

Northern Ireland Audit Office



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report 2020-21

Contact:

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Action Plan	As above <input type="checkbox"/> (double click to open) Name: Telephone: Email:

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

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

Signature:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads '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 2020 and March 2021

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 2020-21, 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.

- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2020-21 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

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The Equality Scheme action plan focusses 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.

NIAO Learning and Development Strategy implementation

A Learning and Development Officer was appointed in September 2020 and part of this role is the development of an organisational plan 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.

A series of Mental Health and Resilience workshops were offered to employees in January and February 2021 with a very good uptake. Preparation work was undertaken to arrange online Mindful Manager training facilitated by Action Mental Health during Mental Health Awareness week in May 2021.

The NIAO offered employees the opportunity to receive a flu vaccination in October 2020 and a procurement exercise was undertaken in March 2021 for employees to avail of health checks commencing April 2021.

Preparation work was undertaken to set up a NIAO WellHub to launch on 28 April 2021. This is a digital resource providing employees with the latest information, advice and support needed to maintain and improve health and wellbeing.

The NIAO underwent its first Investors in People assessment (IiP) and was awarded standard accreditation on 26 March 2021.

- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2020-21 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

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.

Review of NIAO HR policies

An audit of NIAO policies and procedures was undertaken during this reporting period. This has allowed the NIAO to identify which policies to focus on.

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. During this reporting period in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the NIAO temporarily suspended the policy, to consider requests in excess of the usual amount, where staff would receive full salary and not be required to match 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 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 2020-21 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 2020-21 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 2020-21 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 2020-21 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 2020-21 report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Equality action plans/measures

7 Within the 2020-21 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. The Equality Scheme action plan sets out a number of areas of focus.

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

Staff Training and Skills Development (3 areas of focus) – completed in previous reporting periods but reviewed and relevant actions completed in this reporting period.

General Employment Related Matters (2 areas of focus) – completed in previous reporting periods and relevant actions completed in this reporting period.

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

8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2020-21 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

None

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2020-21 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

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

PART A

- 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 2020-21 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 2020-21 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:

N/A

PART A

13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2020-21 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

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2020-21:

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.

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)*

PART A

- 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 2020-21 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 2020-21 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:

- 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 2020-21 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:

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 2020-21, 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 and diversity 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 is conducted via eLearning. This allows employees to access training at a time they choose and review the information at a speed that suits 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 2020-21, 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 2020-21?

Insert number here:

0

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 currently Equality Scheme is due for review in August 2021.

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:

7

Fully achieved

0

Partially achieved

0

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 ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
National ⁱⁱⁱ			
Regional ^{iv}			
Local ^v			

PART B

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

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Equality, diversity and selection training for staff sitting on recruitment and selection panels	Panel members receive training in equality, diversity and selection	Panel members are adequately trained and competent in recruitment process, in line with equality legislation and best practice

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

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Ensure all internal and external communication is in line with best practice on accessibility	<p>A transcript is provided for internal pre-recorded videos</p> <p>Following completion of an accessibility audit of the Office’s website in October 2020, the NIAO has been working with IT Assist to address the issues raised. It is also collaborating with IT Assist to develop the capability to publish html versions of its public reports.</p>	<p>The information is accessible to anyone who may have difficulty following a video</p> <p>Improved adherence to WCGA level AA</p>

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
1	A member of NIAO staff is 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
2	To 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

PART B

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
3	Continue to ensure equality of opportunity in the workplace through Recruitment and Selection and Learning and Development	<p>Employees are encouraged to contact a named individual in relation to any access requirements for Recruitment and Selection</p> <p>An increase in eLearning training available has enabled staff to avail of opportunities and work through these at their own pace</p> <p>Arranging training to be delivered online has enabled remote communication support to be provided for a member of staff with hearing difficulties</p>	<p>Any potential barriers due to a disability can be discussed and addressed</p> <p>Staff can set their own pace to work through training</p> <p>Enabling access to learning and development opportunities</p>
4	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	Proactively assess equipment needs and procurement of same	Specific equipment identified for individual with a disability	Safe and participative working environment

PART B

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

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1				
2				

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

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1		
2		

PART B

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:

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

PART B

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
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?

Disability Action Plan is now due for 5 year review.

ⁱ **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.

ⁱⁱ **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.

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

^{iv} **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level

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