

**OFMDFM
ANNUAL REPORT TO
EQUALITY COMMISSION
2003/04**

on

**Implementation of the equality and
good relations duties
under Section 75 of the
Northern Ireland Act 1998**

**Submitted to the Equality Commission
August 2004**

Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

The Department's Public Service Agreement and Service Delivery Agreement set out how it will carry out its responsibilities within its budget and how these will be delivered. These Agreements, which include specific commitments on equality and good relations, are published annually on the Department's website. Equality/ S75 is covered within the target "promoting better community relations, a culture of equality and rights and targeting social need and promoting social inclusion.

Objectives and targets are included in Forward Job Plans where it is appropriate to the individuals'/Branches' business objectives e.g. equality targets are built into performance targets for personnel and key policy staff, and monitored through the normal performance management arrangements.

Steps taken to work with other public authorities in progressing the duties

During the year there were quarterly meetings of senior cross-departmental officials on the Equality and Social Need Steering Group (ESNSG), which discusses and agrees issues relating to promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations (also New TSN). The development and dissemination of the Gender Equality Strategy was also coordinated and agreed through this Committee. This group is chaired by the Director of the Equality Directorate.

In addition, the Equality and Social Need Research & Information Group (ESNRIG), has developed a Research and Information Strategy which aims to assist Departments and other public authorities in accessing data to inform their work in relation to S75 and complying with their statutory duties. Guided by this strategy, ESNRIG is taking forward work, driven by Section 75 needs, which will feed into work on the development of monitoring guidance being taken forward by ECNI.

The Equality Practitioners' Group, a group of equality officers from across the departments, meets quarterly to discuss implementation issues and share good practice. This forum is chaired by the Head of the Statutory Duty & Human Rights Unit (SDHRU) in OFMDFM.

Officials in the Directorate have worked with Departmental colleagues in providing support and high level policy advice to assist them in progressing their work – over the year key issues have included: Priorities and Budget, PPPs/ Procurement policy, Rating Reform, Water Reform, Neighbourhood Renewal, Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP), etc.

In a Shared Future, independent facilitators were trained to work with groups and assist them in preparing their response to the consultation. The Community Relations Unit funded groups to cascade consultations on this key policy area.

Details of partnership work developed or further progressed with the voluntary and/or community sector as a consequence of Section 75 work

During this period departmental officials were proactively involved with a wide range of groups and organisations in taking forward its legislative and non-legislative programmes on equality, New TSN, good relations, children and young people's strategies, gender, race, older people, and work on EYPD (European Year of People with Disabilities).

Some examples included:

- OFMDFM managed EYPD throughout 2004 and chaired a Regional Steering Group (RSG) – comprising representatives from the voluntary and community sectors, Departments, the business sector and trade unions – in addition to providing grant aid funding and organising the events.
- OFMDFM organised major conferences on Improving Policy Development as part of a programme of work aimed at strengthening the policy development capacity of the NICS. The conferences included workshops/ case studies demonstrating s75/ equality as a feature of good policy-making and included speakers from the voluntary and community sector, to share their perspective.
- OFMDFM represented the NICS on the “Diversity Matters” project, led by Disability Action. The outcome of this was the development of a diversity training programme which aimed to

increase individual employee and employer awareness of issues for marginalized groups, both in employment and in trying to gain employment.

- The North Belfast Community Action Unit worked with the communities in North Belfast, their political representatives and other key stakeholders in preparing the Action Plan to tackle the problems faced by communities there.
- The Gender Equality Unit worked with relevant voluntary and community groups to develop a draft gender equality strategy which better identified the needs of men and women because of the early opportunity for grass roots input and advice on the key issues affecting them.
- The Children and Young People's Unit established a Young People's Advisory Forum comprising young people aged 12-18 years to provide advice specifically on the development of their strategy and the work of the Unit in general. They also established an NGO Forum to ensure that NGOs, young people and the research and information sector have opportunities to input meaningfully in the policy-development process.
- The Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) aspect of New TSN has involved Departments working together with voluntary and community sector partners to help those at most risk of social exclusion. PSI Working Groups, involving these partners, include Disability, Older People and Homelessness.
- The proposed new Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Strategy aims to reinforce partnership working at all levels between departments, agencies and non-governmental organisations.
- The draft Race Equality Strategy was prepared in partnership with representatives from community & voluntary organisations, minority ethnic community representatives and relevant statutory agencies. The consultation included focused seminars, facilitated by minority ethnic voluntary organisations. The Race Equality Unit also commissioned various minority ethnic representative organisations to undertake culturally-specific consultation events with members of their respective communities.

- The NI Race Forum was established to support and oversee the implementation of the Race Equality Strategy and to discuss matters of importance to minority ethnic people in Northern Ireland. This Forum comprises representatives from the community/ voluntary and statutory sectors, as well as representatives of minority ethnic communities.
- In the Shared Future consultation, a number of key public authorities (including District Councils, Local Strategy Partnerships, the Housing Executive, Education and Library Boards and Health and Social Services boards) were engaged through workshops and direct responses.
- The Department developed close working relationships with a wide range of stakeholders in service delivery agencies and disadvantaged communities (for example, Belfast City Council, NIHE and PSNI) in advancing good relations.
- In preparing age discrimination legislation for NI, the Department has sought contributions from a wide range of organisations and established an Age Legislation Working Group, which includes representatives of the community and voluntary sector.

The Director of Equality, who is responsible for driving forward implementation of the Department's Equality Scheme, sits on the Departmental Board and presents quarterly reports on progress on implementation. These reports are forwarded to the Minister.

Direct resourcing of Section 75 work during 2003-04

There is no separate budget for equality scheme delivery as equality is mainstreamed throughout the Department and integrated into objectives and targets. Many staff across the Department are involved in elements of equality scheme delivery, and it would be impossible to disaggregate these elements of the costs.

A dedicated Statutory Duty and Human Rights Unit has been established in the Department to monitor the delivery of the equality scheme, and provide equality advice and support to colleagues in

OFMDFM. The Unit also provides central advice and support to colleagues in the other Departments. This Unit saw the merger of the equality and human rights functions over the course of the reporting year. The Unit is currently staffed with 1 Grade 7, 2 DPs and 1 EO2. A SO post is currently vacant.

Factors that enhanced or impeded the process of Strategic Implementation during the period

In terms of enhancement:

- Commitment of Ministers to ensure the implementation of the duties across the NICS;
- Personal commitment of the Head of the NICS;
- specific knowledge and expertise of key officials;
- closer co-operation and networking between Departments, Equality Commission and the voluntary & community sector to ensure better targeting of consultations;
- more “joined up” approach across the NICS; and
- improving the evidence base, both statistical and research, underpinning S75 obligations.

In terms of impediments:

- the changing political environment presents particular challenges to the implementation of the Department’s programmes;
- having to screen/EQIA all policies equally, as opposed to just ‘key’ or ‘big hitters’
- the undifferentiated nature of the ECNI guidance in terms of the meaning of “policy” - this has led on occasion to disproportionate efforts being put into small policies where the equality impact was likely to be less.
- unrealistic expectations about s75 - for example that consultees have a veto in relation to decision-making, that it is about equality of outcome; that it is the paramount consideration in all policy decisions, or that it can deliver equality on its own.
- the voluntary and community sector infrastructure presents particular challenges in ensuring fully inclusive and effective consultation – the development of “networks” of consultees

interested in particular areas of work would enhance the process and facilitate inclusive targeting.

- a focus on process in the early days and apparent continuing focus on process by ECNI has impeded a more strategic and outcome-based approach.

Section 2: Screening & Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) **see attachment at end**

Section 3: Training

The Department's overall approach is to provide general awareness training to all staff new to the Department through its Corporate Induction or Direct Entrant Staff Officer Induction Programmes. To date, 441 staff have received training on Section 75 obligations, of whom 308 were at EO2 grade and above.

Training and Development Services continue to arrange consultation and other equality training on demand. To date, 39 members of staff have received this training, provided through an NICS agreed list of providers.

As recorded in last year's report, Training and Development Services continue to arrange EQIA training on demand. To date, 69 members of staff have received this training, provided through an NICS agreed list of providers.

Staff and Management Board/Committee training

The training available in relation to Section 75 obligations and the Equality Scheme has been communicated to staff. In conjunction with Training & Development Services, a training plan for staff at G7 and above is being developed.

Equality Scheme Awareness is specifically covered within the Corporate Induction Programme, while BDS have delivered training for those engaged in consultation exercises to ensure that those facilitating consultations have the necessary skills. As previously reported, Training and Development Services continue to arrange specific EQIA and other equality training as and when required.

The Policy Innovation Unit organised two major conferences on Improving Policy Development as part of a programme of work aimed at strengthening the policy development capacity of the NICS. This work has also included the development of *A Practical Guide to Policy Making in Northern Ireland* and a 'policy-link' website aimed at promoting best practice in policy-making and greater engagement between the Civil Service and the broader policy-community. The conferences included workshops based on case studies demonstrating various features of good policy-making, including inclusiveness, with a focus on fulfilling the statutory duties.

The GEU has developed and published a Gender Impact Assessment Handbook, which provides additional support to public authorities in carrying out the gender equality strand of their equality impact assessments required by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Training in relation to Gender Impact Assessment was piloted across the NICS as part of the development work on the Handbook. The Handbook will enable public authorities to enhance the mainstreaming of the gender perspective into their policies and ensure that these policies better address the needs and situations of men and women in Northern Ireland. It provides a methodology which can readily be used in relation to other equality categories.

Training on awareness raising (for new staff) and refresher training (for existing staff)

Induction training for all new staff sets out clearly the requirements of Section 75 and the departmental Equality Scheme. Equality Scheme awareness is also included within the Direct Entrant Staff Officer and general Corporate Induction Programmes. Equality Directorate staff are involved, as appropriate, in the design and delivery of this training and other training involving equality.

Training needs are reviewed and agreed annually between the individual and their line manager based on business requirements. Any identified need is communicated to TDS and arrangements are made to meet it.

Role of affected groups in the development and/or delivery of training

Through its work on gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, race and children and young people, departmental officials work in partnership with groups and organisations from these sectors. Through this work significant awareness and appreciation of the issues that affect the various equality groups has been developed and we use this network of relationships to provide input into training needs when they arise.

OFMDFM represented the NICS on the “Diversity Matters” project, a partnership led by Disability Action. The training package (for use by BDS within the NICS) has now been developed and will provide an important resource to increase awareness-raising throughout the NICS and various sectors. The NICS has an affiliated trainer for this programme.

The Children and Young People’s Unit bought in the services of Save the Children/Children’s Law Centre to provide a short training programme on children’s rights to enable workshop participants to take a children’s rights approach to the strategy development. This training had a strong equality dimension.

Summary of any training evaluations and comments on the benefits of such training.

At present evaluation of training is undertaken by the individual and their line manager.

Section 4: Communication

- Copies of the Department’s Equality Scheme are made available to all staff, external stakeholders and interested parties. Details about the scheme are communicated to all staff at the induction programme.
- Information is available on the Department’s website – www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/equality
- In terms of internal communications, some examples include: the Departmental training programme; providing input into training run by other parts of the Division or in other Departments; providing

update reports to ESNSG/the Departmental Board; the forum of the Equality Practitioners Group; seminars; internal briefings; use of staff magazines; the “Policylink” newsletter; etc.

- In terms of external communications, some examples include:
 - the ECNI annual report on progress;
 - putting information on the Departmental website;
 - in Press Releases and briefings, every opportunity is taken to stress Ministers’ commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity and the elimination of unfair discrimination;
 - SOS speech in June 2003, announcing annual priorities and plans;
 - speech given by Will Haire at ECNI conference in Sept 2003; and
 - speech given by HOCS to ECNI Commissioners.

Section 5: Data Collection & Analysis

OFMDFM’s Research Branch has commissioned research which will inform the development of ECNI’s S75 monitoring guidance. The work will look at definitions, examples of best practice in a range of organisational settings, data availability, use of proxy information, and costs and benefits.

Research Branch also ensures that Section 75 concerns are reflected, where appropriate, in research work commissioned. In turn, the branch plays an important role in highlighting S75 concerns into broader developments within NISRA. A study of Labour Market Dynamics has been commissioned on behalf of the DEL employability Taskforce, specifically focused on religion, disability and gender as key groups.

In terms of research on good relations, research has also been commissioned on:

- Policy Implications/ Solutions to Tensions over the display of Flags and Emblems. This project engages with the PSNI, ECNI, NIHE, Roads Service and District Councils and details current issues, roles and responsibilities and policies around the flying of flags.

- the Community Relations module of the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT). The survey gauges annual change in attitudes and perceptions of Community relations. On a rolling basis, questions are included to assess peoples views on a number of s75 issues including race, and attitudes to equality legislation and to section 75 itself. The survey also ask respondents to state their ethnic background and if they are gay, straight or bisexual.
- Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, and a further study is underway on this topic on an all Ireland basis.
- “Children and the Conflict”. This was a project which, through a series of interviews with children between the ages of 3 and 11, detailed how geography and social class affected children’s views on the sectarian divide as they grew up.
- research on Hate Crime in Northern Ireland. This has culminated in the publication of two reports; one on Racial Harassment, the second on Homophobic incidents and a third report on Sectarianism is at drafting stage. All three of these reports are steered by a cross-departmental group which also includes the PSNI, NIHE and the ECNI.

The Review of Public Administration team commissioned 2 major focus group studies into the views, attitudes and opinions of the public on the provision of public services in Northern Ireland. These groups reflected the demographics of the population in Northern Ireland; in particular equality and social need characteristics such as age (particularly young people and the elderly), disabled status, socio-economic group (particularly lower socio-economic groups), gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and political opinion.

To facilitate the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy, GEU commissioned research to establish gender equality indicators which will ensure greater utilization of available quantitative and qualitative data, including appropriate secondary analysis, to develop a key gender picture of Northern Ireland across policy areas.

Systems established to monitor the future adverse impact of policies that have been equality impact assessed

Anti-Discrimination Division are currently developing a methodology to monitor the future impact of the sexual orientation regulations, and will consult with sexual orientation groups and ECNI in due course.

Factors that enhanced or impeded the process of data collection and analysis during the period.

Enhanced by:

- proactive/facilitative work of Research Branch/NISRA; and
- development and publication of the Cross-Departmental Equality and Social Need Research and Information Strategy.

Impeded by definitional and methodological difficulties.

Section 6: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

Action taken to review and develop arrangements for the provision of information in accessible formats

When working with branches of OFMDFM to produce publications and manage events, the Executive Information Service (EIS) arranges preparation of information in alternative formats on request. This has included Braille print, audio production, both BSL and ISL signers, speedtext operators and translations. During the year EIS staff met RNIB to discuss best practice for the design and production of print documents and whenever practicable follows this guidance.

Under PSI Priority – Better Service (Communication), and following consultation, the final version of the guidelines “Making Services Accessible” has been drafted by OFMDFM and will be available to Departments shortly. This guidance is designed to help Departments to develop a strategic approach to making information accessible. Taking account of that guidance, OFMDFM will conduct a formal review of its arrangements for providing and monitoring access to information.

Steps taken to audit/improve arrangements to make affected groups more aware of information disseminated by the authority and the services it provides

The OFMDFM websites have been reviewed and are currently being re-designed to conform to WAI 3A standards of accessibility. To promote openness and transparency, a wide range of information covering all aspects of the work of the department is placed on the websites.

Over the European Year of People with Disabilities, to accompany events the Department produced materials in Braille print and audio cassette, whilst both BSL and ISL signers and speedtext operators were provided at all events, and used in advertising campaigns on television. The Department has also offered sign language training for all staff, to develop communication skills.

Consultation documents are made available in alternative formats, such as audio cassette, Braille or a minority ethnic language upon request. The Department has been heavily involved in the development of the Northern Ireland Internet Portal known as 'OnlineNI'. The portal follows guidelines on accessibility for those with a disability and is designed with the customer in mind. It is built on the premise that those seeking information should not necessarily know which Department has responsibility for the information sought. It is built in the format of a series of easy, navigable streams, for instance, education, health, transport etc with an easy to use search facility.

Arrangements to develop monitoring systems regarding access to information and services to ensure equality of opportunity

While this Department does not have a service delivery function, it does provide information via the web, including its website and the work currently being undertaken by the NI eGovernment Unit on the OnlineNI Portal. Work is currently underway to promote accessibility and usability. For instance, in June 2004 the OnlineNI Portal was enabled with 'Browsealoud'.

The NI eGovernment Unit is currently sponsoring a Digital Inclusion Steering Group consisting of representatives from the public, private and voluntary and community sectors. To inform the work of this group,

the Unit has commissioned a study into the availability of Internet access points across Northern Ireland.

Section 7: Complaints

This Department has not received any complaints to date.

Section 8: Timetable

Update report sent to ECNI (in February 2004).

Section 9: Consultation, participation and engagement

The Branch or Division responsible for the policy takes the lead and, taking the advice of the Department's Statutory Duty and Human Rights Unit, decides on the most appropriate method of consultation.

Consultation methods have to date included written, face to face meetings, focus groups, round table discussions, NI-wide seminars, the creation of dedicated websites and work with specific reference groups or fora.

In addition the Department has established specific fora with some equality groups, for example the Northern Ireland Race Forum, which will oversee the implementation of the NI Race Equality Strategy and the Government's response to the recommendations of the PSI Working Group on Travellers. The Forum provides a platform for engagement with community and voluntary organisations – especially those representing the minority ethnic communities – enabling them to play a full part in developing and implementing the Race Equality Strategy and advising Government on issues relating to minority ethnic people.

During the period of public consultation on a draft Race Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland, the Race Equality Unit in OFMDFM worked in close partnership with representatives from the community and voluntary sector, in particular with minority ethnic community representatives and organisations. To ensure the widest possible engagement the consultation included focused seminars with minority ethnic communities (facilitated by minority ethnic voluntary organisations) as well as commissioning various minority ethnic representative organisations to undertake a number of culturally-

specific consultation events with members of minority ethnic communities.

The Children and Young People's Unit has continued its engagement with stakeholders through the Young People's Advisory Forum, Non-governmental Organisations Forum, and Research and Information Panel. In November 2003, in an innovative approach, the Unit brought together these panels and additional stakeholders in a series of workshops to draft objectives and targets for the Children's Strategy, one of which specifically focused on rights and equality. As a result, rights and equality will be one of the 5 Key Action Areas in the draft strategy.

More than 10,000 people engaged in the Shared Future consultation on improving relations in Northern Ireland - representing the views of the voluntary and community sector, minority ethnic groups, faith based organisations, schools and youth organisations, trade unions, elected representatives and political parties. Independent facilitators were trained to work with groups and assist in the preparation of their responses to the consultation, whilst the Community Relations Unit provided some financial assistance to allow groups to organise consultation events. Over 500 formal written submissions were received – these are archived on the website www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk.

Section 10: The Good Relations duty

Mainstreaming community relations within the public sector and other institutions continues to be an extremely important part of the progression of the good relations duty.

Proposals for a new cross-departmental strategy and framework for the promotion of good relations, and to ensure an effective and co-ordinated response to sectarianism and racial intimidation, are currently being prepared. The future of community relations policy in NI was discussed at the NI Grand Committee in June 2004. The views raised by MPs on the Government's outlined proposals will be considered in bringing forward a draft new good relations policy and strategic framework. The new policy and strategic framework will provide a mechanism through which Departments can take forward their Section

75(2) duty and more effectively mainstream good relations considerations into policy development.

The North Belfast Community Action Unit is in the process of establishing a Community Empowerment Partnership Network to allow the sharing of information and best practice and to address cross-cutting issues affecting North Belfast. These Partnerships are comprised of local community and voluntary groups and includes cross community representatives, people from minority ethnic communities and of differing political opinion.

Section 11: Impacts and outcomes

A key message from the Shared Future consultation was that Government should seek to promote greater sharing across society, particularly in education, health and housing. Building on this, a new cross-departmental draft strategy and framework for the promotion of good relations, will be put in place later in 2004.

Partly in response to inputs from consultees in Priorities and Budget 2004-07, the Department is developing work on gender budgeting and has refined its methodology for S75 scrutiny of Priorities and Budget and made specific efforts to ensure early consultation in planning for Priorities and Budget 2005-08.

The mainstreaming of S75 has been enhanced during the period by the launch of the "Guide to Policy Making" and the Integrated Impact Assessment Tool, which places equality screening and impact assessment at its heart. Conferences and training on the material also emphasise the centrality of equality to policy-making. It is an important tool in mainstreaming equality into policy-making across the NICS. Establishment of fora in areas including race and Children and Young People, has led to a greater flow of information and therefore greater confidence that the strategies in these areas are best targeted to meet identified need.

The development of the ESNSG's Research and Information Strategy, because of S75, has provided a key driver in optimizing our evidence base for policy-making.

Because of the long-term nature of some of our policies, it is too early yet to demonstrate the benefits which will come from the various strategies, but they are likely to be significant.

Section 12: Additional comments on Mainstreaming

An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) tool has been developed by the Department to help assess a range of impacts of a policy. It is intended to provide a mechanism for screening a policy and a format for presenting the results of a more detailed impact assessment. The IIA has been developed with the intention that it should fulfill statutory requirements. The IIA tool is available at www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/ia.

Section 13: Concluding questions

This short questionnaire is included in the template to enable you to, provide an overall view of the effectiveness of the statutory duties, for your authority and for the Section 75 categories.

QUESTION A

Does the authority believe its work to date on implementing the statutory duties has produced positive benefits for the organisation? (Please tick) YES NO

If you answered yes to QUESTION A, please tick appropriate boxes below to what extent the duties have:

	Very noticeably	Noticeably	No real change
Increased awareness of equality issues in policy making	X		
Increased ability to ensure policies are designed and targeted to reflect equal opportunities objectives	X		
Increased awareness of good relations issues in policy making	X		
Increased ability to ensure policies are designed and targeted to reflect good relations objectives		X	
Increased awareness of equality issues in service delivery	NOT APPLICABLE		
Increased ability to ensure services are designed and targeted to reflect Section 75 requirements	NOT APPLICABLE		

QUESTION B

Does the authority believe its work to date on implementing the statutory duties has produced positive benefits for groups within the Section 75 categories? (Please tick) YES NO

If you answered yes to QUESTION B, please tick appropriate boxes below on what extent the authority's implementation of the statutory duties has increased equality of opportunity for

	Very noticeably	Noticeably	No real change
Persons of different religious belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Persons of different political opinion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Persons of different racial groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Persons of different age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Persons with different marital status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Persons of different sexual orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Men and women generally	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Persons with and without a disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Persons with and without dependents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		