



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

Five Year Review of NIPEC's Equality Scheme

April 2021

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

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1. Introduction

Like all public bodies, NIPEC have 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.

The review is a process of self-assessment. As specified by Equality Commission guidance¹, the review involves looking at what has been achieved, what remains to be done, and lessons learned. It should be based on evidence. The guidance states that the collection and consideration of additional quantitative and qualitative data may be necessary, alongside use of existing information from previous Annual Progress Reports on the implementation of Section 75.

This report presents the key findings from the review. Background information on the organisation and the methodology of the review is included in the opening section. The scope and structure of the concluding section is designed to cover the Equality Commission's requirements in relation to a summary of the main findings.

2. Background

2.1 The Organisation

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.

¹ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2016): Guidance on conducting a 5 year review of an equality scheme.

NIPEC is a small organisation, currently comprising 15 members of staff.

2.2 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 desk-top based collection of in-house data was undertaken, such as the collation of figures on training and equality screenings. NIPEC's Annual Progress Reports 2016-17 to 2019-20, as well as quarterly screenings reports for 2020-21, were key sources of data.

The Head of Corporate Services and the Corporate Services Manager led on the completion of a self-assessment tool, which examined key areas of Section 75 implementation. Members of the Business Team provided input into the completion of this tool.

A focus group was held by the Equality Unit on behalf of NIPEC and its regional partner organisations with members of Tapestry, the staff disability network of the 11 regional HSC organisations.

The findings from a focus group with members of the Equality Forum, which brings together the equality leads in the 11 regional HSC organisations, were also taken into consideration in the review.

Lessons learned and the key priorities and actions for Equality Scheme implementation over the coming years were discussed at a meeting of NIPEC's senior Business Team.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Business Planning, Policy and Decision-Making and Governance

3.1.1 Business Planning

NIPEC's Business Plan references its corporate values that directly impact on what we do and how we do it. One value, namely 'Be Impartial', outlines our commitment to act with integrity, transparency and objectivity, promoting a culture of equality and diversity.

The Plan also refers to NIPEC's commitment to the promotion of good relations between people of differing religious belief, political opinion and, or racial group.

One objective within its Business Plan outlines how NIPEC will meet its Equality and Disability Legislative requirements including the implementation of its Equality and Disability Action Plans 2018-23, reporting of progress in the Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission NI and undertaking a five year Review of its Equality Scheme.

3.1.2 Reporting

Equality is a standing agenda item at NIPEC's senior Business Team, which brings together the Chief Executive with senior professional and corporate services officers, and Professional Team meetings, at which the Chief Executive and senior professional officers come together, and includes updates on screenings undertaken and those still required. NIPEC Council are kept informed of equality issues at their quarterly meetings, including policy development and screening of same.

On the corporate side, records are kept of corporate policies and procedures which have been developed and reviewed, in addition to any screenings required. Updates in relation to these are given at NIPEC's Corporate Services Management Team meetings, and are also referred to / discussed and approved as part of the equality standing item at Business Team meetings.

NIPEC has recently reviewed its process for the development, adoption and approval of corporate policies and procedures. When a draft policy is being presented for approval, it will be accompanied by an explanatory cover note for Council members / senior managers outlining the background of the policy and include details of equality screening undertaken, by whom and a summary of impacts on Section 75 groups and mitigations put in place. This process will ensure that Council members are aware of any equality issues prior to approval of policies.

NIPEC's Annual Progress Report includes a summary of Equality and Human Rights Equality Screening and Mitigation – this report is discussed and approved by NIPEC Council for forwarding to ECNI and is published on NIPEC's main website.

3.1.3 Policy and Decision-Making

NIPEC is committed to equality screen all policies and decisions. However, this remains a challenge for an organisation of 15 employees. In recent years NIPEC has made a concerted effort to increase the number of policies and project plans being screened and published.

NIPEC's Business Plan is equality screened each year and an annual screening programme developed as an appendix. This is shared with relevant senior officers to ensure, where needed, projects and work streams are individually screened.

In addition, where required, policies to support projects and work streams and their outcomes are also developed and screened by senior officers and corporate services staff.

NIPEC's Project Initiation Plan (PID) template includes a section on Equality and Governance Screening, alerting lead officers of the need to undertake appropriate screening and record outcomes within the Plan.

The list of policies screened between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2021 (see Appendix1) shows that:

- in total 33 policies were subjected to screening
- the vast majority of these related to corporate affairs
- six policies related to specific NIPEC functions; all of these screenings have been carried out in the last two years.

From early 2020, and as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Health and Social Care services were significantly reconfigured to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. NIPEC has supported the Department of Health and reviewed its priorities in order to support the HSC from the outset of the pandemic. In response to the pandemic, a number of standard operational procedures were developed and equality screened where appropriate.

3.1.4 Lessons Learned

- In relation to project and work stream planning, NIPEC has put in place governance arrangements that have shown some success in progressing the mainstreaming of equality considerations. Likewise, the development of an annual screening programme as a result of the yearly screening of NIPEC's Business Plan is an asset from a governance perspective. This needs to be built on.

3.1.5 Looking Ahead

- We will continue with the development of an annual screening programme based on Business Plan objectives, planned projects and work streams. We will introduce the requirement to report to the Business Team on a bi-annual basis on progress on undertaking identified screenings.
- To ensure that decision-makers are fully informed of equality issues prior to taking decisions, when a draft policy is being presented for approval, it will be accompanied by an explanatory cover note for Council members/senior managers outlining the background of the policy and include details of equality screening undertaken, by whom and a summary of impacts on Section 75 groups and mitigations put in place

3.2 Monitoring, Access to Information and Services

As per NIPEC's statutory role and functions, it leads and facilitates various projects and work streams on behalf of the Department of Health (its sponsor branch) in partnership with key stakeholders including HSC Trusts and other HSC organisations. This work is usually linked to regional and/or national policy changes. The monitoring of access/uptake/participation, experience and outcomes for service users therefore is outside of NIPEC's authority.

In relation to events that we organise, NIPEC's Accessible Formats Policy ensures that information can be provided in alternative formats on request and ensures that venues, information and the way NIPEC conducts its meetings are accessible.

Evaluations following some NIPEC events, such as our annual conference, are reviewed for equality issues, including access.

NIPEC has access to a number of equality data sources, eg. Census, NI HSC Workforce Census, the Human Resources system used across the HSC (for equality and diversity data for staff), and Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Data from these sources are used, as and where applicable, in the screening of NIPEC policies and decisions.

However, there are limitations 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 do so, data has become less

informative. More robust data would help fully inform the equality screening of relevant policies and decisions.

3.2.1 Lessons Learned

- The quality of the equality data sets that we most need to draw on for our work has significant limitations.

3.2.2 Looking Ahead

- We will continue to reassure and encourage staff to complete equality and diversity information to strengthen the data.
- To improve the quality of available equality data sets, we will use our influence with others to seek the expansion of equality monitoring of nurses and midwives registered and working within Northern Ireland. We will engage with the Nursing and Midwifery Council via its Chief Executive Office, and other officers and their forums.
- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear at our events we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and NIPEC Surveys.

3.3 Engagement

Membership of the various project or working groups are usually comprised of representatives from NIPEC's key stakeholders, eg. HSC Trusts, the Public Health Agency, Department of Health, and the voluntary or independent sector.

As a member of the Equality Forum of the 11 regional HSC organisations, NIPEC has access to some Section 75 groups via its consultation database, which has been used to consult with on the development of Human Resources (HR) policies, eg. Gender Identity Employment Policy. NIPEC also has access to other HSC forums, such as Tapestry Disability Staff Forum, to engage and consult with on a range of employment and service issues. To date, the latter have not been approached by the Business Services Organisation (BSO), who provide HR services to NIPEC, as a matter of course in the development of HR policies.

NIPEC has developed an Engagement and Communications Strategy. It identifies a range of methods that are used for internal and external engagement – these include staff induction, annual appraisal, internal meetings, health and social wellbeing committee and events, project/working groups, focus groups, online surveys and via social media, project newsletters, NIPEC websites, and road shows.

NIPEC work streams are co-produced with a range of relevant stakeholders particular to the subject area. NIPEC works with stakeholders, appropriately addressing accessibility issues to support and encourage full partnership in decision making. This on occasion will include the input of service users.

3.3.1 Lessons Learned

- Where we offer opportunities for individuals to be involved in our work we do not currently know which equality groupings the individuals belong to. Without this information and without targeting any particular equality groupings to encourage them to become involved we cannot be sure that we hear a diverse range of voices. However, the majority of those involved in our work are employed by other HSC employers, who gather the data for these individuals and may not be willing or able to share the data without their consent or due to UK GDPR regulations on the sharing of personal data.
- While dedicated staff forums on disability, sexual orientation and gender identity exist within the HSC, these have not been engaged with in the development of Human Resources policies as a matter of course.

3.3.2 Looking Ahead

- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear in our project groups we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and NIPEC Surveys.
- We will seek assurance from the BSO, our provider of Human Resources services, that engagement with the existing staff forums has been undertaken for any policies they develop on our behalf.

3.4 Ensuring NIPEC staff assist the organisation in implementing Section 75

Whilst the new regional HSC template for Job Descriptions and Personnel Specifications no longer makes reference to the Section 75 duties, all existing NIPEC job descriptions include a general statement to 'assist NIPEC in the fulfilment of its statutory duty under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998, to promote equality of opportunity and good relations and also the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination Order 2007.

In addition and in line with the responsibilities of specific posts, some job descriptions have more explicit references to Section 75 responsibilities and duties such as the Chief Executive, Head of Corporate Services and Corporate Services Manager.

Every member of NIPEC staff participates in an annual development and performance process with their line manager, during which their role and performance is discussed and annual objectives agreed and reviewed. This includes discussions of ongoing challenges and solutions for equality screening.

For key members of staff, eg. Head of Corporate Services, Corporate Services Manager, objectives reflect their role in the implementation of the equality agenda.

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

- Completion of the Making a Difference² equality e-learning programme is mandatory for all staff (Part 1 for all staff, Part 2 for line managers).
- This training is one of our actions within our Equality and Disability Action Plans,
- Mandatory training requirements forms 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 on a regular basis.

These have proven effective, given that as at 31st March 2021, 14 staff had completed this programme, which is 87% of all our staff.

² The programme was developed jointly by all HSC organisations. Prior to the introduction of this, it had been mandatory for staff to undertake the Discovering Diversity eLearning, again a bespoke package, developed in-house.

Moreover, eight members of staff completed equality screening training over the past five years and the equality lead in the organisation attended a session on cultural awareness in the context of good relations.

In addition to this, bespoke update sessions and consultancy from the Equality Unit is organised on a case-by-case needs basis.

3.4.1 Lessons Learned

- Reference to the Section 75 duties in all Job Descriptions is essential for making equality everybody's business in the organisation.

3.4.2 Looking Ahead

- We will seek advice from the BSO Human Resources and Equality Services as to whether reference to the Section 75 duties should be reintegrated into the template used for all new Job Descriptions.

3.5 Outcomes

In relation to the workplace, NIPEC has made some progress in identifying and seeking to raise awareness of the needs of staff and key stakeholders within Section 75 groups, through mandatory completion of 'Making a Difference' equality e-learning programme and 'Discovering Diversity' training. In addressing some of these, staff awareness days have proved to be effective in increasing awareness, knowledge and skills of staff and line managers in meeting the needs of colleagues and key stakeholders with a disability. Tapestry (disability staff network) has also given a platform to staff who have a disability to raise and discuss disability issues in a safe environment.

In relation to sexual orientation, establishment of the HSC LGB&T Staff Forum and adoption of the regional Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy has raised awareness of issues affecting this group – further work is required however and this will include providing training for staff and line managers in implementing the Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy.

Some work to look and consider issues affecting staff with dependents and / or caring responsibilities has taken place including issuing of information on support and help available in NI, production of a carers information leaflet and the development of a Carer's Survey which all HSC organisations plan to conduct with their staff in 2021/22.

Issues affecting all staff, and in particular those with dependents and/or caring responsibilities and disabilities, will remain a priority. Some feedback received during Covid-19, through NIPEC's health and wellbeing survey of staff and a home working survey of BSO staff and Tapestry members, highlighted that staff do have caring responsibilities in these areas. Feedback such as this, and from individuals, could help inform what action is required to support staff now and at any time this is needed in the future.

NIPEC has continued to encourage all staff to complete their equality and diversity information on HRPTS as a means of ensuring complete data and understanding of what is required to support staff. Completion of this information is voluntary - some staff have expressed unease at providing such information for fear of being 'identified' in such a small organisation, and some are unsure of the importance or need for this information. However, NIPEC will continue to reassure staff, emphasising their information is completely confidential and is important in ensuring the organisation can support all staff and take appropriate action to improve work policies and practices.

NIPEC facilitates and leads programmes of work in partnership with the DoH, 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.

A review of the equality screening of PIDs and the project methodology and process has identified possible impacts in terms of access to meetings and information and cite mitigations such as:

- use of Accessible Formats Policy and regional interpreting/translation contract (age, disability, ethnicity)
- flexibility in location/time of meetings (gender/dependents)
- use of neutral venues (religion/political opinion)
- use of approved HR recruitment processes (reasonable adjustments).

3.5.1 Lessons Learned

- To date, we have mainly focused on disability in our efforts to produce outcomes for staff. We want to build on this to widen the focus to include other equality groupings.

3.5.2 Looking Ahead

- To improve the quality of available equality data sets, we will use our influence with others in order to seek expansion of equality monitoring of nurses and midwives registered and working within Northern Ireland. We will engage with the Nursing and Midwifery Council via its Chief Executive Office, and other officers and their forums.
- We will work in partnership with other HSC organisations in undertaking a Carer's Survey of our staff.
- We will work in partnership with other HSC organisations in providing training to our staff and line managers in implementing the Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy.
- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear in our project groups we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and NIPEC Surveys.

3.6 Leadership

NIPEC's Head of Corporate Services is the equality lead and, supported by the Corporate Services 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 kept informed of Equality issues at their quarterly meetings, providing comment and feedback, and approving the Annual Progress Report.

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/Corporate Services 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 Corporate Services Manager
- Ensuring training attendance of relevant staff
- Contributing to Equality and Disability Action Plans, achieving actions outlined within timescales agreed.

In the main, NIPEC provides active leadership externally by seeking to use its influence on other organisations: equality screenings are shared with the Department of Health and/or the respective HSC organisation who has asked NIPEC to facilitate the programme of work.

Implementation of the Equality and Disability Action Plans is primarily managed by the Head of Corporate Services (as the equality lead) and led by the Corporate Services Manager, but individual actions require participation and involvement of all staff.

Visibly promoting and celebrating diversity constitutes a further key aspect of active leadership on Section 75 implementation. For example, two disability awareness days are organised each year and all staff are encouraged to participate in these, read information provided, attend information sessions etc. Details of the HSC Tapestry Disability Staff Forum are also shared with staff, who are encouraged and facilitated to attend meetings within their working day. In addition, development and approval of the Gender Identity Employment Policy was discussed by the Business Team and Corporate Services Management Team, with updates given at staff meetings.

A further aspect of actively promoting equality and diversity relates to sharing, acknowledging and rewarding good equality practice. NIPEC's Quality Improvement Team oversee the implementation of the organisation's Quality Improvement Strategy and its Investors in People Action Plan, both of which

include actions to develop schemes that recognise and reward staff. Whilst equality may be a factor in the work recognised, to date it has not specifically featured.

3.6.1 Lessons Learned

- Active Section 75 implementation over the last five years has been led and supported by the Head of Corporate Services across the organisation and agreed through the Business Team which is made up of Corporate and Professional officers. The Corporate Team is a good fit from a reporting and governance perspective and it is essential there continues to be active ownership of the equality and diversity agenda across the organisation.
- Getting the timing right is important in relation to influencing senior decision-makers and creating and maintaining a culture of equality and diversity.
- Working in close partnership with the other 10 regional HSC organisations through the Equality Forum produces important benefits for small organisations in particular, including access to resources and prompts on deadlines. Likewise, awareness of progress across partner organisations can strengthen arguments of the need to bring about progress in one's own organisation. There remains scope for strengthening of sharing of good practice across the forum to enable the organisations to learn from each other.
- To date, we have mainly focused on disability in our efforts to visibly promote and celebrate diversity. We want to build on this to widen the focus to include other equality groupings.
- Our role in identifying and promoting best practice in Nursing and Midwifery provides a unique opportunity to visibly promote equality and diversity.

3.6.2 Looking Ahead

- 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.
- The Equality Forum will dedicate more time to the sharing of good practice initiatives at its quarterly meetings.

- Over the next five years, we will widen our efforts to draw attention to equality and diversity issues relating to ethnicity and race in the first instance.³

4. Conclusions

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

In relation to the workplace, NIPEC has made progress in identifying and seeking to address the needs of staff and candidates with a disability. Staff awareness days 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. In addition, Tapestry has given a platform to staff who have a disability to raise and discuss disability issues in a safe environment.

NIPEC facilitates and leads programmes of work in partnership with the DoH, 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.

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

NIPEC's Head of Corporate Services is the equality lead and, supported by the Corporate Services Manager, acts as the main driver for the equality agenda.

NIPEC Council are kept informed of Equality issues at their quarterly meetings, providing comment and feedback, and approving the Annual Progress Report.

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

³ We will start by reviewing learning from a recent research report by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (2020): Together in Practice - Ambitious for change. Research into NMC processes and people's protected characteristics.

- Discussion and where required taking action on Equality Scheme issues brought to the team by the Head of Corporate Services/Corporate Services 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 in discussion with and assisted by the Corporate Services Manager
- Ensuring training attendance of relevant staff
- Contributing to Equality and Disability Action Plans, achieving actions outlined within timescales agreed.

4.3 Challenges and how they have been overcome

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. Whilst it cannot be argued that this challenge was fully overcome during the period covered by the review, important progress has been made, first and foremost by seeking to integrate equality into structures and processes, both those already in existence and those created primarily for other purposes, such as:

- Making equality a standing agenda item at regular meetings of the senior Business Team
- Integrating a section on equality screening in the Project/Initiative Plan template
- Integrating equality into the process for the development, adoption, approval and review of corporate policies and procedures.

4.4 Good Practice

Beyond the measures identified in the previous section, the disability awareness days represent good practice, in the main by focusing on the lived experience of people within individual equality categories and on how staff can best support their colleagues belonging to these.

4.5 Lessons Learned

4.5.1 Business Planning, Policy and Decision-Making, and Governance

- In relation to project and work stream planning, NIPEC has put in place governance arrangements that have shown some 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.

4.5.2 Monitoring, Access to Information and Services

- The quality of the equality data sets that we most need to draw on for our work has significant limitations.

4.5.3 Engagement

- Where we offer opportunities for individuals to be involved in our work we do not currently know which equality groupings the individuals belong to. Without this information and without targeting any particular equality groupings to encourage them to become involved we cannot be sure that we hear a diverse range of voices. However, the majority of those involved in our work are employed by other HSC employers, who gather the data for these individuals and may not be willing or able to share the data without their consent or due to UK GDPR regulations on the sharing of personal data.
- While dedicated staff forums on disability, sexual orientation and gender identity exist within the HSC, these have not been engaged with in the development of Human Resources policies as a matter of course.

4.5.4 Ensuring NIPEC staff assist the organisation in implementing Section 75

- Reference to the Section 75 duties in all Job Descriptions is essential for making equality everybody's business in the organisation.

4.5.5 Outcomes

- To date, we have mainly focused on disability in our efforts to produce outcomes for staff. We want to build on this to widen the focus to include other equality groupings.

4.5.6 Leadership

- Active Section 75 implementation over the last five years has been led and supported by the Head of Corporate Services across the organisation and agreed through the Business Team which is made up of Corporate and Professional officers. The Corporate Team is a good fit from a reporting and governance perspective and it is essential there continues to be active ownership of the equality and diversity agenda across the organisation.
- Getting the timing right is important in relation to influencing senior decision-makers and creating and maintaining a culture of equality and diversity.
- Working in close partnership with the other 10 regional HSC organisations through the Equality Forum produces important benefits for small organisations in particular, including access to resources and prompts on deadlines. Likewise, awareness of progress across partner organisations can strengthen arguments of the need to bring about progress in one's own organisation. There remains scope for strengthening of sharing good practice across the forum to enable the organisations to learn from each other.
- To date, we have mainly focused on disability in our efforts to visibly promote and celebrate diversity.
- Our role in identifying and promoting best practice in Nursing and Midwifery provides a unique opportunity to visibly promote equality and diversity.

4.6 Going Forward

4.6.1 Business Planning, Policy and Decision-Making, and Governance

- We will continue with the development of an annual screening programme based on Business Plan objectives, planned projects and work streams. We will introduce the requirement to report to the

Business Team on a bi-annual basis on progress on undertaking identified screenings.

- To ensure that decision-makers are fully informed of equality issues prior to taking decisions, when a draft policy is being presented for approval, it will be accompanied by an explanatory cover note for Council members/senior managers outlining the background of the policy and include details of equality screening undertaken, by whom and a summary of impacts on Section 75 groups and mitigations put in place.

4.6.2 Monitoring, Access to Information and Services

- We will further encourage staff to complete equality and diversity information to strengthen the data.
- To improve the quality of available equality data sets, we will use our influence with others in order to seek expansion of equality monitoring of nurses and midwives registered and working within Northern Ireland. We will engage with the Nursing and Midwifery Council via its Chief Executive Office, and other officers and their forums.
- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear at our events we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and NIPEC Surveys.

4.6.3 Engagement

- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear in our project groups we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and NIPEC Surveys.

- We will seek assurance from the BSO, our provider of Human Resources services, that engagement with the existing staff forums has been undertaken for any policies they develop on our behalf.

4.6.4 Ensuring NIPEC staff assist the organisation in implementing Section 75

- We will seek advice from the BSO Human Resources and Equality Services as to whether reference to the Section 75 duties should be reintegrated into the template used for all new Job Descriptions.

4.6.5 Outcomes

- To improve the quality of available equality data sets, we will use our influence with others in order to seek expansion of equality monitoring of nurses and midwives registered and working within Northern Ireland. We will engage with the Nursing and Midwifery Council via its Chief Executive Office, and other officers and their forums.
- We will work in partnership with other HSC organisations in undertaking a Carer's Survey of our staff.
- We will work in partnership with other HSC organisations in providing training to our staff and line managers in implementing the Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy.
- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear in our project groups we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and NIPEC Surveys.

4.6.6 Leadership

- 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.

- The Equality Forum will dedicate more time to the sharing of good practice initiatives at its quarterly meetings.
- Over the next five years, we will widen our efforts to draw attention to equality and diversity issues relating to ethnicity and race in the first instance.

Appendix 1

List of policies and professional work streams equality screened from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2021

Year	Policy Title	Decision
2016-17	Adverse Incident Reporting Policy	Screened out without mitigation
2016-17	Information Governance Strategy	Screened out without mitigation
2016-17	ICT Security Policy, IT Ethical Code and Computer Usage Policy	Screened out without mitigation
2016-17	Contract Management Procedure	Screened out without mitigation
2017-18	Tapestry (our Disability Staff Network) Communication and Information Screening	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Financial Savings Plan 2017-18	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Corporate Plan 2017-21	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Clear Desk and Screen Policy	Screened out without mitigation
2017-18	Attendance at work	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Leave Pack	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Consultation on Equality and Disability Action Plans 2018-23	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Family Pack	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Data Protection Policy	Screened out without mitigation

Year	Policy Title	Decision
2017-18	Zero Tolerance Policy	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Raising a Concern Policy	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Final Equality and Disability Action Plans, Screening Document and Consultation report	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Project Initiation Document: Post Registration Masters Programme	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Financial Savings Plan 2019-20	Screened out without mitigation
2019-20	Annual Business Plan 2019-20	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Engagement and Communications Strategy	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Policy on Validation and Monitoring of Professional Registration	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Transforming Nursing and Midwifery Data	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Conflict, Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace Policy/Procedure	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	25 Years Length of Service Award	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Information Governance	Screened out without mitigation
2019-20	Quality Improvement Strategy	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Project Initiation Document: Career Pathway for Neurology Nursing	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Project Initiation Document: Career Pathway for Stroke Nursing	Screened out with mitigation

Year	Policy Title	Decision
2020-21	Standard Operating Procedures (Emergency Response to Covid-19)	Screened out without mitigation
2020-21	Annual Business Plan 2020-21	Screened out without mitigation
2020-21	EU Exit Risk Assessment and Operation Readiness	Screened out with mitigation
2020-21	Implementation of Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) Future Nurse Future Midwife Education Standards	Screened out with mitigation
2020-21	Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan 2020-21	Screened out with mitigation
2020-21	Digital Capabilities Project	Screened out with mitigation