



**Northern Ireland Practice and Education
Council
for Nursing and Midwifery**

**5 Year Review of the effectiveness of our
Equality Scheme**

February 2026

Any request for the document in another format or language will be considered

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1.0. Introduction

NIPEC is part of health and social care in Northern Ireland. Our aim is to improve standards of practice, education and professional development of nurses and midwives to facilitate delivery of safe, effective and person-centred practice.

We work with our colleagues across health and social care and with education providers to:

- promote:
 - high standards of practice among nurses and midwives
 - high standards of education and learning for nurses and midwives
 - professional development of nurses and midwives
- and provide:
 - guidance on the best practice for nurses and midwives
 - advice and information on matters relating to nursing and midwifery.

NIPEC is a small organisation, currently comprising 16 members of staff.

Like all public bodies, NIPEC has committed to reviewing its Equality Scheme under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) every five years. Ultimately, the purpose of the review is to take learning and set direction for the coming years by critically evaluating the way the organisation has implemented Section 75 over the past five years.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires NIPEC, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine categories of persons, namely:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to its obligations above, NIPEC must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

NIPEC's Equality Scheme outlines how we propose to fulfil our statutory duties under Section 75. Within the Scheme, NIPEC gave a commitment to apply the screening methodology below to all new and revised policies and where necessary and appropriate to subject new policies to further equality impact assessment.

2.0. Review Methodology

This review was undertaken in partnership with the other regional HSC organisations, supported by the Business Services Organisation (BSO) Equality Unit. It involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The quantitative data elements informing the review include:

- The desk-top based collection of in-house data was undertaken, such as the collation of figures on staff training and equality screenings as well as corporate reports and Business Plans.
- NIPEC's Annual Progress Reports from 2021-2022 -2025-2026 were key sources of data.

3.0 Review of Equality Scheme

A five-year review of NIPEC's Equality Scheme was undertaken in 2016 and again in 2021. In keeping with the statutory requirements laid down in paragraph 8(3) of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act, NIPEC has completed a formal 5-year review of its Equality Scheme in 2026 and now wishes to inform the Commission and the wider public of the outcome of the review.

The purpose of this review is to allow NIPEC, through a process of self-evaluation, to review its approved Scheme. We will address the following questions as part of the review process:

1. How the scheme's implementation has benefitted individuals within the Section 75 groups;
2. How leaders within the authority are engaged in the scheme's implementation;
3. Challenges and how they have been overcome;
4. Lessons learned;
5. Good practice.

4.0 Questions and Responses

4.1 How the scheme's implementation has benefitted individuals within the Section 75 groups?

NIPEC facilitates and leads programmes of work in partnership with the Department of Health (DoH), Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts and other regional HSC Organisations to deliver regionally agreed professional resources and tools, which are subsequently implemented by these stakeholder partners. The impact on Section 75 groups within the nursing and midwifery workforce in implementing these may not be fully known however, we wish to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded across our organisation and that our employment practices are fair, flexible and enabling so that each employee can reach their full potential. In relation to the workplace, NIPEC has made significant progress in identifying and seeking to address the needs of staff and candidates with a disability.

Some key highlights within the five-year period include:

- NIPEC progressed work from 2023 as a lead organisation in monitoring and reviewing access to education and leadership opportunities for the global majority (ethnically diverse) workforces of nurses, midwives, Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) and related support staff. In October 2023, NIPEC appointed five temporary Professional Officers to support one of NIPEC's business plan objectives and one of the actions contained within our Equality Action Plan 2023-2028. Their remit was to enhance access to post-

registration education and career and leadership opportunities for overseas nursing, midwifery, AHPs and support staff working in HSC Trusts. NIPEC will host an annual Regional Ethnic Diversity Collaborative Workshop 25 March 2026.

- NIPEC undertook a staff survey for the global majority workforce of Nurses, Midwives, AHPs and Support Staff across the 6 HSC Trusts. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain what educational and promotional opportunities were available to this particular cohort of staff and in turn to identify specific barriers which hindered educational, promotional and leadership opportunities. In total 1322 responses were received, which included 236 returns from those who are ethnically white. The results of the Survey were presented to staff across the HSC at a Regional Collaborative Event on the 26 February 2025. A report summarising the results and providing recommendations for action was published April 2025.

The survey results were presented to SHSCT, BHSCT, WHSCT & NHSCT and also shared with HEIs/Independent Sector. The Trusts and HEIs will develop Action Plans to take forward improvements in leadership and career and development opportunities. Compliance against recommendations will continue to be monitored and reviewed.

- Two annual disability awareness days are facilitated by BSO Equality Unit on behalf of the regional organisations and have proved to be effective in increasing awareness, knowledge and skills of staff and line managers in meeting the needs of colleagues with a particular disability.

- Tapestry has given a platform to staff who have a disability to raise and discuss disability issues in a safe environment.

Tapestry attended a NIPEC staff team meeting in 2023 and gave an overview of the background of Tapestry, how it was established, aims, membership, overview of Tapestry's accomplishments and key actions for 2023/24. NIPEC staff felt this session was very informative.

- NIPEC along with BSO ITS completed work from October 2024-March 2025 to develop NIPEC's website and enhance compliance with accessibility legislation. The website went live on 1st April 2025 and the website has been user tested with feedback being received from both the universities (students and other staff) and the BSO Tapestry Disability Group. We accrued this using Teams forms and received responses from 24 individuals who spent on average 20 minutes on the site. Overall the feedback was very positive.
- BSO ITS have continued to update NIPEC Careers' website including any accessibility-related updates on the Word Press themed template which hosts the website. Like the main website update, the changes have included an update of the layout to improve accessibility compliance and some new elements to replace sub menus. These changes will ensure that the site is accessible to as wide an audience as possible, making it easier to navigate.

- NIPEC continued to encourage staff and to raise awareness on updating Employment Equality Data on HRPTS.
- A comprehensive programme of Equality and Diversity Training is provided by BSO Equality Unit, both virtually and via the e-learning module 'Making a Difference.
- NIPEC have invested significant time in staff's health and wellbeing, including the development of an internal Health and Wellbeing Staff group, Chaired by the Chief Executive. Important outcomes have been produced through this work, including bringing the team together through team development initiatives and supporting staffs emotional, mental and financial wellbeing.
- NIPEC have made significant progress in identifying and addressing the needs of staff who have dependents, by making staff aware of support available, including through NIPEC's suite of HR policies. This includes looking at different ways we can support staff with caring responsibilities, e.g. through part-time or compressed hours and remote or home working. NIPEC plan to undertake a Carer's Survey of our staff as per our action in NIPEC's Disability Action Plan in 2026/27.

4.2. How leaders within the authority are engaged in the scheme's implementation?

NIPEC is committed to ensuring good governance procedures are in place and these procedures are regularly reviewed.

NIPEC's Head of Corporate Services is the equality lead and, supported by the Business Manager, acts as the main driver for the equality agenda. Both officers are members of the HSC Equality Forum facilitated by BSO's Equality Unit, who meet on a quarterly basis to share good practice in the implementation of Section 75 and to plan joint work. At a strategic level, the BSO's Equality Unit represents member organisations on a number of regional groups, reporting back to the Forum as and where required. The Equality Lead engages with the Equality Commission at key points.

NIPEC Council are involved in Section 75 implementation in a number of ways:

- Annual Progress Report approval and scrutiny of progress and feedback for the coming year;
- Considering and taking action on equality scheme issues within NIPEC, when appropriate;
- Ensuring Equality Screenings and EQIAs are completed for policies and projects.

Members of NIPEC's Business Team are involved in Section 75 implementation in a number of ways:

- Annual progress reporting: scrutiny of progress and direction setting for the coming year.
- Discussion and where required taking action on Equality Scheme issues brought to the team by the Head of Corporate Services/Business Manager and the BSO's Equality Unit.
- Equality screening of Annual Business Plan and development of screening programme.
- Equality and Disability Action Plans: consideration of progress reported to them on an annual basis and what additional steps are required to achieve these.

Senior managers play an important role by:

- Contributing to annual progress reporting by identifying relevant initiatives in their area of responsibility.
- Undertaking screening of projects and work streams where appropriate in discussion with and assisted by the Business Manager.
- Ensuring training attendance of relevant staff.
- Contributing to Equality and Disability Action Plans, achieving actions outlined within timescales agreed.

The BSO Equality Unit attended NIPEC Council workshop in December 2023 to outline NIPEC's statutory equality and disability obligations, to honour the Equality Scheme commitment to provide briefings to senior staff, to strengthen the capacity of Council

members to provide leadership on the equality and disability duties
- to make a difference.

One of NIPEC Council members is the Disability Champion for NIPEC. She attends the Disability Champions Network when the meetings take place. This is a group of HSC Directors and Board members who seek to influence and change everyday practices relating to disability issues within the regional HSC organisations.

4.3 Challenges and how they have been overcome

During the five-year reporting period, NIPEC has continued the emphasis on enhancing our staff knowledge and capacity around equality, diversity and inclusion, across all parts of the organisation.

The key challenge over the past five years was the integration of equality considerations in all core work of the organisation, which in many ways is the key challenge in implementing Section 75 overall. Important progress has been made, first and foremost by integrating equality into structures and processes, both those already in existence and those created primarily for other purposes, such as Integrating a section (in appendix five on equality screening) in the Project/Initiative Plan template.

As part of NIPEC's Disability Action Plan 2023-2028, NIPEC have made a commitment to appoint from the disability placement scheme. This has been a challenge due to the change in the process for recruiting from the Disability Placement Scheme.

Therefore, there would be considerable work with regards to policy development, training, and appointing a safeguarding lead in order to appoint from the scheme. This would be particularly challenging given NIPEC's size, however we will continue to give this due consideration going forward.

There have been challenges in relation to the data available. For example, the NMC data does not cover all nine Section 75 groups nor provides a full breakdown of registrants in NI (only for the UK as a whole). In addition, completion of the equality and diversity information on the Human Resources system is voluntary and whilst staff are encouraged to complete this, data has become less informative. More robust data would help fully inform the equality screening of relevant policies and decisions.

Over the past five years, NIPEC has put robust arrangements in place to ensure that staff complete equality training:

- Completion of the Making a Difference equality e-learning programme is mandatory for all staff (Part 1 for all staff, Part 2 for line managers) This training was one of the actions within our Equality and Disability Action Plans and has been completed.
- Mandatory training requirements form part of NIPEC's induction programme for all staff. Compliance with all mandatory e-learning programmes is monitored by line managers and updates provided to NIPEC's Business Team at each meeting. Reminders are sent to those staff who have any mandatory training courses outstanding.

These have proven effective, given that as at 15th October 2025, 100% of NIPEC staff had completed the making a difference course.

Moreover, 23 members of staff completed equality screening training over the past five years.

4.4 Lessons learned

NIPEC is always reviewing its practices and learning lessons from the way that it endeavours to meet its Equality responsibilities.

The following are some ongoing examples:

- The importance of continued ongoing engagement with key stakeholders including service users and our staff;
- Positive relationship building with the Section 75 groups and consideration of their feedback;
- The quality of the equality data sets that we most need to draw on for our work has significant limitations. We will continue to improve the quality of available equality data sets by: using our influence with others in order to seek expansion of equality monitoring of nurses and midwives registered and working within Northern Ireland. We will also engage with the Nursing and Midwifery Council via its Chief Executive Office, and other officers and their forum.
- In relation to project and work stream planning, NIPEC has put in place governance arrangements that have shown success in progressing the mainstreaming of equality considerations. Likewise,

the development of an annual screening programme as a result of the screening of NIPEC's Business Plan is an asset from a governance perspective.

- We will highlight and demonstrate our commitment to the equality and diversity agenda to new leaders, such as Council members, when they join, including through training.

5.0 Good practice

1. NIPEC Ethnic Diversity Monitoring and Review

During 2024-25 NIPEC continued with its work on monitoring and reviewing the access to education and leadership opportunities for the ethnically diverse workforces of nurses, midwives, AHPs and related support staff across HSC Trusts.

The members of the established Ethnic Diversity Project Board, supported by NIPEC, worked with the NIPEC Professional Officers and Senior Professional Officer Project Lead to design a staff survey to understand the challenges facing Ethnically Diverse staff in accessing education and leadership opportunities. The Professional Officers promoted the survey across the five Trusts and Nursing Homes from 23 October 2024 to 22 January 2025. 1322 responses to the survey were received. Although 236 had indicated they were from a “white background” this proved very useful as a comparison group. The responses to the staff survey and the organisational survey were presented at the second annual Regional Ethnic Diversity Collaborative Workshop in February 2025. The delegates provided suggestions on their preferred way forward as a result of the findings and these were presented to the NIPEC Project Board in March 2025 and a subsequent action plan was agreed. The findings from the staff survey and organisational survey demonstrated that although organisations are undertaking improvements to promote access to education there is still work to do. NIPEC will continue to work with its key stakeholders to implement the learning from this

work. NIPEC also shared this work with a wider audience through presenting at the NICON conference and the NIPEC conference

2. Accessibility of NIPEC's website

BSO ITS completed the review and upgrade of NIPEC's website in March 2025, including accessibility-related updates on the Word Press themed template which hosts the website. The changes included an update of the layout of the main NIPEC website to improve accessibility compliance. These changes will ensure that the site is accessible to as wide an audience as possible, making it easier to navigate. A similar process was completed for NIPEC's Careers' website in 2025-26.

In addition, the Senior Communications Officer linked with the universities to seek feedback from nursing students on the revised site including an existing neurodivergent student group.

The Business Manager secured two members of the BSO Equality Tapestry network to test the site. Feedback forms have been developed for all stakeholders to evaluate and submit comments and the feedback collated and shared with Council members.

3. Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-2028

In September 2023, NIPEC Council approved our new Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-2028. We continued to monitor these through 2023/2024, 2024/25 and 2025/26 and reported on the

progress of our plans annually to the Equality Commission this is part of the annual governance reporting cycle.

4. NIPEC Quality Strategy

NIPEC's Quality Strategy, Lead, Inspire & Improve, sets out our ambitions for quality in a way that is meaningful to our staff and partners to deliver excellence in all that we do and enhance our organisational learning. Throughout 2024-25, we continued to address the actions from our IIP Silver accreditation including the adoption of a QI approach to improving team effectiveness by using team pulse surveys and team building days. One area which we have committed to is the development of a reward and recognition process for staff and this will be considered by the Health and Wellbeing Group in 2025 along with the outcomes from the staff wellbeing survey which was completed in late 2024 and again in 2025-26.

5. Investors in People accreditation

In March 2024, we achieved the Silver level award of Investors In People. We are delighted that we have built on the excellent work which achieved Standard level three years previously. This has provided the team and Council with assurance that NIPEC's organisational culture enables healthy staff engagement, communication and working practices.

6. Disability Awareness Days

Two Disability Awareness Days are facilitated each year by the BSO Equality Unit on NIPEC's behalf.

7. Staff Training

Virtual equality screening training is made available to all staff. Additionally, the Making a Difference (part 1 & 2) is made available through LearnHSCNI for all staff. Compliance reports are presented to NIPEC's Business Team on mandatory training.

8. Disability Champion

A NIPEC Council Member was appointed as NIPEC's Disability Champion in August 2022 and continues to represent NIPEC at regional ALB Equality meetings which are attended by Board members, senior staff and representation from staff groups.

9. Tapestry

Tapestry, jointly with BSO HR, ran a Lunch and Learn session on Reasonable Adjustments on 8th November 2024. This session covered the legislation in relation to Reasonable Adjustments and was well attended by staff and managers alike. A recording of the session was sent to all staff after the session and was made available on the BSO website for those who were unable to attend.

Tapestry are currently working on several engagement projects including looking at their overall experience of the accessibility of SharePoint, NIPEC's new website and the Equip program.

Tapestry also furthered the Carers Agenda, it was added as a standing item on quarterly meeting agendas and, most recently hosted a presentation by Carers NI who discussed issues for working carers and sign-posted members to support resources.

10. Creating Easy Read Versions of our work

We have made a commitment to provide our resources in easy read format when required, and we have demonstrated this commitment through producing easy read versions of our work, such as for the Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-2028 and the Equity of Access and Outcomes Report: outlining the future role of RNLDs in supporting people with learning disabilities to achieve the best health possible.

11. Equality presentation to Council members

In December 2023, Council invited the BSO Equality Unit to attend a workshop in order to summarise NIPEC'S statutory equality and disability obligations for Council members. The session specifically focussed on enhancing the ability of members to provide leadership on the equality and disability duties of the organisation. The session was well attended and covered the following areas:

- NI Public Sector Legislation: Section 75 of NI Act 1998 and Disability Discrimination Order (NI) 2006;
- NIPEC's Equality Scheme;

- Equality Screenings;
- Equality Impact Assessments;
- NIPEC's Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-2028;
- The Equality Commission's Leadership Guidance: Demonstrating Effective Leadership in Section 75.

Please note that the examples given are not exhaustive. For further information please refer to our Annual Progress Reports, submitted to the ECNI each year, for a comprehensive annual review of the work NIPEC has undertaken.

Contact Details:

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