



Northern
Ireland
Office

Northern Ireland Office

Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report for 2024-2025

August 2025



Passionate about Northern Ireland: flexible, empowering, inclusive

This report presents progress made by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) during 2024/25 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.

For further information about the content of this report please contact:

Name: Kirsten Gibson


Telephone: **07973773903**

Email: **governance@nio.gov.uk**

Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/search/transparency-and-freedom-of-information-releases?parent=northern-ireland-office&keywords=equality+scheme&organisations%5B%5D=northern-ireland-office&order=relevance>

Signature:



Julie Harrison, Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Office

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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 '***Strengthening Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom by making it a better place to live, to work and to invest.***'
2. **Supporting greater reconciliation and integration 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 2024/25; 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.

Key Policy / Service Delivery Developments

5. In 2024/25 we undertook the following screening exercises:

Equality Screening Exercises for Policy Proposals on:

- Windsor Framework (Implementation) Regulations 2024

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 2024/25 included:

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- The NIO Diversity, Wellbeing and Inclusion Group has continued their valuable work throughout the year to implement the NIO's Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan which outlines the departmental vision.
- Consistently continuing to promote and celebrate key diversity events throughout the year, including Black History Month, LGBTQ+ & PRIDE events, Carers Rights Day, Stress Awareness Month, Neurodiversity Celebration Week and Time to Talk day.
- Hosting a number of successful and interactive campaigns on Mental Health Awareness Week, Ramadan, International Women's Day alongside a regular 'Wellbeing Wednesday' segment.
- Actively encouraging and promoting staff participation in the broader Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Networks such as the Civil Service Carers Network and supporting colleagues to develop, progress and thrive across the Civil Service.
- Upholding a zero tolerance approach to bullying, harassment and discrimination and fostering an inclusive culture where all employees feel valued.
- Refreshing the guidance available on Bullying Harassment and Discrimination and inviting volunteers to act as Anti-BHD Advisors to the department.
- Continuing to support a 'Mirror Board' and 'Staff Engagement Group' to ensure colleagues at all levels across the department can contribute perspectives and make the department a better place to work for staff.
- Taking action on the results of the People Survey with the People Survey Working Group working closely with the NIO HR team to address themes raised.
- Publishing internal communications and intranet blogs to promote cultural events to engender staff awareness and appreciation as well as providing wellbeing information on work-life balance options.
- Taking proactive steps to ensure our department is representative of a diversity of backgrounds at all levels of the organisation by encouraging applications from a wider, more diverse pool of applicants for staff and public appointment recruitment competitions alongside increasing line management capability through a line manager training essentials offer.
- Providing additional induction resources in relation to Section 75 and working to develop a 'People Strategy' for 25/26.

Examples of Outcomes and / or Impacts of Equality Action Plans

7. The NIO is committed to fulfilling its obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and in carrying out its functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.
8. In 2024, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland introduced regulations to ensure that Annex A and Articles 5-7 of the Windsor Framework are implemented. The regulations are consistent with the commitments made in the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper to empower the UK Government to direct and control Northern Ireland departments on their implementation and observance of relevant provisions of the Windsor Framework. Additionally, to directly implement aspects of the Framework where needed such as in circumstances where a government department has particular skills or expertise or where it makes the most sense to deliver a programme on a UK-wide basis.. An equality screening was completed prior to the introduction of the new regulations which concluded that an equality impact assessment was not required given the impacts identified to equality of opportunity and good relations were minor and could be effectively mitigated.
9. In December 2024, the NIO launched a 12 week public consultation to invite views on the non-jury trial provisions contained within the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007. The provisions were due to expire on 31 July 2025 and the consultation sought views on whether the use of non-jury trials should be extended until 2027. The consultation closed on 3 March 2025 and the response was published on 6 May 2025. Following analysis of the responses received, the Secretary of State subsequently made the decision to seek Parliamentary approval for an extension of the non-jury trial provisions under the 2007 Act for a further two years.

Application of the Equality Scheme Commitments

10. The NIO recognises that its work is sometimes 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.
11. 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 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.

12. 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 at: <https://www.gov.uk/search/transparency-and-freedom-of-information-releases?parent=northern-ireland-office&keywords=equality+scheme&organisations%5B%5D=northern-ireland-office&order=relevance>
13. During the reporting period, NIO received no complaints in relation to its published Equality Scheme, however, the NIO continued to take steps to to implement the findings from the prior year ECNI report into the publication of the Legacy Bill Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to ensure that staff are properly educated on their responsibilities and have access to a range of training materials produced by ECNI.

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme Commitments and Action Plans

14. Updates on the actions and outcomes of the NIO's Equality measures for 2024/25 are set out in **Annex A**. Most of these actions are ongoing with continuation of existing and new activities being carried out each year.
15. Some key updates and assurances for 2024/25 are summarised below:

- Internal Resources including a Guide for Staff on S75 duties continued to be available on the departmental intranet to all staff on Section 75 to enhance awareness of our equality duties. The Section 75 screening template was updated and training resources were made available to staff as part of their mandatory induction training.
- The D&I Statement has been rewritten and is in line with cross government best practices from the Government People Group / Cabinet Office.
- Section 75 Statutory Duties continue to be integrated into job descriptions. A dedicated 'Diversity & Inclusion' commitment section prominently features in all NIO job adverts and all staff have a D&I Objective in their personal development plans.
- Departmental Equality Commitments are outlined in the NIO Outcome Delivery Plan which sets out the department's strategy for Northern Ireland and details its delivery plan for the year.

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

- The department ensures that all staff complete Mandatory Civil Service e-learning on Inclusion in the Civil Service as part of their Induction to the department and as part of annual refresher training.
- Encouraging active participation and membership of the Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Network and promoting interaction from all staff across the department.
- Staff are encourage 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.
- Diversity & inclusion events throughout the year are promoted using the staff intranet. Collaboration and attendance at events led by other government departments such as HMRC is also utilised.
- Issuing regular communications and reminders to staff on our equality duties and providing access to additional resources and training provided by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.
- Circulating guidance for staff on equality duties.

Section 3: Looking Forward

17. The NIO Equality Scheme will be reviewed in Summer 2025. During the next reporting period the NIO's focus is anticipated to be on:

- embedding our new NIO Outcome Delivery Plan / Business Plan alongside the new People Strategy which sets out a key pillar of aiming to make the NIO a truly empowering, inclusive and engaging place to work alongside continuing to implement the Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing (DIW) Plan which sets out our departmental vision to make the NIO a place where everyone feels able to bring their whole selves to work and one that represents the customers and communities we serve; and
- managing the impact of, and supporting staff following a challenging Spending Review settlement to ensure that the department is able to deliver its priorities efficiently and effectively within a reducing resource profile.

18. 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.
19. 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.

Annex A**Progress Update on the Specific Actions and Outcomes of the NIO's Equality Measures for 2024/25**

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	<p>The guidance on our departmental intranet was refreshed in 2024 and is available to all staff alongside the "Guide to Section 75" which aims to provide staff with resources to enhance their awareness of our equality duties. Additional training resources and reminders have been circulated to staff via email, blog posts on the intranet and forms part of the NIO Induction Pack.</p> <p>Staff members continue to engage with ECNI and colleagues continue to attend and participate at NICS Equality Practitioner Group meetings to enhance their knowledge and up-skill to ensure that knowledge 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	Opportunities to promote the interests of Section 75 groups and good relations will be identified and acted upon.	<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 website and monthly updates are circulated to staff on Ministerial Engagements.</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 State's powers under the Justice and Security Act 2007 in relation to the implementation of security measures, including conducting annual reviews	Ensures that all NIO decisions are proportionate and due consideration is given to any potential impacts on Section 75 groups in the operation of powers under the Justice and Security Act 2007.	<p>All relevant NIO policy decisions and changes have undergone an appropriate screening process.</p> <p>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.</p>
4	In line with our objective to provide appropriate protection for those at risk, we will assess all initial applications to the Home Protection Scheme in a just and equal manner within the terms of the Scheme, and monitor the Scheme to ensure compliance with Section 75.	Assurance that protective security measures are applied fairly across Section 75 groups.	We continue to have robust processes in place to ensure all applicants to the scheme are treated fairly and in line with the specified criteria.
5	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 2024 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 84%. Survey results also showed that 87% of NIO staff reported that they are treated with respect by the people they work with and 84% responded that they think that the NIO respects individual differences.</p> <p>A number of recommendations from the People Survey continue to be taken forward by HR.</p>
6	Monitoring staff grievance procedures to ensure that any action, which might be taken to improve	Opportunities to further promote the interests of Section 75 groups	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

	Section 75 outcomes for staff, is acted upon	within and across NIO staff will be identified and acted upon	feel safe to report issues so that we can act swiftly to address them if they arise.
7	We will ensure that all NIO staff undertake regular refresher training on equality and diversity issues.	Increased awareness of equality and diversity amongst all staff.	All staff have a personal responsibility for completing 'Civil Service Expectations' training which covers the legislation around diversity and inclusion; the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy; why diversity and inclusion matters and what it means to you as a Civil Servant.
8	Continue to promote good relations and support integration of people from a wide range of cultural and community backgrounds through engagement with civic society	Promotion of good relations	The NIO regularly engages civic society and community groups from across Northern Ireland at official and ministerial level to better understand community priorities, through visits, meetings, roundtables and hosting events. Work is ongoing to develop an External Affairs Strategy which is due to be launched in 2025 and work has been progressing to develop a Reconciliation Strategy.
9	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	NIO internal policies, including HR policies, were equality screened during the reporting period. NIO HR policies are aligned with MOJ HR policies, all of which are screened & assessed against the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the NIO takes additional steps to ensure internal policies are screened when they are applied to staff based in Northern Ireland.

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans**1 Action measures achieved during 2024/25:****7****Fully Achieved****0****Partially Achieved****0****Not Achieved****2(a) Public life measures achieved:**

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ¹	Outcomes / Impact ²
National ³	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>During 2024/25, three individual public appointment campaigns were advertised on the Cabinet Office website. A total of 7 applications (12.06% of all applications received in 2024/25) were from candidates identifying as disabled and 9 (15.5% of all</p>	<p>Advertising campaigns via the Cabinet Office website/NIDirect/local press 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>The Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) noted the extensive outreach undertaken by NIO to advertise roles and the careful handling of</p>

¹ **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.

² **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.

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

		applications received in 2024/25) were from ethnic minority candidates.	unique NI community sensitivities when considering diversity.
Local ⁴	Maintain a focus on our capability to ensure we continue to encourage people with disabilities to participate in public life.	<p>A dedicated Diversity Champion is allocated within the department and is supported by a Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Group led by staff volunteers from across all teams.</p> <p>The DIW group continues to promote encouragement and sharing of experiences through campaigns, stories and blog posts on the intranet to raise awareness of disabilities.</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, Inclusion and Wellbeing Network.

2(b) Training Action Measures Achieved:

Ref	Measures	Outputs	Outcomes
1	All staff at management level and above will complete the online "Civil Service Expectations" training on the Civil Service Learning site.	All staff have a personal responsibility for completing 'Civil Service Expectations' training which covers the Civil Service code and values; the legislation around diversity and inclusion; the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy; why diversity and inclusion matters and what it means to you as a Civil Servant.	<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>

⁴ **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:

Ref	Measures	Outputs	Outcomes
2	Regular communications published on the NIO intranet site on matters relating to disability.	The Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing group continue to regularly run campaigns and publish regular blogs on the department's intranet to raise awareness on matters relating to disability.	Maintaining visibility on disability issues and promoting engagement across the department.

2 (d) 'Encourage Others' Action Measures Achieved:

Ref	Measures	Outputs	Outcomes
3	Raising awareness of specific barriers faced by people with disabilities.	<p>Awareness of barriers faced by people with disabilities was supported in 2024/25 through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disability Pride Month (July 2024) - National Inclusion Week Campaign (September 2024) - World Mental Health Day (October 2024) - OCD Awareness Week (October 2024) - Neurodiversity Celebration Week (March 2025) 	Increased awareness of a range of disabilities.

2 (e) Additional Action Measures Achieved:

R ef	Measures	Outputs	Outcomes
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.
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.
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.
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.

5. Monitoring Effectiveness

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

(a) Qualitative

The 2024 People Survey showed an “Inclusion and Fair Treatment” score of 84% which was in line with the Civil Service benchmark and showed a positive increase consistent with previous years. 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 2025, the following percentage of staff had done so:

Disability – 71.8% (2024: 72%)

Ethnicity – 70.6% (2024: 70%)

Gender – 100% (2024: 100%)

Sexual Orientation – 68% (2024: 75%)

6. Monitoring Progress

It is intended to undertake a review of the NIO Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan in Summer 2025 to ensure that they provide a sound framework for promoting effective action going forward.