

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Authority Progress Report 2005 - 2006

Template to assist Public Authorities to report on implementation of the equality and good relations duties under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998

The information required from public authorities will be based on the period from **1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006**. Please ensure that it is submitted to the Commission by **31 August 2006**, electronically (by completing this template) and in writing, with a signed cover letter from the Chief Executive or, in his/her absence, the Deputy Chief Executive.

This year's progress report template is significantly different from earlier guidance, reflecting the work that many authorities will be undertaking on their five year review of equality schemes. It is important that the authority reports on what it views as being relevant in terms of progress made on the implementation of the statutory duties from April 2005 to March 2006.

Please enter information at the end of each Section in the template.

Name of public authority

Northern Ireland Audit Office

Name and contact details

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Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

- Outline evidence of progress made in developing equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2005-06. Your response should include any targets for 2006-07.
- Please provide details of the **direct** resourcing of Section 75 work during 2005–06. This should include staff appointed/directed (*not names*) and details of any budget allocation, to specifically deliver equality scheme commitments.

NIAO Corporate Plan

The NIAO Equality Scheme (which was approved in November 2003) gave a commitment to integrating objectives and targets relating to the statutory equality duties into corporate and operational plans. (Section 3.4). The last three editions of the NIAO Corporate Plan have included specific references to Section 75 responsibilities and a strategic objective in the following terms –

“to meet the requirements placed on the Office by legislation This includes fulfilment of the Office’s obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in relation to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations in all its policies and procedures.”

The NIAO also has seven corporate values which underpin the way it approaches its activities, including equality, valuing individuals and working together.

The targets for 2005-06 related to the implementation of the actions set out in the Equality Scheme (Annex 7) by the specified target dates. The actions included –

- integration of equality objectives into the staff objective setting process;
- regular reports to the Senior Management Group;
- awareness training for new staff within one year of joining;
- specialised training for staff as required;
- reviewing access to information and services on an ongoing basis; and
- the annual review of the progress of the Equality Scheme.

The Office evaluates the achievement of these targets as part of the annual review of progress; all targets for 2005-06 were achieved.

The current corporate plan, which covers the three year period 2006-09, includes similar objectives and targets which will be evaluated at the end of 2006-07.

The statutory equality duties are also addressed in operational plans where appropriate.

Resourcing of Section 75 work

As previously reported, one of the Directors has responsibility for driving forward the implementation of the NIAO Equality Scheme with the support of two other members of staff, one of whom is the NIAO Equality Officer. Their equality responsibilities, which form only part of their work, are reflected in the Office's appraisal process.

There is no specific budget allocation for Section 75 work. The main expenditure during 2005-06 was on staff training which was resourced from the Office's training budget.

Section 2: Screening & Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

2a) If a Screening Report has not yet been submitted to the Commission please advise us on the current position with regard to producing this report and forwarding to the Commission.

The results of the initial screening of policies were set out in the Equality Scheme which was approved in November 2003. During 2004-05 a further review of existing policies was undertaken, in consultation with the Equality Commission and affected groups. The outcome of the exercise, in the form of a screening report, was submitted with the 2004-05 annual progress report. The screening report has also been made available on the NIAO website, www.niauditoffice.gov.uk

2b) If a Screening Report and EQIA Timetable has **previously been submitted** to the Commission please provide an update (**using the matrices in Appendix A**) of policies subject to EQIA during 2005-06, new/proposed/revised policies screened during 2005-06, ongoing EQIA monitoring activities and 2006-07 EQIA timetable.

The screening exercises referred to above concluded that none of the current policies should be subject to equality impact assessment on the grounds that they –

- do not present a significant risk to the Office’s obligation to have due regard to the need to promote better equality of opportunity; and
- do not require changing to better promote equality of opportunity.

A number of policies have been revised or developed during 2005-06 and equality considerations have been taken into account in each case. The majority of these policies related to internal issues (falling within the NIAO Terms and Conditions of Employment Policy) and consultation took place with the Trade Unions. One external policy, relating to the introduction of a Code of Audit Practice for Local Government Bodies in Northern Ireland was issued for consultation over the period November 2005 to January 2006 and all consultees listed in Annex 2 of the Equality Scheme were included in the exercise. While one response raised minor procedural issues relating to equality, none of the consultees indicated that the Code might impact adversely on any Section 75 group and it was therefore decided that an EQIA was not necessary.

Procedures are in place to ensure that the screening of all new and revised policies is properly recorded.

Section 3: Training

- Outline staff and Management Board/Committee training during 2005-06 associated with the Section 75 duties/Equality Scheme requirements (Provide details of types of training provision e.g. general awareness raising, specialist training on EQIA, Screening and Consultation). Provide a summary of any training evaluations and comments on the benefits of such training.

Provision of training

The effectiveness of the NIAO is almost entirely determined by the quality of its skills base; training is therefore regarded as a high priority and is well resourced. As the Office does not deliver services directly to the public, the greatest contribution it can make in terms of promoting equality of opportunity under Section 75 is heightening awareness of the statutory equality duties in the course of audit work. Considerable emphasis has therefore been placed on ensuring that staff are fully aware of the statutory duties and their implications.

The NIAO Equality Scheme gave a commitment to developing an effective training programme for all staff (sections 7.1 and 7.3) in order to –

- raise awareness of current anti-discrimination legislation and the statutory equality duties; and
- provide those employees involved in implementing various aspects of the Equality Scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively.

In November 2004 the Office provided in house awareness training for all staff and an in depth course on the duties and responsibilities arising from Section 75 for all managers.

Further training was provided during 2005-06 as follows –

(a) Induction training

The NIAO runs an extensive full day induction course for new employees which includes a module on the Equality Scheme and Section 75 responsibilities. 12 new employees attended the induction course during 2005-06.

(b) Awareness training

All staff undertook general equality awareness training in November 2004 and the Office plans to provide updated, in house refresher training for all staff in October 2006.

In addition, in 2005-06, one member of staff attended a workshop facilitated by the Equality Commission on the 5 year review of Equality Schemes and 1 person attended a seminar provided by the Equality Coalition on general equality issues.

(c) Specialist training

Following the awareness training in November 2004, staff were asked to identify any further training needs and these were taken into account in the preparation of Personal Development Plans. As a result, members of staff undertook specialist training during 2005-06 as follows –

11 members of staff undertook training provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for harassment investigating/reporting officers;

5 members of staff took part in Equality Commission training for designated harassment officers;

5 members of staff undertook refresher training provided by the DFP on criterion based interviewing;

1 person attended a seminar provided by the Association of Graduate Recruiters on age discrimination.

Evaluation of training

The NIAO has a clear procedure for the identification of training needs, the provision of appropriate training and evaluation of the benefits of all training undertaken. This process results in the preparation of annual Personal Development Plans. All training undertaken in relation to Section 75 and the Equality Scheme has been fully evaluated and the outcomes assessed through the PDP process.

Section 4: Communication

- Provide details of how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the statutory duties during 2005-06.
- Provide details of any review of communication activities during the year to ensure effective communication on progressing the statutory duties.

Communication of progress

The principal means which the NIAO employs to communicate progress on the delivery of the statutory duties are –

- the corporate plan;
- the annual progress report; and
- the minutes of Senior Management Group meetings.

(a) Corporate Plan

The corporate plan reports on achievements in the previous year and targets and objectives for the coming years. The plan covers a period of three years and is reviewed and extended on an annual basis. It is submitted to The Public Accounts Commission in July of each year for their consideration and endorsement. Since the adoption of the Equality Scheme, the corporate plan has included specific reference to the implementation of the statutory duties and progress made against the action plan in Annex 7 of the Scheme. The corporate plan is available to the public on the NIAO website.

(b) Annual progress report

The annual progress report submitted to the Equality Commission in the summer of each year contains details of the delivery of the statutory duties in the previous financial year. From 2006 onwards, the progress report will be made available to the public on the NIAO website.

(c) Minutes of SMG meetings

The Senior Management Group (SMG) meets on a monthly basis to discuss matters affecting the NIAO programme of work and corporate issues. Regular reports on the implementation of the

Equality Scheme are made to the SMG. For example, in 2005-06, reports were made to meetings held in July, September and March.

All staff have access to SMG minutes and there is a system in place to ensure that key points are disseminated to staff on a timely basis.

The NIAO is one of very few public bodies which makes the minutes of its senior management group meetings available on its website. The minutes of SMG meetings are posted on the NIAO website shortly after each meeting and can be accessed and downloaded by any member of the public.

Review of communication activities

No specific review of communication activities was undertaken in 2005-06. However, the Office is currently engaged in a major project to extend its office accommodation in University Street, Belfast, to accommodate all staff. This will involve a review of all processes affecting the efficient and effective operation of the Office, including communication. In parallel, work is progressing on the development of ICT which will also have implications for communication.

Section 5: Data Collection & Analysis

- Describe any systems that were established during 2005-06 to supplement available statistical and qualitative research, including consideration given to using internal organisational data and external networks.
- Describe any systems established during the year to monitor the future adverse impact of policies that were subject to EQIA.
- Detail any research undertaken/commissioned during 2005-06 to obtain data/information relating to the nine equality categories.

Systems

As a result of the screening exercises (see response to Question 2 above) the NIAO concluded that none of its current policies should be subject to equality impact assessment. It has consequently been unnecessary to monitor the future adverse impact of any policies subjected to EQIA.

However, the NIAO has developed its information base to assist with any further policy screening and to meet any needs to monitor adverse impact in the future. Information is available from a range of sources including published material (eg Population Census, Labour Force Survey, documents on websites etc) and internal records.

An essential part of the accommodation project (referred to in the response to Question 4 above) is the renewal of the IT infrastructure. Over the period of the current corporate plan, the Office will develop ICT to support its business requirements, including the information base. The Office will remain alert to new information sources and continue to assess the need for more detailed data.

Research

In view of the fact that no equality impact assessments have been required in 2005-06, the NIAO has not found it necessary to undertake or commission any specific research/surveys relating to the Section 75 equality categories.

Section 6: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

- Outline what action has been taken during 2005-06 to develop arrangements for the provision of information in accessible formats.
- Detail any initiatives/steps taken to improve access to services.

Provision of information in accessible formats

In the Equality Scheme, the NIAO made a commitment to putting systems in place to ensure that timely information can be made available, on request, in accessible formats such as Braille, large print, on disk, on audio cassette and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English. (Section 4.11). The Office also made a commitment to monitoring the arrangements for providing such information. (Section 6.14).

Arrangements to source information in different formats on a timely basis were put in place in 2003-04. There were no requests for information in alternative formats in 2005-06.

Access to services

The Equality Scheme contains a commitment to ensuring that the information which the NIAO disseminates is made accessible to ensure equality of opportunity. (Section 6.12). As the NIAO does not provide services directly to the public, the key issues relate to the general availability of information.

By law, the NIAO is required to make reports to the Northern Ireland Assembly (or Parliament during the suspension of devolution) and the Department of the Environment (in respect of local government). The Office's reports to the Assembly/Parliament are published in print by The Stationery Office.

In order to promote public access, the NIAO makes a considerable amount of information available on its website www.niauditoffice.gov.uk. This includes reports to the Assembly/Parliament, general information about the NIAO, notices about job vacancies and details of the NIAO Publication Scheme.

The latter, prepared under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, advises of information that NIAO will make routinely available and highlights the Office's commitment to ensuring that the information it disseminates is made accessible in a way which recognises equality of opportunity.

The website was upgraded in December 2003 and its design incorporates accessibility requirements.

The Office also pays particular attention to the language used in reports, with an emphasis on Plain English, and the format of reports to ensure that no section of the community is unduly deterred from accessing information. In the light of the increasing media attention given to NIAO reports and the interest being shown by the public, the Office will continue to give consideration as to how to provide information in a timely manner which is accessible to all groups.

Section 7: Complaints

- Identify, during 2005-06, the number of Section 75 complaints:
 - received by the authority;
 - resolved by the authority;
 - which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant; and
 - which were referred to the Equality Commission.

The Office received no Section 75 complaints during 2005-06.

Section 8: Scheme Timetable

- Provide an update of your equality scheme implementation timetable (covering all the scheme commitments), identifying any changes since your previous report. Please detail any planned actions outstanding.

There have been no changes to the Equality Scheme implementation timetable since the last annual progress report. A copy of the current timetable is attached at Appendix B.

In 2006-07 the Office intends to –

- continue to integrate equality objectives into the corporate planning and staff objective setting processes;
- continue to make regular reports to the Senior Management Group;
- provide awareness training for all new staff;
- provide updated refresher training for all staff;
- provide additional specialised training for staff as required;
- review access to information and services on an ongoing basis; and
- complete the annual review of the progress of the Equality Scheme.

As part of the current review of progress, the Office is taking account of best practice demonstrated by other designated public authorities and considering whether any additional action could usefully be taken to improve the effectiveness of the process of mainstreaming equality and good relations.

Section 9: Consultation, Participation and Engagement

- Provide details of the processes adopted to engage with representative groups during 2005-06.
- Outline measures taken to enhance the level of engagement that were successful and unsuccessful.

The NIAO consulted and engaged with representative groups in relation to the further screening of current policies in 2004-05 and consultation with all consultees listed in Annex 2 of the Equality Scheme took place over the period November 2005 to January 2006 in respect of the draft Code of Audit Practice for Local Government Bodies in Northern Ireland.

In addition the Office consults with interested parties during the course of VFM studies and takes account of the Equality Commission guidelines when doing so. However, it is unlikely that this type of consultation will routinely involve a wide range of representative organisations.

As the NIAO does not deliver services directly to the public, opportunities to engage with representative groups are limited. The Office would, of course, respond positively to any approaches from individual organisations should they have a direct interest in a particular aspect of the audit programme. The Office considers that one of the most effective ways to engage with representative groups is to involve them in the development and delivery of awareness training courses for staff and this approach will be explored in respect of training to be provided for all staff in October 2006.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

Provide details of steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

In general, NIAO has taken forward the 'good relations' duty alongside its requirement to promote equality of opportunity. All awareness training includes information on the duty to promote good relations and, in particular, references to "A Shared Future" and the type of initiatives which are being taken forward by Government Departments.

There would appear to be limited scope for the Office to promote good relations within the course of its programme of work, but any opportunities to do so will be identified and considered as they arise.

Section 11: Additional Comments on Mainstreaming

The main aim of the statutory duties is to mainstream equality of opportunity and good relations considerations into the functions of the authority, leading to better policies and service delivery. Please provide any additional information/comments you think may be relevant.

The implementation of Section 75 has resulted in NIAO having a heightened awareness of the importance of considering equality implications when formulating policy. It has also emphasised the need for the Office to be alert to issues of equality when considering specific topics as part of its programme of work.

Prior to designation for section 75 purposes, NIAO already took equality considerations into account when developing policy. Consequently, the implementation of Section 75, in itself, has not resulted in any significant change to NIAO policies. However, the Office continues to make minor revisions to policies to further promote equality of opportunity. For example, in 2005, the policy on flexible working was extended to formally set out the policy on home working and introduce term time working.

Section 12: Concluding Questions

A) Does the authority believe its work on implementing the statutory duties during 2005-06 produced positive benefits for the organisation?

YES - See response to Question 11.

If yes please complete the following:

	Very noticeably	Noticeably	No real change
i) Increased awareness of equality issues in policy making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii) Increased ability to ensure policies are designed and targeted to reflect equal opportunities objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
iii) Increased awareness of good relations issues in policy making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv) Increased ability to ensure policies are designed and targeted to reflect good relations objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
v) Increased awareness of equality issues in service delivery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
vi) Increased ability to ensure services are designed and targeted to reflect Section 75 requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

B) Does the authority believe its work on implementing the statutory duties during 2005-06 produced positive benefits for groups within the Section 75 categories?

NO – See response to Question 11.

C) **If you answered yes to QUESTION 12 B**, for each of the categories where a noticeable or very noticeable change has occurred, please give examples of those changes to policies or practices which have resulted in positive change. If the change was a result of an EQIA please tick the appropriate box in column 3.

NOT APPLICABLE

Screening & EQIA Update

Please enter details relating to the authority's progress.

- i) No EQIA were undertaken in 2005-06. (See response to Question 2a above).
- ii) No policies were screened during 2005-06. (See response to Question 2b above).
- iii) No EQIA have been undertaken and there have therefore been no EQIA monitoring activities during 2005-06.
- iv) No EQIA are scheduled to be undertaken in 2006-07.

Equality Scheme Implementation Timetable

Area of Implementation	Tasks identified in Equality Scheme	Milestone/ Target	Progress
Organisational arrangements	Integration of equality objectives into NIAO's corporate and strategic plans	Annually	Achieved.
	Integration of equality objectives into staff objective setting process	Ongoing	Achieved.
	Commitment to statutory duties to be included in job descriptions	During 2003-04	Achieved - Job descriptions amended and placed on NIAO website.
Progress reporting	Regular reports to NIAO's SMG	Ongoing	Achieved.
	Review of Progress of Scheme	Annually	Achieved.
	Review of entire Scheme	Within five years of Scheme's approval	To be carried out in 2008.

Area of Implementation	Tasks identified in Equality Scheme	Milestone/ Target	Progress
Consultation	Results of consultation on the Screening Exercise, including decisions regarding Equality Impact Assessments	Incorporated in Annual Review of Progress sent to the Equality Commission in 2005.	Achieved.
	Consultation on Equality Impact Assessments	N/A	N/A
Training	Training provision to be agreed by SMG	On-going	In action.
	Awareness training	Mid-2004 for all staff. Within one year of joining for new staff. Refresher training for all staff in 2006.	Achieved – delivered in November 2004. To be delivered in October 2006.
	Specialised training	On-going	As needs require.
Equality Impact Assessments	Carry out EQIAs	On completion of review of policies	N/A
Communication	Publication of Equality Scheme	Within one month of approval of Scheme	Achieved.
	Dissemination to key stakeholders	Within one month of approval of Scheme	Achieved.

Area of Implementation	Tasks identified in Equality Scheme	Milestone/ Target	Progress
Access	Review of access to information and services	Ongoing	In action.
Complaints	To respond to any complaints of non-compliance within one month of complaint being made	Ongoing	No complaints received.
	To report on complaints to Equality Commission in annual review of progress	Annually	Achieved.