

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

**Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties
Annual Progress Report 2014-15**

Contact:

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/publications-foi/publications-browse/publication-scheme-who-we-are-what-we-do/departmental-equality-scheme.htm>

Signature:

Carolyn Barr

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 2014 and March 2015

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

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

- 1** In 2014-15, 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 remains committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity and human rights. We continue to ensure that all our policies comply with the Human Rights Act 1998 and continue to fulfil the duties required by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the 'DDA 1995'), as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

The current Departmental Equality Scheme, which contained an Action Plan, was approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) in 2012. The Department continued to implement the Action Plan during this year and our progress on this is detailed in this document.

Detailed information on the Land and Property Services (LPS) is provided through the Government's NI Direct and other websites. There are increasing demands for information through digital, web and telephony channels and LPS continues to work to deliver these.

In addition, there is an ongoing effort to ensure that all online literature (pdf format) is tagged to make it accessible to those with visual impairments. To date all citizen facing literature published on the NIDirect Website has been tagged for accessibility. When placing classified advertising in the press LPS follows Government Advertising Unit

guidelines to ensure all sections of society are included.

When dealing with requests to the District Valuer for a review of the Valuation List or with appeals to the Commissioner of Valuation, valuers will always interview the applicant/appellant in their own property or other location (at their request) if that is more convenient.

All customer literature within LPS includes a prominent line providing instructions on how to get the item in another language or format and during the 2014/15 year LPS responded to three requests for literature to be provided in alternative formats. In April 2014, LPS issued one translation in Irish, one in Dutch and one in Lithuanian.

As part of the wider initiative to improve access to benefits, LPS continues to raise awareness of Housing Benefit Rate Relief, Disabled Person's Allowance and Lone Pensioner Allowance Schemes which are available to assist with the payment of Rates. LPS is continuing to work closely with local councils, the Independent Advisory Sector and community groups to increase awareness of available rate reliefs and encourage uptake across the province.

During 2014/15 there were 1,204 new Disabled Person's Allowance (DPA) awards and 3,021 new Lone Pensioner Allowance (LPA) awards made. The number of individuals receiving LPA increased from 24,703 at the end of 13/14 to 25,266 at the end of 2014/15.

LPS continues to share data with the Department for Social Development (DSD) and also provides validation for Housing Benefit for rates, LPA and DPA claims made during DSD outreach exercises such as Make the Call.

Enterprise Shared Services (ESS) has established the Go ON NI programme with the aim of increasing the number of citizens who are able to access and use online services. This programme, in partnership with relevant charitable organisations promotes digital services to the most disadvantaged groups, and provides assisted digital services.

During 2014/15, this programme continued to deliver digital skills training for older people, with activities such as Silver Surfers Day and Get Online Weeks. They also worked in partnership with local charities such as The Cedar Foundation, Action Mental Health, MS Society, Stepping Stones, NOW and Orchardville Society to hold a series of training sessions for people with disabilities. Using specialist equipment and facilities provided by the charities, participants were given one-to-one tuition in the use of the Internet and specific online services including the nidirect website.

The Departmental Solicitors Office (DSO) took forward work to provide for the criminalisation of forced marriage (see section 16 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015). Evidence suggests that cases of forced marriage tend to involve people from South Asian countries. However the criminalisation applies across the board, thereby promoting equality of opportunity in the application of the criminal law and good relations, by not focussing on a particular community.

DSO also secured the introduction of female genital mutilation protection orders ("FGMPOs", see section 73 of the Serious Crime Act 2015). These are civil orders which can contain such terms, prohibitions, restrictions or requirements as the court considers appropriate to protect the girl in question. FGM is prevalent in particular communities and attempts are made to justify it on cultural or religious grounds. There can, of course, be no justification for the practice and, although, FGMPOs are likely to affect particular communities, they can be justified on public policy/safeguarding grounds.

Also, on behalf of the Executive, DSO published Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines on Female Genital Mutilation.

There is no "lead department" on the issue of FGM and DFP doesn't own the policy. It is cited here as a good example of cross departmental cooperation that we have been involved in.

Contact with the Voluntary and Community sector continues through various fora for the benefit of both the sector and the Department and we have contributed to the development of major cross departmental strategies such as Disability and Autism. We are also represented on the Charter Implementation Group on Regional languages and the Sign Language partnership.

Strategic Equality Branch has been involved with the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL) giving advice and comment and acting as a "critical friend" during the development of a new set of courses relating to Section 75 Equality. Further details of the courses are set out in the section on Staff training - paragraphs 24 and 25 below.

2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2014-15 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

See updated Action Plan accompanying this progress report.

3 Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2014-15 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No (go to Q.4) Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

Equality Issues are examined at all stages of policy development and are mainstreamed in our work. When developing policies, equality of opportunity is firmly embedded in officials' thinking. As such, screening exercises have shown that the impacts are either negative, addressing existing inequalities or are, combined with existing policies, already mitigated.

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:

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

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

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

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

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

Other (*please specify and give details*):

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

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2014-15 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:

All personal performance agreements contain targets and objectives, which include statutory obligations relative to the office holders' responsibility.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2014-15 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:

Plans, flowing out of the Department's business and corporate plans, are created for each

business area and these will include relevant obligations for managers and staff.

6 In the 2014-15 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)*

- 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 ongoing corporate plan
- No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2013-14 report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Please see answer to 5 above.

Equality action plans/measures

7 Within the 2014-15 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:

Actions ongoing:

Actions to commence:

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

Please refer to the Action Plan.

8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2014-15 reporting period *(points not identified in an appended plan)*:

N/A

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2014-15 reporting period, the following have been identified: *(tick all that apply)*

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

- 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 2014-15 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:

We had no policies which were screened for full equality impact assessment during this reporting period.

12 In the 2014-15 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/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation
- Internet discussions
- Telephone consultations
- Other *(please specify)*:

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:

Details are not retained centrally.

13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2014-15 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2014-15 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)

<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/publications-foi/publications-browse/publication-scheme-who-we-are-what-we-do/departamental-equality-scheme.htm>

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

11. See information on web address above. All of our consultees were advised of screening exercises as and when they were carried out.

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2014-15:

0	Policy consultations conducted with screening assessment presented.
0	Policy consultations conducted with an equality impact assessment (EQIA) presented.
0	Consultations for an EQIA alone.

As we were working in line with UK legislation to ensure that there was no gap in

protection, we didn't have the opportunity to consult on the criminalisation of forced marriage or FGMPOs. We undertook a targeted consultation on the Guidelines (NGOs, health and social care professionals etc) and the response was very positive.

When we consulted on parental responsibility for unmarried fathers and contact with children post separation, we asked consultees if they had any information that might assist in the preparation of an impact assessment, but unfortunately there were no replies.

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

N/A

- 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:

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 2014-15 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

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 2014-15 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:

The audit of inequalities resulted in the creation of the Departmental Action Plan which we have been implementing and continue to review and amend where necessary. Please see attached updated Action Plan.

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

- Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

22 Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2014-15 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

N/A

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:

Please see the section on “access to information” in the attached Action Plan.

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

24 Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2014-15, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

The Centre for Applied Learning offers Section 75 training for all NICS staff. Strategic

Equality Branch was involved in the development of the updated Section 75 courses and the following courses were provided this year:

- Section 75 - 6 Classes, 70 Attendees. CAL developed an elearning package on Section 75 during 2014-2015 year which will be the normal method of delivery of this training in the new training year.
- EQIA - 4 Classes, 54 Attendees
- Public Consultation and Engagement - 4 Classes, 55 Attendees
- Disability Awareness for Frontline Staff - 6 Classes 75, Attendees

LPS continues to provide Deaf Awareness Training, training in the use of the EPI pen and in the safe use of evacuation chairs to appropriate staff.

During the 2014/15 year 4 staff members were provided with Safe Use of Evacuation Chairs. A further member of staff was trained in early 15/16 to ensure sufficient provision within a new LPS building in Belfast.

LPS continues to provide new staff within the application based Rate Relief team with specialist courses on Age Awareness, Working with Older people and Introduction to Older People's benefits training. In 2014/15 there were no new staff members who required training. However, it is still planned to avail of training provided by Advice NI in relation to Older Person Awareness in the future.

25 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:

Section 75 training - 100% of those who provided feedback on the course stated the course enabled them to meet their objectives. 89% stated the course was relevant to their current/future work.

EQIA - 100% of those who provided feedback on the course stated the course enabled them to meet their objectives. 100% stated the course was relevant to their current/future work.

Public Consultation and Engagement - 100% of those who provided feedback on the course stated the course enabled them to meet their objectives. 86% stated the course was relevant to their current/future work.

Disability Awareness for front line staff -100% of those who provided feedback on the course stated the course enabled them to meet their objectives. 89% stated the course was relevant to their current/future work.

Deaf Awareness training continues to be a useful asset within LPS - on several occasions over the 2014 - 15 year LPS Training & Development Unit has been contacted by staff members who were seeking a list of staff who had received Deaf Awareness Training.

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

26 Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2014-15, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

For Non Domestic Revaluation LPS released 73,000 draft values on 13 November 2014 in order to give ratepayers an early chance to view and make contact regarding their new valuation. Between 13 November and 31 March there were 1,294 revaluation queries, 924 were resolved by NI Direct using FAQ scripts from LPS and 370 were handled directly by LPS. A dedicated website for Non Domestic Revaluation was also used during 2014/15 offering new features such as information videos, and the ability to view and estimate rate bill changes on all properties. The new website also provided a new facility to make a Revaluation enquiry on-line, either by NI Direct staff filling in a form for the caller, the caller submitting their own form on-line or having a paper form sent out to them. Activity spiked on the website after the release of the draft values. There were 26,286 views of the Revaluation website homepage. In total there were 22,311 web hits and 53,169 page views of the Draft Values site during 2014/15.

Other ways LPS improved access to information and services for Non Domestic Revaluation include the use of social media, SMS and email marketing, a comprehensive programme of stakeholder engagement presentations and a Revaluation clinic at Belfast City Hall. We also followed the Government Advertising Unit Equality guidelines when placing classified adverts in the press to ensure all sections of society were included.

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

- 27 How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2014-15?

Insert number here:

1

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland registered a Stage 1 complaint with Land & Property Services on behalf of an individual. LPS responded by advising that while it sympathised with the individual it is bound by the Rates (NI) Order 1977 and must fulfil its statutory obligations by complying fully with the legislation. LPS went on to confirm to the individual that the Rate relief that was applied was correct.

Following this the individual wrote again to LPS stating they were unhappy with the decision and this was taken forward as a Stage 2 complaint.

Subsequent to this the Equality Commission served a civil bill on LPS. As a result LPS wrote to the Equality Commission advising that the Stage 2 complaint was being withdrawn from the LPS Complaints process as proceedings had been served with the Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO). These proceedings are ongoing at present.

Section 3: Looking Forward

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

2016

- 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)*

Please refer to our Action Plan.

- 30 In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2015-16) 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):

Annex A

Section 75 Action Plan

Section 75 Category	Inequalities identified	action	measure	outcome	2014-2015 update	timescale
Religious Belief	Under representation of protestants in administrative and junior management grades in the NICS compared to the NI labour market.	Use of positive action advertising statements to encourage applications from under-represented group.	Workforce equal opportunities monitoring and Review of Fair Participation in the NICS	Reduction in degree of measured under-representation. In March 2012 the results of the 2010 Article 55 Review were published. This found fair participation in the Administrative Assistant (AA) grade where previously there was a lack of fair	A further review has been completed and a report will be issued in summer 2015	Ongoing.

	<p>Under-representation of Protestants and Catholics in some grades in the Professional and Specialist groups in the NICS compared to the NI labour market.</p>	<p>Use of positive action advertising statements to encourage applications from under-represented group.</p>	<p>Workforce equal opportunities monitoring and Review of Fair Participation in the NICS</p>	<p>participation by Protestants. In view of the continuing lack of fair participation by Protestants in the Administrative Officer grade the ECNI agreed we should continue to use positive action advertising</p> <p>Reduction in degree of measured under-representation.</p> <p>The 2012 Article 55 Review found fair participation in 19 of the larger Professional and specialist groups compared to 14 in 2007</p>	<p>A further review has been completed and a report will be issued in summer 2015</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>
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Note – the section on ‘Political Opinion’ has been removed as no data gaps exist. The NICS is abiding by ECNI guidance and is using community background as a proxy.

Age	<p>Take-up of housing benefits and rate relief</p> <p>Access to Government Services via electronic means</p>	<p>Continue outreach activity and updating of literature</p> <p>Continuation of Digital Inclusion Programme activities, including continuation of Silver Surfers' day and continued liaison with the Libraries Network, and</p>	<p>continued uptake in benefit</p> <p>Reduction of barriers to citizen access to online public services</p>	<p>Benefit reaches those vulnerable groups entitled to financial assistance</p> <p>Continued uptake by new claimants.</p> <p>These digital inclusion activities will provide improved access to services (government and other) for those groups currently less able to avail of them via the web channel.</p>	<p>LPS continues to provide new staff within the Application Based Rate Relief team with specialist courses on Age Awareness, Working with Older People and Introduction to Older People's Benefits training.</p> <p>Go ON NI included a specific programme of digital skills training for older people, including Silver Surfers Day and Get Online Weeks. 86% of people aged 50-64 and 53% of those aged over 65 now have access to the internet.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>Ongoing. Year on year increase</p>
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		similar initiatives with other organisations to encourage digital participation				
Marital Status	Law in NI treats unmarried fathers differently from married and unmarried mothers	Consider amendments to current laws	Initial consultation undertaken, but response rate was very low.	Equality of treatment	Further research to be undertaken.	Ongoing
Sexual Orientation	Data gaps	Information on sexual orientation is collected from applicants and appointees	Workforce Equal Opps monitoring	More reliable data to help inform policy making	Continued to collect data from applicants and appointees.	Ongoing

Disability	Access to information	Continue outreach activity and updating of literature	Continued uptake of benefit	<p>Benefit reaches those vulnerable groups entitled to financial assistance.</p> <p>Continued uptake by new claimants.</p>	<p>There were 1,204 new awards of Disabled Person's Allowance (DPA) during the 2014/15 year. In addition, improving communications for those with disabilities and in particular access to information is core to Land & Property Services strategic approach. The continuous review and revision of documents (print and web) and other communication channels has contributed to better performance, and importantly to the continued increase in benefits and reliefs uptake.</p>	Ongoing
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		Continuation of Digital Inclusion		These digital inclusion	<p>Connectability – a digital inclusion project which focuses on upskilling individuals with disabilities in the use of IT and developing their confidence to recognise the benefits of online access for learning and leisure.</p> <p>We worked in partnership with local charities such as The</p>	
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	Access to information	Programme activities, including continuation of Silver Surfers' day and continued liaison with the Libraries Network, and similar initiatives with other organisations to encourage digital participation	Reduction of barriers to citizen access to online public services.	activities will provide improved access to services (government and other) for those groups currently less able to avail of them via the web channel	Cedar Foundation, Action Mental Health, MS Society, Stepping Stones, NOW and Orchardville Society to hold a series of training sessions for people with disabilities. Using specialist equipment and facilities provided by the charities, participants were trained in the use of the Internet and specific online services including the nidirect website. Disabled citizens were given one-to-one tuition over the course of the sessions, which were held across a range of suitable locations. Connectability continues throughout	Ongoing
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					2015 as part of the DFP Go ON NI programme. A specific programme of digital inclusion training sessions was also carried out with RNIB in response to a request from the Stormont All Party Group on Visual Impairment.	
Dependants	Take-up of housing benefit and rate relief	Continue outreach activity and updating of literature	continued uptake	Benefit reaches those vulnerable groups entitled to financial assistance	Ongoing - LPS staff attended 12 outreach events during the 2014/15 year	Ongoing.
Gender	Under-representation of males/females in some occupational groups/grade levels in the NICS	Use of positive action advertising statements to encourage applications	Workforce equal opportunities monitoring and Review of Gender	In 2010 the NICS carried out a comprehensive review of the gender composition of	A further review has been completed and a report will be issued in summer 2015	Ongoing

	compared to the NI labour market.	from under-represented group.	representation in the NICS	the NICS to identify areas of under-representation This found areas of concern where men or women were under-represented and appropriate actions are being considered.		
Racial Group	Data gaps	Information on place of birth is needed to allow more detailed analysis of ethnic background. This is collected from applicants, appointees.	Workforce equal opportunities monitoring	More reliable data to help inform policy making	Plans are in place to obtain information on place of birth from existing staff.	Ongoing

All Groups

Dignity at Work Policy

In 2007 a corporate Dignity at Work policy and complaints procedures were introduced, ensuring a consistent message was delivered to all staff about the important role each person has in creating and sustaining an environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity. The policy specifically mentions disability and makes it clear that offensive behaviour that is linked to disability will not be tolerated.

The Dignity at Work policy and procedures has been reviewed and refined, and implementation of the revised policy will be considered with the move to HR Professional Shared Services Centre during 2016/17.

New Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy

In July 2015, the NICS officially launched a new policy statement on Equality Diversity and Inclusion.

In order to provide a high quality service the NICS needs to attract, recruit, develop and retain the very best people at all levels. The new policy statement is based on three key principles:-

Equality – *we promote equality of opportunity by seeking to remove barriers, eliminating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity and access for all groups of people.*

Diversity – *we accept each person as an individual. Our success is built on our ability to embrace diversity – and we believe that everyone should feel valued for their contributions. By working together we will deliver the best possible service for our staff, customers and stakeholders.*

Inclusion – we create a working culture where differences are not merely accepted, but valued; where everyone has the opportunity to develop in a way that is consistent with, and adheres to, NICS values of impartiality, honesty, integrity and objectivity. Our aim is to be an organisation where people feel involved, respected and connected to our success.

These principles of equality, diversity and inclusion will be reflected in the development or review of human resource policies.

NICS Diversity Champions

A 'Diversity Champions Network' has been established within the NICS, with the emphasis on:-

- the importance of raising the issue of diversity within the NICS and championing the benefits of a culture where diversity is celebrated;
- the value of a diverse workforce to enable the NICS to best serve the community it represents;
- that the NICS needs to go beyond compliance and needs to be more proactive in its approach to diversity;
- Departments need to work in partnership with each other to promote diversity through both internal and external events.

DFP Disability Action Plan 2014/15 update

Measures	Timescale	Performance Indicators/Targets	2014/15 update
<p>The NICS diversity training is a mandatory training requirement for all staff. It raises awareness of employment legislation, including the DDA, and stresses the responsibility of all staff to treat colleagues and customers with dignity and respect and avoid acts of discrimination and harassment and other unacceptable behaviour in the workplace.</p> <p>The course highlights the 2 disability duties, but because the course has an internal focus, there is more emphasis on the duty to promote a positive attitude towards people with disabilities by making staff aware of the importance of recognising and valuing the contribution that staff with disabilities make to the work of the NICS.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Classroom training continues to be provided for all new entrants to the NICS and Industrial Staff.</p>	<p>All NICS staff will receive training either in the classroom or via the on-line package.</p> <p>Evidence from staff surveys that staff know about the NICS equality and Diversity policy.</p>	<p>The NICS initially launched the Diversity Now mandatory training programme in June 2008, and staff completed this training by either attending classroom sessions or by taking the training course online. Both versions are interactive and challenge staff perceptions about equality and diversity. The courses highlight the 2 disability duties, however because of their internal focus; more emphasis is placed on the duty to promote a positive attitude towards people with a disability. Staff are made aware of the importance of recognising and valuing the contributions that disabled staff make to the work of the NICS. The Diversity Now course has now been reviewed and updated to include data from the 2011 Census, and roll-out of refresher training began in 2014. To date, feedback received from CAL has been positive. The training programme will be</p>

			<p>reviewed again during 2016/17, in advance of move to HR Professional Shared Services Centre.</p> <p>During 2014, 87 LPS staff completed Diversity Now Training. No E-Learning for all staff was available due to a change in e-learning provider/portal.</p>
<p>Work experience opportunities for people with disabilities in the NICS.</p> <p>Corporate HR to provide work experience opportunities specifically aimed at people with disabilities.</p> <p>This is designed to help people with disabilities to gain real work opportunities and experience within the NICS to improve their opportunities of securing future employment.</p>	<p>Pilot scheme launched and completed in 2014. Evaluation to be finalised in 2015.</p>	<p>Recommendations from the evaluation to be implemented in a revised scheme to be launched during 2015. .</p>	<p>The NICS has made a commitment to work with external disability organisations to develop structured work placement programmes to make sure that people with disabilities can gain real work opportunities and experience within the NICS to improve their opportunities of securing future employment.</p> <p>The NICS recognises that for people with disabilities, work placements can be the key to accessing the world of work from which they might otherwise be excluded. Therefore work experience and work placement are excellent interventions to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to gain experience and</p>

			<p>skills in work which may lead to employment in the future.</p> <p>In January 2014, Resourcing Division introduced a pilot scheme aimed at facilitating around 12 placements specifically for those with a disability. Applications were submitted to Corporate HR on behalf of individuals by a recognised disability organisation. The organisation was required to allocate an Employment Officer for each potential placement who was willing to provide appropriate support, guidance and assistance to the individual during their placement and also to staff directly working with the individual. 14 disability organisations were contacted to register their interest in the scheme, 10 confirmed interest and were keen to participate. 17 applications for placements were received from these organisations from which 12 placements were agreed. Of those applications that were not facilitated, 4 of these were due to applicants withdrawing prior to commencement and 1 which asked for a specialised placement for which</p>
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			<p>the department in question had no resource to facilitate.</p> <p>Feedback from all parties involved was overwhelmingly positive. Some minor lessons learnt and areas for improvement have been identified and are being addressed by CHR. The key finding was that departments agreed that a separate specific scheme was preferred. The feedback stressed the importance of maintaining a dedicated scheme to ensure opportunities were specifically available for people with disabilities and to ensure that they are not competing with placements through the generic scheme as well as allowing for targeted marketing.</p> <p>The pilot scheme has now been evaluated; it is envisaged that CHR will begin work to launch and market the new scheme, taking into account the lessons learnt and implementing the areas for improvement identified from the pilot.</p> <p>“”NICS Policy on reasonable adjustments in the recruitment and</p>
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			<p>selection process This policy was launched and published In November 2012. The aim of this policy is to ensure that the NICS’ recruitment and selection procedures provide equality of opportunity to people with disabilities so that they are encouraged to apply and compete for employment opportunities. A review of this policy is ongoing and the revised policy will be published in 2015/2016 after consultation with stakeholders</p> <p>NICS Marketing Strategy Corporate HR has committed to develop a Marketing Strategy to promote the NICS as a career of choice. This strategy will focus on areas of underrepresentation in the NICS. It will consider outreach measures with a view to strengthening relationships with relevant representative groups.</p> <p>Research on Adverse Impact Corporate HR commissioned research in 2013 on the causes of identified adverse</p>
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			<p>impact in NICS recruitment competitions for first line managers focusing on the Executive Officer 2 competitions held in 2007 and 2011. This independent review is now complete. The review concluded that, taken as a whole, neither competition adversely impacted any group. Further, it acknowledged and welcomed the measures the NICS has already put in place to minimise potential adverse impact including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing its own selection tests to avoid potential adverse impact; • Reviewing and refreshing the NICS' competency framework to ensure this is up to date, relevant and well-defined as regards acceptable levels of behaviour/performance; • Making reasonable adjustments for disabled candidates at each stage of the recruitment process; and • Ensuring that candidates are
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			<p>provided with sufficient opportunity to practice prior to commencing psychometric testing.</p> <p>The report provided 11 recommendations as to how the NICS might further mitigate potential adverse impact within selection and recruitment processes. The recommendations have been accepted, in whole or in part and are already being progressed by Corporate HR and NISRA HR Consultancy Services, working in partnership to follow best practice and to minimise the potential for adverse impact, in so far as possible, in recruitment and selection.</p> <p>Rehabilitation Programme The aim of the Welfare Support Rehabilitation Programme is to develop a plan to support the employee and help overcome obstacles to their return to work. The Welfare Officer will complete an assessment and, using the information provided, advises the employee of relevant support and</p>
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			<p>services which may of assistance. A return to work plan will be completed and agreed and can be reviewed as necessary.</p> <p>Departments have been very positive about the impact of the Rehabilitation Plan in assisting employees to address issues influencing their return to work. Approximately one third of participants have reported that they had returned to work sooner than they would otherwise have done so, with 83% reporting that they found the programme beneficial. ""</p>
Digital Inclusion Programme activities to encourage people with disabilities to make more use of online services.	Ongoing	Reduction of barriers to citizen access to online public services.	In partnership with local charities, we held a series of training sessions for people with disabilities to hrlp increase the use of the Internet and specific online services including the nidirect website. Disabled citizens were given one-to-one tuition over the course of the sessions, which were held across a range of suitable locations.

<p>Staff Surveys to include questions on equality and diversity to monitor changes in staff attitudes towards people with disabilities.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Inclusion of relevant questions in staff surveys.</p>	<p>Ongoing – the results of staff surveys are carefully scrutinized and appropriate action taken.</p>
<p>Improvements to Reasonable Adjustment process for NICS employees</p>	<p>Completed</p>	<p>Reduction in time taken to implement reasonable adjustment.</p>	<p>In November 2014, CHR produced new guidance, providing advice and support for line managers when dealing with requests for adjustments in the workplace. The information is available on the HRConnect portal. Requesting an adjustment in the workplace The guidance highlights the issues to be considered, the importance of keeping records and where to look for additional support. It is also designed to help ensure that any requests for an adjustment in the workplace are handled effectively, efficiently and sympathetically, to meet the needs of both the individual and the NICS. Individuals, who are seeking an adjustment in the workplace, should make a request through the self service facility on HRConnect. There are also Quick Reference guides on HR Connect detailing the steps to be followed when requesting a</p>

			reasonable adjustment.
Land and Property Services will continue involvement with organisations such as CAB, Disability Action, Help the Aged with regard to communication of and maximising take up of Rate Reliefs by vulnerable groups.	Ongoing	Take up of Rate Reliefs	Work has continued to promote the take up of Rate Reliefs by vulnerable groups. There were 1,204 new awards of Disabled Person's Allowance (DPA) during the 2014/15 year.