



Northern
Ireland
Office

Section 75

Equality Screening Form

May 2026
Updated September 2026

Screening assessment conducted on the Local Growth Fund Strategic Investment Plan.

This screening exercise was initially conducted on the proposed strategic framework for the Local Growth Fund and published on 8th May. Following a public consultation on the Local Growth Fund in Northern Ireland 2026-2029, the screening exercise has now been updated.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE POLICY

Name of the policy	Local Growth Fund
Is this an existing, revised or new policy?	New policy
What is it trying to achieve (intended aims/outcomes)?	The Local Growth Fund has two core themes Enhancing productivity - through business support and promoting innovation, infrastructure investment and skills enhancement. Promoting active participation in the workforce - through investment in economic inactivity provision, social enterprise support and social inclusion, including working with employers. As part of this theme, the Fund will also include support interventions for young people who are NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) The Fund is aimed at delivering key outcomes which include: business scaling up, business with enhanced productivity, creation of new jobs, new and improved infrastructure, improved skills and education levels, return to labour market for those who are unemployed or inactive, and increasing the distance travelled (for those who are inactive or unemployed) towards the labour market.
Are there any s75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy? If so, explain how.	All Section 75 categories could potentially benefit from the Local Growth Fund through the economic and social interventions supported through the Local Growth Fund.
Who initiated or wrote the policy?	The policy involves a co-design process between the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Civil Service / Northern Ireland Executive.

Who owns and who implements the policy?	The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government owns the policy and is the accountable department. The Local Growth Fund is co-designed by the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Executive within the framework set by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. The Northern Ireland Executive will be responsible for implementation of the interventions included within the Local Growth Fund and ensuring that implementation decisions are screened when necessary.
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IMPLEMENTATION FACTORS

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?	Yes
If yes, are they: - financial - legislative - other (please specify)	Macro economic and political conditions could provide a supportive or restrictive environment in which to implement the Local Growth Fund

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS AFFECTED

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? - staff - service users - other public sector organisations - voluntary/community/trade unions - other (please specify)	The Local Growth Fund is centred on supporting the following beneficiaries: • Businesses and employees • Individuals who are not in the labour market and those in the labour market who are in need of reskilling • Public service users The Local Growth Fund will be implemented (delivered by or co-designed with) a range of stakeholder organisations including: • Northern Ireland Civil Service • Other public sector organisations • Voluntary/community sector • Private Sector
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OTHER POLICIES WITH A BEARING ON THIS POLICY

What are they?	Other economic and labour market policies developed by the UK Government or the Northern Ireland Executive which are focused on delivering similar outcomes in Northern Ireland and can potentially impact the beneficiaries listed.
Who owns them?	UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive

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	The 2021 Census in Northern Ireland showed 45.7% of the population identified as Catholic and 43.5% of the population defined themselves as being from a Protestant religious upbringing. Those brought up in other religions represented 1.5% of the population and no-religion, 9.3%. Census 2021 shows that the highest rates of economic activity were for those who declared No religion (65.4%), followed by those with a Catholic community background (60.7%). The rates for those with a Protestant community background (56.1%) and other religions (56.1%) were both slightly lower than the overall Northern Ireland economic activity rate (58.8%)¹. An analysis of the shares of those who were economically active by community background and sex shows that Catholic males (23.8%) and Protestant males (23.2%) held broadly similar shares. There was a greater difference between the female shares of economic activity with Catholic females (22.6%) having a slightly higher share than Protestant females (20.9%). When considering Other religions, the shares by sex were broadly similar, with Other male (0.8%) and Other female (0.6%)². Census 2021 also provides details on the variances, according to religion or religion brought up in, within different categories of economic inactivity and activity, including those who are unemployed. <table><tr><th></th><th>Catholic</th><th>None</th><th>Other religions</th><th>Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)</th></tr><tr><td>Economically active (excluding full-time students): In employment: Employee</td><td>46.0</td><td>8.2</td><td>1.3</td><td>44.5</td></tr><tr><td>Economically active (excluding full-time students): In employment: Self-employed with employees</td><td>46.4</td><td>5.2</td><td>1.8</td><td>46.6</td></tr><tr><td>Economically active (excluding full-time students): In employment: Self-employed without employees</td><td>45.9</td><td>6.3</td><td>1.4</td><td>46.4</td></tr><tr><td>Economically active (excluding full-time students): Unemployed</td><td>46.8</td><td>13.1</td><td>2.4</td><td>37.7</td></tr><tr><td>Economically active full-time students: In employment: Employee</td><td>52.9</td><td>10.0</td><td>1.7</td><td>35.4</td></tr><tr><td>Economically active full-time students: In employment: Self-employed with employees</td><td>49.5</td><td>12.8</td><td>5.5</td><td>32.1</td></tr><tr><td>Economically active full-time students: In employment: Self-employed without employees</td><td>39.5</td><td>16.0</td><td>4.0</td><td>40.6</td></tr><tr><td>Economically active full-time students: Unemployed</td><td>49.6</td><td>13.5</td><td>4.5</td><td>32.3</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Long-term sick or disabled</td><td>50.6</td><td>6.6</td><td>1.2</td><td>41.6</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Looking after home or family</td><td>48.8</td><td>8.3</td><td>2.9</td><td>39.9</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Other</td><td>49.7</td><td>11.3</td><td>2.5</td><td>36.6</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Retired</td><td>36.5</td><td>2.4</td><td>0.7</td><td>60.4</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Student</td><td>47.2</td><td>15.0</td><td>3.5</td><td>34.4</td></tr></table> More recently, in the monitored workforce (assessed by the Equality Commission), 41.5% were Protestant, 42.3% were Catholic and 16.2% were non-determined (Equality Commission, 34th Fair Employment Monitoring Report, July 2025)³.		Catholic	None	Other religions	Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)	Economically active (excluding full-time students): In employment: Employee	46.0	8.2	1.3	44.5	Economically active (excluding full-time students): In employment: Self-employed with employees	46.4	5.2	1.8	46.6	Economically active (excluding full-time students): In employment: Self-employed without employees	45.9	6.3	1.4	46.4	Economically active (excluding full-time students): Unemployed	46.8	13.1	2.4	37.7	Economically active full-time students: In employment: Employee	52.9	10.0	1.7	35.4	Economically active full-time students: In employment: Self-employed with employees	49.5	12.8	5.5	32.1	Economically active full-time students: In employment: Self-employed without employees	39.5	16.0	4.0	40.6	Economically active full-time students: Unemployed	49.6	13.5	4.5	32.3	Economically inactive: Long-term sick or disabled	50.6	6.6	1.2	41.6	Economically inactive: Looking after home or family	48.8	8.3	2.9	39.9	Economically inactive: Other	49.7	11.3	2.5	36.6	Economically inactive: Retired	36.5	2.4	0.7	60.4	Economically inactive: Student	47.2	15.0	3.5	34.4
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<https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/Census2021-BriefingPaper-EconomicActivityNI.pdf>

2

<https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/Census2021-BriefingPaper-EconomicActivityNI.pdf>

³ <https://www.equalityni.org/femonrep34>

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information																																																						
	Excluding non-determined, the community background composition of the monitored workforce is 50.5% Catholic and 49.5% Protestant.																																																						
Political opinion	Lucid Talk polling (July 2026) indicates that 43% indicated their first preference vote would be for a Unionist party (DUP, UUP, TUV) if an assembly election were held the following day. It also showed 38% of respondents would list a nationalist party (SDLP, Sinn Féin, Aontú) in these circumstances. 17% indicated their first preference would be for 'other' parties (Alliance, PFB, Greens). 2% indicated they would vote for independent or other candidates⁴. However, beyond this information, no data has been identified to indicate what proportion of the various political opinions are included within and across the target beneficiaries under the Local Growth Fund.																																																						
Racial group	From Census 2021, 96.6% of the population in Northern Ireland was recorded to be of a white ethnicity with 3.4% belonging to ethnic minority groups. Census 2021 also provides details on the variances, by ethnic group, within different categories of economic inactivity and activity, including those who are unemployed. <table><tr><th></th><th>Asian</th><th>Black</th><th>Mixed</th><th>Other</th><th>White</th></tr><tr><td>Economically active: Employee (including full-time students)</td><td>1.8</td><td>0.6</td><td>0.5</td><td>0.3</td><td>96.7</td></tr><tr><td>Economically active: Self-employed (including full-time students)</td><td>1.3</td><td>0.3</td><td>0.4</td><td>0.3</td><td>97.7</td></tr><tr><td>Economically active: Unemployed (including full-time students)</td><td>2.8</td><td>1.2</td><td>1.0</td><td>0.6</td><td>94.4</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Long-term sick or disabled</td><td>0.4</td><td>0.2</td><td>0.3</td><td>0.6</td><td>98.5</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Looking after home or family</td><td>2.7</td><td>0.8</td><td>0.6</td><td>0.8</td><td>95.1</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Other</td><td>2.4</td><td>1.3</td><td>0.6</td><td>1.3</td><td>94.5</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Retired</td><td>0.5</td><td>0.1</td><td>0.1</td><td>0.1</td><td>99.3</td></tr><tr><td>Economically inactive: Student</td><td>5.7</td><td>1.1</td><td>1.3</td><td>0.5</td><td>91.4</td></tr></table>		Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	White	Economically active: Employee (including full-time students)	1.8	0.6	0.5	0.3	96.7	Economically active: Self-employed (including full-time students)	1.3	0.3	0.4	0.3	97.7	Economically active: Unemployed (including full-time students)	2.8	1.2	1.0	0.6	94.4	Economically inactive: Long-term sick or disabled	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.6	98.5	Economically inactive: Looking after home or family	2.7	0.8	0.6	0.8	95.1	Economically inactive: Other	2.4	1.3	0.6	1.3	94.5	Economically inactive: Retired	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.1	99.3	Economically inactive: Student	5.7	1.1	1.3	0.5	91.4
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Age	The 2021 Census in Northern Ireland reported that 19% of the population were 0-14, 31% were 15-39, 32% were 40-64 and 17% were over 65. In terms of economic activity, the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey, Apr-Jun 2026 (published Aug 2026) records that economic activity for the whole population (16-64 age group) is 73.6% but this rate varies by age⁵.																																																						

⁴ <https://www.lucidtalk.co.uk/news/lucidtalk-belfast-telegraph-ni-tracker-poll-summer-2026/>

⁵ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/labour-market-report-august-2026>

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information										
	<table> <tr> <th>Age group</th><th>% economic activity rate</th></tr> <tr> <td>16-24</td><td>54.1</td></tr> <tr> <td>25-34</td><td>85.1</td></tr> <tr> <td>35-49</td><td>83.2</td></tr> <tr> <td>50-64</td><td>67.2</td></tr> </table>	Age group	% economic activity rate	16-24	54.1	25-34	85.1	35-49	83.2	50-64	67.2
Age group	% economic activity rate										
16-24	54.1										
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35-49	83.2										
50-64	67.2										
Marital status	The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's Statement on Equality in Northern Ireland regarding employment (published in 2024), found that, in 2021, the overall employment rate (aged 16 – 64) was 70% but that variations existed by marital status⁶: • Single 60% • Married 82% • Separated 65% • Divorced 56% • Widowed 52%										
Sexual orientation	The 2021 Census shows that 90% of the NI population identifies as straight/heterosexual, 2% define themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or other and 8% prefer not to say. From Census 2021, among those who were recorded as economically active, 92.0% are straight or heterosexual, 2.5%, stated identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other sexual orientation and 5.5% preferred not to say. When considering the rate of economic activity for each of the sexual orientation groups, as set out in Census 2021, the highest rate of economic activity is for gay, lesbian, bisexual, other sexual orientation (70.2%), followed by straight or heterosexual (60.1%). The lowest rate of economic activity was for those who didn't state a sexual orientation (41.3%), which was also below the overall economic activity rate (58.8%)⁷. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's Statement on Equality in Northern Ireland regarding employment (published in 2024), found that LGBTQI+ respondents (among all equality groups) were more likely to disagree with the statement "workers are generally treated with dignity and respect" (23%) and "workplaces are welcoming and inclusive" (19%)⁸										

⁶ https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/ECNI_MENI_Employment_2024.pdf

⁷ <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/Census2021-BriefingPaper-EconomicActivityNI.pdf>

⁸ https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/ECNI_MENI_Employment_2024.pdf

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Men and women generally	The 2021 Census in Northern Ireland showed 49% of the population to be male and 51% of the population to be female. In terms of economic activity, the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey, Apr-Jun 2026 (published Aug 2026) records that economic activity for the whole population (16-64 age group) is 73.6% but this rate varies by gender: • Males - 77.1% • Females - 70.2% Among males who are economically inactive, the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (Apr-Jun 2026) shows that the main reasons for inactivity are - long-term sick (39.6%), student (32.6%) and retired (10.9%) Among females, the main reasons for inactivity are - long-term sick (34.4%), family and home care (23.9%) and student (18.6%) Women are more likely to work part-time than men. From the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (Apr-Jun 2026) 24% of those aged 16 and over in employment, work part-time. Among males who are in employment, 13% work part-time but 37% of females in employment work part-time. Differences are also evident in pay. Based on employee Earnings in Northern Ireland (October 2025), the gender pay gap for all employees (full-time and part-time combined) in Northern Ireland was 7.2% in favour of males in 2025⁹.
Disability	In Census 2021, 24.3% of the population had a limiting long-term health problem or disability. Research shows that NI has substantially higher rates of disability and disability benefit receipt than England¹⁰. Northern Ireland also has the largest disability employment rate gap (employment differential between disabled and non-disabled people) compared to the other nations and regions in the UK at 44 percentage points (UK ave 29).¹¹ The Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (Apr-Jun 2026) records that 315,000 people are economically inactive but that a high proportion of this number (36.6%) are inactive due to long-term sickness.

⁹ <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/economy-and-labour-market/Employee-earnings-NI-2025.html>

¹⁰ Economic and Social Research Institute (2023) [Why are Disability Rates for Older Working-Age Adults in Northern Ireland So High?](#), The Economic and Social Review, Vol. 54, No. 1 Spring 2023, pp. 1-28

¹¹ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2023) [Maximising potential: A review of labour market outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland](#)

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Dependants	The Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (Apr-Jun 2026) records that 315,000 people are economically inactive and that 15.8% of this number are inactive due to dependency (family and home care).

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.

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Religious belief	With a focus on two central themes of 'Enhancing productivity' and 'Promoting active participation in the workforce', the Local Growth Fund will provide economic development opportunities across all Section 75 groups. In particular, under the theme 'Promoting active participation in the workforce', the Fund will aim to address issues of economic disadvantage experienced across all Section 75 groups by focusing on reducing barriers to entry into the labour market and enhancing economic opportunity. The community background composition of the monitored workforce is 50.5% Catholic and 49.5% Protestant (when excluding non-determined). As research shows individuals which cross a number of Section 75 categories have a greater tendency towards being economically inactive¹². It will be important to consider how interventions can address the particular needs of those who are furthest from the labour market and how productivity in employment can be enhanced. To address needs and maximise opportunities, the consultation identified the importance of addressing employment barriers (such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan is placed on encouraging employer-led approaches (across a range of business sectors) which are adaptive to a diverse workforce, as well as supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation.

¹² https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/ECNI_MENI_Employment_2024.pdf : UUEPC (2025) [Labour Market Intelligence Portal](#)

Political opinion	While no data has been identified to indicate what proportion of the various political opinions are included within and across the target beneficiaries under the Local Growth Fund, the Fund will aim to address issues of economic disadvantage experienced across all Section 75 groups by focusing on reducing barriers to entry into the labour market and enhancing economic opportunity. To address needs and maximise opportunities, the consultation identified the importance of addressing employment barriers (such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan is placed on encouraging employer-led approaches (across a range of business sectors) which are adaptive to a diverse workforce, as well as supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation.
Racial group	By 'Enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce', the Local Growth Fund will provide economic development opportunities across all Section 75 groups. Census 2021 has identified some variances in economic inactivity across ethnic groups. In addition, as research shows individuals which cross a number of Section 75 categories have a greater tendency towards being economically inactive, it will be important to consider how interventions can address the particular needs of those who are furthest from the labour market and how productivity in employment can be enhanced. To address needs and maximise opportunities, the consultation identified the importance of addressing employment barriers (such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan is placed on encouraging employer-led approaches (across a range of business sectors) which are adaptive to a diverse workforce, as well as supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation.
Age	The Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey records that economic activity varies by age. While the Fund will include support for young people who are NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) it will also consider the challenges faced across all working age groups to ensure the interventions can maximise employment growth in Northern Ireland. In addition, as research shows individuals which cross a number of Section 75 categories have a greater tendency towards being economically inactive, it will be important to consider how interventions can address the particular needs of those who are furthest from the labour market and how productivity in employment can be enhanced. To address needs and maximise opportunities, the consultation identified the importance of addressing employment barriers

	(such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan is placed on encouraging employer-led approaches (across a range of business sectors) which are adaptive to a diverse workforce, as well as supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation. In the consultation, digital skills were specifically identified as a barrier for older workers while for early intervention addressing young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), respondents raised concerns that traditional, standardised, or purely classroom-based employability interventions fail to engage the most vulnerable young people.
Marital status	The Equality Commission has found that variations in levels of employment exist by marital status. As research also shows individuals which cross a number of Section 75 categories have a greater tendency towards being economically inactive, it will be important to consider how interventions can address the particular needs of those who are furthest from the labour market and how productivity in employment can be enhanced. To enhance active participation in the workforce, the consultation identified the importance of addressing employment barriers (such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan was placed on encouraging employer-led approaches (across a range of business sectors) which are adaptive to a diverse workforce, as well as supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation.
Sexual orientation	Economic activity rates are high for those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, other sexual orientation but research has identified higher levels of concern (compared to other Section 75 groups) regarding being treated with dignity and respect in the workplace. Interventions supported under the Local Growth Fund will provide economic development opportunities across all Section 75 groups and will focus on particular needs of those who are furthest from the labour market and how productivity in employment can be enhanced. To address needs and maximise opportunities, the consultation identified the importance of addressing employment barriers (such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan is placed on encouraging employer-led approaches (across a range of business sectors) which are adaptive to a diverse workforce, as well as supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency

	initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation.
Men and women generally	Variations in levels of employment, types of employment and pay exist by marital status. In addition, as research shows individuals which cross a number of Section 75 categories have a greater tendency towards being economically inactive, it will be important to consider how interventions can address the particular needs of those who are furthest from the labour market and how productivity in employment can be enhanced. To address needs and maximise opportunities, the consultation identified the importance of addressing employment barriers (such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan is placed on encouraging employer-led approaches (across a range of business sectors) which are adaptive to a diverse workforce, as well as supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation. In the consultation, childcare and wider caring support for those with dependents was specifically identified as a barrier for females.
Disability	Northern Ireland has the largest disability employment rate gap (employment differential between disabled and non-disabled people) compared to the other nations and regions in the UK. In addition, as research shows individuals which cross a number of Section 75 categories have a greater tendency towards being economically inactive, it will be important to consider how interventions can address the particular needs of those who are furthest from the labour market and how productivity in employment can be enhanced. To address needs and maximise opportunities, the consultation identified the importance of addressing employment barriers (such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan is placed on encouraging employer-led approaches (across a range of business sectors) which are adaptive to a diverse workforce, as well as supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation. The consultation also identified concerns that a narrow focus on higher-level skills (such as RQF Level 3 and above) could exclude individuals who are furthest from the labour market, specifically persons with disabilities, those with long-term health conditions, and individuals with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

	or low educational attainment. Respondents to the consultation noted that traditional, standardised, or purely classroom-based employability interventions fail to engage the most vulnerable people and that neglecting the lower-level foundational pipeline (including numeracy, literacy, and digital essential skills) could widen existing inequalities. Particular needs were required for flexible skills programmes, which offer accessible entry points and support.
Dependants	Those with dependencies (family and home care) form a large proportion of those who are economically inactive. In addition, as research shows individuals which cross a number of Section 75 categories have a greater tendency towards being economically inactive, it will be important to consider how interventions can address the particular needs of those who are furthest from the labour market and how productivity in employment can be enhanced. To address needs and maximise opportunities, the consultation identified the importance of addressing employment barriers (such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan is placed on encouraging employer-led approaches (across a range of business sectors) which are adaptive to a diverse workforce, as well as supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation. In the consultation, childcare was specifically identified as a barrier for lone parents and caring support for those with caring responsibilities.

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	Economic / socio-economic interventions, supported by the Local Growth Fund, will provide economic development opportunities across all Section 75 groups and will likely have a positive impact on equality of opportunity by addressing any disadvantage experienced.	Minor
Political opinion		Minor
Racial group		Minor
Age		Minor
Marital status		Minor
Sexual orientation		Minor
Men and women generally		Minor
Disability		Minor
Dependants		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	Yes - any impact on particular Section 75 groups will likely have a positive impact on equality of opportunity by addressing any disadvantage experienced.	N/A
Political opinion		N/A
Racial group		N/A
Age	In particular, under the theme 'Promoting active participation in the workforce', the Fund will aim to address issues of economic disadvantage experienced across all Section 75 groups by focusing on reducing barriers to entry into the labour market.	N/A
Marital status		N/A
Sexual orientation		N/A
Men and women generally	Additionally, the 'Enhancing productivity' theme will provide support for economic growth which will increase economic and social opportunities across all Section 75 groups.	N/A
Disability		N/A
Dependants		N/A

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	By enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce, the Local Growth Fund will provide economic development opportunities across all Section 75 groups. This will provide positive action towards addressing economic disadvantage and building greater social cohesion within and across all communities in Northern Ireland.	Minor
Political opinion		Minor
Racial group		Minor

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	Yes, by enhancing productivity and promoting active participation in the workforce (including support interventions for young people who are NEETs), the Local Growth Fund will provide economic development opportunities across all Section 75 groups. This will provide positive action towards addressing economic disadvantage and building greater social cohesion within and across communities in Northern Ireland. The consultation identified that proposals to support strategic infrastructure investment could support good relations by providing shared community infrastructure. This included, for example, regenerating heritage sites and creating shared spaces where people of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group can participate together. The consultation also identified that the cross-community delivery of skills and employability programmes could provide an opportunity to enhance good relations. Respondents noted that delivering collaborative training to mixed cohorts builds relationships and networks across community lines, while targeted youth work, using employment pathways to foster pro-social behaviour, mutual understanding, can also build social connections.	N/A
Political opinion		N/A
Racial group		N/A

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.

Under the theme of 'Promoting active participation in the workforce' the Local Growth Fund aims to tackle barriers to employment and to increase the working-age population's participation rate and meet immediate and future labour needs. As such, this theme within the Local Growth Fund will be focusing on supporting those who are distant from the labour market and experiencing particular economic and social disadvantage.

Research shows individuals which cross a number of Section 75 categories have a greater tendency towards being economically inactive. For example, economic inactivity due to long-term sickness is highest among those aged 50–64 but when combined with a lack of qualifications or caring responsibilities, this creates particularly challenging barriers to entering the labour market¹³.

Research also shows that inactivity is highly concentrated in particular geographic areas and that there is a strong correlation between areas with no qualifications and high levels of economic inactivity, most of which have seen little change in levels of inactivity over the past decade suggesting entrenched inactivity and barriers to the labour market.¹⁴ To promote active participation in the workforce, the Local Growth Fund aims to address these challenges by focussing on those who are most distant from the labour market, including early interventions for young people who are NEETs to prevent a long-term cycle of economic inactivity.

Aligning with the research, the consultation also found that respondents cited the importance of identifying and addressing the range of employment barriers (such as a childcare provision, digital exclusion and transport) and ensuring focus in the Investment Plan was placed on supporting staff-intensive (person-centred), multi-agency initiatives which focus on the complex range of barriers to participation.

¹³ https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/ECNI_MENI_Employment_2024.pdf : UUEPC (2025) [Labour Market Intelligence Portal](#)

¹⁴ UUEPC (2024) [Economic inactivity Who, what, where, why?](#)

PART 3 – SCREENING DECISION

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

The Local Growth Fund will be open to beneficiaries across all of the Section 75 groups. By enhancing productivity and promoting active participation in the workforce, the Fund is expected to have positive effects on equality of opportunity by supporting economic growth and tackling barriers to employment, focusing on those of greatest need. The positive benefits arising from the Fund are expected to outlast the length of the supported interventions.

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.

The objectives of the Fund are to provide benefit, based on need, across Section 75 groups and to have only positive effects on equality of opportunity.

As the Investment Plan progresses into the delivery phase, it is intended that further equality screening exercises will be conducted as detailed proposals for programme funding and delivery mechanisms are developed.

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.

In taking account of the particular needs across the Section 75 groups to reduce adverse impacts and maximise the potential for promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, the consultation identified a number of considerations to support implementation of the Investment Plan.

These included providing physical and neuro-diverse accessibility and flexible, modular skills delivery which can focus on those with complex needs (most furthest from the labour market) and provide opportunities for inclusion. In terms of wraparound support, the consultation also highlighted integrated childcare, rural transport solutions, and workplace adjustments which focus on the practical barriers to participation.

Noting from the consultation that under-represented groups including women, carers, disabled individuals, and ethnic minorities face complex, intersecting practical barriers such as language constraints and digital exclusion, delivery mechanisms which are adaptive and inclusive to a diverse workforce also provide an opportunity to reduce adverse impacts and maximise the potential for promoting equality of opportunity and good relations. To support this, robust, ongoing equality impact assessments and monitoring data can track participation and impacts to inform implementation and ensure targeted interventions.

As the Investment Plan progresses into the delivery phase, it is intended that further equality screening exercises will be conducted as detailed proposals for programme funding and delivery mechanisms are developed.

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?

N/A

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.

Please set out any proposed monitoring arrangements for the proposed policy:

Robust, ongoing equality impact assessments and monitoring data can track participation and impacts to inform implementation and ensure targeted interventions, and maximise opportunities for promoting equality of opportunity and good relations.

The Investment Plan will outline a monitoring and evaluation framework approach for the Local Growth Fund. As details of the specific programme interventions are established, this framework will be further developed to ensure a process of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, including assessment of equality impacts.

PART 5 - APPROVAL AND AUTHORISATION

Screened by:	Jonathan Greer
Grade/Branch/Group:	Northern Ireland Office, Strategy Team
Date:	28 August 2026
Approved by Deputy Director:	Steven Squire Law
Date:	09 September 2026

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	Buddhist; Catholic; Hindu; Jewish; Muslims; people of no religious belief; Protestants; Sikh; other faiths. 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>”.
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

