

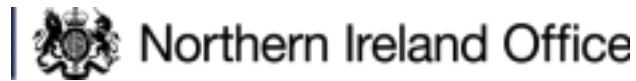


Northern  
Ireland  
Office

# Northern Ireland Office

## Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report for 2022-2023

Governance Team  
August 2023



Passionate about Northern Ireland: flexible, empowering, inclusive

This report presents progress made by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) during 2022/23 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, appearing to read "D Wilson", enclosed within a rectangular border.

Dominic Wilson, Acting Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Office

## CONTENTS

### PART A – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 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 2022/23	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 commitments during 2022/23; 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 2022/23 we undertook the following screening exercises:

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

- Identity & Language (Northern Ireland) Bill
- Funding for Integrated Education
- Provisions to exercise NI Public Appointment functions
- Provisions on MLA Pay
- Provisions on the exercise of NI Departmental functions
- Provisions to set regional rates
- Executive Formation Period
- Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement UK Government approach to 25th Anniversary
- Determination on MLA Pay

**Equality Screening exercises for consultations on:**

- **Non-Jury Trial Provisions under the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007**

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 2022/23 included:

- **Introduction of a new staff-led Diversity and Inclusion Network with volunteers from teams across the department.**
- **Continuing to promote the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion networks that support staff to develop, progress and thrive within the Civil Service.**
- **Hosting a successful and interactive campaign within the department to raise awareness of Invisible Disabilities such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Autism, ADHD and Stammering.**
- **Promoting annual diversity events such as Sign Language Week, Mental Health Awareness Week, Black History Month, International Stammering Awareness Day, National Inclusion Week, LGBTQ+ & PRIDE events, and World Menopause Day.**
- **Maintaining a zero tolerance approach to bullying, harassment and discrimination and fostering an inclusive culture where all employees feel valued.**
- **Supporting an internal 'Mirror Board' and 'Staff Engagement Group' to ensure colleagues at all levels across the department can contribute perspectives on issues raised at monthly Executive and quarterly Departmental Board meetings**
- **Introduction of a People Survey Working Group to address themes on Leadership, Wellbeing and Opportunities and regular discussion regarding staff welfare and resourcing issues at senior leadership forums.**
- **Regular internal communications and intranet blogs written by staff to promote 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.**

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

7. 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.
8. 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 and the associated legislation ([The Northern Ireland Troubles \(Legacy and Reconciliation\) Bill](#)), to enact the Legacy and Reconciliation Body is currently progressing through Parliament.
9. In line with the commitments of the New Decade, New Agreement (NDNA), the NIO has also taken 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 [legislation](#) was enacted in December 2022.
10. The UK Government, and NIO's, commitment to the ensuring consensus across communities was demonstrated in the agreement reached by the UK Government and EU and contained in the [Windsor Framework](#) that was published in February 2023. This agreement amends the text and provisions of the original Northern Ireland Protocol to uphold Northern Ireland's integral place in the United Kingdom, address the democratic deficit and set out a new way forward that restores the balance of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and provides the basis for a sustainable and prosperous future for the people of Northern Ireland.
11. Finally, In March 2023 we celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the [Belfast \(Good Friday\) Agreement](#) which sought to bring communities together to reflect upon the peace, prosperity and other benefits brought to Northern Ireland from the Agreement and to

look forward to the next 25 years. A programme of activity was developed to mark the 25th Anniversary as part of which we announced the development of a new educational package telling the story of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and Northern Ireland's transformation.

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

12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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](#).
15. During the reporting period, NIO received one complaint in relation to its published Equality Scheme in respect of proposals for addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past and the equality impact assessment that was published in May 2022. The complaint was dealt with in line with procedures set out in the NIO's Equality Scheme but was subsequently escalated to the Equality Commission for consideration under Paragraph 10 of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
16. However, the Commission had already commenced an investigation under Paragraph 11 on the same issue. The Commission's investigation report was published in March 2023 and the NIO accepted all the recommendations and took immediate action to address them by issuing updated guidance to staff and ensuring that equality impact assessments are made available to decision-makers.

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

17. Updates on the actions and outcomes of the NIO's Equality measures for 2022/23 are set out in **Annex A**. Most of these actions are ongoing with continuation of existing and new activities being carried out each year.
18. Some key updates and assurances for 2022/23 are summarised below:

- Resources on "Section 75 Duties" were issued across the department to enhance awareness of our equality duties, including access to the new ECNI Section 75 Training video. A Guide for Staff on S75 Duties was also made accessible on our intranet page.
- 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

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

- Ensuring that staff undertake Mandatory Civil Service e-learning on Inclusion in the Civil Service as part of their Induction to the department and as part of refresher training.
- Encouraging active participation and membership of the Diversity and Inclusion Network.
- Using internal communications to encourage staff to take a minimum of five days each year to focus on learning and development and to apply for up to five days special leave to undertake volunteering opportunities.
- Using the staff intranet to promote diversity & inclusion events throughout the year with a focus on a number of priority campaigns during the year.
- Issuing communications to staff on our equality duties and providing access to additional resources and training provided by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.
- Promulgating guidance for staff on equality duties.



### Section 3: Looking Forward

20. 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:
  - any further measures the UK Government may be required to take forward in the ongoing absence of an Executive;
  - publishing the NIO Diversity & Inclusion strategy and developing a Diversity & Inclusion project plan; and
  - managing the impact of, and supporting staff through, a challenging delivery period to ensure the NIO continues to operate efficiently, effectively within a reducing resource profile.
21. 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.
22. 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 2022/23**

Action	Outcomes	Update
1	Communicating and assisting the understanding of Section 75 duties to Central Government Departments	<p>Wider and more effective engagement with Section 75 duties by Central Government Departments</p> <p>A staff “Guide to Section 75” has been published to enhance awareness of our equality duties and additional resources on Section 75 have been shared via email and on our intranet.</p> <p>A ‘Lunch and Learn’ event is being planned for late 2023 to educate staff about Section 75 duties.</p> <p>Staff are engaging with ECNI regarding opportunities to up-skill their knowledge on S75 and undertake training which can be shared with the wider department.</p>
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	<p>Opportunities to promote the interests of Section 75 groups and good relations will be identified and acted upon.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Further information on the programme of visits and engagements undertaken can be found on the NIO <a href="#">website</a>.</p>
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	<p>Ensures that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The SoS is fully compliant with all Section 75 obligations in the operation of powers under the Justice and Security Act 2007.</li> </ul> <p>All relevant NIO policy decisions and changes have undergone an appropriate screening process.</p> <p>The NIO also continues to sponsor the</p>

	State's powers under the Justice and Security Act 2007 in relation to the implementation of security measures, including conducting annual reviews	· All NIO decisions are proportionate and due consideration is given to any potential impacts on Section 75 groups	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	<p>The 2022 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 80%. Survey results also showed that 89% of NIO staff reported that they are treated with respect by the people they work with and 73% 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 encourages staff to use the Speak Up campaign to 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	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 &

	these support and promote the interests of Section 75 groups		assessed against the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
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## PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

### 1 Action measures achieved during 2022/23:

7

Fully Achieved

3

Partially Achieved

1

Not Achieved

### 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 2022/23 eleven public appointment roles were advertised on the Cabinet Office website. A total of 26 applications (20% of all applications received in 2022/23) were from candidates identifying as disabled and 13 (10% of all applications received in 2022/23) were from ethnic minority candidates.</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>Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) compliance reports have noted the extensive outreach taken by NIO to advertise roles and the careful</p>

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

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

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

			handling of unique NI community sensitivities when considering diversity.
Local <sup>4</sup>	Maintain a focus on our capability to ensure we continue to encourage people with disabilities to participate in public life.	<p>Dedicated Diversity Champion within the department.</p> <p>A reformed Diversity and Inclusion Network led by staff volunteers to raise awareness.</p> <p>Promoting encouragement and sharing of experiences through the Invisible Disability campaign.</p>	Increased awareness of issues that people with disabilities may face in participating in public life and a measurable increase in blogs, intranet articles and interactive sessions and colleagues volunteering to run campaigns as part of the Diversity and Inclusion Network.

**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.	<p>Embedding an equality and disability awareness culture within NIO.</p> <p>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.</p>

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

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

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
2	Regular communications published on the NIO intranet site on matters relating to disability.	The Disability section of the intranet kept up to date with regular articles and blogs as evidence of this being a dynamic aspect of our intranet pages alongside the interactive sessions provided on the Invisible Disability Awareness Campaign.	Maintaining visibility on disability issues and promoting engagement across the department.

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

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
3	Raising awareness of specific barriers faced by people with disabilities.	Awareness of barriers faced by people with disabilities was supported in 2022/23 through:  Mental Health Awareness Week (May 2022) National Inclusion Week (October 2022) World Menopause Day (October 2022) Invisible Disabilities Campaign (November to December 2022): - Stammering Awareness Blog (November 2022)	Increased awareness of a range of disabilities.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disability Action NI (December 2022)</li> <li>- Autism Awareness in Policing (December 2022)</li> <li>- Presentation on Dyslexia and Dyspraxia (December 2022)</li> <li>- Blog on NOW Group and 'Just a Minute' Cards (December 2022)</li> <li>- Blog on Workplace Adjustments (December 2022)</li> </ul> <p>Neurodiversity Celebration Week (March 2023)</p> <p>Sign Language Week (Mar 2023).</p>	
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**2 (e) Additional action measures achieved:**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
4	Disability section included within the 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 across government.	Evidence of good practice being integrated into the department's policy development practice.



**3. Action measures partly achieved:**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Reasons not fully achieved</b>
6	Encourage staff to declare that they have a disability.	Increase in completion of disability monitoring information; diversity data published monthly and reported quarterly to Management Board.	More accurate data on % of staff with a disability and an increase in declaration rates.	Declaration rates have improved slightly during the reporting period with 75% of staff now declaring compared to 68% last year.
7	Promoting employment support programmes.	Increase in staff with a disability remaining in employment.	People with a disability are supported to access and remain in employment.	During the reporting period the department continued to support its network of Diversity & Inclusion champions. Promoting development opportunities will be a continued focus going forwards.
8	Annual progress report to the NIO Board on disability and equality.	Annual report included in the Management Board agenda and subsequent minutes.	Increased visibility and senior leadership awareness of actions being taken on our equality duties.	The Board receives regular management information on disability and equality data on a quarterly basis.

**4. Action measures not achieved:**

Ref	Measures	Reasons
9	Access to Cancer Focus screening mobile facility	Initially Covid guidance prevented this measure being undertaken and then a suitable date could not be arranged.

**5. Monitoring effectiveness**

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

(a) Qualitative

The NIO 2022 People Survey showed an “Inclusion and Fair Treatment” score of 80% 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 2023, the following percentage of staff had done so:

Disability – 75% (2022: 68%)

Ethnicity – 74% (2022: 70%)

Gender – 100% (2022: 100%)

Sexual Orientation – 72% (2022: 69%)

## **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.