

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE OCSC REVIEW OF THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS' EQUALITY SCHEME DATED 19 DECEMBER 2016

Introduction

1. The Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland are regarded as a public authority for the purposes of *Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998*, by virtue of the fact that the Commissioners are a listed authority at Schedule 3 of the Public Services Ombudsman Act (NI) 2016.
2. Under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, designated public authorities are required to submit an equality scheme to the Commission. An equality scheme is a statement of the public authority's commitment to fulfilling its Section 75 statutory duties and describes arrangements that a public authority has set-up and which it is obliged to apply and follow as a means of fulfilling the duties imposed on it by Section 75(1) and (2). i.e. the duties to have:
 - due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and
 - regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
3. Public authorities are obliged to review their schemes periodically:

"A public authority shall, before the end of the period of five years beginning with the submission of its current scheme, or the latest review of that scheme under this sub-paragraph, whichever is later, review that scheme and inform the [Equality] Commission of the outcome of the review." ('Northern Ireland Act 1998, Schedule 9, paragraph 8(3)')

4. This means that:
 - the first review must be done within 5 years of a public authority's current equality scheme being submitted to the Commission for approval;
 - further reviews must be done periodically after that, with a later review being done within 5 years of a previous review; and
 - the Commission must be informed about the outcome of each review.

The Review

5. The Secretariat has reviewed the Commissioners' equality scheme dated 25 July 2012. The Secretariat is content that the scheme is an effective scheme that assists Commissioners to fully comply with their Section 75 duties. The Scheme reflects the size, scale and nature of the Commissioners' statutory remit with regard to regulating recruitment to the NICS and hearing appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics.
6. Equality Commission guidance on conducting a 5 year review of an equality scheme advises that the Commission is provided with a summary of the main findings of the review in relation to:

- how the scheme's implementation has benefitted individuals within the Section 75 groups
- how leaders within the authority are engaged in the scheme's implementation
- challenges and how they have been overcome
- lessons learned, and
- good practice.

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

7. The Commissioners commitment to issues of diversity, inclusivity and equality of opportunity are regarded as central to the Merit Principle and are embedded within the Recruitment Principles which reflects Commissioners' commitment to fulfilling their obligations to promote equality and good relations. The Commissioners Recruitment Code is mandatory for everyone involved in open recruitment and selection to the NICS. It is the Commissioners' firm view that adhering to the Code will ensure appointments to the NICS are made on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition. Adherence will ensure that the best people are recruited for the posts available and will promote an effective Civil Service which reflects the diversity of Northern Ireland society. Commissioners also seek to influence and encourage the NI Civil Service to take proactive measures to promote equality of opportunity and good relations throughout all stage of the recruitment process.
8. All amendments to the Recruitment Code are equality screened to assess whether or not the proposed amendment will have any differential impact on any of the Section 75 categories.
9. Through the promulgation of the Recruitment Code and auditing compliance with the Code in line with the Commissioners' Equality Scheme commitments all individuals within the section 75 groups will have benefitted.
10. At the corporate level the Commissioners' Business Plans always include an objective to fulfil all statutory equality responsibilities and encourage the NICS to promote diversity, equality and good relations via the recruitment process.

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

11. Commissioners attach particular significance to issues of diversity, inclusivity and equality of opportunity which are central to the Merit Principle and embedded within the Recruitment Principles. Commissioners seek to influence and encourage the NI Civil Service to take proactive measures to promote equality of opportunity and good relations throughout all stage of the recruitment process particularly through their "4 Stage Authorisation Process" that is a key element in the Commissioners' approval for all appointments to the Senior Civil Service.
12. Job descriptions and performance plans for the CSCNI staff reflect their contributions to the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties and implementation of the Equality Scheme, where relevant. Targets relating to equality duties and responsibilities are included in forward job plans which are reviewed bi-annually. Staff also identify training needs aimed at raising their awareness of the statutory duties and attend seminars, as appropriate, to ensure they are informed about any developments in relation to Section 75 groups.
13. The effective discharge of Section 75 statutory duties is appraised annually through the annual performance reviews of Commissioners and the Secretariat staff.
14. Commissioners' commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations is demonstrated through their proactive engagement, outreach and training activities undertaken over the years. This includes annual training sessions provided by ECNI staff, engagement meetings with Equality Commission Commissioners and engagement meetings with a wide number of stakeholders representing Section 75 groups e.g. the Older Persons Commissioner, NICEM, and NICS disability working group.
15. The Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 and the Commissioners' Recruitment Code require NICS Departments and Agencies to publish a wide range of information and statistical summaries regarding recruitment to the NICS. Amongst other things, Commissioners require the following information to be published:
 - statistical summaries, in a format which the Commissioners may specify, of all recruitment activity during the publication period, including analyses by all categories covered by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
 - any actions or initiatives undertaken in the reporting year to attract candidates, and advance a recruitment- related agenda for diversity, inclusivity and equality of opportunity and which specifically target areas of under representation; and
 - a report on the outcomes as a result of any such actions or initiatives.
16. The Commissioners Equality Scheme, Equality Scheme Action Plan and Disability Action Plan are reviewed annually in order to produce the annual

progress report in relation to Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties that is submitted to ECNI.

Challenges and how they have been overcome

17. The turnover of CSCNI staff has presented challenges in maintaining knowledge levels in relation to the Commissioners' Equality Scheme. These challenges have been overcome by a comprehensive induction process that places a particular emphasis on the Section 75 equality duties and signposts relevant guidance both internal and external.

Lessons learned and Good practice

18. The CSCNI places particular emphasis on Commissioners and staff keeping abreast of issues and developments that may impact on the delivery of the Commissioners' Statutory duties by scheduling and attending an annual Section 75 training session provided by ECNI staff. Commissioners also meet with Equality Commission Commissioners periodically to discuss issues of mutual interest. In discharging their statutory remit in relation to the protection of the Merit Principle Commissioners hold engagement meetings with a wide number of stakeholders representing Section 75 groups on an ongoing basis. Commissioners report on their activity each year in their Annual Report.