

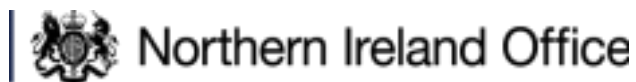


Northern  
Ireland  
Office

# Northern Ireland Office

**Public Authority Statutory Equality and  
Good Relations Duties Annual Progress  
Report for 2021/22**

**August 2022**



Passionate about Northern Ireland: flexible, empowering, inclusive

This report presents progress made by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) during 2021/22 in fulfilling its statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments with reference to Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found [here](#)

**Signature:**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Madeleine Alessandri".

Madeleine Alessandri, Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Office

## CONTENTS

### PART A – IMPLEMENTATION OF NIO EQUALITY SCHEME

<b>SECTION</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1 Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice	4
- Examples of key policy / service delivery developments	4
- Examples of outcomes and/or impacts of equality action plans	6
- Application of the Equality Scheme commitments	6
2 Progress on Equality Scheme commitments	8
3 Looking Forward	9
Annex A - Progress update on NIO's Equality measures for 2021/22	10

### PART B – DISABILITY ACTION PLANS

<b>SECTION</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1. Summary of Action Measures achieved	12
2. Action Measures Achieved	12
3. Action Measures Partly Achieved	15
4. Action Measures Not Achieved	16
5. Monitoring Effectiveness	17
6. Monitoring Progress	17

## **PART A – Implementation of the Northern Ireland Office Equality Scheme**

### **Section 1: Equality and Good Relations Outcomes, Impacts and Good Practice**

1. The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) is dedicated to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations in Northern Ireland as it works towards its vision of ***Northern Ireland being a better place to live, work and invest.***
2. **Supporting greater inclusion, tolerance, and openness in Northern Ireland** is one of the NIO's priority outcomes. We aspire to promote equality of opportunity and to support good relations in all of our work to deliver a more prosperous, safer and better-governed society. As an employer, the NIO puts equality at the heart of its core values of inclusiveness, empowerment and flexibility.
3. This report demonstrates:
  - **how the NIO has delivered on its equality duty commitments during 2021/22; and**
  - **highlights the positive impact the NIO Equality Scheme has in influencing policy decisions and outcomes.**
4. To ensure the NIO upholds its legal duty to comply with public sector equality duties and the Section 75 (s75) obligations set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the NIO uses Screening and Equality Impact Assessments to assess the likely impact of new or revised policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. In discharging these responsibilities, the NIO undertakes to:
  - screen policies at the earliest opportunity and to ensure a system is in place to monitor the impact of these policies;
  - ensure information is accessible to all the people of Northern Ireland;
  - publish screening reports in a timely fashion;
  - ensure adequate consultation with interested or affected parties; and
  - provide staff with relevant training on equality matters.

#### **Examples of Key Policy / Service Delivery Developments**

5. In 2021/22 we completed:

##### **Equality Screening exercises for policy proposals on:**

- **Rebalancing our workforce**
- **Northern Ireland Office approach to supporting the new US Envoy on Northern Ireland**
- **Hybrid working**
- **NIO Accommodation**

### Equality Screening exercises for consultations on:

- Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill 2021
- Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's past
- Domestic implementation of the commitment set out in Article 2 of the Northern Ireland/Ireland Protocol

6. As an employer, the NIO strives to ensure that its employment policies and procedures conform to best practice, employment law, and promote equality of opportunity for all employees. Examples of activity undertaken during 2021/22 included:

- Continuing to promote the Civil Service Disability Network and REACH Disability Mentoring Programme to mentor staff with disabilities and long-term health conditions and the Civil Service BAME Mentoring Scheme that supports BAME staff to develop, progress and flourish within the Civil Service
- Promoting annual diversity events such as Sign Language Week, Mental Health Awareness Week, International Stammering Awareness Day, Global Accessibility Awareness Day and World Menopause Day
- Maintaining a network of anti-bullying, harassment and discrimination champions to support staff concerned about bullying or harassment and promote the inclusive culture which the department strives towards
- Implementing our Diversity & Inclusion Network action plan to direct activity to achieve real improvements
- Supporting a 'Mirror Board' and 'Staff Engagement Group' to ensure colleagues at all levels can contribute perspectives on issues raised at monthly Executive and quarterly NIO Board meetings
- Regular discussion of staff welfare and resourcing issues at senior leadership forums
- Posting intranet blogs about cultural events to engender staff awareness and appreciation as well as providing mental wellbeing information on work-life balance options on the department's intranet
- Encouraging applications from a wider, more diverse pool of applicants and enabling staff on fixed term contracts to convert to permanent status

### **Examples of Outcomes and / or Impacts of Equality Action Plans**

7. The events held throughout 2021 to mark the Northern Ireland Centenary represented a respectful and positive celebration of the anniversary of the creation of Northern Ireland. The events focused on investment, young people, culture and the environment, reflecting on the past whilst looking forward to a bright future for Northern Ireland. The Centenary Team was proud to be nominated for the Diversity & Inclusion Category of the Government Project Awards, being awarded third place.
8. In March 2022, the Secretary of State announced that he was preparing regulations to take the necessary powers to directly commission abortion services in Northern Ireland if urgent progress was not made. New [regulations](#) were subsequently introduced in May 2022 replacing the [Abortion Services Directions 2021](#). The Directions now require relevant health care to be provided as soon as reasonably practicable to ensure that women and girls in Northern Ireland can access the same basic abortion healthcare that is available to women and girls in the rest of the UK.
9. An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) regarding proposals for addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past was developed during the reporting period and published for consultation in May 2022. The EQIA acknowledged the complexities of the issues and considered the information and evidence acquired from previous screenings undertaken in 2018 and 2021. It concluded that the proposals would have a positive impact insofar as the proposals are for the benefit of all victims and families wishing to seek information about Troubles related deaths or very serious injuries, as well as wider society which would benefit from collective truth recovery and the promotion of reconciliation. A key element of the proposals is the designation of a new information recovery body which will have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. The consultation closed on 8 August 2022.
10. In line with the commitments of the New Decade, New Agreement (NDNA), the NIO is taking forward legislation to introduce a package of identity and language measures that will require specified public authorities to have regard to certain national and cultural identity principles when carrying out functions in Northern Ireland and create an Office of Identity and Cultural Expression and provide for official recognition of the status of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. The Bill will receive its 2nd reading in the autumn parliamentary session of 2022.

### **Application of the Equality Scheme Commitments**

11. The NIO recognises that its work is often sensitive and controversial. Feedback from policy consultations and regular engagement with the full spectrum of stakeholders, communities and those directly impacted in Northern Ireland, forms a critical part of our evidence base, informs policy development and facilitates transparent decision making.

12. The **NIO uses a wide range of consultation and awareness raising methods** including written documents circulated for comment, questionnaires and engagement through face to face / virtual discussions involving Ministers and policy officials. Engagement with key stakeholders and interested parties on some of NIO's most sensitive and difficult work is an important part of the NIO's approach to ensuring that all those directly impacted by potential policy changes have an opportunity to provide their views and these can be properly considered by the government.
13. The **results of all screening are routinely published on the NIO website**; further details of the screenings and consultations referenced in this report can be found [here](#).
14. During the reporting period, **NIO received two complaints in relation to its published Equality Scheme** in respect of appointments made by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Castlereagh Foundation Advisory Committee and the appointment of a UK Government Envoy to the United States on Northern Ireland. Both complaints were dealt with in line with the procedures set out in the NIO's Equality Scheme but the complainant decided to escalate their complaint relating to the appointment of the UK Government Envoy to the Equality Commission for consideration under Paragraph 10 of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Commission found that the complaint did not meet the criteria for investigation.
15. Also in the reporting period, the Equality Commission published its report on a complaint received in the previous reporting year about screening in relation to legislation to address the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland. The report was published in September 2021 and the NIO accepted the recommendations in full and took action in-year to address all of these.

## Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme Commitments and Action Plans

16. Updates on the actions and outcomes of the NIO's Equality measures for 2021/22 are set out in **Annex A**. Most of these actions are ongoing with continuation of existing and new activities being carried out each year.
17. Some key updates and assurances for 2021/22 are summarised below:

- A staff "Guide to Section 75" has been issued across the department to enhance awareness of our equality duties
- Section 75 statutory duties are integrated into job descriptions and the personal performance plans of those individuals with specific 'Diversity & Inclusion' objectives and a dedicated 'Diversity & Inclusion' commitment section prominently features in all NIO job adverts
- Departmental Equality Commitments have been included in the NIO Outcomes Delivery Plan which sets out the department's strategy for Northern Ireland and details its delivery plan for the year. Implementation and performance against this Plan and these commitments is monitored and managed by the NIO Strategy Team, NIO Board and the Cabinet Office

18. The Department has also delivered on its Equality Scheme training objectives by:

- Ensuring that staff undertake Civil Service e-learning on Inclusion in the Civil Service as part of their Induction to the department and as part of mandatory refresher training
- Allowing staff to take up to five days each year to focus on learning and development and to apply for up to five days special leave to undertake volunteering
- Actively participating in Diversity & Inclusion events during the year
- Using the staff intranet to promote diversity & inclusion events throughout the year
- Issuing a guide to staff summarising our equality duties



### Section 3: Looking Forward

19. The NIO Equality scheme is due to be reviewed in 2024. During the next reporting period the NIO's focus is anticipated to be on:
  - legislative changes arising from the Identity and Language, Legacy and Reconciliation, and Northern Ireland Protocol Bills;
  - any measures the UK Government may be required to take forward in the ongoing absence of an Executive;
  - developing a Diversity & Inclusion strategy; and
  - managing the impact of, and supporting staff through, a challenging delivery period as we ensure the NIO operates efficiently, effectively and within budget.
20. Looking forward, the Government remains firmly committed to ensuring that the rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity provisions set out in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, and reflected in Article 2 of the Northern Ireland Protocol, continue to be upheld.
21. The NIO will continue to work closely with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to operationalise the Dedicated Mechanism and ensure the processes and structures are embedded appropriately.

**Progress update on the specific actions and outcomes of the NIO’s Equality measures for 2021/22**

Action		Outcomes	Update
1	Communicating and assisting the understanding of Section 75 duties to Central Government Departments	Wider and more effective engagement with Section 75 duties by Central Government Departments	A staff “Guide to Section 75” has been issued across the department to enhance awareness of our equality duties
2	Working with wider Government and the Northern Ireland Executive Departments to promote good relations by visiting all sections of the community and engaging with the broader political and civic society when organising Secretary of State, Ministerial and VIP visits	Opportunities to promote the interests of Section 75 groups and good relations will be identified and acted upon.	The NIO External Relations Team continues to support Ministers and teams within NIO to engage with all sections of the NI community to promote good relations on a range of issues  Further information on the programme of visits and engagements undertaken can be found on the NIO <a href="#">website</a>
3	Adopting a fully human rights compliant approach, and giving meaningful consideration to the impact of activities on Section 75 groups in exercising the Secretary of State’s powers under the Justice and Security Act 2007 in relation to the implementation of security measures, including conducting annual reviews	Ensures that: · The SoS is fully compliant with all Section 75 obligations in the operation of powers under the Justice and Security Act 2007. · All NIO decisions are proportionate and due consideration is given to any potential impacts on Section 75 groups	All relevant NIO policy decisions and changes have undergone an appropriate screening process  The NIO also continues to sponsor the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and supports the Commission in their role to promote human rights in Northern Ireland and beyond
4	Reviewing the outcomes of the Staff Survey to determine whether or not any issues / trends have emerged which would provide opportunities to better meet the Department’s Section 75 responsibilities	Opportunities to further promote the interests of Section 75 groups within and across NIO staff will be identified and acted upon	The 2021 NIO People Survey showed that the NIO is on par with the civil service benchmark for “Inclusion and Fair Treatment”, with an overall rating score of 82%. Survey results also showed that 88% of NIO staff reported that they are treated with respect by the people they work with

NIO PUBLIC AUTHORITY STATUTORY EQUALITY AND GOOD RELATIONS DUTIES: ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2021/22

			<p>and 80% responded that they think that the Office respects individual differences.</p> <p>The Department maintains a zero tolerance approach to bullying, harassment and discrimination and has introduced a network of Anti- Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination champions to support colleagues.</p>
5	Monitoring staff grievance procedures to ensure that any action, which might be taken to improve Section 75 outcomes for staff, is acted upon	Opportunities to further promote the interests of Section 75 groups within and across NIO staff will be identified and acted upon	No formal grievances were raised during the reporting period. The NIO HR team continues to promote best practice in this area and the Speak Up campaign should help encourage people to feel safe to report issues so that we can act swiftly to address them if they arise.
6	In developing HR policies, the Department will give particular consideration to the extent to which these support and promote the interests of Section 75 groups	HR policies will, where appropriate, take account of the needs of Section 75 groups	All NIO internal policies, including HR policies, were equality screened during the reporting period. Some NIO HR policies are aligned to MOJ, all of which are screened & assessed against the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

## PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

### 1 Action measures achieved during 2021/22:

<b>7</b>	<b>Fully Achieved</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Partially Achieved</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Not Achieved</b>
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### 2(a) Public life measures achieved:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs <sup>1</sup>	Outcomes / Impact <sup>2</sup>
National <sup>3</sup>	NIO continues to engage with the Commissioner for Public Appointments and Cabinet Office's reporting mechanisms to monitor the diversity of public appointments and recruitment processes.	<p>Contributing to the Government wide public appointments process helps ensure transparent reporting data on the number of public appointments held by persons with a disability.</p> <p><i>During 2021/22 eleven public appointment roles were advertised on the Cabinet Office website. A total of 24 applications (20% of all applications received in 2021/22) were from candidates identifying as disabled and 12 (10% of all applications received in 2021/22) were from candidates identifying as BAME.</i></p>	<p>Advertising campaigns via the Cabinet Office website/NIDirect and sharing with relevant public authorities ensures a diverse audience is captured. By accepting applications in accessible formats and operating the Disability Confident Scheme, the Department continues to encourage people with disabilities to apply for these roles.</p> <p><i>The OCPA 2021-22 compliance report noted the extensive outreach taken by NIO to advertise roles and the careful handling of unique NI community sensitivities when considering diversity.</i></p>

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

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

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

Local <sup>4</sup>	Maintain a focus on our capability to ensure we continue to encourage people with disabilities to participate in public life.	Dedicated Diversity Champion Network of Diversity & Inclusion Advocates supported by a steering group. <i>A new D&amp;I Champion was appointed in 2022.</i>	Increased awareness of issues that people with disabilities may face in participating in public life and a measurable increase in blogs, intranet articles and colleagues volunteering.
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**2(b) Training action measures achieved:**

Ref	Measures	Outputs	Outcomes
1	All staff at management level and above will complete the online “Diversity, Equality & Disability Awareness” training on the Civil Service Learning site.	All staff have a personal responsibility for completing ‘Inclusion in the Civil Service’ training which covers the Equality Act 2010, strategies to include fairness in decision-making, and being aware of stereotyping, bullying and harassment.	Embedding an equality and disability awareness culture within NIO.  This will continue to be monitored and consideration will be given to putting in place mechanisms to monitor the achievement of this action measure. Civil Service Learning is currently unable to provide data on completion rates.

**2(c) Positive attitudes communication measures achieved:**

Ref	Measures	Outputs	Outcomes
2	Regular communications published on the NIO intranet site on matters relating to disability	Disability section of intranet kept up to date, and with regular articles and blogs as evidence of this being a dynamic aspect of our intranet pages	Maintaining visibility on disability issues and promoting engagement across the department

<sup>4</sup> **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.

**2 (d) 'Encourage others' action measures achieved:**

Ref	Measures	Outputs	Outcomes
3	Raising awareness of specific barriers faced by people with disabilities	<p><i>Awareness days supported in 2021/22 included:</i></p> <p>Inclusion, Visibility, Accessibility and Awareness for the deaf community - hearing loss survey (April 2021)</p> <p>Civil Service Disability Network &amp; REACH Disability Mentoring programme (May 2021)</p> <p>Global Accessibility Awareness Day (May 2021)</p> <p>Mental Health Awareness Week (May 2021)</p> <p>Speak Up Week (Sept 2021)</p> <p>Mental Health &amp; Wellbeing Conference (Oct 2021)</p> <p>International Stammering Awareness Day (Oct 2021)</p> <p>World Menopause Day (Oct 2021)</p> <p>Menopause and employment awareness (Dec 2021)</p> <p>New Civil Service Diversity &amp; Inclusion Strategy (Feb 2022)</p> <p>Sign Language Week (Mar 2022)</p>	Increased awareness of a range of disabilities

**2 (e) Additional action measures achieved:**

Ref	Measures	Outputs	Outcomes
4	Disability section included in staff induction checklist	Accurate information about staff requiring support or workplace adjustments	To ensure that new and existing employees feel empowered to declare any disability and/or request any appropriate reasonable adjustments.
5	NIO Participation in NICS-led Equality Practitioners Group	To identify and disseminate best practice and ensure we are engaged in ongoing conversations on disability issues	Evidence of good practice being integrated into the department's policy development practice.

**3. Action measures partly achieved:**

Ref	Measures	Outputs	Outcomes	Reasons not fully achieved
6	Encourage staff to declare that they have a disability	<p>Increase in completion of disability monitoring information; diversity data published monthly and reported quarterly to Management Board</p> <p><i>Declaration rates have improved slightly during the reporting period.</i></p>	More accurate data on % of staff with a disability	<p>Diversity declaration data shows that c. 34% of staff have not declared.</p> <p>Increasing declaration rates will be a priority for the next reporting period.</p>

7	Promoting employment support programmes	<p>Increase in staff with a disability remaining in employment</p> <p><i>Disability representation remains relatively stable in line with the Civil Service average.</i></p>	People with a disability are supported to access and remain in employment	During the reporting period the department appointed a new D&I lead and continued to support its network of Diversity & Inclusion champions. This will be a continued focus going forwards.
8	Annual progress report to the NIO Board on disability and equality	Annual report included in Management Board agenda and subsequent minutes	Increase visibility and senior leadership awareness of actions being taken on our equality duties	<i>The Board receives regular management information on disability and equality data on a quarterly basis. However, recent senior management changes and reassignment of diversity responsibilities have delayed completion of the progress report which will be prioritised for later in the year.</i>

**4. Action measures not achieved:**

Ref	Measures	Reasons
9	Access to Cancer Focus screening mobile facility	<i>Covid restrictions prevented this measure being undertaken</i>



## **5. Monitoring effectiveness**

The following measures are used to measure the effectiveness of action measures:

### **(a) Qualitative**

The NIO 2021 People Survey showed an “Inclusion and Fair Treatment” score of 82% which was in line with the Civil Service benchmark. This is an annual survey that we supplement with a mid-year health check, giving us regular data on how staff feel we are performing in this important area.

### **(b) Quantitative**

The Department encourages staff to declare diversity data to help understand the make-up of the office and provide a benchmark for monitoring diversity impacts. As of end March 2022, the following percentage of staff had done so:

Disability – 70%

Ethnicity – 68%

Gender – 100%

Sexual Orientation – 66%

## **6. Monitoring progress**

As a result of monitoring progress against our Disability Action Plan it is intended to undertake a review and refresh of the plan during the next reporting period to ensure that actions remain appropriate and provide a sound framework for promoting effective action going forward.