

## Northern Ireland Audit Office



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### Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report 2021-22

#### Contact:

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at: <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/equality>

#### Signature:

*Nicola Strahan*

**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 2021 and March 2022**

## **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 2021-22, 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 NIAO conducts audits in accordance with legislation, reporting the results of its work to the Northern Ireland Assembly. It does not deliver services directly to the public. The greatest contribution the NIAO can make in terms of promoting equality of opportunity is raising awareness of the statutory duties in the course of its audit work.

As set out in previous progress reports, NIAO has no formal remit in terms of assessing how well the bodies it audits are meeting the requirements of Section 75. However bodies audited by the NIAO are subject to Section 75 and the performance of these bodies against their Section 75 responsibilities may be relevant to our judgment about how economically, efficiently and effectively they have used their resources. Accordingly, a key way in which Audit contributes to promoting equality of opportunity is through our programme of work.

In March 2021 the NIAO launched its Corporate Plan for 2021-2024 which is centred around three strategic priorities for the period. The third of these priorities is “to ensure the NIAO operates as a highly performing organisation to meet emerging challenges”. In line with this priority, a People Strategy was agreed in late 2020. One aspect of this strategy is a focus on employee Health and Wellbeing, which relates to the actions in the Equality Scheme on staff awareness of equality and diversity issues.

In December 2021 the NIAO refreshed its Equality Scheme and associated action plan for the period 2021 to 2026.

- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2021-22 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

The NIAO conducts audits in accordance with legislation, reporting the results of its work to the Northern Ireland Assembly. It does not deliver services directly to the public. The greatest contribution the NIAO can make in terms of promoting equality of opportunity is raising awareness of the statutory duties in the course of its audit work.

In December 2021 the NIAO refreshed its Equality Scheme and associated action plan for the period 2021 to 2026. The action plan continues to focus on communication and HR and employment-related matters. These are reviewed and aligned to best practice.

### **NIAO Communications Strategy Review**

As part of the ongoing implementation of the Office's Communications Strategy, the NIAO has been working closely with IT Assist to address issues raised in an accessibility audit of its website, which it commissioned in October 2020. Many of the issues raised in this audit, relating to the underlying content management system have been addressed in the development of our new website, launched in February 2022.

### **NIAO Learning and Development Strategy implementation**

The Learning and Development Officer anticipates the development of an organisational plan in the latter part of 2022, which will include relevant training to support roles in the organisation and statutory obligations.

### **Staff awareness of equality and diversity issues**

As part of the NIAO's commitment to health and wellbeing of its staff, a number of actions have taken place in the reporting period. Employees can confidentially access an Employee Assistance Programme provided by BHSF.

The NIAO Wellhub launched in April 2021 and a demonstration was delivered to employees in June 2021. The Wellhub is a digital resource providing employees with the latest information, advice and support needed to maintain and improve health and wellbeing.

Online Mindful Manager training facilitated by Action Mental Health took place during Mental Health Awareness week in May 2021 and again in October 2021.

The NIAO offered employees the opportunity to receive a flu vaccination in October 2021.

A Wellness Committee was set up and Terms of Reference for this were agreed. Wellbeing principles were finalised and shared with employees in October 2021.

- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2021-22 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

Six employees volunteered to undertake training as Health Champions in December 2021 and January 2022. They formulated a draft action plan for wellbeing, based directly on employee feedback from a health survey, with feedback on the draft plan invited from the wider office.

Mandatory training on Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace was rolled out for all staff in December 2021 and January 2022.

A series of Mental Health and Resilience workshops were offered to employees again in January and February 2022 with another good uptake.

Further to Investors in People (IiP) standard accreditation being awarded in March 2021, an annual check-in took place in March 2022. The review report was shared with all NIAO staff and demonstrated that considerable progress had been made.

One member of staff undertook their Mental Health First Aid certificate in March 2022.

### **Dignity at Work**

The NIAO has 8 employees trained as Dignity at Work Advisers. The framework and names of these individuals are available on the WellHub which can be accessed by all staff.

### **Continued involvement in the Community**

The NIAO currently has a policy on volunteering where staff can apply for paid special leave for up to 3 days in a 12 month period, and match this with their own time.

### **Recruitment and Selection**

All advertisements and role profiles are reviewed to ensure that they only contain necessary skills and abilities required. All external advertisements are placed online on NIjobfinder website, NIAO's website and GETGOT.

Selection methods remain objective and measurable. Panels are selected to ensure they are balanced in terms of gender and community background.

The NIAO continues to ensure that any panel members have received Recruitment and Selection training encompassing equality and diversity prior to sitting on the panel and that refresher training is undertaken when necessary. The NIAO has also introduced mandatory Unconscious Bias training for panel members.

The Annual Monitoring Return is completed and analysed on an annual basis.

PART A

**3** Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2021-22 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

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

Please provide any details and examples:

**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 2021-22 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:

In 2019-20 reporting period a review of job profiles was conducted and these were refreshed to reflect NIAO's objectives and targets.

- 5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2021-22 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:

- 6 In the 2021-22 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

PART A

- No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
- No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2021-22 report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

**Equality action plans/measures**

**7** Within the 2021-22 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*):

Details and examples are set out in the response to Question 2. In December 2021 the NIAO refreshed its Equality Scheme and associated action plan for the period 2021 to 2026, setting out a number of areas of focus.

Communications (1 area of focus) – reviewed in this reporting period and relevant actions completed.

Staff Training and Skills Development (4 areas of focus) – Work on a Learning and Development Strategy to commence in 2022-23. Staff Awareness of equality and diversity issues has had relevant actions completed in this reporting review and remains ongoing. The review of Dignity at Work Advisers is due in December 2022. An Action Plan for Investors in People has been developed and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

General Employment Related Matters (1 area of focus) – the review of NIAO HR policies remains an ongoing action.

Recruitment and Selection (1 area of focus) – this requires ongoing review. Relevant actions have been completed in this reporting period.

**8** Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2021-22 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

None

PART A

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2021-22 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 2021-22 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:

None

12 In the 2021-22 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)*: No consultations within the reporting period

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:

PART A

N/A

**13** Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2021-22 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes       No       Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

**14** Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2021-22 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)**

<https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/equality>

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

0
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**16** Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2021-22:

0	Policy consultations conducted with <b>screening</b> assessment presented.
0	Policy consultations conducted <b>with an equality impact assessment (EQIA)</b> presented.
0	Consultations for an <b>EQIA</b> 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:

N/A



PART A

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:

N/A

**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 2021-22, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

The NIAO remains focussed on timely and relevant training to ensure Section 75 duties are implemented effectively. All new employees receive induction training. Recruitment and Selection training encompassing equality, diversity and unconscious bias was provided to those sitting on recruitment and selection panels. Refresher training was also provided.

- 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:

Relevant training was conducted via eLearning. This allowed employees to access training at a time they chose and review the information at a speed that suited them. Recruitment and Selection training has been carried out in a more structured format via online methods.

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

- 26** Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2021-22, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

N/A

**Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)**

- 27** How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2021-22?

Insert number here:

0
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Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

N/A

### Section 3: Looking Forward

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

The Equality Scheme was due for review in 2021. In December 2021 the NIAO refreshed its Equality Scheme and associated action plan for the period 2021 to 2026.

**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 do not anticipate any one area of focus.

**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):

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

**1. Number of action measures for this reporting period that have been:**

**10**

Fully achieved

Partially achieved

**3**

Not achieved

**2. Please outline below details on all actions that have been fully achieved in the reporting period.**

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs <sup>i</sup>	Outcomes / Impact <sup>ii</sup>
National <sup>iii</sup>			
Regional <sup>iv</sup>			
Local <sup>v</sup>			

PART B

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	(i) Training on Diversity and Inclusion encompassing disability equality legislation and disability awareness to be included within mandatory training programme to be delivered to all staff.	Mandatory Diversity and Inclusion training rolled out to all staff in December 2021 and January 2022.	All staff members receive training to increase their awareness of diversity and inclusion.

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
5	(ii) Ensure all internal and external communication is in line with current best practice on accessibility.	Many of the issues raised in the initial audit of our website on 28 October 2020, relating to the underlying content management system (CMS), have been addressed in the development of our new website, launched in February 2022. Content issues on the website have also been addressed through a thorough review of our new website.	Communication systems are compliant with and relevant WMAA Regulations.

PART B

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others**’ to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1			
2			

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
2	(ii) Relevant NIAO staff trained in and responsible for equality compliance, including disability equality.	Member of staff identified with responsibility for the equality remit	Compliance with statutory equality reporting requirements and equality incorporated into NIAO’s processes e.g. recruitment practices reviewed, reasonable adjustments in the workplace
3	(i) Continue to ensure recruitment and selection procedures comply with best practice and are accessible to all.	Recruitment and selection processes reviewed to comply with best practice. Documentation on the role includes a named contact in the NIAO in relation to reasonable adjustments	Candidates with a disability can raise requests for reasonable adjustments with a specific individual during the recruitment process
3	(ii) Continue to ensure equality of opportunity in the workplace, through	Employees are encouraged to contact a named individual in relation to any	Any potential barriers identified can be addressed or mitigated.

PART B

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
	policy formulation, Recruitment and Selection, and service provision reviews; and formulating Learning and Development training plans.	access requirements for Recruitment and Selection, and Learning and Development. Policies are screened for their impact on equality of opportunity. Service reviews will also consider equality impact.	
3	(iii) Proactively assess if any reasonable adjustments are needed and ensure that any appropriate equipment is available.	Engagement with individual, reasonable adjustments and specific equipment identified for individual with a disability.	Safe and participative working environment.
4	(i) Promote the Employee Assistance Programme and the benefits of a healthy, resilient workplace	Proactively promoting the EAP with employees, line managers and new members of staff.	Increased uptake of services offered by Employee Assistance Programme provider.
4	(ii) Promote an open and inclusive culture supporting health issues and establish Wellbeing Committee.	Volunteer Health Champions and Mental Health First Aider trained. Calendar of wellbeing activities developed.	Increased engagement and awareness of issues. Employees driving the well-being agenda.
5	(i) Annual Review of Progress on Disability Action Plan.	Annual progress report prepared and submitted to Equality Commission.	The NIAO remains committed to actions identified in the Disability Action plan and their application.
5	(iii) Continue to screen policies and consult as widely as possible to ensure that any organisation or group which has a legitimate, particular interest in NIAO's	12 week consultation held in relation to Disability Action plan.	Stakeholders had an opportunity to provide feedback on a draft Disability Action plan.

PART B

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
	work and/or likely impact of NIAO's policies on its disability duties will be included in the process of engagement.	No new policies developed within the reporting period.	

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved

4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
2	(i) Ensure that leadership and management training (directed specifically at managers and senior staff) includes training on disability equality.	Management training programme is underway, outside of timeframe of this reporting period.
3	(iv) Ensure newly refurbished building at 106 University Street, Belfast complies with all disability requirements.	Completion of refurbishment falls outside this reporting period.

PART B

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
3	(v) Ensure all publications comply with Accessibility requirements.	Work on this is ongoing. Issues remain around the accessibility of our published reports (pdf attachments). These are currently being addressed through the development of html pages for all of our reports published from September 2018. This is being conducted in consultation with both IT Assist and our publishers.

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

Evaluation of training and feedback from internal communication channels.

(b) Quantitative

Monitoring data is collected from applicants. The electronic HR system holds information relating to employees.

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

No

If yes please outline below:

PART B

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation’s annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

A twelve week consultation on a draft Disability Action Plan opened in December 2021. Following this, the Disability Action Plan was published on the NIAO website in March 2022. This plan will be reviewed in the next reporting period (April 2022 to March 2023)

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<sup>i</sup> **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

<sup>ii</sup> **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

<sup>iii</sup> **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments

<sup>iv</sup> **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level

<sup>v</sup> **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.