

Department of Finance



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties

Annual Progress Report 2023-24

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:	https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/dof-departmental-equality-scheme
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This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between April 2023 and March 2024

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

- 1** In 2023-24, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

The Department of Finance (DoF) is one of nine Northern Ireland Departments. It aims to help the Northern Ireland Executive secure the most appropriate and effective use of resources and services for the benefit of the community. In pursuing this aim, the key objective of DoF is to deliver high-quality, cost-effective and efficient public services and administration within its areas of executive responsibility.

Reflecting its balance of responsibilities, this report considers the Department's contributions to equality outcomes in (1) the population in general, (2) the NICS and (3) the Department itself. It includes a separate section (4) updating on activities undertaken by the NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion (now a combined role with the DoF Racial Equality Champion).

1. Population-level

Land & Property Services (LPS)

LPS is responsible for the billing, collection and recovery of over £1.5 billion in rates revenue each year. There are various rate support schemes available that reduce the amount of rates due in certain circumstances, such as Lone Pensioner Allowance, Disabled Persons Allowance, Rate Rebate and Landlords discount. LPS Revenues & Benefits (R&B) Directorate undertakes outreach activities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations by raising awareness of rate support schemes through digital and non-digital methods to encourage those eligible for support to apply.

The online 'digital first' approach for Rate Rebate claimants, with frontline telephony support, is provided to assist citizens with their online rate relief application. For greater accessibility to information on services offered, LPS introduced the use of QR codes for domestic and non-domestic customers, enabling quicker linking to online content on NI Direct and NI Business Info webpages for customers at all LPS events.

LPS continues to build on external collaboration on the promotion of rate reliefs with a wide range of stakeholders such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), Libraries NI, Health & Social Care Trusts, Positive Ageing, DfC Jobs & Benefits Offices (JBOs), the Landlords Association for Northern Ireland (LANI) and DfC Make the Call.

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The LPS Outreach Team reviewed how we communicate discount for landlords, and a new Rates Discount for Landlord flyer was circulated to customers at events and through digital communication channels to stakeholder groups. Landlords Association for Northern Ireland (LANI) was contacted by email to ask if they could circulate the flyer to their customers in advance of the discount date.

Information leaflets on Disabled Person's Allowance (DPA) were circulated to relevant groups such as Autism NI, five Health Trust Carer Coordinators during Carers week from 5th - 11th June 2023, Positive Ageing, Alzheimer's Society, DfC JBOs, ABC Council Age Friendly Officer, Solás Autism and Additional Needs Charity NI, Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). Similar approaches were taken on promoting Lone Pensioner Allowance (LPA) with leaflets circulating to Positive Ageing, Alzheimer's Society, ABC Council Age Friendly Officer, RNIB, DfC JBOs.

The LPS Outreach Team agreed a 3-monthly distribution process with DfC for 500 copies each of the Get Help with Rates booklet (updated to include detail on the Rating of Empty Homes relief) and the Rate Rebate Factsheet to be delivered to their three DfC Stationery Stores for onward distribution to the 35 JBOs. These documents are used by their frontline staff when engaging with customers and are displayed in the JBOs. LPS Outreach Team has provided a Microsoft Teams presentation to JBO frontline staff during weekly team time events to promote LPS Rate Reliefs.

Outreach to minority ethnic stakeholder groups continues through the distribution of translated versions of the Rate Rebate Factsheet, with versions now available in Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Romanian, Polish and simplified Chinese (Mandarin). LPS Outreach are currently expanding their translated versions of the document to include Ukrainian, Russian and Arabic, which will reflect the same minority ethnic stakeholder groups as DfC Universal Credit.

LPS Outreach Team liaised with the DoF Press Office throughout the year to promote information/webpages for all the LPS domestic and non-domestic rate reliefs through the various DoF social media channels, and to promote attendance at Outreach events such as Balmoral Show, Belfast Mela, Libraries NI, Health & Social Care Trusts, Positive Ageing, DfC Jobs & Benefits Offices events.

LPS Outreach Team issued Lines to Take on flooding to 11 councils, LPS Customer Team for NI Direct Operatives and LPS Internal Comms for R&B staff for potential phone calls.

Digital Inclusion

The Digital Inclusion Unit promotes Digital Inclusion in response to the increased use of online channels to access public services. The aim is to promote a digitally inclusive society through a range of projects and by working in close partnership with a number of public and private organisations to help digitally excluded people get online.

JAM Card

The JAM Card was created by participants of The NOW Group. It allows users with autism or a communication difficulty/disability, if they choose, to discreetly inform a colleague or service provider that they need Just A Minute of patience.

The NICS renewed its partnership with the NOW group in 2022 and continues to promote the JAM Card to raise awareness and encourage all colleagues to complete the training, with c. 17,000 staff having completed the training as at March 2024.

2. NICS wide

The HR Policy team within People and Organisational Development is responsible for developing and reviewing modern, effective policies covering the employee life cycle, enabling an innovative, ambitious, diverse and inclusive Civil Service. It works with a range of internal and external stakeholders to support departments in developing and delivering evidenced-based, cross-cutting actions that diversify the NICS workforce and embed diversity and inclusion across all aspects of people management and build an inclusive organisation for S75 equality groups.

NICS Diversity and Inclusion

The NICS Diversity and Inclusion Strategy continues to be evidence based and driven by best practice from external benchmarking and by listening to our people. It is not focused on quick wins; instead, the NICS has optimised its strategy to promote

diversity, tackle areas of under-representation and support inclusion by creating the architecture to achieve real and lasting change.

Latest key data relating to the diversity of the NICS is available in the annual Equality Statistics for the NICS Workforce (2024): [Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024](#).

DoF, in common with each NI Department, has its own Diversity Champion (at senior level) who represents DoF in a central Diversity Champions Network (DCN). In addition to Departmental Diversity Champions, the NICS has appointed Diversity Champions for each of the four key themes: Gender, LGBTQ+, Race and Ethnicity and Disability. The thematic leads are powerful advocates and have been instrumental in establishing the NICS staff networks.

NICS Diversity Action Plan

Diversity and inclusion initiatives are delivered on a service wide and departmental basis and have the commitment and support of Senior Civil Servants. The diversity and inclusion related performance objective “leaders demonstrate and are accountable for visible inclusive leadership and behaviours” to support achievement of the NICS’ ambition of being a diverse and inclusive workplace, which was introduced for Permanent Secretaries in 2022, was extended to all Senior Civil Servants in 2023. Diversity Champions also completed inclusive leadership training.

The NICS Diversity Action Plan 2023/24, developed by the Diversity Champions Network and People and Organisational Development, identified key activities to be undertaken to improve diversity and inclusion within the organisation across the four themes of gender, disability, LGBTQ+, race and ethnicity, as well as cross cutting priorities. The three pillars of focus were (i) employer offering; (ii) knowledge and learning; and (iii) peer support.

Implementation of the plan was overseen by the Head of the Civil Service, Permanent Secretaries, the NICS Diversity Champions Network and People and Organisational Development, working in partnership with staff networks and stakeholder organisations.

In 2023/24 key achievements of the Diversity Action Plan include:

- **Delivery of interventions to deepen knowledge and understanding of diversity issues and embed diversity and inclusion**, including: launch of a new diversity and inclusion learning bundle, featuring two new mandatory diversity and inclusion e-Learning courses, as well as e-learning modules on LGBTQ+ Inclusion and Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion; new learning resources including a Guide for Allies; an LGBTQ+ Role Models Guide and LGBTQ+ pilot reverse mentoring programme and Women's Mentoring programme; and delivery of a programme of disability awareness training.
- **Delivery of actions to raise awareness of health and well-being issues**, including menopause and mental health. A promotional campaign was delivered to raise awareness of support to colleagues who are experiencing or are at risk of domestic and / or sexual abuse as well as renewing the NICS' commitment to the White Ribbon NI Charter and delivering further training to increase the number of Safe Place Advocates in the organisation.
- **External independent benchmarking of NICS practices with several diversity accolades being awarded**, such as, Stonewall Silver Employer Award, Silver Diversity Mark and the Onus Gold Workplace Charter for the work undertaken to support colleagues who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing Domestic and Sexual Abuse.
- **Ongoing development of active staff networks** including the formation of a new NICS student network for the 2023/24 cohort of students, and a new Cancer Support Network to support colleagues who have been affected by a cancer diagnosis.
- **Participation in important events to celebrate diversity** including National Inclusion Week, Belfast Mela, Belfast Pride, Carers Week, International Men's Day, International Women's Day, Black History Month, International Job Shadow Day and International Day for Persons with Disabilities.

NICS Advertising, Marketing and Outreach

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Throughout the reporting period, work continued to promote the range of career opportunities available in the NICS and encourage the widest applicant pool by using a mix of advertising, communications and engagement and outreach activity.

Advertising campaigns employing a mix of traditional, digital, social and outdoor channels were developed to support NICS recruitment competitions such as the DfC Administrative Officer (Alternative Working Pattern) competition, NICS Student Placement programmes, NI Prison Service recruitment campaigns and Senior Civil Service Permanent Secretary roles during 2023. Advertising channels included print, social media (e.g. Facebook and Instagram) and radio advertising (Spotify, radio and podcasts).

The Head of the NICS featured in a video for the Senior Civil Service Permanent Secretary roles, highlighting the work of the NICS and the importance of these roles in making a positive difference to the lives of the people it serves.

During the reporting period there was engagement with the education sector and the NICS participated in events with other employers to promote the diversity and inclusion agenda, as well as events to highlight to prospective applicants the many benefits of working in the NICS and to showcase the work it does, including:

- outreach sessions with the disability and minority ethnic sectors in conjunction with Northern Ireland Union for Supported Employment (NIUSE) and TEO's Racial Equality Unit to promote the Administrative Officer recruitment competition;
- participation in Belfast Pride, Black History Expo and Belfast Mela to promote the NICS as an inclusive employer;
- participation in the Chief Executive Forum's "Women in Leadership" conference; the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) NI Annual Conference and Healthcare People Management Association (HMPA) Conference to promote the diversity and inclusion agenda to other employers and professionals;
- delivering an event with young female students promoting female civil servants working in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) roles to mark International Day of Women and Girls in Science; and

- participation in a range of careers fairs and activities with local universities including Queens University Belfast (QUB), Ulster University (UU) and The Open University (OU).

Economist Profession Diversity and Outreach

The NICS Economist Profession Outreach and Diversity Working Group (ODWG) has a remit to promote a more diverse Economist Profession and fulfil the NICS ambition to ‘have a truly inclusive workplace culture and to be a service that reflects the society we serve’.

The NICS Economist Profession offers school and university students placement opportunities across a number of departments for up to 51 weeks. The Profession also engages with universities through their recruitment activities to ensure maximum outreach and improve opportunities to recruit from as diverse of a pool of candidates as possible; and staff within the Profession deliver talks to schools to promote economics as a potential career for all.

In July 2023, the ODWG developed an outreach desk-based research paper: *“Growing a Diverse Economist Profession”*, which examined data across a range of sources to provide a baseline and overview of the current economics uptake at schools and Universities and thereby, making an assessment of the potential pipeline for the future.

The paper revealed that the gender imbalance within the Profession reflects the pool of economics graduates within Northern Ireland. This is an issue that is also evident in Great Britain and RoI, where we are aware that the UK Government Economic Service (GES) and Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) have similar gender balances to the NICS Economist Profession.

Since then, the Profession worked with the Careers Service to create ‘[Spotlight on Economics](#)’, an economics career guide showcasing how local people have used economics in their journeys to build successful careers, as well as information on local routes.

Disability

The proportion of NICS staff with a declared disability rose from 5.7% in January 2023 to 6.1% in January 2024. Disability data is missing for 44.5% of the NICS workforce therefore it is likely that this figure is higher. It is recognised that the 2024 figure (6.1%) is lower than that for the comparator economically active population (aged 16-64 years) who have a disability (10.2%, subject to sampling error) and more work is required to increase the representation of disabled people in the NICS workforce. The comparative figure for the UK civil service was 15.8%.

During the reporting period the NICS has delivered a number of interventions to promote colleagues' understanding of neurodiversity in the workplace including an awareness event for all staff and a series of internal communications to mark Autism Awareness Week, Dyslexia Awareness Week and ADHD Awareness Month. Development of a new Neurodiversity Line Manager's Toolkit also progressed with the toolkit launching in April 2024. The toolkit was developed to help line managers better understand neurodivergence and how they can create supportive, neuro-inclusive working environments where neurodivergent colleagues can flourish and thrive. The toolkit was developed by People and Organisational Development through engagement with Diversity Champions Network, staff networks, neurodivergent colleagues and external stakeholders including Equality Commission NI and disability sector representatives.

The NICS commenced a review of its reasonable adjustment procedures to ensure line managers are equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills; and that the organisation provides an effective reasonable adjustment process for users which complies with obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; reflects best practice; and supports service delivery/business needs. The outworkings of the review will include a new reasonable adjustment policy and guidance which will be developed and co-designed with stakeholders including colleagues with lived experience.

Employers for Disability Northern Ireland – Lead Partner Membership

Employers for Disability NI (EFDNI) is a network of employers from the public, private and voluntary sectors working together to promote training and employment opportunities, and accessibility for disabled people as employees and customers.

The NICS continues to be a Lead Partner of EFDNI and as such enjoys access to the range of services EFDNI provides, including independent and professional advice, guidance and support on disability issues for all NICS staff and managers, a conciliation service to help resolve disability-related issues and training to increase disability knowledge and awareness across the NICS.

During 2023/24, EFDNI delivered 18 hours of disability awareness training available to all NICS staff in collaboration with People and Organisational Development and the Disability Staff Network. The programme also included Disability Positive training for staff and a session specifically for Diversity Champions which allowed participants to attain the Disability Positive accreditation – 30 staff across the service were accredited as Disability Positive in 2023/24.

A range of activities to encourage and promote NICS career opportunities to the disability sector were delivered during the year, including positive action advertising, targeted advertising and outreach information sessions. The NICS continues to have a permanent presence on the EFDNI Jobs Bulletin Board which is an online career opportunities service circulated to disability organisations to attract disabled applicants.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS)

The Guaranteed Interview Scheme, which launched in January 2022, continued to be applied in appropriate external NICS recruitment competitions (at any grade and any discipline).

International Job Shadow Day

Since 2018, the NICS has participated annually in International Job Shadow Day (IJSJ which offers work experience to disabled people). In 2023, the NICS offered 53 placements under the initiative with nine placement opportunities accepted and facilitated. IJSJ is an opportunity to celebrate the valuable contribution that disabled

people make to our workforce and economy, and to promote inclusion in the workplace for people with disabilities.

NICS Disability Champion/Disability Working Group/Autism Working Group

People and Organisational Development provides support to the NICS Disability Champion in their role as Chair of the Disability Working Group, which is a consultative group that promotes disability inclusion across the NICS. The group comprises members of the NICS Disability Staff Network, representatives from the disability sector and NIPSA and a number of departmental colleagues responsible for disability public policy.

The Disability Champion also chairs the NICS Autism Working Group whose overall aim is to help NICS autistic staff as well as those who are parents/carers of autistic individuals to raise awareness and understanding. During the reporting period, the e-learning package 'Supporting Autistic People: an introduction' (which was developed in conjunction with people with lived experience) continued to be promoted across the organisation.

Disability Staff Network (DSN)

Since its formation in November 2020, the Disability Staff Network has continued to provide an opportunity for colleagues to come together to share experiences, information, support and learning; to promote, celebrate and champion disability diversity; and to provide a voice to disabled colleagues that will enhance their working lives, and contribute to a work environment where everyone feels supported and valued.

People and Organisational Development continues to support the DSN, providing funding to support its development, raise its profile and increase its membership.

LGBTQ+

The NICS is committed to being an LGBTQ+ inclusive employer and latest data published in January 2024 indicates that 5.9% of civil servants identify as LGBTQ+ however data is missing for 66.4% of the NICS workforce therefore the figure may be higher. The percentage of applicants for permanent NICS jobs in the most recent

reporting period (i.e. recruitment competitions which closed to further activity in 2023) who identified as LGBTQ+ was 7.4%.

Pride

The NICS celebrated Pride season 2023 through a series of internal and external communications and events, and participation in the Belfast Pride Village provided a valuable outreach opportunity and to promote the NICS as a diverse and inclusive employer.

Civil servants, including senior leaders such as the Head of the NICS, supported the LGBTQ+ Staff Network and participated in the Belfast Pride parade.

Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme/Workplace Equality Index

During 2023, the NICS renewed its membership to the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme and made a submission to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) to externally benchmark its practices to ensure that they are LGBTQ+ inclusive. The NICS achieved Stonewall's Silver Employer Award under the 2023 WEI and, as part of ongoing benchmarking, made a submission during 2023 to the 2024 Index. Results are expected in summer 2024.

NICS LGBTQ+ Staff Network

The LGBTQ+ Staff Network continues to play an integral role in advancing LGBTQ+ inclusion across the organisation. The NICS also has a designated LGBTQ+ Champion whose role is to encourage a positive and LGBTQ+ inclusive workplace across the NICS. To achieve this, the Champion works closely with the LGBTQ+ Staff Network to deliver a series of events, communications and initiatives focusing on relevant health, wellbeing and lived experiences of colleagues.

In addition, the network also supported the development of e-learning products on LGBTQ+ Inclusion and Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion; launched an LGBTQ+ Role Models Guide and delivered a pilot Reverse Mentoring Programme during the reporting period.

People and Organisational Development continues to support the LGBTQ+ Staff Network, providing funding to support its development, raise its profile and increase its membership.

Gender

The NICS has implemented and continues to develop actions to support gender diversity; to seek to remove barriers to female progression; and to promote equal representation at every level of the NICS. By way of example, female representation across the NICS on 1 January 2024 was 50.2%, up from 47.9% in 2000 (closely matching wider society where women make up 49.5% of the economically active population).

Female representation at senior levels (i.e. Grade 5 and above) continues to improve. At 1 January 2024 it had increased to 43.8% compared to 11.3% in 2000.

The NICS delivered a number of initiatives to support gender diversity including events to celebrate International Men's Day and International Women's Day, and World Menopause Month. The Menopause Policy and accompanying e-learning module continued to be promoted during the reporting period to support colleagues experiencing menopause symptoms with several new departmental menopause circles established.

The NICS Women's Network aims to promote a diverse and inclusive NICS with equal representation of women at every level of the organisation. The Women's Network continues to grow and in 2023 led on activities to celebrate International Women's Day (IWD) and developed a pilot six-month Women's Mentoring Programme to support career development of female civil servants. 36 pairs of mentors and mentees were matched with the pilot due to complete in the summer 2024.

People and Organisational Development continues to provide an annual budget to support the running of the Women's Network, raise its profile and increase its membership.

Diversity Mark

The NICS is a founding member of Diversity Mark NI which is the awarding body in the UK and Ireland for the Diversity Mark Accreditation. This accreditation recognises an organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion, initially focussing on gender diversity. The Diversity Mark requires signatories to undergo an ongoing annual independent assessment to demonstrate the required standard of commitment to progressing diversity and inclusion and to develop an action plan with targets initially focusing on gender diversity.

In 2023, the NICS was awarded the Silver Diversity Mark through independent external assessment in recognition of its work to promote gender diversity. Further commitments have been made for 2024/25 as part of the Diversity Mark accreditation.

Age

The NICS has an older age profile than the comparator economically active population aged 16-65+ years. In particular, at January 2024, the proportion of NICS staff aged 55 or over (28.8% of NICS staff) is just over one and a half times that of the economically active population 16-65+ (17.2%).

Pensions

Between 2021-23/24 Pensions Division progressed a legislative response to promote age equality and remedy age discrimination in NI public service pension schemes (including the scheme for the NICS) as a consequence of the 'McCloud' judgement. This judgement found that the transitional protections introduced alongside 2015 reformed public service pension schemes had discriminated against younger members in some schemes. During this period the NI Assembly agreed two legislative consent motions for the remedy to address this age discrimination, which is now contained in the provisions of the Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Act 2022 to extend to devolved public service pension schemes in Northern Ireland. This framework legislation enabled scheme responsible departments to remove age related discrimination and ensure age equality going forward, with the effect that from 1 April 2022 all public service pension scheme members are now members of the 2015 reformed schemes only. Regulations have also now been made under the 2022 Act by

each of the scheme responsible departments (including DoF). This legislation enables Schemes to provide scheme members, who have been affected by the discrimination since the introduction of transitional protections on 1 April 2015 up until their removal from 1 April 2022, with a choice at the point of retirement (or retrospectively if they have already left service) as to how any reckonable service accrued within the remedy period is treated for pension purposes. This means all members affected by the discrimination are being given the choice to have their service during that 'remedy' period treated under either the pre 2015 (legacy) scheme or the post 2015 (reformed) scheme, thus ensuring equal treatment retrospectively and regardless of age. Civil Service Pensions has implemented this choice for new retirements from October 2023 and continue to work on the retrospective exercise.

Race and ethnicity

Excluding from the analyses those cases where data on ethnicity was missing (2,190 staff, or 9.1% of NICS staff), at 1 January 2024 0.6% (128 staff) of the NICS workforce was from a minority ethnic background (including members of mixed ethnic groups and the Irish Travelling Community). The proportion of NICS staff from a minority ethnic background is 2.4 percentage points lower than from the economically active population (3.0%). The NICS recognises it has more to do to increase the representation of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in its workforce.

On International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2024, the NICS signed Business in the Community's Race at Work Charter in support of its commitment to racial equality and wider strategy on diversity and inclusion. The Race at Work Charter is a charter to tackle ethnic disparities in the workplace. It provides employers with seven commitments to improve equality of opportunity for people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the workplace.

A range of activities to encourage and promote NICS career opportunities to minority ethnic groups were delivered during the reporting year, including positive action advertising, targeted advertising and outreach information sessions. The NICS also participated in Black History Expo to promote Civil Service careers and its public services.

Belfast Mela

In summer 2023, a number of NI departments, including DoF as Friends of Mela, once again supported the annual Belfast Mela. Mela offered an important in-person opportunity for the NICS, as an employer and service provider, to engage with minority ethnic communities and the public promoting the wide range of careers available and its public services. DoF published communications internally and on social media to celebrate Belfast Mela 2023.

To ensure all NI civil servants are aware of their roles and responsibilities in regard to the Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025, the Racial Equality e-learning package is available, which includes key ideas, awareness and practical strategies for racial equality that can be incorporated into daily actions, policy decisions and communications.

Race and Ethnicity Network

The Race and Ethnicity network was established in August 2020 and supports colleagues from minority ethnic backgrounds, ensuring their uniqueness and individuality are valued and respected. The network is also a platform to share experiences, raise concerns and share solutions where issues have been overcome.

The Race and Ethnicity Network continues to build its presence across the NICS and during the reporting period delivered a programme of events and communications. This included collaboration with JoinHer Network and the wider minority ethnic sector to promote opportunity, recognition and inclusion. Learning opportunities were created through webinars with lived experienced speakers and facilitators, covering a range of topics developed and led by the minority ethnic sector as part of Black History Month.

People and Organisational Development continues to support the Race and Ethnicity Staff Network, providing funding to support its development, raise its profile and increase its membership.

3. Departmental focussed

DoF Diversity Network

The DoF Diversity Network continues to promote diversity and inclusion across the Department and support specific location or topic related groups. This year DoF was represented at Belfast MELA, which again had a large representation from the various DoF business areas. DoF also hosted all those from NICS taking part in the Belfast PRIDE parade and has increased its participation to the SistersIN mentoring Programme. The network continues to consider where it can fill gaps in the work being undertaken by others such as People and OD, NICS HR or specific DoF groups.

Goodwood House Mental Health Group

The Goodwood House quiet room remains available for staff who are working in the office. It has been renamed “Hazy’s Haven” following the sad passing of Hazlette Benson – one of the Goodwood House Mental Health Group’s founding members.

LPS Health and Wellbeing Hub

LPS continues to maintain a Health and Wellbeing Hub on its Intranet site with the main aim being to provide support for staff working in the hybrid environment. The hub lists the Mental Health First Aiders and Health & Safety representatives in LPS locations. The hub also holds contact details for support services available within the NICS and contact routes for various help services. Posters with this information are displayed in all LPS offices.

4. NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion and DoF Racial Equality Champion Update

In November 2022, the DoF Racial Equality Champion (REC) and NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion (one individual) joined the Executive Office (TEO) to take up role of Head of Racial Equality Delivery Team, supporting colleagues on the implementation of the priorities from the Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 and aiding the development of future policies.

These dual responsibilities are not full-time roles; the roles effectively merged into one. There is not always a clear distinction between DoF and NICS activities; however, this ensures communication and activities in respect of racial equality, diversity and

inclusion are therefore consistent for all NICS departments and staff. Please see the following outline of 2023/24 activities:

Internal Outreach – within NICS

- The NICS Race and Ethnicity Network (REN) continues to develop, since it was established in August 2020; it currently has two co-chairs. The network supports colleagues from minority ethnic backgrounds, ensuring their uniqueness and individuality are valued and respected. The network is also a platform to share experiences, raise concerns and share solutions where issues have been overcome. The network is consulted, involved and included in the development of relevant NICS policies and initiatives. Membership includes staff across government departments, grades and backgrounds.
- The NICS Race and Ethnicity Network continues to build its presence across the NICS, including maintaining and developing its intranet resource hub, accessible to all staff in NICS and its related agencies. The hub includes useful links to organisations in the minority ethnic sector to raise awareness of the important work being done by the sector and also encourage collaboration and connections by NICS with the sector. The hub hosts the Vision and Mission Statement, Terms of Reference, latest information on the work of the Network and details of upcoming events. It highlights NICS' support of Belfast Mela including membership of Friend of Mela scheme, and links to NICS Black History Month and NICS Cultural Competence webinars, delivered in partnership with the minority ethnic sector. There is also promotion of articles published by the Network including one which highlighted the importance of using proper pronunciation of people's names and another which highlighted, following review of Census 2021 data, that minority ethnic people represent 8.1% (153,000) of the total 1.9m population here.
- NICS Race and Ethnicity Network runs events to raise awareness of the issues facing underrepresented groups and to help colleagues understand how they can help everyone in the workplace to feel valued for who they are. There are also learning and development opportunities to listen, to ask, to share and to learn.

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- NICS Race and Ethnicity Network runs monthly virtual tea-breaks for members to build connections and provide safe inclusive spaces for conversations around race and ethnicity.
- NICS Race and Ethnicity Network has collaborated with the minority ethnic sector to promote opportunity, recognition and inclusion. The Network supports people from minority ethnic backgrounds participating in and being represented fully in all aspects of life - public, political, economic, social and cultural - and enjoying a shared sense of belonging. Working together with the minority ethnic sector, the Network has created opportunities for learning through a series of webinars delivered to NICS staff by lived experienced speakers from the minority ethnic sector itself:
 - Black History Month NICS Cultural Competence Webinars - Celebrating the culture, history, achievements and contributions of our African and Caribbean communities here, and contributing to the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024).
 - NICS Cultural Competence Webinars - Following the successful format of Black History Month, there was again collaboration with the minority ethnic sector to deliver NICS staff webinars, hearing from our local Chinese, Indian, Polish, South American and Mexican communities.
- In April 2023, the Executive Office Racial Equality Legislation Team was invited to speak to members at an information session in relation to the public consultation on the review of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 and introduction of Ethnic Equality Monitoring.
- On 21st May 2023, the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development was marked with NICS Race and Ethnicity Network co-chairs publishing a NICS article on #MyNames, reflecting on the importance of names, how they define us, giving insight to our culture and identity.
- In May 2023, there was collaboration with other NICS staff networks and DoF People & Organisational Development, to develop and launch mandatory NICS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion e-learning products for all NICS staff, covering 'Introduction to Diversity and Inclusion' and 'Equality and Diversity Essentials'. This

included NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion participating in a video on the theme of race and ethnicity which was used to support learning by staff.

- NICS Race and Ethnicity Network continued to collaborate with other NICS staff networks and People & Organisational Development to mark National Day for Staff Networks (10th May 2023) and National Inclusive Week (25th September to 1st October 2023); this included participating in videos and speaking at virtual NICS staff events.
- In August 2023, in order to raise awareness and promote its work, NICS Race and Ethnicity Network published an article in the Department for Communities (DfC) Operational Delivery Apprenticeship Scheme Newsletter.
- In September 2023, following development in conjunction with other NICS staff networks, People and Organisational Development and the NICS Diversity Champions Network, a NICS Guide for Allies was launched to raise awareness and understanding of what it means to be an ally in the Civil Service and the important role allies play in supporting under-represented groups in our workplace. Across the main diversity areas, including race and ethnicity, each concentrated on themes of:
 - Considering your behaviour and understanding of microaggressions
 - Being informed
 - Being active and visible
 - Challenging inappropriate behaviours
 - Language and terminology
- In September 2023, following NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion working together with TEO Statistics and Research Branch and NISRA Census colleagues to analyse the various race and ethnicity Census 2021 datasets, it was possible to provide a more comprehensive figure of 8.1% (c153,000) minority ethnic people (reflecting a wider definition to include ethnic group, national identity and religion) of the total 1.9m population here. This should be used in policymaking, supporting decision-making (including EQIAs) and planning. A NICS intranet article was published in

November 2023, to further communicate and promote this information to NICS departments and staff.

- In November 2023, NICS Race and Ethnicity Network held its first in-person cultural event at PRONI. They welcomed NICS colleagues to an afternoon of dance, arts, culture and learning, including a Japanese Origami workshop from ArtsEkta and a Greek dance demonstration from one of the co-chairs, with the chance for attendees to learn some steps. A NICS intranet article was also published.
- In December 2023, NICS Race and Ethnicity Network published an article in the Department of Health Pulse Ezine to raise awareness and promote its work.
- NICS marked 21st March 2024, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as part of its commitment to racial equality and its wider diversity and inclusion strategy, with the signing of Business in the Community's Race at Work Charter. This is a national charter which provides employers with a strategic framework to help to address racial inequality and create a truly inclusive workplace.
- To mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, colleagues from DoF People & Organisational Development, NICSHR Learning and Development, NICS departmental Racial Equality Champions, NICS Race and Ethnicity Network and TEO Racial Equality Division, took part in a Small Worlds workshop, offering a safe space for participants to meet and have conversations with people from different backgrounds and parts of the world, including refugees and asylum seekers. It allowed participants to get a glimpse into real lives, of growing up in a different part of the world, a different culture or religious background, challenges of being new and different reasons for moving here. Attendees benefited from hearing fresh perspectives and of the resilience demonstrated by the speakers which also helped in addressing misunderstandings and myths.
- NICS Race and Ethnicity Network has been collaborating with People & Organisational Development to improve information on the designated section of the NICS recruitment website to provide guidance to applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly in relation to nationality requirements and right to work requirements. This is to be enabled on the website soon.

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- NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion and Network continue to support and participate in People & Organisational Development led marketing strategy in respect of various recruitment campaigns, including speaking at information awareness sessions targeted at the minority ethnic sector.
- NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion continues to update NICS staff about racial equality, diversity and inclusion, with personal reflections. Hyperlinks are used within articles to support staff wanting to click and learn more. Also reminders to staff that network activities are supported by NICS Diversity Champions' Group and therefore staff can participate and support as part of the working day. Furthermore there is promotion of the importance of raising awareness and helping colleagues understand how they can help everyone in the workplace to feel valued for who they are.
- The Departmental Racial Equality Network, chaired by the DoF Racial Equality Champion, meets as required to address any specific items. DoF Racial Equality Network was established to improve engagement and internal communication between directorates, promote awareness and understanding of racial equality issues and to build upon and share existing areas of good practice. Regular updates to DoF Departmental Board are provided as required, including verbal briefing to DoF Minister and Permanent Secretary.

External Outreach – outside NICS

- NICS Race and Ethnicity (and DoF Racial Equality) Champion continues to update the Racial Equality Subgroup as required, where there is regular opportunity for members to seek further information. As the Champion is also the Head of Racial Equality Delivery Team at Executive Office, he attends the quarterly Subgroup meetings, being able to update, speak and discuss across his various NICS roles.
- In addition to regular updates to Subgroup, DoF Racial Equality Champion communicates to both Subgroup and non-Subgroup members within the minority ethnic sector via NICS/DoF Comms emails. DoF Racial Equality Champion remains accessible to Subgroup members and has been contacted by individual members or organisations, within the minority ethnic sector, who brought specific DoF related matters for attention to progress and address together.

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- Since March 2018, NICS Race and Ethnicity (and DoF Racial Equality Champion) has had a twitter/X account (@alfiecbwong) set up to continue outreach and engagement with DoF/NICS staff and outside NICS. For example, on social media he has promoted the more comprehensive figure of 8.1% (c153,000) minority ethnic people (reflecting a wider definition to include ethnic group, national identity and religion) of total 1.9m population here. He has highlighted that continued misuse of ethnicity data would underestimate the impact of decisions (e.g. funding, budget cuts, planning), when it comes to supporting minority ethnic communities, if presence and visibility of already under-represented groups are diminished by human error. Also, he promotes and raises awareness during attendance at various events organised by the minority ethnic sector.
- NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion is also currently DoF's (now also for NICS and TEO) representative on Belfast Migrant Forum (chaired by Belfast City Council) and Consultative Forum on Equality (chaired by NIHE); therefore, allowing for further engagement with the minority ethnic sector.
- NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion also sits on NICS Race and Ethnicity Network Executive Committee and attends regular Civil Service Race Forum meetings involving leads from all four nations.
- Since May 2021, NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion also sat on the British National (Overseas) Advisory Group, supporting Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP), in respect of the immigration scheme devised by the UK Government, for people from Hong Kong who are British Nationals (Overseas). This role was stopped when NISMP ceased to operate, however he worked with DoF colleagues to set up a Welcome Hub on nidirect, being the key information source (including translation facility) to support integration.
- NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion continues to support the online translation service on the nidirect website. This free translation facility (over 100 languages) was developed in collaboration with the minority ethnic sector and enabled on the nidirect website in February 2021 in response to feedback obtained from an engagement event with the Racial Equality Subgroup and a subsequent survey launched at Belfast

Mela 2019 with the wider minority ethnic sector on DoF services. DoF reviewed the official central website to raise awareness and improve accessibility to online government services, contributing to the Equality of Service Provision outcome of the Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025. Positive feedback has been received from the sector, including that it has helped organisations reduce their own translation costs on accessing government information and support. Recently, this accessibility has been enhanced by the deployment of a floating widget button, following consultation with NICS Race and Ethnicity Network, which means the translation facility is always readily accessible regardless of where someone is on the webpages, even if scrolling up and down.

- On 24th May 2023, NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion spoke at a Labour Relations Agency lunchtime event on racial equality, diversity and inclusion. Topics covered included Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025, Ethnic Equality Monitoring, Review of Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, Minority Ethnic Development Fund, NICS Race and Ethnicity Network, Belfast Mela, Census 2021 data, annual PPS hate crime statistics and role of NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion.
- People & Organisational Development has implemented a range of outreach actions to encourage and promote NICS career opportunities to minority ethnic applicants and other groups, which are under-represented in our workforce. These actions included using inclusive imagery and NICS minority ethnic staff role models in advertising, positive action advertising, targeted advertising and information sessions with minority ethnic organisations for large volume recruitment competitions.
- In recent years the Civil Service has externally advertised a number of its general service competitions, moving from internal promotion boards open only to existing civil servants, in order to attract as wide an applicant pool as possible and to help diversify the composition of its workforce. These competitions include Administrative Officer, Executive Officer 1 and 2, Staff Officer and Deputy Principal, Skills Academy and Apprenticeships.
- A communications and outreach plan has been developed with the overarching objective to support delivery of the NICS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda,

promoting key messages at all levels across the Service and key audiences externally. The plan records actions to support the delivery of specific communication requirements identified throughout the Diversity Action Plan.

- DoF, and NICS as the employer, renewed its Friend of Mela scheme with ArtsEkta. On 27th August 2023, DoF and NICS as the employer took part again in Belfast Mela Day in Botanic Gardens. Exhibiting were colleagues from Land & Property Services, Ordnance Survey NI, Go ON NI, NI Cyber Security Centre, NISRA, People & Organisation Development and NICS Race and Ethnicity Network. There was a series of social media videos (including by Director of NICS People and Organisational Development and NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion), tweets, NICS articles to promote the event in the lead-up to it, during the week-long programme and after the event.
- The Mela remains an important opportunity to outreach and engage with minority ethnic communities and other members of the public. There is opportunity to share, with our diverse communities, what we do and who we are, and about our public services. It provides opportunity to reach out to people, helping with signposting, advice and support, while always listening to feedback and looking for ways to work together, supporting minority ethnic communities. It also presents the opportunity to promote the wide range of careers, roles and opportunities to join NICS.
- During October 2023, NICS participated in Black History Month, celebrating the culture, history, achievements and contributions of African and Caribbean communities here. NICS is also contributing to the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), where the theme is "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development". NICS Race and Ethnicity Network has collaborated with the minority ethnic sector, to create opportunities for learning through a series of webinars by lived experienced speakers from the minority ethnic sector, delivered to staff both in NICS and colleagues in UK Civil Service across Scotland, England and Wales, on topics such as:

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- Revisiting Customary Laws (African & Brehon) through the Lens of Ubuntu (I am Because We Are) as a means towards justice and inclusive societies;

- Investigating cultural values, traditions, language, customs and how the law either hinders, infringes, or supports justice within inclusive societies;

- Confronting the past in the present in making the future: The past and how it still continues to have ongoing implications in the present and future; and

- What to take from it, Where, When and how to move forward. Understanding exclusion systematically, methodology, practice and how change is necessary to move forward. How to understand the cause and effect of actions and the long-term implications that result.

- On 25th October 2023, NICS Race and Ethnicity Network, People & Organisational Development, Go ON NI and Land & Property Services exhibited at Black History Expo, St. George's Market, Belfast. This was another opportunity to outreach and engage with minority ethnic communities and other members of the public about public services and careers.

- On 8th November 2023, NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion spoke at QUB event on Transforming Divided Societies into Welcoming Communities.

- NICS Race and Ethnicity Champion (and DoF Racial Equality Champion) has attended various external events (promoting through social media) including:

- Launch of QUB Research on Experiences of Education Among Minority Ethnic Groups in Northern Ireland

- Launch of Belfast Mela 2023

- Launch of South East Asian Heritage Month event: Routes to our Roots by Civil Service Race Forum (CSRF) East & South East Asian (ESEA) Working Group

- Black History Expo, Belfast

- First Steps Women's Centre - Human Library event

- Civil Service Race Forum (CSRF) East & South East Asian (ESEA) Working Group Virtual Trip to South Korea

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2023-24 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

Please see appended S75 action plan with progress/examples identified.

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3 Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes

No (go to Q.4)

Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

3a With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

3b What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)*

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As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

Other *(please specify and give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

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4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Job descriptions contain Section 75 statutory duties relative to the official's responsibility. For example, Central Support Team staff job descriptions contain objectives relative to their role in providing advice and guidance and promoting equality across the Department.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes, organisation wide

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- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Under the NICS Performance Management Framework, Personal Performance Agreements contain targets and objectives which include statutory obligations relative to the official's responsibility. For example, specific Central Support Team staff PPAs contain objectives relative to their role in providing advice and guidance and promoting equality across the department.

To ensure senior leaders demonstrate and are accountable for visible inclusive leadership and behaviours, the diversity and inclusion related performance objective which was introduced for Permanent Secretaries in 2022 was extended to all Senior Civil Servants in 2023.

- 6 In the 2023-24 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

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- Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- Yes, in some departments/jobs
- No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's corporate plan
- No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2023-24 report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The Department has annual Business Plans that provide detail on priority areas, objectives and associated targets.

Equality action plans/measures

7 Within the 2023-24 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:

See below

Actions ongoing:

See below

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Actions to commence:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

Due to the 'live' nature of the action plan, although some actions/activities are marked complete, they sometimes continue into other years i.e. some actions have been completed since its conception in 2018, with others ongoing as annual activities for the duration of the plan or spanning 2 or more years.

- 8** Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2023-24 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

N/A. The Section 75 Action Plan 2018-23 was published in October 2018 following consultation.

Work is ongoing to prepare new plans for publication in 2024/25.

- 9** In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2023-24 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality

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- Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

10 Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)*

- All the time
- Sometimes
- Never

11 Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2023-24 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

Click or tap here to enter text.

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12 In the 2023-24 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: *(tick all that apply)*

- Face to face meetings
- Focus groups
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- Questionnaires
- Information by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation
- Internet discussions
- Telephone consultations
- Other *(please specify)*: Click or tap here to enter text.

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

Click or tap here to enter text.

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13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes

No

Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes

No

Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

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<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/impactassessments>

- 15** Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*):

13

- 16** Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2023-24:

5 Policy consultations conducted with **screening** assessment presented.

Click or tap here to enter text. Policy consultations conducted **with an equality impact assessment** (EQIA) presented.

Click or tap here to enter text.Consultations for an **EQIA** alone.

- 17** Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

None.

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18 Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*tick one box only*)

Yes

No concerns were raised

No

Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

All feedback received from our equality consultees, including the Commission, is considered and appropriate amendments to the screening form completed. No decisions though were affected by those considerations.

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

19 Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes

No

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Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

20 From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes

No, already taken place

No, scheduled to take place at a later date

Not applicable

Please provide any details:

Click or tap here to enter text.

21 In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

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Yes

No

Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

- 22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2023-24 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

N/A – ongoing monitoring of policies has not revealed any adverse impacts.

- 23** Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

NISRA Equality Statistics for the NICS 2023 and 2024:

[Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service updated 2023 report](#)

[Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 report](#)

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[Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024](#)

Equality data from Census 2021 is available from the results section of the NISRA website (which includes the main statistics publications, commissioned tables and local level Grid Square data (see <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/2021-census/results>) and also from census digital products (i.e. the [Census 2021 Flexible Table Builder](#) and [Census Area Explorer](#)). The Flexible Table Builder allows users to browse or create their own tables to include multiple equality variables at a variety of available geographies – each available to share or download on demand. The Census Area Explorer allows users to browse geographies in Northern Ireland using an interactive map and obtain summary census equality statistics for each area.

In January 2023, TEO policy leads in the Racial Equality Delivery Team commissioned NISRA Census Office to create a new Census variable with the aim of providing a more refined classification of groups in Northern Ireland that might require Ethnic Equality Monitoring. To that end, NISRA statisticians in TEO and Census Office worked collaboratively to define a specification for a variable that went beyond simply looking at Ethnicity (it is recognised that looking at results of the Census ethnicity question in isolation does not provide the full picture on the wide range of diversity in Northern Ireland) but also incorporated characteristics such as religion and national identity to

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create a classification of combined characteristics, enabling analysis of the census dataset against a new, more detailed diversity indicator – [The TEO Racial Equality variable](#). This work has been very successful at identifying a larger group of residents in Northern Ireland that would be in scope for equality monitoring and to date has been included in the [Census Flexible Table Builder](#) and [NI Longitudinal Study](#) products – enabling detailed Census analysis and increasing the capability to undertake research of that group. Anyone can use the variable in the Census table builder, and to date further analysis has already been done by TEO and other departments since its release in June 2023.

In February 2024, NISRA, funded by [Administrative Data UK](#) published the research report '[Disability Pay Gaps in Northern Ireland](#)'. The study used earnings data from the 2011 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, enriched with data on personal characteristics from the 2011 Census to generate novel information to assist policy understanding of disability pay gaps in Northern Ireland. For disabled and non-disabled employees, the key aims of the research were to: compare job-related and personal characteristics; quantify disability pay levels and associated disability pay gaps for job-related and personal characteristics; and use statistical modelling to identify key factors associated with (i) disability pay levels and the (ii) disability pay gap. The work included comparisons between public and private sector among other areas.

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In November 2023, NISRA published the [2023 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#) (ASHE). This provides detailed information on employee earnings in Northern Ireland and includes analysis of the gender pay gap in Northern Ireland. The gender pay gaps for all employees (regardless of working pattern) in both NI and the UK have consistently been in favour of males, however, the difference in male and female earnings in both regions has narrowed over the last two decades.

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2023-24, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

24 During 2023-24 several new learning interventions were made available to staff by

NICSHR Learning and Development. The new interventions are listed below:

Introduction to Children's Rights (e-Learning); Conducting Child Rights Impact Assessment (e-Learning); LGBTQ+ Inclusion - Team Member (e-Learning); LGBTQ+ Inclusion - Team Member (e-Learning); Introduction to Diversity and Inclusion (e-Learning); Equality and Diversity Essentials (e-Learning); Trans & Non-Binary Inclusion - Manager (e-Learning); Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion - Team Member (e-Learning); Section 75 Duties - Monitoring Requirements (Virtual Classroom); Section 75 Duties - A Focus On Screening

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(Virtual Classroom); Section 75 Duties -Section 75 Duties and Equality Assessments
(Virtual Classroom).

Staff in the Department undertook the following training provided by NICHR L&D during
2023 -2024.

Course	Numbers of staff completed
Buy Social (e-learning)	0
Disability Awareness for Frontline Staff (e-learning)	9
Domestic Abuse (e-learning)	9
Introduction to Human Rights (e-learning)	2
Introduction to Children's Rights (e-Learning)	3
Conducting Child Rights Impact Assessment (e-Learning)	1
Introduction to Section 75 (e-learning)	2
Mental Health Awareness for Managers Managing Remote Teams (Webinar)	1
Mental Health Awareness for Staff Working at Home (Webinar)	1

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Positive Mental Health Toolkit for Line Managers (e-learning)	5
Positive Mental Health Toolkit for Staff (e-learning)	9
Recruitment and Selection – Standards and Skills (Webinar)	137
Recruitment & Selection: Refresher Training for SCS (Webinar)	14
Scoring Social Value - Construction Contract (Webinar)	2
Scoring Social Value - Services and ICT Contract (Webinar)	10
Supporting Vulnerable People (e-learning)	11
Unconscious Bias (e-learning)	40
Supporting Autistic People (e-Learning)	287
LGBTQ+ Inclusion - Team Member (e-Learning)	41
LGBTQ+ Inclusion – Manager (e-Learning)	31
Menopause Matters starting the conversation (e-learning)	8
Introduction to Diversity and Inclusion (e-Learning)	3521
Equality and Diversity Essentials (e-Learning)	0
Trans & Non-Binary Inclusion - Manager (e-Learning)	15

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Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion - Team Member (e-Learning)	33
Section 75 - The Monitoring Requirements (Virtual Classroom)	2
Section 75 Duties - A Focus On Screening (Virtual Classroom)	15
Section 75 Duties -Section 75 Duties and Equality Assessments (Virtual Classroom)	16
Section 75 Screening Video (e-Learning)	0
Racial Equality NICS (e-Learning)	6

Please provide **any examples** of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

25 Below is an example of the feedback received for the Racial Equality NICS eLearning 2023-24 :

91% of respondents rated the training materials as Good to Excellent

91% of respondents rated the training as Good to Excellent

94% of respondents rated their increase in knowledge of the subject as Good to Excellent

94% of respondents rated their overall experience as Good to Excellent

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Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)

Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2023-24, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

- 26** NISRA, the principal source of official statistics and social research on Northern Ireland, has been running a Continuous Household Survey since 1983. The Survey is designed to provide a regular source of information on a wide range of issues relevant to Northern Ireland.

The survey asks questions on a variety of topics, such as internet access and how people access government and public services. We use this information to inform the types of digital skills courses which we run, and the target audience for the incoming year plan.

Course satisfaction surveys are completed by participants and are used to inform course content and the types of courses being offered.

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2023-24?

- 27** Insert number here: 0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Section 3: Looking Forward

28 Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

A statutory 5-year review was completed in the 2022/23 reporting period, with the next review scheduled for 2026/27. However, the Scheme can be reviewed at any stage.

29 Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? (*please provide details*)

We will continue to focus on improvements to equality screening, the consideration and inclusion of relevant data.

We will continue to review our processes relating to the NI Budget and provide opportunity for decision makers to review the equality implications in line with our Equality Scheme.

We will work to improve our Departmental processes for monitoring the equality impact of policies over time.

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30 In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

- Employment
- Goods, facilities and services
- Legislative changes
- Organisational changes/ new functions
- Nothing specific, more of the same
- Other (please state):

Click or tap here to enter text.

DoF Section 75 Action Plan 2018-23: Update on Progress during 2023/24

Policy Area: Human Resource Management

Strategic Objectives:

- Develop and implement policies and procedures to support NICS departments in meeting their business objectives
- Effectively manage and develop our people and resource DoF effectively to support the delivery of business objectives

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Inequality	Action	Performance Outcome	Timescale	2023/24 Update
<p>Under-representation of Protestants in General Service administrative and junior management grades and of Protestants and Catholics in some grades in the Professional and Specialist groups in the NICS compared to the NI labour market (Religious belief).</p>	<p>Use of positive action advertising (PAA) statements to encourage applications from under-represented groups. The NICS will develop and implement a NICS wide outreach plan, which will include a range of affirmative actions such as PAA and targeted outreach with the education sector and appropriate professional bodies as appropriate.</p>	<p>Representation of both communities in line with what would be expected based on the relevant comparator, through the Review of Fair Participation in the NICS (the “Article 55 Review”).</p>	<p>Continuous until the next review (due for publication 2024)</p>	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>The NICS continues to meet its statutory obligations under the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (1998) by submitting an annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return. In addition, it continues to analyse recruitment competitions to monitor the profile of applications and the progress of all equality groups through each recruitment process.</p> <p>The latest workforce equality data indicates that overall there is a 4.0 percentage points difference between the community background composition of the NICS and its comparator population.</p> <p>Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024</p> <p>Preparation has commenced for the next Article 55 Review to be submitted to the ECNI, which will assess the fair participation of Protestants and Roman Catholics, the findings of which will inform areas where affirmative action has to be taken.</p>

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Inequality	Action	Performance Outcome	Timescale	2023/24 Update
				<p>Throughout 2023/24 work continued to promote the range of career opportunities available in the NICS and encourage the widest applicant pool by using a mix of advertising, communications and engagement and outreach activity Further details are available in the NICS Recruitment Annual Report 2023 and Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 2023.</p>
<p>Under-representation of males/females in some occupational groups/grade levels in the NICS compared to the NI labour market (Men and women generally).</p>	<p>Use of positive action advertising statements to encourage applications from under-represented group.</p> <p>The NICS will develop and implement a NICS wide outreach plan, which will include a range of positive actions such as PAA and targeted outreach with the education sector and</p>	<p>Representation of each gender in line with what would be expected based on the relevant comparator, through the Review of Gender in the NICS.</p>	<p>Continuous until the next review (due for publication 2024)</p>	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>The NICS continues to meet its statutory obligations under the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (1998) by submitting an annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return. In addition, it continues to analyse recruitment competitions to monitor the profile of applications and the progress of all equality groups through each recruitment process.</p> <p>The latest workforce equality data indicates that the community background composition of the NICS is similar to that of its comparator population Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024.</p>

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Inequality	Action	Performance Outcome	Timescale	2023/24 Update
	appropriate professional bodies as appropriate.			<p>Throughout 2023/24 work continued to promote the range of career opportunities available in the NICS and encourage the widest applicant pool by using a mix of advertising, communications and engagement and outreach activity Further details are available in the NICS Recruitment Annual Report 2023 and Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 2023.</p> <p>In the reporting period, the NICS made a submission to Diversity Mark as part of its commitment to externally and independently benchmark its employment practices. As part of the accreditation, the NICS has committed to an annual independent assessment and development of an action plan for the forthcoming year. In 2023, the NICS was awarded the Silver Diversity Mark in recognition of the work it has delivered to promote gender diversity. Further commitments have been made for 2024/25 as part of the Diversity Mark accreditation.</p>

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Inequality	Action	Performance Outcome	Timescale	2023/24 Update
<p>Under-representation of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds.</p>	<p>The NICS will develop and implement a NICS wide outreach plan to attract under-represented groups.</p> <p>The DoF Racial Equality Champion (REC) will engage with business areas to ensure that all policies and operational practices of the Department and its agency take account of the aims and principles of the Racial Equality Strategy 2015-25. REC will also continue to engage externally, outside DoF, with Racial Equality Subgroup (chaired by TEO), Belfast Migrant Forum (chaired by Belfast City Council) and Intercultural Interest</p>	<p>Representation in line with what would be expected through the annual review of the NICS workforce composition.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>The NICS continues to analyse recruitment competitions to monitor the profile of applications and the progress of all equality groups through the recruitment process.</p> <p>Throughout 2023/24 work continued to promote the range of career opportunities available in the NICS and encourage the widest applicant pool by using a mix of advertising, communications and engagement and outreach activity Further details are available in the NICS Recruitment Annual Report 2023 and Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 2023.</p> <p>On International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2024 (31 March), the NICS signed Business in the Community’s Race at Work Charter in support of its commitment to racial equality and wider strategy on diversity and inclusion.</p> <p>COMPLETE</p> <p>REC established a Departmental Racial Equality Network in August 2020 to promote</p>

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Inequality	Action	Performance Outcome	Timescale	2023/24 Update
	Forum (chaired by Bryson Intercultural), to assist with any consultation.			awareness/share good practice. Feedback from the Racial Equality round-table event shared with Network and Departmental Board to progress (including feedback shared with People and OD for consideration and incorporation into current and planned work programme).
Support for transitioning staff (Men and women generally).	Develop transgender guidance for managers and staff.	Transgender guidance in place to ensure managers are aware of how to appropriately support transitioning staff and that staff are aware of the support they can expect.	By 31 st March 2019.	COMPLETE NICS Trans Policy and Transitioning at Work Guide launched in March 2019. HOCS, together with a colleague from NICS LGBT Staff Network and a Stonewall representative took part in a video to launch the Policy and Guide.
Data Gaps on Section 75 profile of NICS workforce (Racial group; Persons with a disability; Persons with dependents; Sexual orientation).	Obtain data from staff on ethnicity, disability, dependents and sexual orientation.	Increase in data held on HRConnect for existing staff in relation to ethnicity, disability, dependents and sexual orientation.	Ongoing	ONGOING The NICS Employee Services Portal provides functionality for NICS staff to update their disability, dependents and sexual orientation information.

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Inequality	Action	Performance Outcome	Timescale	2023/24 Update
				<p>A “Count Me In” campaign ran from October to December 2023 encouraging colleagues through a series of communications to update their equality data to increase completion rates and help the NICS to identify areas where action is required to better meet the needs of all colleagues. The campaign will run on an annual basis.</p> <p>The latest annual Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 report reflects a decrease in the data missing for NICS staff in respect of sexual orientation, ethnicity and disability.</p>
<p>Job opportunities for the long-term unemployed and those leaving education (All S75 categories).</p>	<p>The recruitment agency under Lots 1 and 2 (administration roles) and 6 (ancillary and industrial roles) of the new agency worker’s contract is required to recruit a minimum of 11.25% of new personnel who are long term</p>	<p>11.25% of AA and AO job roles recruited from the long-term unemployed and those leaving education.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>From 1st April 2023 - 31st March 2024, 304 AAs and AOs were placed on assignment from the long-term unemployed and those leaving the education sector. Total AAs and AOs placed from April 2023 - 31st March 2024 was 2658. The recruitment agency achieved 11.44 %.</p>

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Inequality	Action	Performance Outcome	Timescale	2023/24 Update
	unemployed or have left education in an Administrative Assistant (AA), Administrative Officer (AO) or analogous role, as per the conditions of the contract.			
Job opportunities for those who have a disability; who are a looked after child/care leaver; and who are from a minority ethnic background	The recruitment agency under Lots 1 and 2 (administration roles) and 6 (ancillary and industrial roles) of the new agency worker's contract is required to recruit a minimum of 3.75% of new personnel who have a disability; who are a looked after child/care leaver; or who are from a minority ethnic background in an Administrative Assistant (AA), Administrative	3.75% of AA and AO job roles recruited from those who have a disability; who are a looked after child/care leaver; and who are from a BAME community.	Ongoing	<p>From 1st April 2023 - 31st March 2024, 27 AAs and AOs from the priority groups were placed on assignment. Total AAs and AOs placed from April 2023 - 31st March 2024 was 2,658. The recruitment agency achieved 1.01%.</p> <p>The recruitment agency continues to communicate with various disability support groups who have been assisting in promoting the available opportunities. We are pleased to advise that we have seen a positive increase in the number of individuals placed from the priority groups into this current financial year (2024/2025) compared to previous years.</p> <p>Following the success of the Jobstart scheme pilot, which launched in 2022, the NICS</p>

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Inequality	Action	Performance Outcome	Timescale	2023/24 Update
	Officer (AO) or analogous role, as per the conditions of the contract.			<p>commenced work during 2023 on the development of the next phase of the scheme. The NICS as an employer will participate in phase two which will provide nine-month job placements to young people aged 16-24 who are at risk of long-term unemployment in Specialist Pathways groups (i.e. groups including young disabled people; those not in education, employment or training (NEET); care experienced, those engaged with the criminal justice system, and those at risk of falling into paramilitary activity or coercive control).</p> <p>Unlike the 2022 NICS pilot, which restricted job opportunities to within the Department for Communities, phase two will provide opportunities across the majority of NI departments. The NICS opportunities launched in tranches beginning February 2024.</p>

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Policy Area: Services to the Citizen

Strategic Objective:

- Deliver high quality, efficient and effective services to the citizen, NICS departments and the wider public sector

Inequality	Action	Performance Outcome	Timescale	2023/24 Update
<p>Access to Government Services (Age; Persons with a disability).</p>	<p>A range of accessible Digital Inclusion Programme activities and events are promoted throughout the year. They include: Positive Ageing, Carers Week, Get Online Week and Spring Online Week, and similar initiatives with other external organisations to encourage digital participation such as Safer Internet Day. Additionally, online training and informational opportunities were provided via our</p>	<p>Increase in Digital skills and internet usage for those aged 50-64 and 65+.</p>	<p>By 31st March each year.</p>	<p>COMPLETE Previous survey information indicates that internet use has increased for those age 50-64 and aged 65+ as follows: Age 50-64 2015/16 – 72% 2016/17 – 84% 2017/18 – 75% 2018/19 – 87% Unfortunately, no relevant NI stats have been available since 2019/20, although alternative data sets such as Lloyds Consumer Digital Index indicates that the UK as a whole has shown an increase of approx. 11% in the number of over 60s going online especially in the 60- 65 age group from 2019. Well in excess of 10,000 Northern Ireland citizens have been reached through Go ON NI Programmes over the years in liaison with the</p>

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	<p>partners at LibrariesNI and Supporting Communities during the year. The Go ON NI programme focuses on the benefits of being online, and brings together initiatives, places and tools to help and encourage off-liners to become internet beginners.</p> <p>Further details are all available at www.nidirect.gov.uk/go-on</p>			<p>Libraries NI Network, Supporting Communities and Business in the Community (BITC), as well as including input from the Digital Assist Steering Group (DASG) partners. The digital training sessions and information were focused on those over age 50, people with a disability, or those living in a rural community. The sessions included training on ‘Staying Safe Online’, ‘Introduction to the iPad’, ‘IT Help for Beginners’, ‘How to make more use of your iPad’, ‘Privacy and Security’, ‘using online government services’ as well as ‘1-2-1 eClinics’. In 2023/2024 the Go ON NI programme helped nearly 8,000 people with digital support.</p>
	<p>Increased working relationships and working in partnership with a range of organisations represented on the Digital Assist Steering Group, to deliver bespoke training, awareness and</p>	<p>Quarterly DASG and ScamwiseNI meetings.</p>	<p>By 31st March each year.</p>	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>Participation in DASG and Scamwise continues.</p> <p>During 2023/24, many aspects of this work were delivered through Go ON NI liaison with other key organisations as well as attendance at a range of informational events.</p> <p>Such events included sessions at Praxis Care Lisburn, Moira Friendship Group, Cost of Living</p>

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	<p>information sessions. Continuing working relationships with council Age Friendly Networks, as well as voluntary & community groups and organisations throughout the province.</p>			<p>events throughout the province, as well as digital training in community groups in Glenelly, Millisle, Ederney, Pomeroy, Gortin, Artigarvan, Lurgan, Enniskillen and Benbradagh, to name a few.</p> <p>We also attended larger events such as Balmoral Show, Belfast Mela and Open Botanic events, which enabled a digital inclusion outreach to more than 300 individuals from many ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>Go ON NI participation with Education Authority (EA) school admissions, free school meals and uniform grants, as well as EA transport procurement.</p>
	<p>Connectability Programme to continue as part of the DoF Go ON NI programme: specific IT sessions to be delivered for those with a mental or physical disability or to those caring for a disabled person. Provided across</p>	<p>Evaluation of IT sessions whereby increased Digital Skills enable engagement with government services and financial capability online as required.</p>	<p>By 31st March 2020.</p>	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>Now subsumed into the wider Go ON NI Programme.</p>

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	ten groups initially on a programme plan.			
	Engage with Autism NI on further training/awareness and review signage and communications. Share good practice with other public facing areas of the department.	People with a learning difficulty, Autism or a communication barrier supported in accessing government services.	By 30th June 2019.	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>Autism NI delivered be-spoke training to NICS HR OHS and Welfare Staff. Further training arranged for Land and Property Services and General Registry Office staff.</p> <p>The Autism (Amendment) Bill passed in March 2022 seeks to strengthen current legislation and places considerable responsibility on all government departments and on the health and social care sector. In response to this, NICS HR Learning and Development Team and DoH work continued to develop an e-learning package ‘Supporting Autistic People’ to assist in increasing colleague’s understanding of autism and enable them to provide necessary support within the workplace and in how we develop and deliver our services.</p> <p>The e-learning package was co-produced with people who have lived experience of autism and launched on 31 May 2022.</p>

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	<p>Introduce the JAM (Just a Minute) card to the NICS.</p>		<p>By 31st March 2019.</p>	<p>2023/24 update The Department of Health (DoH) published the cross departmental Autism Strategy 2023-28 on 13 December 2023 setting out key commitments and actions to be delivered to enhance and improve support for autistic people and their families. The strategy was accompanied by a two-year Delivery Plan (2023-2025) outlining the timescales for implementation of actions within the strategy. DoF has responsibility to deliver actions in support of outcome three of the strategy: <i>“We will seek opportunity for increased understanding of autism in the workplace to enable individuals to feel supported within the work environment and enhance career confidence and opportunity”</i>. In particular, DoF has committed to <i>“explore and deliver interventions to support and promote neurodiversity in (the NICS) its workplace. In addition, we will work in partnership with key stakeholders including people who have a lived experience of autism to review and implement a new reasonable adjustment process and develop a range of supporting resources for managers”</i>. Progress against delivery of the plan during 20-23/24 included ongoing promotion of the</p>
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				<p>Supporting Autistic People e-learning module; 18 hours of disability awareness training delivered (14.5 of which covered areas of neurodivergence); ongoing promotion of the JAM Card training (see below); events and a series of communications to increase awareness and development of a new Neurodiversity Line Manager's Toolkit.</p> <p>COMPLETE Implementation planning began in early 2019.</p> <p>The NICS remains committed to being a JAM (Just a Minute) friendly organisation. In 2022, the NICS renewed its partnership with the NOW Group - training continues to be promoted across the organisation.</p>
Accessibility of Stormont Estate	A new inclusive play park built at Stormont Estate.	A play park that is suitable for children of all abilities.	By 30 th June 2019.	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>Work is complete and the play park opened in June 2019.</p>

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<p>(Persons with a disability).</p>	<p>A new Changing Places toilet to be built at Stormont Estate.</p>	<p>Provide a Changing Places toilet that will enable people with complex needs to access the facilities they need to enjoy what Stormont Estate has to offer.</p>	<p>By 30th April 2021</p>	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>The facility was opened by the Finance Minister on 26 April 2021.</p>
<p>Take-up of rate rebate disabled person’s allowance and lone pensioner allowance (Marital Status, Age, Persons with a disability, Persons with dependents).</p>	<p>Outreach activity and updating of literature. The introduction of a ‘digital first’ approach for use by claimants to the new Rate Rebate scheme remains in place, alongside a suite of support options, including telephony for those who may have difficulty interacting with a digital interface, including help and assistance being</p>	<p>Uptake in benefit each year from those vulnerable groups entitled to financial assistance.</p>	<p>By 31st March each year.</p>	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>Figures for 2023-2024 indicate a slight decrease of 10% in DPA applications and a slight decrease of 15% in LPA figures when compared to 2022-2023 figures.</p> <p>Through 2023/2024 networking activities, engagement has taken place with various stakeholder groups such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Autism NI, - 5 Health Trust Carer Coordinators - Positive Ageing - Alzheimer Society - DfC JBOs - ABC Council Age Friendly Officer

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	<p>available at www.nidirect.gov.uk/go-on-ni. This should benefit customers who have faced difficulties in the past, including those who have found it difficult to access services during normal office opening hours.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solás Autism and Additional Needs Charity NI - RNIB <p>LPS Outreach Activities during 2023/2024 included attendance at the Balmoral Show from 10th – 15th May 2023, 5 Health Trust Carer Coordinators during Carers week from 5th - 11th June 2023, Belfast Mela 27th August 2023, DfC Cost of Living events held in Magherafelt JBO in September 2023, by Ballymena JBO in The Braid Ballymena in January 2024, in Downpatrick JBO in January 2024, by Newry JBO in Buttercrane Shopping Centre in February 2024, by Limavady JBO in Roe Valley Arts & Cultural Centre in March 2024, in Armagh JBO in March 2024, a Positive Aging Event held by in October 2023, Winter Warmer Information Session held by Lisburn & Castlereagh in October 2023 and Libraries NI Cost of Living events held in February and March 2024.</p> <p>These networking activities were used to promote a wide variety of LPS Rate Reliefs. The number of applications received by LPS for Disabled Persons Allowance (DPA) and Lone Pensioner Allowance (LPA) increased since the</p>
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				appointment of a dedicated LPS Outreach Manager in 2018.
Law in NI treats unmarried fathers differently from married and unmarried mothers (Marital Status).	Consider amendments to current laws.	Take forward recommendations on parent/child contact emerging from The Lord Chief Justice Review which was published in September 2017.	TBC	ONGOING Further work will be considered in the context of the work of the shadow Family Justice Board and taking account of existing legislative and other resource priorities.

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plan

DoF Disability Action Plan 2018-23: Update on Progress during 2023/24

Measure	Performance Indicators/Target	Timescale	Intended Outcome	Responsibility	2023/24 Update
Awareness Raising and Training					
DoF Diversity Network to work with people with disabilities to raise awareness of disability e.g. showcase and promote the positive contribution of DoF staff with disabilities to the department.	Promotion articles/activities. Staff survey results.	31 st March each year.	Positive attitudes towards people with a disability within the department.	DoF Diversity Network.	Ongoing outreach via multiple channels.
NICS Diversity Training Unconscious bias (e-learning) training to be completed by all staff but is mandatory for all new managers (EO2 and analogous and above).	Number of new staff trained.	Priority 1 training – within 0-4 months of appointment.	All new staff to know about the NICS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and their responsibilities, including the disability duties.	Line managers and NICS HR	ONGOING The DoF Induction process includes Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. There is a NICS Online Induction package on the LInKS Learning Management System that automatically updates the learner's training records when this package has been completed.

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					<p>During 2023/24 17 DoF staff completed this package although we are unable to identify if these were new or existing staff. A new e-learning Corporate Induction Programme is due to launch by the end of the 2024.</p> <p>L&D Update 2023-2024</p> <p>NICS diversity learning products developed and released by NICSHR are covered in point 24 of this report and for 2023-2024 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction to Diversity and Inclusion eLearning - Designated as mandatory training• LGBTQ+ Inclusion - Manager (e-Learning)• LGBTQ+ Inclusion - Team Member (e-Learning)
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					<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting Victims & Witnesses to Provide Evidence in Court (e-Learning)• Trans & Non-Binary Inclusion - Manager (e-Learning)• Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion - Team Member (e-Learning) <p>The Diversity and Inclusion Hub is accessible to all staff and contains all relevant diversity and inclusion related information. The diversity section of the NICS recruitment website sets out achievements to date in the NICS' diversity and inclusion journey and makes a public commitment to being a diverse and inclusive employer.</p> <p>People and Organisational Development collaborated with the NICS Disability Staff</p>
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					<p>Network and Employers for Disability NI (EFDNI) to deliver a comprehensive programme of disability awareness training to staff during 2023/24. The programme included Disability Positive training for staff and a module specifically for Diversity Champions which allowed participants to attain the Disability Positive accreditation.</p> <p>Interventions were also delivered to promote neuro-inclusion in the workplace – including an all staff event, a series of internal communications and a new Neurodiversity Line Manager’s Toolkit.</p>
Revise Form and Guidance on Reasonable Adjustments	New Form and Guidance available to staff.	By 31 st March 2019.	Clearer process and guidance for staff on the reasonable adjustments process.	People and Organisational Development	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>Guidance issued to staff in September 2018 by NICS Disability Champion on</p>

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					<p>passporting of reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>Update 2023/24 – a review of the NICS reasonable adjustment procedures commenced in 2023/24 to: (i) ensure line managers are equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills; and (ii) provide an effective and efficient reasonable adjustment process for users which is compliant with legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, reflects best practice, and supports service delivery/business needs.</p> <p>The outworkings of the review in 2024/25 will include a new reasonable adjustment policy and guidance which will be developed and co-designed with stakeholders including colleagues with lived experience. The NICS</p>
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					has agreed to engage with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) in the policy development process.
<p>Front-line staff to be trained to deal with customers with a disability through completion of the following e-learning courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Awareness for front-line staff; • Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) awareness; • Supporting Vulnerable People <p>Induction for front-line staff to include 'Every Customer Counts'.</p>	<p>Number of staff trained.</p> <p>Customer surveys/feedback.</p>	<p>Priority 1 training (0-4 months)</p> <p>Complaints dealt with within customer service standards timescales.</p> <p>Customer surveys carried out every year.</p>	<p>Improved service for customers with disabilities.</p>	<p>Line managers and customer service teams.</p>	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>NICS agreed to become JAM Card friendly and implementation planning began early 2019 with staff beginning training April 2019.</p> <p>2023/24 update - The NICS remains committed to being a JAM (Just a Minute) friendly organisation. The NICS renewed its partnership with the NOW Group in 2022 and a promotional campaign to encourage all colleagues to complete the training is ongoing, c. 17,000 staff have completed the training.</p> <p>A new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Learning bundle was</p>

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					<p>launched in May 2023 which features two new mandatory equality, diversity and inclusion related modules. Currently over 23,000 staff have completed each of the modules.</p> <p>In 2023, DoF (People and OD and NICSHR) and DfC reviewed and updated the Supporting Vulnerable People e-learning module. 11 staff completed this module during 2023/24.</p> <p>People and Organisational Development collaborated with the NICS Disability Staff Network and Employers for Disability NI (EFDNI) to deliver a comprehensive programme of disability awareness training which was available to all staff during 2023/24. As part of the programme, Disability Positive training</p>
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					<p>was also offered and 30 staff were accredited as Disability Positive.</p> <p>Training rolled out to support Every Customer Counts.</p> <p>Mandatory e-learning courses for disability awareness, autism awareness and supporting vulnerable people were rolled out to all LPS Revenue & Benefits staff in November 2018.</p> <p>Local inductions updated to include 'Every Customer Counts'.</p>
<p>Provision of advice and support to staff on health related matters, including promoting positive mental health, through NICS Well and in line with the NICS Mental Health Strategy (strategy under development).</p>	<p>Publication of the NICS Well Newsletter 'Well Times'.</p> <p>Well Champions Conference</p>	<p>Quarterly.</p> <p>Annually.</p>	<p>Increase awareness of health conditions and how to manage them.</p>	<p>NICS HR.</p>	<p>NICS WELL has delivered 371 events during the period. These included programme initiatives such as Mental Resilience, Awareness, Roadshows and Health Checks. A total of 7,717 NICS staff registered to attend WELL Programme initiatives,</p>

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					of which 1,170 NICS staff had face-to-face interactions during.
Recruitment and Development					
Promote and develop the work experience programme, providing meaningful placements for people with disabilities with a wide range of disability organisations.	<p>Number of participants by work area.</p> <p>Number of participating disability organisations.</p> <p>Feedback from participants and hosting managers.</p>	Annually.	More people with a disability apply for NICS jobs and the Department has a positive attitude towards people with a disability.	People and Organisational Development.	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>The NICS Work Experience Scheme was suspended in March 2020 due to COVID restrictions and remained suspended until October 2022.</p> <p>People and Organisational Development co-ordinated the NICS' participation in the 2023 International Job Shadow Day (IJSJ) offering 53 placements to disabled people, nine of which were accepted and facilitated.</p> <p>Preparation work also commenced during 2023 for the NICS as an employer to participate in phase two of the Job Start Scheme which</p>

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					will provide nine-month job placements to young people aged 16-24 across the NICS who are at risk of long-term unemployment in Specialist Pathways groups (including young disabled people and those at risk of falling). The NICS opportunities launched in tranches beginning February 2024.
Review and implement the NICS Policy on reasonable adjustments in the recruitment and selection process in collaboration with people with a disability.	Monitoring information on applications from people with a disability and feedback on the reasonable adjustment process.	31 st March 2019.	NICS' recruitment and selection procedures to provide equality of opportunity to people with disabilities so that they are encouraged to apply and compete for employment opportunities.	People and Organisational Development.	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>The review of this policy is now complete, and the new version was uploaded onto the NICS Recruitment website on 19/3/2019.</p> <p>2023/24 update– as part of our commitment to continuous improvement, a review of the reasonable adjustment process spanning the full employee lifecycle will be undertaken. Phase one of the review commenced in</p>

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					2023 which focuses on in-work support for existing disabled colleagues. Phase two will be taken forward in late 2024 to consider recruitment, selection and onboarding.
Participation and Engagement					
Development of a NICS-wide Mental Health Strategy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish Mental Health forum (internal partners) to connect all NICS mental health activities. 2. Connected links developed with external partners (Inspire/Charity for Civil Service Servants) 3. Mental Health Strategy developed and implemented. 	31 st March 2024.	To encourage our people to be healthy with a sense of wellbeing and to enable them to be their best in the workplace.	NICS HR.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Following the completion of the Health and Wellbeing (H&WB) diagnostic for each Department (in September 2024) an inaugural Mental Health Forum will be convened in October 2024. This will enable diagnostic data and activities to be shared across the NICS and future planning initiatives to be co-ordinated and considered in collaboration. 2. NICSHR Occupational Health and Wellbeing (OH&W) continues to develop its successful arrangements

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					<p>with external partners (including Inspire, Charity for Civil Servants and WELL) to promote and develop services to support mental health and wellbeing. This has been extended to additional external partners including Sands and CRUSE in terms of specific bereavement support.</p> <p>3. NICHSR has developed and implemented an organisational health and wellbeing diagnostic tool (which includes mental health and wellbeing) across the Departments to identify and implement a targeted approach in delivering a wider range of health and wellbeing initiatives and support services from internal and external partners. A draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy built on the outworkings of the diagnostic</p>
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					tool will be developed for end September 2024. This strategy will supersede the need for a single Mental Health Strategy as a standalone.
Complete appointment plan for each new public appointment competition, focusing on diversity and steps to encourage applications from disabled people, and taking on board any recommendations or actions emanating from the TEO strategic diversity plan for public appointments.	Numbers of people with a disability applying for and being appointed to public life positions.	Plan to be completed at the time draft competition is being developed.	More people with disabilities applying for public appointments.	Sponsor Branch (monitored by Central Support Team).	During 2023/24, People and Organisational Development supported promotion of five public appointment competitions (DfE and DAERA) with the NICS Diversity Champions Network and Disability Working Group (DWG) who were asked to share with their sector contacts. DWG Members include external representatives from the disability sector.
Digital Inclusion Programme activities specifically targeted at disabled people and their carers and developed in conjunction	Number of activities and evaluation results.	Annually	People with disabilities make more use of online services.	Digital Enabling Services.	COMPLETED The wider Go ON NI Programme includes services for those who are disabled. During 2023/2024 the DoF Digital Inclusion team

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with disability organisations.					attended a number of outreach events promoting the Go ON NI Programme, this included presenting at the Independent Living NI event in November 2023. Digital training sessions were also provided to residents of Praxis Care, and help was provided to parents/carers with the Education Authority SEN Annual Review.
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