The first step in the screening exercise is to gather evidence to inform the screening decisions. Relevant data may be either quantitative or qualitative or both (this helps to indicate whether or not there are likely equality of opportunity and/or good relations impacts associated with a policy). Relevant information will help to clearly demonstrate the reasons for a policy being either 'screened in' for an EQIA or 'screened out'.

9. The absence of evidence does not indicate that there is no likely impact but if none is available, it may be appropriate to consider subjecting the policy to an EQIA.

10. Screening provides an assessment of the likely impact, whether 'minor' or 'major', of its policy on equality of opportunity and/or good relations for the relevant categories. In some instances, screening may identify the likely impact is none.

11. The Equality Commission has developed a series of four questions, included in Part 2 of this screening form with supporting sub-questions, which should be applied to all policies as part of the screening process. They identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

SCREENING DECISIONS

12. Completion of screening should lead to one of the following three outcomes. The policy has been:

- i. 'screened in' for equality impact assessment;
- ii. 'screened out' with mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted; or
- iii. 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.

SCREENING AND GOOD RELATIONS DUTY

13. The Equality Commission recommends that a policy is 'screened in' for EQIA if the likely impact on **good relations** is 'major'. While there is no legislative requirement to engage in an equality impact assessment in respect of good relations, this does not necessarily mean that EQIAs are inappropriate in this context.

FURTHER INFORMATION

14. Further information on equality, including a copy of the NIO Equality Scheme, yearly progress reports on equality to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, information on data sources and the Cabinet Office code of practice on consultation may be found on the NIO Intranet under About the NIO > Equality.

15. If you have any questions regarding the screening exercise or Section 75 in general please contact the Corporate Governance Team on 028 9076 5497; or nio.equalityscheme@nio.gov.uk.

16. When you have completed the form please retain on file in the branch for record purposes, and send a copy to the s75 equality advisor.

PART 1 – POLICY SCOPING

DEFINITION OF POLICY

1.1. There have been some difficulties in defining what constitutes a policy in the context of Section 75. To be on the safe side, it is recommended that you consider any new initiatives, proposals, schemes or programmes as policies or changes to those already in existence. It is important to remember that even if a full EQIA has been carried out in an “overarching” policy or strategy, it will still be necessary for the policy maker to consider if a further EQIA needs to be carried out in respect of those policies cascading from the overarching strategy.

OVERVIEW OF POLICY PROPOSALS

1.2. The aims and objectives of the policy must be clear and terms of reference well defined. You must take into account any available data that will enable you to come to a decision on whether or not a policy may or may not have a differential impact on any of the s75 categories.

SCOPING THE POLICY

1.3. The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

1.4. Remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the NIO), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the NIO).

INFORMATION ABOUT THE POLICY

Name of the policy	Relationship & Sexuality Education (RSE)
Is this an existing, revised or new policy?	In bringing forward these Regulations the UK Government is not setting a new policy direction, but rather giving effect to a decision taken by Parliament in 2019 to implement the recommendations in paragraphs 85 and 86 of the 2018 Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
What is it trying to achieve (intended aims/outcomes)?	<p>The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has a statutory duty under section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 (“the NIEF Act”) to ensure that recommendations in paragraphs 85 and 86 of CEDAW Report are implemented in full. CEDAW recommendation 86(d) requires the UK Government to <i>“Make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights a compulsory component of curriculum for adolescents, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, and monitor its implementation”</i>.</p> <p>The Regulations will amend the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007, place a statutory duty on the Northern Ireland Department of Education (“DENI”) to issue guidance by 1 January 2024 on the content and delivery of education on sexual and reproductive health and rights that complies with the 2018 Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Report, and place a duty on the Board of Governors and principal of every grant-aided school to have regard to guidance. This date was originally 1 September 2023, however, was amended to 1 January 2024 after engagement with the DENI who advised they will need to complete an Equality Screening under s. 75 of NIA 1998 on</p>

the changes in line with the Department's Equality Scheme and should this indicate the need for a full EQIA, they will then move to consult for 12 weeks.

In addition, during the process of developing the policy proposals, we considered the comparisons between how RSE is delivered in other parts of the United Kingdom, and how implementing this policy would be received by schools, pupils and parents in Northern Ireland. Recognising the sensitives, a ministerial decision was taken that a duty will be placed on the DENI to make Regulations about the circumstances in which at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused from receiving the education required, or specified elements of that education relating to age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion. The Regulations will only extend to NI. However, similar approaches are already taken in England and Scotland. For example, in England, parents have a right to request to withdraw their child from sex education delivered as part of RSE in secondary schools which, unless there are exceptional circumstances, should be granted, up to three terms before their child turns 16. At this point, if the child themselves wish to receive sex education rather than be withdrawn, the school should make arrangements for this to happen in one of the three terms before the child turns 16 - the legal age of sexual consent. There is no right to withdraw from Relationships Education at primary or secondary school. Good practice is also likely to include the headteacher discussing with parents the benefits of receiving this important education and any detrimental effects that withdrawal might have on the child. Once those discussions have taken place, except in exceptional

circumstances, the school should respect the parents' request to withdraw the child, up to and until three terms before the child turns 16. However there may be exceptional circumstances where the headteacher may want to take a pupil's specific needs arising from their circumstances when making this decision.

In Scotland, in the instance of a parent wishing to withdraw a school aged child from sexual health education lessons, schools must remind parents of the child's right to an education and to participate, bearing in mind their age and maturity. Where, after due consideration, the parent or carer decides to withdraw a school aged child from sexual health education lessons, arrangements should be made for the child to have alternative positive educational provision, which meets the Health and Wellbeing outcomes. In secondary education, young people will often be capable of deciding themselves, with support where necessary from parents, carers and teachers, to participate in sexual health education programmes. The capacity of a particular young person to take decisions of this nature will depend on their maturity, understanding and experience. In all cases, schools must respect the decision of that young person. As above, where a young person does not take part in sexual health education lessons, arrangements should be made for alternative positive educational provision, which meets the Health and Wellbeing outcomes.

We have engaged with the DENI and wider stakeholders on the potential impacts of this aspect of the policy. The main concerns raised were that this policy may lead schools to petition parents to opt children out of sex education en masse, resulting in young people who are in most need being denied learning; and that, including a parental opt-out may mean that the CEDAW recommendations is not fully

implemented, as RSE would then not strictly speaking be “compulsory”.

Finally, the Regulations will place duty on the DENI to publish a report by 1 September 2026 on the implementation of RSE in grant aided schools, and consult with statutory bodies such as the Equality Commission NI, the NI Human Rights Commission, the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People, and any other persons the DENI considers appropriate, and lay the report before the Assembly. This date was originally 1 September 2025, however after engaging with the DENI, we amended it to 1 September 2026 to account for the change to the date that the DENI will issue guidance.

Currently, Learning for Life and Work (LFLW), and Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) are mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age (4 to 16) and it is the responsibility of the Board of Governors of each school to ensure that a comprehensive programme is delivered. This is the case for all areas of learning. The DENI also requires schools to develop their own RSE policy, which should be subject to consultation with governors and parents.

Beyond the minimum statutory content, there is no list of prescribed topics but rather schools in Northern Ireland must provide opportunities to explore self-awareness, personal health and relationships. The DENI’s position is that flexibility in an area such as RSE provides schools with the freedom to design a programme linked to the ethos and ethical framework of the school. It is their view that this is particularly important given the broadly Christian character of almost all NI schools and that parents also have the choice of denominational faith based education.

In bringing forward these Regulations the UK Government is not setting a new

	<p>policy direction, but rather giving effect to a decision taken by Parliament in 2019 to implement the CEDAW recommendations. It was intended that the DENI would take the policy forward by introducing the necessary legislation in the Northern Ireland Assembly, however, they have not acted to do so.</p> <p>We've been engaging with the DENI since February 2020 on this issue. Initially, the DENI were providing assurances that they would implement the CEDAW recommendation, including setting up a working group to amend the Curriculum Minimum Content Order.</p> <p>In February 2022, the DENI clarified that their position was that the curriculum on RSE is a matter for schools and teachers to decide how it should be delivered, which resources to use, and which specific topics should be covered. This position is in direct conflict with the Secretary of State's legal duty which requires that certain elements of RSE, as set out in the CEDAW report, are made compulsory components of the curriculum, and at that point we began examining policy options to implement the CEDAW recommendation.</p> <p>In July 2022, the former SoSNI, Shailesh Vara, wrote the Education Minister to advise the UKG would intervene if the DENI did not implement the CEDAW recommendation</p> <p>The DENI's current position is that they have to act on the last direction received from their previous Minister, Michelle McIlveen MLA, which is not to make any changes to the curriculum. As such, they are unable to fully implement the CEDAW recommendation.</p>
<p>Are there any s75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy? If so, explain how.</p>	<p>The Regulations will update the curriculum in grant-aided post primary schools in Northern Ireland for adolescents, adding specific topics such as accessing abortion services and prevention of early pregnancy, amending the curriculum to make education</p>

provided, age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate. We anticipate that these enhanced education measures will be of benefit to all adolescents.

The 2018 CEDAW Report¹ found that *“relationship and sexuality education, although a recommended part of the primary and post-primary statutory curriculum of the Department of Education, is underdeveloped or non-existent since it is at the school’s discretion to implement the contents of the curriculum according to its values and ethos”*. And concluded that: *“Those factors point to State negligence in pregnancy prevention through a failure to implement its recommended curriculum on relationship and sexuality education”*.

There is a risk that the topics outlined in the CEDAW recommendation, such as prevention of early pregnancy, and access to abortion may be seen as more relevant to female than to male pupils, however, we anticipate that all pupils will gain an understanding of issues such as comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, resulting in a positive impact on them and their lives. This is likely to be of benefit to those persons in the age, men and women, and dependents categories.

The Regulations will make CEDAW compliant RSE compulsory in all grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland. It is accepted that some of the content of CEDAW compliant RSE may challenge the religious beliefs of some faith groups. The subjects cover topics where some faith communities’ views can differ from what is permitted under the law, e.g. use of contraception and abortion. In designing a policy on the new subjects, as is currently the case, we expect the DENI to consult with schools and parents

¹ [2018 CEDAW Report](#)

on the CEDAW compliant materials that will be taught. The Regulations also place a duty on the DENI to produce a report into the implementation of these. We have also considered whether the implementation of the CEDAW recommendation is compatible with Article 2 of the First Protocol to the ECHR. It is the Secretary of State's view that it is compatible to inform children of the legal right to an abortion in Northern Ireland and how relevant services may be accessed, without advocating a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations. Providing such information would not affect the ability of parents to provide advice and guidance to their children in keeping with their religious or philosophical views and therefore is also compatible with Articles 9 & 10 of the ECHR.

CEDAW compliant RSE must be accessible for all pupils in grant aided schools, including pupils with Special Education Needs. However, schools should ensure that their teaching is sensitive, age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate and delivered with reference to the law. Therefore, the proposals are likely to provide better education and benefit persons with a disability.

Engagement with a range of stakeholders, such as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland; the Commissioner for Children and Young People; Informing Choices NI; the National Society for the Protection of Young People; ARK; Love for Life; Common Youth; Parentkind; Alliance for Choice; and Amnesty, has taken place during the development of this policy. This has allowed us to refine the proposed Regulations to ensure they achieve successful implementation of the CEDAW recommendation. For example, feedback was taken on board for monitoring arrangements which resulted in the inclusion of a duty on the DENI to

	<p>consult with statutory organisations to prepare a report on the implementation of relationships and sexuality education in grant-aided schools.</p> <p>We also reached out to the following organisations but did not receive a reply: Committee on the Administration of Justice; Relate NI, and ACET.</p>
Who initiated or wrote the policy?	The Northern Ireland Office is responsible for these Regulations as a result of the Secretary of State's statutory duty under s.9 of the NIEF Act to implement the CEDAW recommendations.
Who owns and who implements the policy?	All provisions in the Regulations are a matter for the DENI to implement, support and fund.

IMPLEMENTATION FACTORS

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?	Yes
<p>If yes, are they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - financial - legislative - other (please specify) 	<p>Other - The issue of RSE in Northern Ireland is sensitive and characterised by contested views and narratives on how to deliver effective education. Timing for the implementation of the DENI making Regulations about the circumstances in which a pupil may be excused from receiving education on the updated curriculum is a matter for the DENI. There is no guarantee this will be in place by January 2024, the point at which the DENI is under a duty to issue guidance to schools on the content and delivery of the updated curriculum. This may attract criticism from faith-based schools, and some teachers and parents. However, it is our assessment that education should be delivered in a way that informs children of contraception, the legal right to an abortion in Northern Ireland and how relevant services may</p>

	<p>be accessed, without advocating a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations. We also assess that there will need to be a period of implementation from January 2024, and further consultation by the DENI with parents and teachers will be key to providing reassurance.</p> <p>Financial - The DENI is currently facing significant budgetary pressures and adding additional compulsory elements to subjects in the curriculum may result in additional costs, for example, teacher training.</p> <p>Political - A lack of willingness by Northern Ireland political parties could prevent implementation of this policy.</p>
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MAIN STAKEHOLDERS AFFECTED

<p>Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff - service users - other public sector organisations - voluntary/community/trade unions - other (please specify) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff, pupils and parents of students at grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland Department of Education - The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment - Controlled Schools' Support Council - The Transferor's Representative Council (TRC) - The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) - Equality Commission for Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission - Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People - Wider children's and education stakeholders with an interest in this policy
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OTHER POLICIES WITH A BEARING ON THIS POLICY

<p>What are they?</p>	<p>If The Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 are updated in future, the DENI will need to ensure that their guidance is updated to take into account any updates to the law, or changes to accessing abortions or prevention of early pregnancy.</p> <p>The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 The Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007</p>
<p>Who owns them?</p>	<p>The Northern Ireland Office own the Abortion (NI) Regulations 2020</p> <p>The Department of Education The Education (NI) Order 2006, and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (NI) 2007</p>

AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

1.5. Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Please ensure that your screening decision is informed by relevant data.

What evidence / information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the s75 categories.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information																				
Religious belief	<p>The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency² (NISRA) released a report in March 2023 that showed “In total 154,312 pupils are enrolled in post-primary schools in 2022/23, increasing by nearly 2,500 pupils from 2021/22. There are approximately 28,943 pupils in sixth forms in schools, 61% of all 16-17 year olds in Northern Ireland.”</p> <p>The report also provides data on the religion of pupils by school type and management type:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>School type</th> <th>Protestant</th> <th>Catholic</th> <th>Other</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Secondary non-grammar</td> <td>29,269 33%</td> <td>45,456 51%</td> <td>13,865 16%</td> <td>88,590</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grammar School</td> <td>21,317 32%</td> <td>33,177 50%</td> <td>11,228 17%</td> <td>65,722</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Special School</td> <td>2,087 30%</td> <td>3,017 44%</td> <td>1,826 26%</td> <td>6,930</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Notes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Secondary (non-Grammar) schools (school / management types including: Controlled, Catholic Maintained, Other Maintained, Controlled Integrated, and Grant Maintained Integrated) 2) Grammar Schools (school / management types including: Controlled, Voluntary - Schools under Catholic Management, Voluntary - Schools under Other Management) 3) Special Schools (school / management types including: Controlled, Catholic Maintained, Other Maintained) <p>The 2021 Census³ reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45.7% were either Catholics or had been brought up as Catholics 	School type	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Total	Secondary non-grammar	29,269 33%	45,456 51%	13,865 16%	88,590	Grammar School	21,317 32%	33,177 50%	11,228 17%	65,722	Special School	2,087 30%	3,017 44%	1,826 26%	6,930
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²https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Annual%20enrolments%20at%20schools%20and%20in%20funded%20pre-school%20education%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20-%202022-23_1.pdf

³ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-religion-tables>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 43.5% belonged to or had been brought up in Protestant or Other Christian (including Christian-related) denominations • The proportion of people who belonged to or had been brought up in Other religions is 1.5% • The proportion of those who neither belonged to nor had been brought up in no-religion is 9.3%. <p>The CEDAW report found that “<i>young people in Northern Ireland were denied the education necessary to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Most children in Northern Ireland attend denominational schools, either Catholic or Protestant. Church representatives play active roles in school management boards, and the result is that relationship and sexuality education, although a recommended part of the primary and post-primary statutory curriculum of the Department of Education, is underdeveloped or non-existent since it is at the school’s discretion to implement the contents of the curriculum according to its values and ethos. Where relationship and sexuality education is delivered, it is frequently provided by third parties and based on anti-abortion and abstinence ethos.</i>”</p>
Political opinion	<p>Nationalist, non-designating and moderate Unionist parties are traditionally perceived as supportive in relation to standardising the approach to RSE.</p> <p>A 2022 survey commissioned by Informing Choices NI⁴ highlights that only 17% of Northern Ireland MLAs believe RSE in schools is ‘satisfactory’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 78% agree that there should be a standardised curriculum, regardless of a school’s ethos. • 62% agree that children and young people should be taught about different family types, such as single parent or same sex families. • 60% agree that information on the availability of contraception and access to abortion should be included in all post-primary schools.
Racial group	<p>The NISRA Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2022-23⁵ states that:</p>

⁴ <https://informingchoicesni.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/MLA-Survey-PR-Social-Media.pdf>

⁵

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Revised%2022nd%20March%2023%20-%20Annual%20enrolments%20at%20schools%20and%20in%20funded%20pre-school%20education%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20-%202022-23.pdf>

Schools are increasingly becoming more ethnically diverse. Nearly 21,800 pupils in schools in Northern Ireland are recorded as “non-white”, and this represents 6.1% of the school population. This is an increase of nearly 7,400 pupils and 1.9 percentage points compared to 2017/18.

- There is also a rise year-on-year in the number of pupils whose first language is not English (an increase of nearly 2,300 from last year). In 2022/23, there are approximately 90 first languages spoken by pupils, with Polish and Lithuanian being the most common behind English.

- As such, there has been an increase in the number and proportion of newcomer pupils in schools in Northern Ireland (Table 6b). A newcomer pupil is one who has enrolled in a school but who does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum. In 2022/23, there were nearly 19,500 newcomer pupils accounting for 5.5% of the school population. This has risen by nearly 4,300 pupils since 2017/18.

The ‘Annual Enrollments at NI Schools’ report, published by NISRA provides data on the racial group of pupils by school type and management type:

School type	White	Black	Mixed-ethnic Group	Other	Total
Secondary non-grammar	83,839 95%	1,018 1%	1,456 2%	2,277 3%	88,590
Grammar School	61,989 94%	369 1%	1,172 2%	2,192 3%	65,722

Notes:

- 1) **Secondary (non-Grammar) schools** (school / management types including: Controlled, Catholic Maintained, Other Maintained, Controlled Integrated, and Grant Maintained Integrated)
- 2) **Grammar Schools** (school / management types including: Controlled, Voluntary - Schools under Catholic Management, Voluntary - Schools under Other Management)
- 3) **Special Schools** (school / management types including: Controlled, Catholic Maintained, Other Maintained)

The 2021⁶ Census in Northern Ireland reported 96.6% of the population to be of a white ethnicity, and 3.4% to be of an ethnicity other than white.

The 2021 Census results also reported that the population is becoming more diverse. Minority ethnic groups have increased in size and the number of people living here born outside the UK and Ireland is up to around one person in 15, the highest ever recorded.

	<p>The % of the resident population of NI belonging to minority ethnic groups is 3.4%.</p> <p>No dominant group exists among the ethnic population. The largest is 'Mixed' with 0.8%, followed by Indian (0.5%) and Black African (0.4%).</p>
Age	<p>A statement released by the National Education Union (NEU)⁷ in November 2022 reported that “Sexism and sexual harassment is a chronic issue in Northern Irish schools”, and further stated that “A lack of training and education for pupils and staff on challenging sexism and sexual harassment in the classroom is negatively impacting girls’ education.</p> <p>The 2020 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey noted that young people aged 18-24 were less likely to agree with the view that Northern Ireland is a place where people respect each other (net 36% for 18-24 year olds) than those aged 65+ (net 44%).⁸</p> <p><i>The CEDAW Report stated that “The Committee notes that access to abortion services and contraceptives are not statutory requirements of the advisory curriculum. Data show that the rate of contraception use among young people in Northern Ireland is lower and their rates of sexually transmitted infections are higher compared with their peers in other parts of the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the prevalence of unplanned teenage pregnancy in Northern Ireland is higher compared with other European Union countries, six times higher in deprived areas of Northern Ireland. Those factors point to State negligence in pregnancy prevention through a failure to implement its recommended curriculum on relationship and sexuality education and ensure age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, comprehensive and scientifically accurate sexuality education.”</i></p> <p>A Report published by the Northern Ireland Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup (NIACT)⁹ in June 2022 made a number of recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RSE should be evidence based and delivered in a consistent, high quality, inclusive and sex positive manner across all schools in Northern Ireland, including Special Educational Needs schools, and be included as part of a school’s inspection report 2. Organisations in receipt of public funding should provide a consistent and standardised approach to the delivery of RSE in school and community settings.

⁷ <https://neu.org.uk/blog/sexism-and-sexual-harassment-chronic-issue-northern-irish-schools#>

⁸ <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2020/Respect/NIRESPLECT.html>

⁹ <https://www.fsrh.org/documents/annual-review-sexual-reproductive-health-northern-ireland-2022/>

3. RSE should start early and be relevant to the individual at each stage of their development and maturity.
4. RSE should be delivered by trainers who are confident in talking about all issues relevant to RSE with an equal emphasis placed on all areas of the programme.
5. RSE programmes should be offered to parents and carers with the view to alleviating their fears and assisting them to support children and young people in making informed choices.
6. Young people should play a key role in formulating RSE programmes in schools and communities.
7. On-line resources should be used in school, community and home settings
8. All training delivered should be assessed and evaluated to ensure consistency, and that gaps are identified and current trends are incorporated.

A recent thematic inspection carried out by the Education Training Inspectorate into the Preventative Curriculum in Schools and Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) Centres¹⁰ collected the views of 14,665 pupils from years 7, 10, 12 and 14, 7,583 responses were received from post-primary pupils. The Inspection found that post primary pupils want to learn more about issues such as, women’s rights and respect; teenage pregnancy; information on birth control, STIs, sexual health and abortion, amongst other issues such as healthy relationships, sex, consent and sexual violence. Post primary pupils made a number of suggestions on how to improve the preventative curriculum, of which RSE is part of. The suggestions included that topics should be “taught by someone with little bias and awareness outside of the school curriculum”, that schools should “teach it more often” and not to “teach it through the lens of a church” and “it could be less religiously based with more open conversations”.

Data on pupils attending post primary school in NI is collected annually by NISRA the 2022/23 report gave the following age breakdowns:

School	Key Stage 3			GCSE		Sixth Form	
	Yr 8 11-12	Yr 9 12-13	Yr 10 13-15	Yr 11 14-15	Yr 12 15-16	Yr 13 16-17	Yr 14 17-18
Secondary non-grammar	15,897 18%	15,236 18%	15,684 18%	16,568 18%	14,332 15%	6,396 7%	5,477 6%
Grammar School	9,551 14%	9,889 15%	9,630 14%	9,988 16%	9,594 15%	8,831 14%	8,239 12%

Notes:

¹⁰

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Secondary (non-Grammar) schools (school / management types including: Controlled, Catholic Maintained, Other Maintained, Controlled Integrated, and Grant Maintained Integrated) 2) Grammar Schools (school / management types including: Controlled, Voluntary - Schools under Catholic Management, Voluntary - Schools under Other Management) 3) Special Schools (school / management types including: Controlled, Catholic Maintained, Other Maintained)
Marital status	<p>Opposite-sex civil partnerships were made legal in 2019, and same-sex marriage in 2020.</p> <p>At the time of this screening, there was no reliable and generally available statistical data or other information to indicate an impact on this group.</p>
Sexual orientation	<p>The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006¹¹ make it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of education. The Equality Commission for NI (ECNI) is responsible for enforcing these Regulations. The ECNI have made recommendations on tackling gender stereotyping, including through the curriculum generally and within RSE specifically, and have highlighted that support materials and opportunities within the curriculum should address prejudice-based bullying, and that measures to tackle bullying should include challenging gender roles.</p> <p>The DENI published research in 2017 on the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people (aged 16–21) in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. 92.1% of the young people indicated that there was not sufficient information available in their school about LGBTQ+ issues. They believed that this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● impacted on their ability to come to terms with their sexual orientation and gender in safe and supportive environments; and ● contributed to the high levels of homophobic and transphobic language and attitudes. <p>The research revealed that transgender young people were significantly disadvantaged by schools not understanding them or their needs. In particular, schools should pay attention to names, pronouns, uniforms, toilets and changing facilities.</p> <p>The young people were also concerned about confidentiality, which was a significant barrier to them accessing support. They were concerned about how, without consent, parents and carers could be informed of a child’s sexual orientation, and how this could pose a risk for some young people.</p>

¹¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2006/439/contents/made>

	<p>The 2020 Northern Ireland Life and Times¹² survey asked respondents about their sexual orientation. 3% of respondents identified as gay or lesbian, 2% as bisexual, 94% as heterosexual, and 1% gave other answers.</p> <p>The 2021 Census in Northern Ireland found that 31,600 people aged 16 or over in the region identified as LGB+, resulting in 2.1% of the region's population identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other.</p> <p>1.364 million adults (18 years +) (90%) identified as straight or heterosexual, and 119,000 (8%) did not answer the question, or preferred not to say.</p>
Men and women generally	<p>The 2021 Census in Northern Ireland showed the population comprised 967,000 females and 936,200 males.</p> <p>The 2020 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey asked respondents about gender identity. 41% identified as male and 59% identified as female, with those identifying as male to female transgender or other not sufficient to register.¹³</p>
Disability	<p>The DENI reports that learners with SEN are educated in a variety of settings, and over 5,000 learners with SEN currently study at 39 special schools in Northern Ireland. Most learners with SEN, over 70,000, are in mainstream classrooms. This inclusive education addresses barriers to learning and raises standards. These learners have needs that can range from minor or transitory to long-term moderate.</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency reports that as of March 2023, there are a total of 6,930 pupils attending special schools in Northern Ireland.</p>
Dependants	<p>The 2021 Census in Northern Ireland reported there were 365,200 children (aged 0 to 14) or 19% of the population.</p>

NEEDS, EXPERIENCES AND PRIORITIES

1.6. Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision? Specify details for each of the s75 categories.

¹² <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2020/Background/ORIENT2.html>

¹³ <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2020/Background/GENDERID.html>

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Religious belief	<p>The new Regulations will make CEDAW compliant RSE a compulsory component of the curriculum in all schools, including faith schools, therefore, there is no discriminatory impact on religious groups in terms of access to the subjects.</p> <p>The subjects cover topics where some faith communities' views can differ from what is permitted under the law, e.g. use of contraception and abortion services. In designing a policy on the new subjects, we expect the DENI to consult with schools and parents on the CEDAW compliant materials that will be taught, as is currently the case. The Regulations also place a duty on the DENI to produce a report into the implementation of the education it will be required to deliver. We have also considered whether the implementation of the CEDAW recommendation is compatible with Article 2 of the First Protocol to the ECHR. It is our view that it is compatible to inform children of the legal right to an abortion in Northern Ireland and how relevant services may be accessed, without advocating a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations.</p> <p>Providing such information would not affect the ability of parents to provide advice and guidance to their children in keeping with their religious or philosophical views and therefore is also compatible with Articles 9 & 10 of the ECHR.</p> <p>The Secretary of State recognises that some parents may wish to teach their child about sex education or make alternative arrangements for sex education to be provided in line with their religious background, or their belief about the age that their child/children should access sex education. As such, the new Regulations will also place a duty on the DENI to make Regulations about the circumstances in which at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused from receiving the education required, or specified elements of that education relating to age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.</p> <p>We assess that this policy caters for the needs, experiences and priorities of this group.</p>
Political opinion	<p>There are no specific needs, experiences or priorities identified for this group.</p> <p>Political opinion across Northern Ireland is varied around RSE. Nationalist, non-designating and moderate Unionist</p>

	<p>parties are traditionally perceived as supportive in relation to standardising the approach to RSE.</p> <p>A 2022 survey commissioned by Informing Choices NI highlights that only 17% of Northern Ireland MLAs believe RSE in schools is 'satisfactory'. 78% agree that there should be a standardised curriculum, regardless of a school's ethos. 62% agree that children and young people should be taught about different family types, such as single parent or same sex families. 60% agree that information on the availability of contraception and access to abortion should be included in all post-primary schools.</p>
Racial group	<p>The policy's intention is to make CEDAW compliant RSE a compulsory component of the curriculum, and by making it a compulsory component the delivery of RSE will be accessible to pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds and with other spoken languages.</p>
Age	<p>The initial age-group of individuals this will impact is those of post primary school age that fall into the adolescents category (11-16 year olds). This age group of individuals who are capable of becoming pregnant or require information in relation to accessing abortion, and wider sexual and reproductive health and rights, will also be affected in the most direct way.</p> <p>As these regulations will make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights a compulsory component of curriculum for adolescents, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, we assess that this policy caters for the needs, experiences and priorities of this group.</p>
Marital status	<p>There are no specific needs, experiences or priorities identified for this group.</p>
Sexual orientation	<p>Amending the curriculum and implementation of the CEDAW recommendation places the DENI under a statutory duty to produce guidance that delivers age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion. We assess that implementing CEDAW compliant RSE as a compulsory component of the curriculum caters for the needs, experiences and priorities of this group, and further</p>

	<p>builds on the work that has been undertaken by the DENI as set out below.</p> <p>In August 2018, the DENI commissioned CCEA to carry out a review of existing RSE resources and develop new guidance and resources in a number of priority areas, including LGBTQ+ matters.</p> <p>CCEA initially developed a summary of links to useful RSE resources from a wide range of organisations and developed new teaching resources and support materials in these areas. In June 2019, CCEA launched a new online RSE Hub¹⁴ recommending that learning about LGBTQ+ matters should cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the importance of valuing diversity and the uniqueness of individuals, including diversity in sexual attraction and gender identity; ● the terms associated with sex, sexuality, gender identity and transgender, and an understanding of what they mean in real life; ● that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying is unacceptable and how to challenge it; and ● how young LGBTQ+ people can access support. <p>The following units are readily available for key stages 3 & 4 to support teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● LGBTQ+ Identities and Terms ● Coming out ● Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic (HBT) Bullying ● Gender Identity ● Transgender people in the media ● LGBTQ+ History and Pride
Men and women generally	<p>We anticipate that all pupils at adolescent age will gain an understanding of issues such as comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.</p> <p>This is likely to be of benefit to men and women and we assess that implementing CEDAW compliant RSE as a compulsory component of the curriculum caters for the needs, experiences and priorities of this group.</p>

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Disability	<p>The delivery of RSE, teaching and information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, should be accessible to pupils with a disability.</p> <p>This policy will ensure that age appropriate CEDAW compliant RSE is accessible for all pupils in grant aided schools, including pupils with Special Education Needs.</p> <p>We assess that implementing CEDAW compliant RSE as a compulsory component of the curriculum caters for the needs, experiences and priorities of this group, and further builds on the work that has been undertaken by the DENI, as set out below;</p> <p>The CCEA RSE Hub includes the current approach to learners with SEN:</p> <p><i>“RSE for learners with SEN should be accessible, appropriate and relevant to them and their life experiences. For example, RSE should help learners, in an age-appropriate way, to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>recognise safe boundaries and understand the concept of consent;</i> - <i>understand the components of healthy relationships in contrast with unhealthy relationships; and</i> - <i>learn how to avoid risk-taking behaviours.</i> <p><i>School staff should support learners with SEN in dealing with puberty changes and personal hygiene. Learners with SEN should learn how to distinguish between friendship and romantic or sexual relationships, and have a framework to understand acceptable and appropriate behaviour.</i></p> <p><i>Learners with SEN may display sexually inappropriate behaviours because they need help to understand social norms. Teachers should help them develop the ability to read body language and communicate around consent.</i></p> <p><i>In today’s connected world, learners with SEN should be aware of the challenges of the internet and online identities, the influence of peers and peer pressure, and the influence of media including social media. Effective RSE should contribute to building confidence and resilience in learners with SEN.</i></p> <p><i>High quality RSE teaching should be differentiated and personalised to meet learners’ needs and ensure accessibility to all. It’s important that RSE is a planned developmental programme of teaching across all key stages.”</i></p>
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	<p>A number of resources are also available for teachers and pupils on the RSE Hub.</p>
<p>Dependants</p>	<p>The DENI requires each school to have in place its own written policy on how it will address the delivery of RSE. A school's RSE policy should be subject to consultation with parents and endorsed by a school's Board of Governors.</p> <p>This policy will not change that approach and we expect and encourage the DENI to engage and consult with parents on the guidance they produce. The policy includes a provision that in delivering statutory relationships and sexuality education the Board of Governors and principal of every grant-aided school must have regard to guidance issued by the DENI.</p> <p>The Secretary of State recognises that some parents may wish to teach their child about sex education or make alternative arrangements for sex education to be provided in line with their religious background, or their belief about the age that their child/children should access sex education. As such, the new Regulations will also place a duty on the DENI to make Regulations about the circumstances in which at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused from receiving the education required, or specified elements of that education relating to age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.</p> <p>As such we assess that this policy addresses the needs, experiences and priorities of this group.</p>

PART 2 – SCREENING QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

2.1. In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an EQIA, please give consideration to your answers to the questions 1-4 which are given on pages 66-68 of the Equality Commission’s “A Guide for Public Authorities”.

2.2. If your conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, you may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is ‘screened out’ as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, you should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

2.3. If your conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

2.4. If your conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- take measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- introduce an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

IN FAVOUR OF A ‘MAJOR’ IMPACT

- a. The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b. Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
- c. Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
- d. Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
- e. The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f. The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

IN FAVOUR OF 'MINOR' IMPACT

- a. The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
- b. The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
- c. Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
- d. By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

IN FAVOUR OF NONE

- a. The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

2.5. Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

SCREENING QUESTIONS

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? (minor/major/none)

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
Religious belief	<p>We assess the Regulations will have a positive impact as the DENI, and schools, will be statutorily obliged to provide age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion to adolescents in all grant aided schools in Northern Ireland. This will ensure adolescents of all backgrounds receive a more standardised level of education.</p> <p>The Secretary of State recognises that some parents may wish to teach their child about sex education or make alternative arrangements for sex education to be provided in line with their religious background, or their belief about the age that their child/children should access sex education. As such, the new Regulations will also place a duty on the DENI to make Regulations about the circumstances in which at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused from receiving the education required, or specified elements of that education relating to age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.</p>	Minor
Political opinion	We assess there is no impact on equality of opportunity based on political opinion.	None
Racial group	We assess the Regulations will have a positive impact on equality of opportunity as the DENI, and schools, will be statutorily obliged to provide age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of	Minor

	early pregnancy and access to abortion to adolescents in all grant aided schools in Northern Ireland. This will ensure the delivery of the updated curriculum will be accessible to pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds and with other spoken languages.	
Age	<p>The targeted age group of this policy relates only to adolescents (11-16 year olds) and the policy requires age appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.</p> <p>The policy will amend the curriculum for key stage 3 and 4 age groups (11-16 year olds, and is limited to within scope of what is required by the CEDAW recommendation, in line with the Secretary of State's powers and statutory duty under section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019.</p> <p>We assess the Regulations will have a positive impact on equality of opportunity based on age, as the DENI, and schools, will be statutorily obliged to provide age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion to all adolescents in grant aided schools in Northern Ireland. This will ensure adolescents receive a more standardised level of education.</p>	Minor
Marital status	We do not anticipate an impact on equality of opportunity based on marital status.	None
Sexual orientation	We assess that implementing CEDAW compliant RSE as a compulsory component of the curriculum will have a positive impact on equality of opportunity and further builds on the work that has been undertaken by the DENI and the CCEA to carry out a review of existing RSE in developing new guidance and resources	Minor

	in a number of priority areas, including LGBTQ+ matters.	
Men and women generally	The policy's intention is to provide young men and women in the adolescents category with enhanced and standardised education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering access to abortion and prevention of early pregnancy. We therefore assess the Regulations will have a positive impact on equality of opportunity for both young men and women.	Minor
Disability	The policy's intention is to amend the curriculum for adolescents in all grant aided schools, including SEN schools. We therefore assess the Regulations will have a positive impact on equality of opportunity for adolescents with disabilities.	Minor
Dependants	As adolescents may fall into the dependents category, we assess the policy supports equality of opportunity for this s.75 category by implementing comprehensive, age appropriate and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion a compulsory component of the curriculum for adolescents.	Minor

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?

Section 75 category	If Yes, provide details	If No, provide reasons
Religious belief	<p>Yes. We anticipate this policy supports equality of opportunity for this s.75 category by implementing age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion is made a compulsory component of curriculum for adolescents.</p> <p>In implementing this policy, the DENI, and schools in Northern Ireland will have further opportunities to promote equality of opportunity for people within this s.75 category</p>	
Political opinion		There was no relevant information to indicate an equality of opportunity impact on this s.75 group.
Racial group	<p>Yes. This policy supports equality of opportunity for this s.75 category through ensuring that age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion is made a compulsory component of curriculum for adolescents.</p>	
Age	<p>Yes. The scope of this policy will target the adolescent age group (11-16 year olds) in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State's legal duty does not extend beyond those outside of the adolescent age group. This policy supports equality of opportunity within the scope of the powers that the Secretary of State has in relation to adolescents to</p>	

	implement the CEDAW recommendation.	
Marital status		There was no relevant information to indicate an equality of opportunity impact on this s.75 group.
Sexual orientation	<p>Yes. This policy supports equality of opportunity for this s.75 category by implementing comprehensive, age appropriate and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion a compulsory component of the curriculum for adolescents.</p> <p>In implementing this policy, the DENI, and schools in Northern Ireland will have further opportunities to promote equality of opportunity for people within this s.75 category.</p>	
Men and women generally	<p>Yes. This policy supports equality of opportunity for this s.75 category by implementing comprehensive, age appropriate and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion a compulsory component of the curriculum for adolescents.</p> <p>In implementing this policy, the DENI, and schools in Northern Ireland will have further opportunities to promote equality of opportunity for people within this s.75 category.</p>	
Disability	Yes. This policy supports equality of opportunity for this s.75 category by amending the curriculum for adolescents in all grant aided schools, including SEN schools.	

Dependants	Yes. This policy supports equality of opportunity for this s.75 category by implementing comprehensive, age appropriate and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion a compulsory component of the curriculum for adolescents.	
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3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (minor/major/none)

Good relations category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact minor/major/none
Religious belief	<p>The updating of the curriculum will not have an adverse impact on good relations between people of different religious beliefs, and there is no discriminatory impact on religious groups in terms of access to the subjects.</p> <p>The policy places a duty on the DENI to make Regulations about the circumstances in which at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused from receiving the education required, or specified elements of that education relating to age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.</p> <p>Once in place, the policy places duties on the DENI, to issue guidance on the content and delivery of CEDAW compliant education in grant-aided schools. The DENI may also wish to consider its s.75 duties in the development and implementation of the updated curriculum. As such we are engaging closely with the DENI to keep them updated on the policy.</p>	Minor
Political opinion	<p>The updating of the curriculum will not have a direct impact on good relations between people of different political opinion. There will be a range of views on updating the curriculum, and by extension, providing education in relation to access to abortion and prevention of early pregnancy. These are issues that are not subject to whether a person is a 'nationalist' or a 'unionist', or a supporter of another political party.</p>	None
Racial group	<p>There was no relevant information to indicate a good relations impact on this s.75 group.</p>	None

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Good relations category	If Yes, provide details	If No, provide reasons
Religious belief	<p>People with strongly held, religiously motivated opposition to abortion, are unlikely to agree with the updated curriculum in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>However, recognising the sensitivities in Northern Ireland, the policy places a duty on the DENI to make Regulations about the circumstances in which at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused from receiving the education required, or specified elements of that education relating to age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.</p> <p>Good communication and opportunities for parents to understand and ask questions about the school's approach to help increase confidence in the curriculum will be required, and implementation of the policy will be monitored to ensure that its intended aims are being met. Once in place, the policy places duties on the DENI, to issue guidance on the content and delivery of CEDAW compliant education in grant-aided schools. The DENI may also wish to consider its s.75 duties in the development and implementation of the updated curriculum. As such we are engaging closely with the DENI to keep them updated on the policy.</p>	
Political opinion	None	N/A
Racial group	Yes. This policy supports good relations among this s.75 category	

	<p>by making the delivery of RSE accessible to pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds. The DENI has a responsibility to ensure that education is accessible, and inclusive to pupils with other languages.</p> <p>Once in place, the policy places duties on the DENI to issue guidance on the content and delivery of the updated curriculum grant-aided schools. The DENI may wish to consider its s.75 duties in the development and implementation of the updated curriculum. As such we are engaging closely with the DENI to keep them updated on the policy.</p>	
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ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities? *(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).*

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

This policy will directly impact adolescents within the men and women category, who generally are likely to fall within a combination of s75 categories. A number of multiple identities are possible, such as young men and women within the LGBTQI+ category, disability, or religious beliefs categories.

The DENI will be responsible for collecting equality data on the impact of the policy during and after the implementation process.

PART 3 – SCREENING DECISION

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

An equality impact assessment is not required given this assessment has not identified any equality of opportunity or good relations impacts.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, you should consider if the policy should be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced.

N/A

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

3.1. All public authorities' equality schemes must state the arrangements for 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. The Equality Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in the Equality Commission publication: "Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment".

MITIGATION

3.2. If you have concluded that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, you may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

If so, give the reasons to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

During the course of developing the policy, several mitigations were identified and adopted:

- Parents can request that a pupil is excused from receiving the education.
- The delivery of RSE will be accessible to pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds and with other spoken languages.
- RSE for learners with SEN should be accessible, appropriate, and relevant to the learners and their life experiences.
- The duty on the DENI to issue guidance on the content and delivery of the updated curriculum was amended (from 1 September 2023) to 1 January 2024, to enable the DENI to complete an Equality Screening on the changes in line with the Department's Equality Scheme and should these indicate the need for a full EQIA, they will then move to consult for 12 weeks resulting in potential for the DENI to consult with schools, young people and parents on the CEDAW compliant materials that will be taught.
- In addition, the duty on the DENI to produce a report on the implementation of the updated curriculum was amended (from 1 September 2025) to 1 September 2026 to take into account the amended date for the DENI to issue guidance.

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TIMETABLING AND PRIORITISING

3.3. If the policy has been ‘**screened in**’ for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	N/A
Social need	N/A
Effect on people’s daily lives	N/A
Relevance to the NIO’s functions	N/A
Total rating score (total of 12)	N/A

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist you in timetabling. Details of the NIO’s Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

No

If yes, please provide details.

PART 4 – MONITORING

4.1. The NIO should consider the guidance contained in the Commission’s Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

4.2. The Equality Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, you should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

4.3. Effective monitoring will help you identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead you to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

In relation to monitoring arrangements, the Regulations place a duty on the DENI to produce a report on the implementation of RSE by 1 September 2026. As stated above, the DENI will be responsible for collecting equality data on the impact of the policy during and after the implementation process. The DENI may also wish to carry out an Equality Screening under s. 75 of Northern Ireland Act 1998. We will continue to work closely with the DENI during the implementation period.

PART 5 - APPROVAL AND AUTHORISATION

Screened by:	T/Head of Rights and Equality Team
Grade/Branch/Group:	Constitution and Rights Team
Date:	26 May 2023
Approved by Deputy Director:	Paul Flynn
Date:	31/5/2023

Note: A copy of the Screening Template for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy and made available on request.

Any screening forms completed within the Department will be published on a six monthly basis in line with our Departmental Equality Policy monitoring arrangements. Such information will be collated and published by the Corporate Governance Team.

ANNEX A – MAIN GROUPS IDENTIFIED AS RELEVANT TO THE SECTION 75 CATEGORIES

Category	Example Groups
Religious Belief	<p>Buddhist; Catholic; Hindu; Jewish; Muslims; people of no religious belief; Protestants; Sikh; other faiths.</p> <p>For the purposes of Section 75, the term “religious belief” is the same definition as that used in the <i>Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order</i>. Therefore, “religious belief” also includes any <i>perceived</i> religious belief (or perceived lack of belief) and, in employment situations only, it also covers any “<i>similar philosophical belief</i>”.</p>
Political Opinion	Nationalists generally; Unionists generally; members/supporters of other political parties.
Racial Group	Black people; Chinese; Indians; Pakistanis; people of mixed ethnic background; Polish; Roma; Travellers; White people.
Men and women generally	Men (including boys); Trans-gendered people; Transsexual people; Women (including girls).
Marital Status	Civil partners or people in civil partnerships; divorced people; married people; separated people; single people; widowed people.
Age	Children and young people; older people.
Persons with a disability	Persons with disabilities as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
Persons with dependants	Persons with personal responsibility for the care of a child; care of a person with disability; or the care of a dependant older person.
Sexual orientation	Bisexual people; heterosexual people; gay or lesbian people.

ANNEX B – SCREENING FLOWCHART

