



Summary Equality Scheme

May 2012

**Drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern
Ireland Act 1998**

**The Full Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission for
Northern Ireland in September 2011**

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Our Equality Scheme commitments explained

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of our Equality Scheme which was approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in September 2011, and to outline what the commitments mean to you as a member of NIPEC staff.

A full copy of the Equality Scheme and easy read version is available on our server (ADM/Equality/Equality Commission/Schemes) or on our website at <https://nipec.hscni.net/> (click on the Equality icon on the home page)

For specific queries in relation to this equality scheme please contact Janet Hall, Corporate Services Manager.

For more general queries or information on equality or human rights issues staff can also contact Sandra Calwell at BSO's Equality Unit at 2 Franklin Street Belfast, BT2 8DQ or at sandra.calwell@hscni.net or on (028) 9053 5531

Equality commitment

Our organisation is committed to actively recognising equality of opportunity, good relations and human rights. It is our intention that all people can experience fair treatment and a more equal opportunity to achieve what they want in their lives. We believe that our staff and the people we work and come into contact with should be treated with dignity and respect.

Our Equality Scheme

Our Equality Scheme is a plan outlining how our organisation intends to meet its legislative duties. As a public authority NIPEC has a legal requirement to promote equality of opportunity under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

This legislation is unique to Northern Ireland and includes the following nine categories:

- **Age**
- **Gender**
- **Racial Group**
- **Marital Status**
- **Dependants**
- **Disability**
- **Political Opinion**
- **Religious Beliefs**
- **Sexual Orientation**

The good relations element of the legislation relate to **Religion, Political Opinion and Racial Group**. Whilst the Chief Executive carries overall responsibility for delivering on Equality Scheme commitments, all staff have a part to play in relation to their own role within the organisation.

The Equality Scheme sets out our key commitments for making equality an integral part of what we do. This is often referred to as 'mainstreaming the agenda'. For you as a member of staff, this means that Section 75 applies both to how you do your job and how others do their job as it impacts on you. In other words this includes how you are treated in the workplace and how you treat others.

Equality Scheme commitments

1. Reporting

We will report progress annually to the Equality Commission and within our organisation's annual report. We will also provide regular reports to Senior Management Team and Board members and integrate equality objectives and targets into business plans, relevant job descriptions and appraisal processes.

What this means for you

You need to make progress reports available on the website as public documents and ensure that relevant information is collated and reported upon on a regular basis. Integrate key actions into business plans and report against these. Review equality targets where relevant, as part of performance management and appraisal processes.

2. Audit of Inequalities

A major requirement in the development of the equality scheme was the conduct of an audit of inequalities. We will publicise the action plan and make sure that actions identified are progressed, reviewed and monitored.

What this means for you

You need to deliver actions within your area of work and provide reports on progress and participate in annual reviews of progress.

3. Consultations

We will carry out consultations in accordance with the principles outlined by the Equality Commission NI. Seek views from section 75 groups, community and voluntary sector, trade unions and others. We will generally allow 12 weeks. We will ensure that methods are inclusive and accessible and that consultees receive feedback. Training opportunities will be provided to staff.

What this means for you

You need to view consultations as an integral part of policy or strategy development. Engage with specified groups and participate in consultations relevant to your area of work. Build equality screening into any consultation exercises.

4. Screening and equality impact assessments (EQIA)

Prior to implementation of policies we will carry out screening and, if necessary, equality impact assessments. We will publish screening templates and EQIA's on our website and publish quarterly reports.

What this means for you

You need to undertake screening in accordance with the templates and guidance issued. Forward completed templates to Equality Unit on an ongoing basis for publication.

5. Monitoring of Adopted Policies

Within 1 year of approval we will review existing information systems and identify gaps and establish systems for collection of information. We will conduct an annual review of monitoring of adverse impact, publish results and look at better ways to promote equality and good relations.

What this means for you

You need to engage in the audit of information systems. This includes collecting and analysing equality data both quantitative on the numbers impacted by the policy, and qualitative on their needs.

6. Training and Communications

We will provide copies of the equality scheme and summary scheme and provide staff briefings. We will incorporate equality scheme commitments into induction training and provide training on Section 75, screening, consultations and complaints. We will monitor the profile of staff trained and evaluate staff knowledge and skills developed.

What this means for you

You need to read communications provided at induction or through other agreed processes. If necessary, seek out clarity of these duties from Equality Unit in the Business Services Organisation. Participate in training in accordance with your roles and responsibilities.

7. Access to information and services

We will ensure information is accessible and, where it is reasonably practical, provide information in alternative formats usually within 10 working days. We will ensure services are accessible and will monitor and review access.

What this means for you

You need to provide information in alternative formats where relevant. Plan and budget for the production of alternative formats. Where barriers to services or information are identified consider changes. In engagement with users of services ask questions about accessibility.

8. Complaints

We will deal with equality complaints in line with the general complaints procedure.

What this means for you

You need to follow the organisation's complaint's procedure if you receive a section 75 complaint.

9. Publication of Equality Scheme

This will be progressed by the Equality Unit in the Business Services Organisation.

What this means for you

We will publish the equality scheme on our Website and notify consultees.

10. Review of Equality Scheme

We will review and evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of equality scheme commitments.

What this means for you

You need to participate in review within 5 years, or sooner in accordance with the guidance issued by the Equality Commission NI.

Frequently asked questions

Q1. So what has changed with the new guidance¹ and new Scheme?

Answer

Whilst many of the principles for promoting equality and good relations in employment and services remain the same, there have been some changes. Greater emphasis is now placed on outcomes for equality categories with the requirement to undertake an audit of inequalities against our functions and implement actions in order to reduce or remove inequalities identified. A closer link is now made between equality and business planning processes.

Tighter guidance is provided for consultation with a requirement generally for 12 weeks consultation. The new guidance produced by the Equality Commission NI in April 2010 has required new arrangements to be put in place for the screening of policies considering equality, good relations and human rights implications, including the requirement for publication of completed screening templates and quarterly reports.

The Equality Commission NI now have the power to investigate complaints in relation to the wider commitment of having due regard to promoting equality. Previously only a complaint against a public authority's breach of equality scheme could be investigated.

Q2. Do all policies have to be screened?

Answer

Yes, consideration needs to be given to all policies and major decisions. This includes, for example, plans, strategies, service frameworks or contracts. Start with the positive question "to what level of detail do I need to screen this policy (decision), rather than 'do I have to screen this policy (decision)?"

The new guidance and screening template allows you to very quickly screen out those where there is no impact on people, for example, some technical policies or policies that are purely administrative. Even in these policies it is important to use the equality assurance statement as evidence that "due regard was given to the equality duties".

¹ www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf

Q3. Does consultation guidance only apply to equality consultations?

Answer

The key purpose of the equality duties is to integrate them into the business of the organisation. Mainstreaming the equality agenda means when consultations are being undertaken in relation to policies, strategies and business initiatives it requires that these consultations are also undertaken in accordance with the principles outlined in the Equality Commission's Guidance².

This needs to be undertaken early, be inclusive and allow adequate timing. The Consultee list is included in full equality scheme. This list is maintained by the Equality Unit in the Business Services Organisation.

Q4. Within consultation exercises, what equality questions should be asked of consultees?

Answer

It is the responsibility of the public authority to undertake the screening of policies for equality, good relations and human rights issues and to seek responses from consultees on the detail of the screening. Hence the question "are there any equality issues with the proposal" is inadequate.

It is not the responsibility of consultees to tell us these. Rather consider including the following question "the detail of the screening of this proposal for equality, good relations and human rights is included as part of this consultation. Are you satisfied with the detail of this screening? Can you suggest any additional issues for consideration"?

Look out for similar issues in other public authorities' consultation exercises. If the screening is not included ask for a copy of it before commenting on the equality implications.

Q5. In my work I already make sure that I treat everybody the same. Is that not what equality is about?

Answer

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 promoting equality of opportunity is a positive duty. Nine equality categories as highlighted on page 3, are specified within the legislation and three good relations categories also highlighted on page 3.

² www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf

This legislation goes beyond anti discriminatory legislation and recognises that some groups and individuals face barriers in accessing our services. As a result of, for example, language, disability, communication barriers, cultural, faith or belief differences or attitudes, people can feel marginalised or be excluded.

Equality is about recognising difference and treating people according to their needs so that they have the same opportunities as everyone else.

Q6. *What help can I get with the equality agenda?*

Answer

A comprehensive package of support for staff is available from the Equality Unit in the Business Services Organisation. This includes: training, guidance materials, individual advice and feedback including on research, data collection, analysis, engagement, consultation and how to produce material in alternative formats.

www.hscbusiness.hscni.net

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