



BUSINESS PLAN FOR 2022-23

Rebuilding our Economy through Better Workplaces

April 2022

VISION: To be widely recognised as Northern Ireland’s leading authority in promoting productive working relationships for the benefit of individuals and organisations and to support the creation of a thriving and inclusive economy.

PURPOSE: To improve employment relations, promote best employment practice and resolve workplace disputes through the delivery of quality, impartial and independent services.

VALUES: To achieve our vision and purpose, our values are to be:

Progressive – forward thinking, outward looking, and creative, harnessing all insights to find better ways to support the economy and society;

Ethical – always acting with integrity, impartiality, equity and utmost professionalism, and demonstrating openness and accountability;

Exemplary – challenging ourselves to be the best we can be and a role model in employment relations and equality, diversity and inclusion; and,

Responsive – listening to all our customers and colleagues and adapting to ensure our services meet their needs.

These values underpin all that we do.

FOREWORD

This Business Plan implements the second year of the Labour Relations Agency's Corporate Plan for 2021-25.¹

A key focus last year was building foundations for delivery of the Corporate Plan and supporting economic recovery and growth as we emerge from the Covid pandemic. The foundations we laid included new delivery partnerships, service reviews, and development of new corporate strategies regarding our people, communications, digital services and business intelligence. We also outlined a vision for how the Agency might transform over the coming year to deliver the ambitious commitments contained in the Corporate Plan.

Our key priority last year, and continuing throughout 2022-23, is supporting economic recovery and growth by promoting good employment relations. We were grateful to the Department for the Economy (DfE) for additional funding for this important work, which we hope will continue in the year ahead.

A key development was the partnerships we are developing with Invest NI and local councils to support new and growing employers, and incoming foreign direct investment companies.

Our economic recovery work included targeted support to hospitality and manufacturing; industry sectors badly hit by the pandemic. This was delivered through partnerships with Hospitality Ulster and Manufacturing NI. We helped Hospitality Ulster develop the Hospitality Employers Charter, which aims to support recruitment and retention in the sector through good employment practice; further work is planned in the year ahead to support the development of managers and supervisors in the sector. Within manufacturing, we developed and delivered a programme to support the managers adopt good practice in managing employment relations; this work will continue in 2022-23.

We also worked in partnership with others to support small and medium enterprises and those employers working in an area of economic deprivation. Again, we plan to continue and expand this work in 2022-23.

The Agency provided thought leadership on key workplace issues last year for which we received hugely positive feedback. We did this in partnership with the Employment Forum on Covid-19, which the Agency continued to facilitate on behalf of the NI Executive throughout 2021-22. This brings together business leaders and senior trade union representatives, and relevant public bodies, to provide advice on workplace Covid issues.

¹ Available at: <https://www.lra.org.uk/publications/corporate-plan-2021-25>.

We also resumed meetings of the Employment Relations Roundtable to focus on non-Covid issues in 2021-22.

We worked with the Forum and Roundtable to identify areas for the development of guidance and ensure it meets the needs of employers and employees alike on a number of key issues. As the Covid vaccination programme was rolled-out in 2021, we published 'A Practical Guide to the COVID-19 Vaccination and the Workplace'² to help employers work through employment relations issues that we anticipated would arise from this.

A current hot topic is hybrid working. As employers plan to bring back to the workplace those employees who have been working from home during the pandemic, we have published 'A Practical Guide to Hybrid Working'³. Hybrid working potentially transforms the future of work for many employers and employees. Our Guide seeks to help employers realise the considerable benefits of hybrid working through practical guidance in negotiating the challenging employment relations issues arising.

The Agency also produced leading edge guidance in 2021-22 on menopause in the workplace,⁴ in partnership with the Equality Commission and Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). In 2022-23, also with ICTU, we will publish guidance on sexual harassment in the workplace, including the development of a model policy. We will also work with DfE on raising awareness of new workplace rights for victims of domestic abuse, as well as parental bereavement leave.

Our thought-leadership on contemporary workplace issues in the year ahead will culminate with a conference in February 2023 where we plan to bring together high profile keynote speakers to discuss the future development of employment relations in NI.

Regrettably, however, we also anticipate needing to have a particular focus on resolving collective disputes in 2022-23. Last year, we experienced a significant increase in industrial disputes, most of which were pay-related as employees seek to maintain living standards in the face of surging price inflation. By way of response, we trained a number staff in collective conciliation skills, so that we can respond effectively when the parties to these disputes require our expertise to resolve them. We are also planning in 2022-23 to conduct research on the cost of workplace conflict to highlight the benefits of good employment relations and, importantly, early resolution of disputes when they do arise. We hope to showcase this research at our conference in February.

² Available at: <https://www.lra.org.uk/resources/practical-guide-covid-19-vaccination-and-workplace>.

³ Available at: <https://www.lra.org.uk/resources/practical-guide-hybrid-working-lra-october-2021>.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.lra.org.uk/resources/promoting-equality-employment-women-affected-menopause>.

The service reviews conducted last year are already producing good outcomes for our customers and enabling more efficient use of our resources. The previous Document Review Service has moved online, with the development of the Employment Document Toolkit,⁵ which we launched in early 2022. This allows employers to create their own bespoke suite of employment documentation, including contract of employment and a range of policies. It is supported by videos and guidance to explain legal requirements and good practice in key areas of employment. We will monitor the effectiveness of this service; early feedback suggests that that it will be well-received.

The Agency is transforming in many ways. With hopefully the worst of the Covid pandemic behind us, the Agency is itself adopting hybrid working. This means our staff are now working both from home and the office as business need requires.

The Agency also plans to relocate our Head Office in the year ahead to more suitable, modern premises from which to base our operations. With an emphasis on collaborative workspace, our new accommodation in James House on Belfast's Gasworks is specifically designed to support hybrid working.

2021-22 brought a particular focus by the Agency on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) to further drive transformation as we strive to be an exemplary employer and, as a service provider, better target support for more vulnerable employees. Our work in this area was led by EDI champions at both Board and staff level. This work will gather even more momentum in the year ahead and, for the first time, this Business Plan contains specific EDI objectives. These objectives build on our achievements last year in respect of the Diversity Mark Bronze Award and being a founder member of the UK-wide Neurodiversity in Business initiative. Our values have also been adapted to recognise the importance of EDI to our work.

The Agency is also seeking to ensure we have the right skills and structure to better support employers to put in place good employment relations and avoid workplace disputes. A review of current working arrangements is underway.

As you might gather, it is going to be a busy and interesting year ahead for the Labour Relations Agency.

We commend this Business Plan to you.



Gordon Milligan
Chairperson



Don Leeson
Chief Executive

⁵ Available at: <https://www.lra.org.uk/employment-document-toolkit>.

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The Agency is a publicly funded body established by the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, and continued by the Industrial Relations Order (Northern Ireland) 1992. We are independent of, but accountable to, the Department for the Economy.

Our independent Board, comprising members drawn from business, trade union, employment law and academic backgrounds, establishes the Agency's strategic direction. Board members are public appointments, appointed by the Minister for the Economy.

We currently employ the equivalent of approximately 69 full-time staff who operate from two locations – our Head Office in Belfast and a Regional Office in Derry/Londonderry. There are also a number of temporary staffing arrangements in place, which was funded by additional budget provided in 2021-22 to help support post-Covid economic recovery and respond to increased customer demand for conciliation.

We are planning to relocate the Agency's Head Office to James House, which is part of part the Government Estate, during the summer of 2022.

A hybrid working policy will be trialled in 2022-23. This will allow staff to work from the office and remote locations, including home, depending on business need.

Agreement of the Agency's budget for 2022-23 has been held up by a hiatus in NI Executive decision-making. The budget baseline is £3,823k. However, the Agency has sought to increase this through the Executive's Spending Review in order to maintain 2021-22 temporary staffing levels to continue work on economic recovery and growth and respond to the anticipated demand for holiday pay conciliation. In the absence of a budget settlement, the Agency will seek the additional funding needed through in-year monitoring rounds.

The affordability of this Business Plan is dependent on additional funding being provided in-year. The funding situation will be monitored throughout the year, with appropriate measures taken to flex resources and the services provided if budgeting assumptions change.

Services

The Agency provides a range of **advisory services** to promote good employment practice and advise employers and employees on their rights and responsibilities. These services include:

- **Workplace Information Service (WIS)** – this is a confidential information and advice line (telephone number: 03300 555 300) for employers, individuals and their representatives.
- **Briefings, seminars/webinars, and workshops** – these are aimed at disseminating information and promoting good practice on a range of employment issues and enhancing the employment relations skills of line managers.
- **Document Service** – this online service, which launched in 2021-22, allows employers to compile workplace documentation – from written statements of employment particulars through to employee handbooks – with guidance on compliance and good practice. It superseded the previous document vetting service, which involved staff reviewing and providing feedback on employer’s employment contracts and policies – this was highly labour intensive and consequently limited in reach.

The Agency also provides a range of confidential **dispute resolution** services designed to deal with problems that arise in the workplace. These include:

- **Conciliation** – this service seeks to find a mutually agreeable solution to an employment problem or dispute where an individual could make a claim to a tribunal. There are three aspects to this:
 - **Early Conciliation** – potential tribunal claimants are required to notify the Agency of a dispute and consider conciliation before submitting a tribunal claim;
 - **Post-claim conciliation** – once a tribunal claim has been submitted, the Agency continues to be available to the parties to settle their dispute through conciliation; and,
 - **Employer-led conciliation** – the Agency provides a service to employers who wish to avoid the risk of a tribunal claim by using conciliation to resolve an employment matter.
- **Arbitration** – where a solution to a problem or disagreement to an individual dispute cannot be found, and the parties wish to avoid a tribunal, our arbitration service provides a quick, confidential, non-legalistic process to resolve the matter. Arbitration decisions, and remedies that flow from these, are legally enforceable in the same way as tribunal decisions.
An adjunct to Arbitration is the Independent Appeals Service, which facilitates second stage appeals for a number of public bodies, mainly in the education sector.
- **Mediation** – this is an effective process for restoring positive working relationships, using a mediator to work with those in conflict or dispute to find a mutually agreed resolution to overcome their differences.

- **Collective Conciliation** – this service aims to help employers and trade unions resolve disputes typically affecting larger numbers of employees.

Influencing the employment relations policy agenda

As well as being a service provider, the Agency has a key role in working collaboratively with and providing platforms for representative bodies of employers and employees to facilitate discussion and seek to influence employment relations issues at a strategic level. These bodies include the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Chambers of Commerce, Institute of Directors (IoD), and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU). We also work across all sectors, including the public, private, education and research, and voluntary and community sectors.

The Agency chairs and facilitates two key fora of stakeholders:

- **The NI Employment Relations Roundtable** – this promotes the strategic importance of strong and equitable employment relationships and industrial relations to economic competitiveness and social wellbeing.
- **The NI Engagement Forum on Covid-19** – established in March 2020 at the request of the NI Executive, the Forum provides advice on Covid-19 matters as they apply to workplaces and the labour market.

THE PLANNING CONTEXT

Political matters

The latest iteration of the draft Programme for Government (PfG) was published for consultation in January 2021.⁶ The Agency's work is particularly relevant in delivering the following outcomes:

- *Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral;*
- *People want to live, work and visit here;*
- *We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment;*
- *We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect; and,*
- *Everyone can reach their potential.*

⁶ Available at: <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/programme-government-pfg-2021>.

We anticipate playing an important role in helping shape and deliver a number of the key PfG priorities and underpinning strategies, including 'Better Jobs' which includes a focus on giving employees a voice, and the Vision for a 10x Economy and Skills for a 10X Economy (see 'Economic Matters below).

'New Decade New Approach'⁷ makes a number of employment-related commitments. These include reforms relating to protecting workers' rights, giving workers greater voice, and specific reforms around zero hours contracts and devolved minimum wage powers.

It is anticipated that a new employment bill will be progressed by DfE once a new mandate is in place, following Assembly elections in May 2022. The Agency will provide advice and support to DfE in any future development and implementation of employment relations policies and legislation.

The current political hiatus caused by the collapse of the Executive in February 2022 has meant that the multi-year Spending Review for the period 2022-25 has not yet concluded. Consequently, the Agency, in common with other public bodies, is continuing to work within the confines of a one-year budget settlement. This has been the position for a number of years and inhibits effective long term planning by placing a reliance on in-year bids to acquire funding to recruit additional staff to respond to increased demand for services.

Economic matters

NI economy was profoundly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. As the pandemic eased in 2022, further economic distress has been caused by other global events, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This has resulted in surging prices.

Despite these factors, the labour market is buoyant with the number of people employed at record levels in April 2022.⁸

Rising inflation and labour shortages have led to increased pay demands and industrial unrest. The Agency has seen a substantial increase in demand during 2021-22 for our collective conciliation service to help resolve pay disputes.

Economic inactivity levels in NI are over 27%, compared to the UK average of 21%. This is being fuelled in part by the pandemic-related phenomenon known as the 'Great Resignation'.⁹ This is resulting in people leaving their jobs in large numbers for new opportunities with other employers or leaving the labour market altogether.

⁷ Available at: Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deal-to-see-restored-government-in-northern-ireland-tomorrow>.

⁸ See: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/Labour-Market-Report-April-2022.PDF>.

⁹ See, for example: <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210629-the-great-resignation-how-employers-drove-workers-to-quit>.

There are also worrying signs that young people are, in increasing numbers, choosing not to enter the labour market. The Agency is working with employers to promote good employment relations and improve workplace cultures to enable them to be better able to attract and retain staff.

DfE published, in February 2021, the Economic Recovery Action Plan for NI with the strapline, “*Rebuilding a Stronger Economy*”.¹⁰ This references the Agency’s work in, “*Providing advice and guidance to NI employers, employees and policy makers on the NI Labour Market, employee relations, best practice and compliance in response to the pandemic and its impact on labour relations.*” Among other actions, the plan identifies a highly skilled and agile workforce as one of the outcomes required for the rebuilding of the NI economy.

DfE has also developed a Vision for a 10x Economy¹¹ and Skills for a 10X Economy.¹²

The Agency is playing a critical role in supporting economic recovery and growth, particularly the hospitality and manufacturing sectors. The Agency worked in partnership with industry representative bodies during 2021-22 to help them recover; this work will continue throughout 2022-23.

We are also substantiating and articulating the correlation between good employment relations and productivity. We endeavour to link our ongoing work on employment relations with the objectives of the new Skills for a 10X Economy, helping employers work towards more economic success. At individual employer level, the Agency is focused on disseminating good employment practice to newly established and growing employers, including delivery of employment relations skills in partnership with others such as Invest NI, local government, and employer and employee representative bodies.

Societal matters

Social partnerships are expected to continue to feature strongly during 2022-23. The NI Engagement Forum on Covid-19, facilitated by the Agency, brings together representatives of employers and employees to discuss workplace issues arising from the pandemic. The Forum has proved a useful vehicle in guiding employers through the challenges that the virus has created, including supporting the safe re-opening of our economy through advice to DfE and the Executive. At the request of the Head of the Civil Service, the Forum met twice during January 2022 to advise on issues relating to the Omicron variant of the virus.

¹⁰ Available at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/economic-recovery-action-plan>.

¹¹ Available at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/10x-economy-economic-vision>.

¹² Available at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/skills-10x-economy-skills-strategy-northern-ireland>.

The Employment Relations Roundtable meets every three months or so. A particular focus has been promoting effective social partnership between employer and employee representatives, as envisaged in the Employment Relations Model for NI developed by the University of Warwick. This will need to be supported by further research, including evidencing the positive link between effective employee engagement and productivity; we also plan to extend to NI research commissioned by Acas on the cost of workplace conflict. A major conference in 2022-23 will showcase best practice examples of employment relations in workplaces.

A review of the Roundtable will be undertaken with stakeholders in 2022-23 to consider whether and how its work, and that of the Forum, can best be progressed and supported by the Agency.

Technological developments

Technology will continue to play a critical role in how the Agency delivers services. Our primary focus is on achieving integration and connectivity across our platforms, media and devices. Ensuring stability of the technology environment, and continuity of digital services as we move to a more hybrid and agile delivery model will be important.

We will enable the growth of our digital presence by ensuring a permanent and stable environment for our digital outreach, our webinars, podcasts and online clinics.

Interim IS Managed Services arrangements are in place because on-boarding to IT Assist has been paused. This is to allow time for further work to the Agency's core case management and records system (CMRS) to enable it to be hosted in the IT Assist environment.¹³ This work is expected to take 12 months to complete. Additional IT management support is being recruited to progress this work.

New CMRS support arrangements went live in January 2022. As part of the work support migration to IT Assist, a review against defined business and customer needs will be commissioned to determine whether CMRS remains fit-for-purpose for longer-term delivery.

Lastly, the Agency remains guarded against the ever-present, and perhaps growing, threat of a cyber attack. We are engaging with the National Cyber Security Centre on assurances it can provide in respect of the Agency's defences, pending on-boarding to IT Assist.

¹³ Migration to the IT Assist environment is subject to business case approval by DfE.

Legal developments

New legislation on Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay entitlements comes into effect in 2022-23. The Agency will play a key role in promoting awareness of the new rights and responsibilities.

As discussed above, new employment legislation is expected to be developed by DfE, following Assembly elections in May 2022.

A number of key legal cases are affecting the Agency's work. There has been a continued surge in tribunal claims regarding incorrectly calculated holiday pay. Resolution of these tribunal claims had been deferred pending resolution of the case of Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) v Agnew (Alexander) and Others. However, ahead of this, a number of organisations are seeking to settle backdated holiday pay liabilities – the Agency is planning to deal with approximately 20,000 such cases.

The Supreme Court decision in February 2021 in respect of Uber v Aslam and others¹⁴ is expected to have far-reaching ramifications regarding employment status and the so-called 'gig economy'. The Agency will monitor the outworkings, and consider the potential implications of any developments, from this case.

In the meantime, further employment legislation is anticipated in Great Britain covering a range of issues.¹⁵ This means that employment law differences between Great Britain and NI are likely to further diverge for at least the next 2-3 years. The Agency will need to continue to monitor the differences, so that these can be explained to employers operating in both jurisdictions.¹⁶

Environmental matters

Accommodation matters and agile working practices will be a key focus for the Agency in 2022-23 and will support 'greener' working practices.

Hybrid working, where staff spend a proportion of their time working from home, will be trialled in 2022-23. Staff will also make use of the new 'Connect2' regional hubs¹⁷ to meet customers, when they come on stream in 2022-23. These developments will mean less commuting and business travel, thus reducing our 'carbon footprint'.

¹⁴ Available at: <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2019-0029.html>.

¹⁵ See <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/experts/legal/key-employment-law-changes-2021>.

¹⁶ A list of current differences between Great Britain and NI is available at: <https://www.lra.org.uk/resources/toolkit/key-differences-employment-law-between-ni-and-gb-may-2020>.

¹⁷ For further information, see: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/connect2-regional-hubs-written-ministerial-statement>.

The Agency's Head Office is scheduled to relocate to new premises in James House in central Belfast in summer 2022. Planning for this is a key priority in the year ahead. James House will be a more energy efficient building. Furthermore, it will be largely paper-free, thereby reducing the Agency's consumption of paper and print cartridges.

Corporate Plan for 2021-25

This Business Plan operationalises the second year of the Agency's Corporate Plan for 2021-25. The first year saw a particular focus on the development of a number of strategies to underpin the Corporate Plan. These cover our people, digital, communications, and harnessing the data we collect. This year's plan will see implementation of these strategies.

A number of reviews of services, including independent appeals and mediation, commenced in 2021-22. Conclusions from these reviews will be implemented in 2022-23.

These strategies and service reviews are intended to ensure the Agency is optimally positioned to deliver the Corporate Plan. A structural review will also take place once these are in place to ensure that our staffing and management structures are fully aligned to deliver the Plan.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2021-22

Strategic Theme 1: Improving organisational performance and responding to the needs of individuals through expert employment relations advice and support.

1.1 Provide effective guidance on employment relations issues to individuals and organisations.

Objectives for 2022-23

a) Respond effectively to callers to the Workplace Information Service.

Performance measures:

- Number of enquires received/handled.
- Average waiting time (*target: less than one minute*).
- Lost call rate (*target: less than 10%*).
- Number and % of contacts reporting that information provided helped them to decide what to do next.

b) Continue to focus advisory services to support post-Covid economic recovery and growth through the development of delivery partnerships with statutory, employer and industry bodies, and trade unions.

Performance measures:

- Number of active delivery partnerships.
- Number of joint events delivered.
- Stakeholder and customer satisfaction with the quality of the events.
- Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters as a result of attendance at events (*target: at least 75%*).

c) Develop and deliver a programme of good practice seminars/webinars and briefings to give employers, employees, and their representatives, greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters.

Performance measures:

- Number of seminars/webinars developed.
- Number of events delivered and recorded webinars viewed.
- Number of participating organisations in webinars.
- % planned events delivered.

- Customer satisfaction with the quality of the events.
- Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters as a result of attendance at events (*target: at least 75%*).

d) Provide managers with practical skills and confidence to create positive and productive working environments through the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice to encourage employers to adopt good practice in managing employment relations.

Performance measures:

- Number of line managers undertaking the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice.
- % of line managers achieving the LRA Certificate in Management Practice.
- Customer satisfaction with the quality of the events.
- Number and % of line managers applying learning/skills in the workplace as a result of completing the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice.

e) Develop and pilot, **by March 2023**, a programme for employee representatives to provide them with the practical skills and confidence to support the creation of positive and productive working environments by encouraging employers to adopt good practice in managing employment relations.

Performance measures:

- Pilot programme delivered and evaluated to timetable.

f) Promote take-up of the new online Employment Document Toolkit to support legislative compliance by employers and encourage good practice in employment relations matters **from April 2022**.

Performance measures:

- Number of customers using the Toolkit.
- Customer satisfaction with the quality of the Toolkit.
- Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in applying revised documentation as a result of the Toolkit.

- g) Deliver sectoral-based good practice facilitation services.

Performance measures:

- Number of projects registered.
- Number of collective agreements/policies facilitated.
- % projects completed.
- Customer satisfaction with the quality of the service.
- Number of more effective protocols and policies in place.
- Number and % of customers reporting a more positive employment relations environment and reduced likelihood of disputes occurring.

- h) In partnership with the Department for the Economy raise awareness of new employment rights in respect of:

- Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay arrangements with effect **from April 2022**; and,
- Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) – implementation date to be decided.

Performance measures:

- Stakeholder satisfaction with the quality of the information, advice and events.
- Customer satisfaction with the informative quality of the events.
- Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters as a result of attendance at events (*target: at least 75%*).

- i) Provide thought-leadership through the development and promotion of best practice employment policies and publications.

Performance measures:

- Number of policies and publications developed and promoted.
- Number of website page views and document downloads.

1.2 Help prevent and resolve individual and collective workplace disputes.

Objectives for 2022-23

- a) Deliver an Early Conciliation service that reduces the number of claims heard by an employment tribunal.

Performance measures:

- Number of employee and employer-led notifications received.

- Number and % of EC notifications settled.
- Customer satisfaction with the service provided.
- Number and % of EC notifications not resulting in a tribunal claim.¹⁸
- Number and % of cases not proceeding to tribunal hearing (*target: no more than 20%*).
- Number and % of tribunal days saved.

b) Respond effectively to demand for conciliation to resolve holiday pay disputes.

Performance measures:

- Number of holiday pay cases received.
- % of cases settled.
- Customer satisfaction with the service provided.
- Number and % of cases not proceeding to tribunal (*target: no more than 20%*).
- Number and % of tribunal days saved.

c) Deliver an effective collective conciliation service to facilitate the resolution of collective workplace disputes.

Performance measures:

- Number of collective conciliation cases received.
- % collective conciliation cases undertaken.
- % resulting in a settlement to resolve the dispute (*target: 70%*).
- Customer satisfaction with the service provided.
- Number and % of customers reporting higher levels of engagement/trust following collective conciliation.

d) Deliver an effective mediation service to facilitate the resolution of interpersonal workplace disputes within the context of devising a future mediation strategy for the Agency based on available resources.

Performance measures:

- Number of requests received.
- % resulting in agreement to resolve the dispute (*target: 70%*).
- % of requests undertaken.

¹⁸ Measured by analysing the number of EC certificates issued in the period ending six months before the current reporting period and the number of tribunal cases received during the current reporting period associated with those certificates.

- Customer satisfaction with the service provided.
 - Number and % of customers reporting better working relationships following mediation.
- e) Review, **by December 2022**, the Mediation Service and make proposals to ensure the most effective use of Agency resources, in line with customer needs.

Performance Measures:

- Timetable achieved.
- Efficiencies/process improvements identified.

- f) Deliver an Arbitration and Independent Appeals Service that meets agreed performance standards, including reducing the pandemic-related backlog of hearings by 75%.

Performance measures:

- Number of arbitration and independent appeals cases received.
- % of arbitration and independent appeals cases completed.
- Customer satisfaction with the service provided.
- Number and % of customers reporting a difference in behaviours/attitudes following an arbitration or independent appeal hearing.

- g) Review, **by September 2022**, the Independent Appeals Service and make proposals to ensure the most effective use of Agency resources, in line with customer needs.

Performance Measures:

- Timetable achieved.
- Efficiencies/process improvements identified.

- h) Work with key delivery partners in line with agreed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

Performance measures:

- Partner satisfaction with the quality of the Agency's input.
- MoU with the Office of The Industrial Tribunals and The Fair Employment Tribunal reviewed and updated **by December 2022**.

Strategic Theme 2: Working with stakeholders and delivery partners to evidence and promote the economic and social return from good employment relations and shape public policy.

2.1 Work with strategic partners to facilitate discussion and collaboration on matters relating to employment relations public policy, skills and research.

Objectives for 2022-23

- a) Secure secretariat resources for, and facilitate the work, of the NI Employment Relations Roundtable.

Performance measures:

- Stakeholder satisfaction with the Agency's input.

- b) Review the term of reference for the NI Employment Relations Roundtable to ensure it continues to meet stakeholder needs.

Performance measures:

- Stakeholder satisfaction with the Agency's input.

- c) Continue to facilitate any engagement forum as established by the NI Executive, if asked to do so.

Performance measures:

- Stakeholder satisfaction with the Agency's input.

- d) Further develop partnership arrangements to progress collaborative projects with Acas and the Workplace Relations Commission.

Performance measures:

- Stakeholder satisfaction with the Agency's input.

- e) Further develop partnership arrangements to progress work with the Equality Commission and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Performance measures:

- Stakeholder satisfaction with the Agency's input.

- f) Host, **by March 2023**, a major employment relations conference in partnership with the Department for the Economy and the NI Employment Relations Roundtable.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.
- Customer satisfaction with the quality of the event.
- Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters following attendance at the event.

2.2 Develop and promote an Employment Relations Model for Northern Ireland.

Objectives for 2022-23

- a) Develop, **by December 2022**, proposals regarding the Agency's role in respect of an Employment Relations Model for NI, based on the University of Warwick research recommendations.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.
- Stakeholder satisfaction with the Agency's input.

2.3 Evidence the economic and social return from good employment and industrial relations practice.

Objectives for 2022-23

- a) Secure funding for, and commission, research to extend Great Britain research to NI on the cost of workplace conflict **by December 2022**.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.
- Stakeholder satisfaction with the Agency's input.

- b) Secure funding for, and commission, research to establish the extent to which good employment relations supports improved productivity **by March 2023**.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.
- Stakeholder satisfaction with the Agency's input.

Strategic Theme 3: Optimising the contribution of staff and resources to deliver our statutory functions through effective leadership and governance practices.

3.1 Ensure the effective development of Agency staff and systems to deliver our statutory functions.

Objectives for 2022-23

- a) Manage, **from April 2022**, the re-opening of the Agency's offices in line with public health guidance.

Performance measures:

- Level of employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in attendance at work.

- b) Relocate the Agency's Head Office to James House in line with a timetable agreed with the Department of Finance.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.

- c) Develop and implement a pilot hybrid working policy with effect **from August 2022**.

Performance measures:

- Level of employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in attendance at work.

- d) Develop, **by June 2022**, an action plan to implement the Year 2 elements of the People Strategy for 2021-25.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met for development of action plan.
- Action plan implemented.

- e) Develop, **by June 2022**, an action plan to implement the Year 2 elements of the Communications Strategy for 2021-25.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met for development of action plan.
- Action plan implemented.

- f) Develop, **by June 2022**, an action plan to implement the Year 2 elements of the Business Intelligence Strategy for 2021-25.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met for development of action plan.
- Action plan implemented.

- g) Develop, **by June 2022**, an action plan to implement the Year 2 elements of the IS Strategy for 2021-25.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met for development of action plan.
- Action plan implemented.

- h) Manage, **by March 2023**, the on-boarding of the Agency's IS Managed Services to IT Assist.¹⁹

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.

- i) Evaluate, **by March 2023**, the case management and records system (CMRS).

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.

- j) Implement, **by May 2022**, planned enhancements to the web portal and CMRS.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.
- Customer satisfaction with the services provided.

¹⁹ Migration to the IT Assist environment is subject to business case approval by DfE.

- k) Implement, **by August 2022**, a new intranet.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.

- l) Establish, **by March 2023**, effective mechanisms to facilitate the sharing of knowledge amongst Agency staff.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.

- m) Agree and implement, **by March 2023**, an organisational transformation programme.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.

3.2 Deliver excellent governance in the management of the Agency's resources in line with the requirements placed on public bodies

Objectives for 2022-23

- a) Ensure the effective quality management of the Agency's resources.

Performance measures:

- Number of internal/external/ISO 27001 audit recommendations implemented.
- Number of Customer Service Excellence Award non-conformities v conformities.
- % of internal/external/ISO 27001 audit recommendations implemented
- ISO 27001 retained.
- Customer Service Excellence Award retained.
- liP Status maintained/improved.
- Internal customer satisfaction with Corporate Services.

- b) Achieve a budget outturn (resource and capital) of 99%.

Performance measures:

- Number of invoices paid.
- % of invoices paid within 10 working days (target: 90%) and 30 calendar days (target: 100%).
- % of budget spent.
- Annual report and accounts certified without qualification.

- c) Develop, **by March 2023**, a scheme of delegation in preparation for new legislation clarifying the roles of Board and staff members.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.

- d) Support the recruitment of new Board members, in line with timetable agreed with the Department for the Economy.

Performance measures:

- Timetable met.

- e) Ensure Board effectiveness.

Performance measures:

- Compliance with recommended practice.²⁰
- Board member satisfaction with their development.

²⁰ Board Effectiveness – A Good Practice Guide, NIAO, November 2016 (available at: <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/sites/niao/files/media-files/Board%20Effectiveness-%20A%20Good%20Practice%20Guide.pdf>) and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Effectiveness Checklist, NAO, September 2017 (available at: https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Self_Assessment_Checklist.pdf).

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION PRIORITIES FOR 2022-23

During 2021-22, the Agency made a corporate commitment to put equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of what we do. Our values were amended to reflect this.

Set out below are the Agency's priorities for 2022-23; delivery of these will be monitored and reported on throughout the year.

The priorities have been informed by the Agency's successful application for the Diversity Mark's Bronze Award, which requires organisations to focus on the achievement of gender diversity objectives. We also surveyed our staff regarding priorities; they also wanted to see a specific focus on disability issues.

The objectives are both internal, aimed at increasing knowledge of issues and supporting colleagues in particular groups, and outward facing where we seek to promote the Agency's services to those people most in need of them.

Objectives for 2022-23

1. Identify, **by June 2022**, a resource dedicated to deliver the Agency's equality, diversity and inclusion priorities.
2. Develop, **by December 2022**, an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
3. Ensure that women in the Agency are developed to be able to compete effectively for senior leadership roles when they arise (ongoing).
4. Increase awareness, sensitivity and support for gender issues (ongoing).
5. Deliver, **by September 2022**, disability awareness training to all staff.
6. As a founder member of Neurodiversity in Business, promote neurodiversity in our workplace through awareness raising and adaptations to working practices and environment (ongoing).
7. Undertake, **by March 2023**, a programme of lunchtime talks aimed at increasing awareness of disability issues among staff.
8. Work with a range of representative groups to identify issues faced by vulnerable workers and promote awareness of the Agency's services (ongoing).

PERFORMANCE SCORECARDS

Advisory Services

HOW MUCH DID WE DO?	HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?
<p><u>Good Practice Seminars/Briefings/Workshops</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of events delivered • Number of participating organisations • Number of line managers undertaking the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice <p><u>Document Reviews</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number registered <p><u>Good Employment Practice Projects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of projects registered • Number of collective agreements/policies facilitated <p><u>Partnership working</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of partners worked with • Number of joint events held <p><u>Workplace Information Service</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of enquires received/handled 	<p><u>Good Practice Seminars/Briefings/Workshops</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % planned events delivered • % of line managers achieving the LRA Certificate in Management Practice • Customer satisfaction with the quality of the events <p><u>Document Reviews</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer satisfaction with the quality of the service <p><u>Good Employment Practice Projects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % projects completed • Customer satisfaction with the quality of the service <p><u>Partnership working</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % planned events held • Partner satisfaction with the quality of the Agency's input • Customer satisfaction with the quality of the events <p><u>Workplace Information Service</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average waiting time • Lost call rate
<p>IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters as a result of attendance at events • Number and % of line managers applying learning/skills in the workplace as a result of completing the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice • Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in applying revised documentation as a result of document reviews • Number of more effective policies in place • Number and % of customers reporting a more positive employment relations environment and reduced likelihood of disputes occurring • Number and % of Workplace Information Service contacts reporting information provided helped them to decide what to do next 	

Dispute Resolution Services

HOW MUCH DID WE DO?	HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?
<p><u>Individual Conciliation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of employee-led cases received • Number of employer-led cases received <p><u>Collective Conciliation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of collective conciliation cases received <p><u>Mediation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of requests received <p><u>Arbitration and Independent Appeals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of arbitration and independent appeals cases received 	<p><u>Early Conciliation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of employee-led cases completed • % of employer-led cases completed • Customer satisfaction with the service provided <p><u>Collective Conciliation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % collective conciliations cases undertaken • % resulting in a settlement to resolve the dispute • Customer satisfaction with the service provided <p><u>Mediation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of requests undertaken • % resulting in agreement to resolve the dispute • Customer satisfaction with the service provided <p><u>Arbitration and Independent Appeals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of arbitration and independent appeals cases completed • Customer satisfaction with the service provided
<p style="text-align: center;">IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and % of notifications settled. • Number and % of EC notifications not resulting in a tribunal claim. • Number and % of cases not proceeding to tribunal hearing • Number and % of tribunal days saved • Number and % of customers reporting better working relationships following mediation • Number and % of customers reporting higher levels of engagement/trust following collective conciliation • Number and % of customers reporting a difference in behaviours/attitudes following an arbitration or independent appeal hearing 	

Corporate Services

HOW MUCH DID WE DO?	HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?
<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of performance reviews conducted on time • Number of days spent on learning and development • Number of return to work interviews conducted within three working days <p><u>Finance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of invoices paid <p><u>Quality Improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of internal/external/ISO 27001 audit recommendations implemented • Number of Customer Service Excellence Award non-conformities v conformities <p><u>Communications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of external events and exhibitions • Number of social media posts • Number of news releases/press statements • Number of pages of new/refreshed web content 	<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of performance reviews conducted on time • % of days lost through sick absence • % of return to work interviews conducted within three working days • Level of employee engagement <p><u>Finance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of invoices paid within 10 working days and 30 calendar days • % of budget spent • Annual report and accounts certified without qualification <p><u>Quality Improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of internal/external/ISO 27001 audit recommendations implemented • ISO 27001 retained • Customer Service Excellence Award achieved/retained • liP Status maintained/improved <p><u>Communications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of engagement with social media • Reach of social media posts • % increase in social media followers • Proportion of coverage • % increase in website usage <p><u>Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal customer satisfaction with Corporate Services
<p style="text-align: center;">IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and % increase in employee engagement • Number and % increase in attendance at work • Number and % increase in public awareness of the Agency and its services 	