

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



Equality in Participation in Public Life

FULL REPORT: Policy Recommendations

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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Participation in public life includes the way in which people contribute to, or are involved in, public decision-making (such as board membership). It can also include the way in which people participate in political life (e.g. as political representatives; members of political fora). This involvement can be at various levels.
- 1.2 Diversity in public life, and ensuring the participation of people from all types of backgrounds, including those protected by the equality laws, enhances decision-making processes and provides for greater accountability. It is also vital to people's sense of status and belonging as well as helping to counteract negative attitudes and behaviours that different groups might experience.
- 1.3 The Commission is aware of the proactive steps taken by public bodies and others to promote equality across Section 75 grounds. Whilst we both recognise and welcome this work, it is clear that challenges remain.
- 1.4 Developed from a range of research and evidence sources, and the Commission's wider work over a number of years, this policy position paper sets out the Commission's recommendations and specific priorities for action with regard to participation in public life.
- 1.5 It is intended that these recommendations, in tandem with our *Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland*¹, will both support and challenge government and key partners to address key inequalities in participation in public life through the development and delivery of policy and service delivery over the coming period.
- 1.6 Addressing key inequalities will require action not only by government and relevant departments, but also by elected representatives / political parties and key stakeholders to

¹ ECNI (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland](#)

champion actions to advance and secure equality in participation in public life.

Priority areas for action

- 1.7 Alongside noting the impact of substantial data gaps on the ability to identify key inequalities and distilling key barriers to participation, the Commission's 2018 *Statement* identified 4 key inequalities², where data was sufficiently robust to form a view.
- 1.8 The Commission considers, following engagement with stakeholders and wider consideration, that there are immediate opportunities and / or a particular pressing need over the current period to secure change in the following specific areas.

Improve equality data collection and disaggregation

- address identified gaps in equality data; and ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow meaningful equality analysis and better inform public policy development.

Increase diversity in government public appointments

- establish and promote support measures, and targeted actions to increase the participation in public life of people with disabilities;
- ensure early implementation of an action plan to achieve the Executive's 2016 target for gender equality in board and chair public appointments;
- implement the cross-departmental diversity strategic action plan to address under-representation and support participation, including to give effect to the 2014 recommendations of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

Increase diversity in political representation

- advance the participation of women, and individuals from minority ethnic groups, in political life.
- 1.9 These will represent priorities for proactive action by the Commission now and over the coming period.

² Government public appointments: under-representation of persons with a disability, and women; Elected positions in NI: under-representation of women, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Wider Commission Recommendations (by Thematic area)

- 1.10 While the Commission will work to encourage prompt action to address the above, we also encourage action by government, officials and key stakeholders to advance our full range of recommendations with a particular focus on tackling the inequalities identified in our 2018 *Statement on Key Inequalities*³.
- 1.11 The following thematic areas form a framework for a number of wider recommendations that are summarised below and developed further in the main body of this document.
- **Improve equality data collection and disaggregation:**
Action should be taken to address identified gaps in equality data; and ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow meaningful equality analysis and public policy development.
 - **Increase diversity in government public appointments:**
We call for action to increase the participation of those with disabilities; deliver on gender targets for boards and chairs; and implement a cross-departmental strategic action plan to advance participation more generally.
 - **Increase diversity in political representation:**
There is a need to advance the participation of women and minority ethnic individuals in political life; and advance the participation of women in peace building.
 - **Ensure access to the voting system by those with disabilities:**
Action is required to remove barriers across all stages of the electoral process to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote.
 - **Tackle cross-cutting barriers to active participation:**
Steps should be taken to foster active participation; address structural barriers; meet physical access and communication needs; build capacity and overcome perceived barriers; and challenge stereotypes and prejudice.

³ ECNI (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland](#)

2 Background and Context

What we mean by participation in public life

- 2.1 Participation in public life includes the way in which people contribute to, or are involved in, **public decision-making** (such as board membership).
- 2.2 It can also include the way in which people can participate in **political life** (e.g. as political representatives; members of political fora).
- 2.3 This involvement can be at various levels including community (such as membership of a community organisation or school board of governors); regional (e.g. election as a local councillor) and national (e.g. election as an MP)⁴.
- 2.4 The Commission's 2007 'A Guide for Public Authorities – Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People and Encouraging the Participation of Disabled People in Public Life'⁵ noted that 'public life' is:

*"...a very broad term, which includes government public appointments; the House of Lords; Local Strategic Partnerships; community associations or fora; community police liaison committees; neighbourhood watch committees; citizens panels; public bodies' focus or working groups; school Boards of Governors, school councils; youth councils; user groups for a service provided by a public authority. This is not an exhaustive list."*⁶

⁴ Summarised from ECNI (2007) [A Guide for Public Authorities – Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People and Encouraging the Participation of Disabled People in Public Life](#)

⁵ ECNI (2007) [A Guide for Public Authorities – Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People and Encouraging the Participation of Disabled People in Public Life](#).

⁶ ECNI (2007) [A Guide for Public Authorities – Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People and Encouraging the Participation of Disabled People in Public Life](#)

Advancing equality in participation in public life

- 2.5 Diversity in public life and ensuring the participation of people from all types of backgrounds, including those protected by equality laws, enhances the decision-making processes. It provides for greater accountability along with having more representative groups of people influencing and shaping the decisions that affect all our daily lives.
- 2.6 Action is required both to address key inequalities and to remove the barriers experienced by equality groups to participation in public life. Further, whilst socio-economic disadvantage is not a specified ground under the equality legislation, it is clear that barriers and inequalities experienced by equality groups can be exacerbated by poverty and social exclusion.

Equality Commission work to advance equality in participation in public life

- 2.7 The Commission has a history of seeking to advance equality of opportunity and diversity in participation in public life.
- 2.8 For example, the Commission's 2007 *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*⁷ highlighted the importance of diversity in public life to increase the voice and influence of under-represented groups.
- 2.9 In 2007 we published 'A Guide for Public Authorities – Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People and Encouraging the Participation of Disabled People in Public Life'. In 2008, the Commission's (2008) *Guidance for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people* set out that *active participation* meant not only engaging with people when developing policies, but also giving them the opportunity to take part in decision-making. This may include involving people in formal decision-making structures and activities⁸.
- 2.10 In January 2016 our Recommendations: Programme for Government and Budget⁹ called for action to:

⁷ ECNI (2007) Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland

⁸ Summarised from ECNI (2008) 'Guidance for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people'.

⁹ ECNI (2016) Recommendations: Programme for Government and Budget

- Increase the participation of women in political / public life and decision-making, including peacebuilding.
- Promote the participation of other under-represented Section 75 groups in public life, including people with disabilities, lesbian, gay and bisexual people, older people and minority ethnic communities.

2.11 We also raised concerns about the under-representation of people with disabilities in public life and called for steps, in furtherance of the disability duties on public bodies, to promote their participation in public life.

2.12 The Commission has also called for action to both address data gaps and to provide more disaggregated data. For example, our June 2016 response to the Executive's consultation on a draft Programme for Government Framework recommended that all relevant Programme for Government measures (and all relevant indicators and all outcomes) should not only be tracked in aggregate but also for the impact on individuals from each of the Section 75 grounds.

Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland (2018)

2.13 In September 2018, the Commission finalised and published a *Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland*¹⁰. The *Statement* draws on research¹¹ conducted on its behalf by Ipsos MORI in 2015, and stakeholder engagement and input on an earlier draft version of the *Statement*.

2.14 Alongside noting the impact of substantial data gaps on the ability to identify key inequalities and distilling key barriers to participation, the Commission's *Statement* identified the following **key inequalities**:

- **Government public appointments:** under-representation of persons with a disability;
- **Government public appointments:** under-representation of women;

¹⁰ ECNI (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland](#)

¹¹ Ipsos MORI (2015) *Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds*. ECNI

- **Elected positions in Northern Ireland:** under-representation of women;
- **Elected positions in Northern Ireland:** there are no elected representatives within the Northern Ireland Assembly from minority ethnic backgrounds (under-representation of those from ethnic minority backgrounds).

2.15 It is the Commission's intention that the *Statement* and underlying research, will inform the work of the Executive, relevant departments and stakeholders, further assisting them to mainstream equality considerations into the development and review of public policy and service delivery.

Progress in advancing equality and diversity in participation in public life

2.16 The Commission is aware of the proactive steps taken by public bodies and others to promote equality across Section 75 grounds.

2.17 Whilst we both recognise and welcome this work, it is clear that challenges remain. These include the long-standing under-representation of women in the Assembly. Further, whilst targets for public appointments now exist, the absence of Northern Ireland Ministers since 2017 has resulted in limited numbers of public appointments being made.

2.18 The recommendations set out below will require action not only by government and relevant departments, but also by elected representatives / political parties and key stakeholders to champion actions to advance and secure equality in participation in public life.

3 Priorities and areas for action

Priority areas for action

- 3.1 As with the underpinning research and *Statement on Key Inequalities*, the identification of priority areas for intervention is impacted by substantive data gaps across a number of areas of public and political life.
- 3.2 The Commission however considers, following engagement with stakeholders and wider consideration, that there are immediate opportunities and / or a particular pressing need over the current period to secure change in relation to government public appointments and political representation, in the following specific areas.

Improve equality data collection and disaggregation

- address identified gaps in equality data; and ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow meaningful equality analysis and better inform public policy development.

Increase diversity in government public appointments

- establish and promote support measures, and targeted actions to increase the participation in public life of people with disabilities;
- ensure early implementation of an action plan to achieve the Executive's 2016 target for gender equality in board and chair public appointments;
- implement the cross-departmental diversity strategic action plan to address under-representation and support participation, including to give effect to the 2014 recommendations of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

Increase diversity in political representation

- advance the participation of women, and individuals from minority ethnic groups, in political life.

3.3 These will represent priorities for proactive action by the Commission now and over the coming period.

Wider Commission Recommendations (by Thematic area)

3.4 While the Commission will work to encourage prompt action to address the above, we also encourage action by government, officials and key stakeholders to advance our full range of recommendations with a particular focus on tackling the inequalities identified in our 2018 *Statement on Key Inequalities*¹².

3.5 The Commission calls for wider action across the following thematic areas to address key inequalities and advance equality of opportunity and diversity.

- **Improve equality data collection and disaggregation:**
Action should be taken to address identified gaps in equality data; and ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow meaningful equality analysis and public policy development.
- **Increase diversity in government public appointments:**
We call for action to increase participation of those with disabilities; deliver on gender targets for boards and chairs; and implement a cross-departmental strategic action plan to advance participation more generally.
- **Increase diversity in political representation:**
There is a need to advance the participation of women and minority ethnic individuals in political life; and advance the participation of women in peace building.
- **Ensure access to the voting system by those with disabilities:**
Action is required to remove barriers across all stages of the electoral process to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote.

¹² ECNI (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland](#)

- **Tackle cross-cutting barriers to active participation:** Steps should be taken to foster active participation; address structural barriers; meet physical access and communication needs; build capacity and overcome perceived barriers; and challenge stereotypes and prejudice.

3.6 These thematic areas form a framework for a number of specific recommendations which are set out in turn below.

3.7 Whilst socio-economic disadvantage is not a specified ground under the equality legislation, the barriers and inequalities experienced by individuals across the equality categories can be exacerbated by poverty and social exclusion. The Commission continues to proactively highlight the link between poverty and social exclusion, and the inequalities faced by individuals protected under equality legislation. We stress the need for urgent action to address poverty and social exclusion experienced by individuals across the range of equality categories.

3.8 The remainder of this document sets out our specific recommendations for action, under each of the five thematic areas listed above. Each recommendation is accompanied by a supporting rationale and key evidence.

4 Improve equality data collection and disaggregation

4.1 Action should be taken to address identified gaps in equality data; and ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow meaningful equality analysis and public policy development.

Recommendations:

- address identified gaps in equality data across a number of areas of public policy.
- ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow for meaningful equality analysis, to better inform public policy development.

Address identified gaps in equality data across a number of areas of public policy.

4.2 There are substantial and specific data gaps across all areas of public life in relation to the participation of those from across the nine equality categories.

4.3 We call upon public authorities to ensure comprehensive monitoring, analysis and reporting of equality characteristics relating to public and political life.

4.4 We also call upon departments to take more extensive action to encourage candidates for public appointments to complete and return monitoring forms.

4.5 We note and welcome that the Assembly has begun to collect disability data on an annual basis, and recommend broader monitoring of the MLAs.

Supporting Rationale

- 4.6 Comprehensive equality data is necessary to shape, refine and evaluate the impact of strategies, programmes and policies.
- 4.7 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998¹³, places a clear onus on public authorities to put in place systems to collect relevant information to assess and monitor the impact of their policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity.
- 4.8 Only three of nineteen areas of public life examined¹⁴ by Ipsos MORI collected and reported quantitative data on a regular basis, namely: government public appointments; elected representatives; and access to the voting system.
- 4.9 Further, there is a complete absence of data for the specific Section 75 grounds of marital status, dependent status and sexual orientation, across all of the nineteen areas of public life that were analysed¹⁵.
- 4.10 Even where data is collected, comprehensive coverage is often lacking. The Executive's Office's 'Public Appointments: Annual Report for NI, 2016/17'¹⁶ stated that 'due to a change in the data collection process for the 2016/17 statistics, some data relating to several characteristics – such as gender, age, and ethnicity – are unknown'. For example, the gender is unknown for 26 (19%) of the 131 public appointments¹⁷.
- 4.11 The paucity in monitoring and reporting participation in public life has substantially impacted upon the extent to which the Commission's *Statement on Key Inequalities* and underpinning research could identify inequalities in participation in public life in Northern Ireland. The ability to develop targeted and evidenced based policy solutions is thus similarly impacted.

¹³ [Northern Ireland Act 1998, Section 75](#)

¹⁴ Ipsos MORI (2015) *Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds*. ECNI

¹⁵ The Commission's 2007 *A Guide for Public Authorities – Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People and Encouraging the Participation of Disabled People in Public Life* noted that 'public life' is: "...a very broad term, which includes government public appointments; the House of Lords; Local Strategic Partnerships; community associations or fora; community police liaison committees; neighbourhood watch committees; citizens panels; public bodies' focus or working groups; school Boards of Governors, school councils; youth councils; user groups for a service provided by a public authority. This is not an exhaustive list."

¹⁶TEO (2018) [Public Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland, 2016/17](#)

¹⁷TEO (2018) [Public Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland, 2016/17](#)

Ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow for meaningful equality analysis, to better inform public policy development.

- 4.12 There is very limited disaggregation of data across all equality grounds, which prevents an examination of potential inequalities encountered as a result of multiple identities (e.g. barriers faced by young, single mothers).
- 4.13 The availability of data is often limited, patchy and often not disaggregated¹⁸. We call upon government departments to ensure that in the areas of public life where data is collected it is routinely collected and disaggregated across the Section 75 equality categories.

Supporting Rationale

- 4.14 The ability to develop targeted and evidence-based policy solutions is further impacted by a lack of disaggregated data. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998¹⁹, places a clear onus on public authorities to put in place systems to collect and make use of information for assessing and monitoring the impact of their policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity.
- 4.15 A lack of data disaggregation negatively affects not only the degree to which specific inequalities in participation in public life can be assessed and monitored, but also impacts on the ability to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of specific actions taken by public authorities and others to address specific inequalities.
- 4.16 The lack of disaggregated data regarding participation in public life further impacted upon the extent to which the Commission's research could robustly identify inequalities.

¹⁸ The monitoring of ethnicity and disability within participation in public life does not allow for disaggregation by categories. For example, 'white' category by nationality would enable the experiences of Eastern European migrants and other minority ethnic groups such as Travellers to be determined. Similarly, disaggregated beyond the classification of 'disability'.

¹⁹ [Northern Ireland Act 1998, Section 75](#)

5 Increase diversity in government public appointments

5.1 We call for action to increase participation of those with disabilities; deliver on gender targets for boards and chairs; and implement a cross-departmental strategic action plan to advance participation more generally.

5.2 This section sets out recommendations to advance equality in government public appointments. The recommendations should be read in tandem with the preceding recommendations to address key data gaps and the later cross-cutting recommendations to tackle barriers to participation.

Recommendations:

- establish and promote support measures, and targeted actions to increase the participation in public life of people with disabilities;
- ensure early implementation of an action plan to achieve the Executive's 2016 target for gender equality in board and chair public appointments;
- implement the cross-departmental diversity strategic action plan to address under-representation and support participation, including to give effect to the 2014 recommendations of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

5.3 While noting the **impact of substantial data gaps** on assessing effectively the participation of those from a range of equality categories across all areas of public life, the Commission's 2018 *Statement on Key Inequalities* identified the under-representation of **those with a disability** and **women** within government public appointments as key inequalities. Aligned to these, we make the following policy recommendations.

Establish and promote support measures, and targeted actions to increase the participation in public life of people with disabilities.

- 5.4 The Executive Office's 2016 *Public Appointments Guide*²⁰ acknowledges the under-representation on public bodies of, amongst others, people with disabilities. Our 2018 *Statement*²¹ identified the under-representation of people with disabilities as a key inequality.
- 5.5 The Commission has identified a range of specific barriers to participation in public life, including physical and other accessibility issues; lack of capacity-building; and wider support²².
- 5.6 We recommend action to involve those with disabilities and their representative organisations to identify and implement specific measures to tackle the under-representation of disabled people. Such measures could include:
- Encouraging stakeholders to promote the participation of disabled people;
 - Developing supported work and boardroom initiatives to build experience, capacity and skills;
 - Addressing physical, communication and other barriers to access, including covering the reasonable additional costs associated with the participation of a person with disabilities.
- 5.7 These align to the 2018 Lord Holmes Review²³ recommendation that government use 'multipliers, connectors and conduits to promote opportunities more widely'. The Review also recommended the establishment of a 'mentoring programme to support talented disabled candidates.'

Supporting Rationale

- 5.8 The Commission's 2012 'How does Northern Ireland measure up?'²⁴ report identified participation in public life as one of three priority areas where further action was key to the implementation of the State's obligations under the United

²⁰ TEO (2016) [Public Appointments Guide](#)

²¹ ECNI (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland](#)

²² ECNI (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland](#)

²³ Cabinet Office (2018) [Lord Holmes Review, Opening up Public Appointments to Disabled People](#)

²⁴ ECNI (2012) [How Does Northern Ireland Measure Up?](#)

Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

- 5.9 A 2015 report by the organisation Disabled People's Voices²⁵ reported that disabled people did not feel that they had the same opportunity as their non-disabled peers to be involved in public life.
- 5.10 The under-representation²⁶ of persons with disabilities in government public appointments has remained reasonably consistent over the period 2006-2016 (1-3%)²⁷.
- 5.11 However, during the period 2008 - 2016, there was an observed trend of a decreasing number of applications to government public appointments from persons who had declared a disability²⁸. In 2014, CPANI reported that previous diversity initiatives during the period 2008 - 2011 had made no impact on the number of persons with disabilities serving on public boards²⁹.
- 5.12 Improved measures and outcomes can potentially be improved by closer work with those with disabilities and wider stakeholders on how to secure and enable greater participation levels. For example, initiatives such as mentoring programmes can encourage and empower those from under-represented groups to participate in training and gain skills, capacity and practical experience of public appointments (see later discussion in the '*Tackle cross-cutting barriers to active participation*' section).

Ensure early implementation of an action plan to achieve the Executive's 2016 target for gender equality in board and chair public appointments.

- 5.13 In March 2016, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed targets for the appointment of women to public bodies. However, in the context of an absence of Assembly Ministers since January 2017 to make appointments, we note the Commissioner for

²⁵ Disabled People's Voices (2015) Our lives, our voices, our votes

²⁶ When compared to persons with disabilities share of the population which is 21%. NISRA (2011) Northern Ireland 2011 Census Population Tables, [Table KS301NI: Health and provision of unpaid care](#)

²⁷ Analysis by ECNI of public appointments published data

²⁸ Commissioner for Public Appointments (2014) [Underrepresentation and Lack of Diversity in Government Public Appointments in Northern Ireland.](#)

²⁹ Commissioner for Public Appointments (2014) [Underrepresentation and Lack of Diversity in Government Public Appointments in Northern Ireland.](#)

Public Appointments' 2018 observation that the current situation *'makes impossible the achievement of the equality targets within the set timeframe'*³⁰.

- 5.14 Some of the targets agreed by the Executive in March 2016 for the appointment of women to public bodies have already been missed. Concerted action will be needed to catch up and to address the range of political; socio-economic; ideological and psychological barriers impacting on women's participation in public life at board and chair level. These are wide-ranging, including being part of the networks that gain access to boards, the availability of childcare and the confidence of individuals.
- 5.15 We recommend that government departments move to address recruitment and selection processes which may hamper greater diversity in public appointments (see later discussion on 'cross-cutting barriers'). Action is also required by Departments to tackle the greater under-representation of women in remunerated posts.
- 5.16 We urge the prompt implementation of a timetabled action plan setting out key milestones to deliver on the agreed targets for the appointment of women to public bodies.

Supporting Rationale

- 5.17 The Executive Office's 2016 *Public Appointments Guide*³¹ acknowledges the under-representation on public bodies of, amongst others, women. Our *Statement* identified the under-representation of women as a key inequality.
- 5.18 The Commission has welcomed that, in March 2016, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed targets for the appointment of women to public bodies. These are reported to include that by 2017/18 there should be gender equality for all appointments made in year, and that by the year ending 2020-21 there should be gender equality for all appointees in post, reflected in both board membership and at Chair level³². However, in the absence of Assembly Ministers since January 2017 to make public appointments, progress has been limited - only 131

³⁰ Commissioner for Public Appointments (2018) [Annual Report 2017/18](#) – page 5

³¹ TEO (2016) [Public Appointments Guide](#)

³² As reported in CPANI Annual Report 2015/16, page 8

appointments were made between April 2016 and March 2017³³, compared to 471 between April 2015 and March 2016³⁴.

- 5.19 The Commission's submission to inform the 2019 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Shadow Report³⁵, called for further action by Government in Northern Ireland to strengthen institutional mechanisms for gender equality. We referenced the need to, among other things, *"increase the use of positive action and temporary special measures where appropriate..."*
- 5.20 In 2015 Ipsos MORI research reported the continuing under-representation of women, compared to their share of the population, in government public appointments (36%) and as publicly appointed chairpersonships (21%)³⁶.
- 5.21 The period April 2016 to March 2017 showed an increase in women's representation to 42% of public appointments and 28% of chair appointments³⁷. This was an improvement compared to 2014 statistics, but falls short of the Executive's targets.
- 5.22 While women are under-represented across public appointments, this under-representation is greater in remunerated positions. During 2016/17, 45% of unremunerated positions were held by women, compared to 33% of positions remunerated at £5000 per annum and above³⁸.

Implement the cross-departmental diversity strategic action plan to address under-representation and support participation, including to give effect to the 2014 recommendations of the

³³ TEO (2018) [Public Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland 2016/17](#)

³⁴ TEO (2017) [Public Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland 2015/16](#)

³⁵ ECNI (2018) Women in Northern Ireland: UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Submission to inform 'List of Issues' Consideration (Examination of United Kingdom, 2019). Pg 4

³⁶ This inequality is derived from analysis of OFMDFM Government Public Appointment data by Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds. ECNI, Belfast.

³⁷ TEO (2018) [Public Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland 2016/17](#)

³⁸ TEO (2018) [Public Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland 2016/17](#)

Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

- 5.23 It is our understanding that a five-year cross-departmental diversity strategic action plan for public appointments is currently in draft form.
- 5.24 In our view, it should include actions to implement the 2014 recommendations of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland. These recommendations included, for example: using the Public Appointments Forum to address under-representation at an NICS, rather than departmental level; making board diversity public policy and setting measurable goals; and taking a centralised approach to raising awareness of public appointments.
- 5.25 We urge early publication and implementation of the cross-departmental strategic action plan with associated actions, targets and review mechanism.
- 5.26 Actions must seek to address not only under-representations and known barriers, but also to raise awareness of opportunities and their relevance to members of specific equality categories.

Supporting Rationale

- 5.27 The Executive Office's 2016 *Public Appointments Guide*³⁹ acknowledges the under-representation on public bodies of women, people with disabilities, people from an ethnic minority background and those under the age of 30. Our *Statement* identified the under-representation of women and people with disabilities as key inequalities.
- 5.28 In 2014, the Commissioner for Public Appointments stated that 'our public boards are missing out on skills, knowledge and perspectives that exist throughout the community. This is not conducive to optimal performance by our boards...'⁴⁰.
- 5.29 The Commission has identified a range of barriers to participation in public life, including accessibility, capacity and wider support⁴¹.

³⁹ TEO (2016) [Public Appointments Guide](#)

⁴⁰ Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (2014) Under-representation and lack of diversity in public appointments

⁴¹ ECNI (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland](#)

5.30 Ensuring representative participation of individuals from across the full range of Section 75 equality categories in public appointments would help to ensure a more informed policy decision-making process.

5.31 A cross-departmental strategic action plan would provide a government wide approach to addressing the under-representation of groups such as women and people with disabilities, and better allow consideration to be given to sexual orientation and gender identity, where monitoring data is not collected. Such an action plan would require clear actions, timelines, review mechanisms and measures of success.

Gender and Disability

5.32 Arguments in support of actions to address under-representations of women and those with a disability are already set out under recommendations further above and so are not repeated here.

Young people

5.33 In 2015/16 only 1% of appointments to public boards in Northern Ireland were to people under the age of 30⁴². This is a decrease from 3% in 2014/15⁴³ and is considerably lower than other age bands. In 2014, the Commissioner for Public Appointments (NI) reported that when younger people (under the age of 30) were asked why they had not applied for a public appointment opportunity they indicated that they were “*reluctant to submit themselves to a recruitment process that they see as ‘not for them’*”⁴⁴.

Minority ethnic groups

5.34 The Commission notes that 3% of applications for public appointments came from minority ethnic communities during 2016/17. However fewer than five appointments were to members of ethnic minority communities during this period⁴⁵.

⁴² In 2016/17, age data was not recorded in 42% of applications compared to 23% in 2015/16. The proportion of 2016/17 was 2%.

⁴³ OFMDFM (2015) [Public Bodies and Public Appointments annual report 2014/15](#)

⁴⁴ The Commissioner for Public Appointments NI (2014) Under-representation and lack of diversity in public appointments in Northern Ireland

⁴⁵ TEO (2018) [Public Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland 2016/17](#). Precise figure not published by NISRA due to disclosure control

- 5.35 We note later in this document the importance of a 'sense of belonging'⁴⁶ to the participation of those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Other groups

- 5.36 While sufficiently categorised and disaggregated quantitative data does not exist to form a robust view with regards to any under-representation or otherwise of wider equality groups, for example lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) or Transgender people, we note and recommend action to address the barriers often faced by individuals from across wider grounds.

- 5.37 For example, specific barriers for LGB and Transgender people participating in public life include: the fear of being 'outed'; negative media stereotyping; the fear of vandalism, violence or abuse⁴⁷; and the general public being 'uncomfortable' with having a Transgender person in the highest elected position⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ ECNI (2014) [Response to consultation on OFMDFM draft Racial Equality Strategy](#)

⁴⁷ Ryri. I.; McDonnell, S.; Allman, K. And Pralat, R. (2010) [Experiences of and barriers to participation in public and political life for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.](#)

⁴⁸ ECNI (2018) [A Question of Attitude](#) _ECNI, Belfast.

6 Increase diversity in political representation

6.1 There is a need to advance the participation of women and minority ethnic individuals in political life; and advance the participation of women in peace building.

6.2 This section sets out recommendations to advance equality in political life and as elected representatives. The recommendations should be read in tandem with the preceding recommendations to address key data gaps and the later cross-cutting recommendations to tackle barriers to participation.

Recommendations:

- advance the participation of women, and individuals from minority ethnic groups, in political life;
- advance the active and meaningful participation of women in peace building and post conflict reconstruction.

6.3 While noting the **impact of substantial data gaps** regarding the participation of a range of equality groups across all areas of public life, the Commission's *Statement on Key Inequalities* identified as key inequalities the under-representation of **women** and those from **minority ethnic backgrounds** within elected positions. Aligned to these, we make the following policy recommendations.

Advance the participation of women, and individuals from minority ethnic groups, in political life.

6.4 Our *Statement on Key Inequalities*⁴⁹ considered the under-representation of women and minority ethnic groups within elected positions in Northern Ireland to be key inequalities. This under-representation means that, in addition to there being fewer women and minority ethnic groups in elected chambers,

⁴⁹ ECNI (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland](#)

the bodies that are made up from elected members, such as the Assembly scrutiny committees, or bodies that have elected member representation, such as the Policing Board⁵⁰, will also have a similar under-representation.

- 6.5 We call on government and political parties to take prompt steps to further promote and support the participation in political life of women, and those from minority ethnic groups, by actively tackling the barriers they may face (see later discussion). We also recommend actions to develop and broaden candidate pools.
- 6.6 In relation to women specifically, we recommend steps, including the adoption of temporary special measures, to increase the representation of women in political life⁵¹. We welcome the positive action measures taken by local government at elected member, officer and service delivery level through the Women in Local Councils initiative⁵² ⁵³, and at the Northern Ireland Assembly through the establishment of the Women's Caucus⁵⁴.
- 6.7 Particular consideration is also required in relation to those with multiple identities such as women with a minority ethnic background or women with disabilities. Specific, tailored responses to address the barriers they face to participation may be required.

Supporting Rationale

Women

⁵⁰ Six of 19 Policing Board Members are women (32%) – 3 of 9 independent members (33%) and 3 of 10 political members (30%) [NI Policing Board website, accessed 03.04.19](#)

⁵¹ In terms of temporary special measures, ECNI has welcomed the extension of the Sex Discrimination Election Candidates Act 2002 which allows for positive action in relation to women's political participation and including all women shortlists. CEDAW stipulates that States parties 'shall take all appropriate measures' to achieve equality between women and men including through the use of temporary special measures.

⁵² Which included the creation of gender champions, the development of family friendly operating and working practices and training and mentoring.

⁵³ The 2019 local government elections resulted in a marginal increase in women elected (26% against 25% elected in 2014, 23.5% at the 2011 election and 21% in 2005). Three of the eleven council chief executives are women.

⁵⁴ [Politics Plus website, accessed 03.04.19](#), The Women's Caucus is: '*concerned primarily with the review of policy and legislation from a gender perspective, increasing the representation of women in the leadership of parliamentary committees, building capacity and empowering women MLAs, advocating gender equality on a local, national and international level and promoting gender-mainstreaming within the Assembly*'.

- 6.8 In elected positions - at Westminster, in the Northern Ireland Assembly and in local government⁵⁵ - there has been a persistent under-representation of women when compared to their share of the population⁵⁶.
- 6.9 Women currently make up one third of MLAs⁵⁷. Whilst the 2017 increase in female representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly is to be welcomed⁵⁸, the Northern Ireland Assembly still has the lowest female representation (30%) when compared with other devolved legislatures in the United Kingdom⁵⁹.
- 6.10 It is internationally recognised that societies' needs are better served where there is a diverse political representation. Further, it has been shown⁶⁰ that gender balance in parliamentary bodies raises the profile of social policy generally and women's rights issues particularly.
- 6.11 The Commission's Equality Awareness Survey (2011) demonstrated high levels of support for more female MLAs, with two thirds (63%) of those surveyed indicating they would like to see an increase in the number of female MLAs⁶¹.
- 6.12 The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement⁶² committed Government to work for the right of women to full and equal political participation and the advancement of women in public life. This commitment is reiterated in the Stormont House Agreement⁶³.
- 6.13 In 2015, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee concluded⁶⁴ that the *'under-representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland is a serious issue which must be addressed urgently'*. In our 2014 evidence⁶⁵ to the Committee, we cited actions to increase female representation within parties such as

⁵⁵This inequality is derived from analysis of OFMDFM Government Public Appointment data by Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds. ECNI, Belfast.

⁵⁶ Women account for 51% of the Northern Ireland Population, source NISRA (2012) 2011 Census

⁵⁷ NI Assembly, Research and Information Service (2019) [Who Runs Northern Ireland? A Summary of Statistics Relating to Gender and Power in 2019](#)

⁵⁸ Following the 2017 elections.

⁵⁹ Northern Ireland 30%, Scotland 35%, Wales 48%.

⁶⁰ Inter Parliamentary Union (2010) [Gender Sensitive Parliaments](#)

⁶¹ ECNI (2011) Equality Awareness Survey, Do You Mean Me?

⁶² 1998 [Good Friday / Belfast Agreement full text](#)

⁶³ 2014 [Stormont House Agreement full text](#)

⁶⁴ Assembly and Executive Review Committee (2015) Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly. (p1)

⁶⁵ ECNI (2014) [Evidence to the AERC Committee](#)

challenging negative stereotypes, and engaging with women's groups. We also drew on actions in other jurisdictions to encourage participation, such as development schemes and mentoring programmes.

- 6.14 The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 amends the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 to exempt the selection of election candidates from the provision of the Order. This enables political parties to use positive discrimination⁶⁶ for the promotion of women candidates over men. However, while this provision has been extended to 2030, it has never yet been used in Northern Ireland.

Minority ethnic groups

- 6.15 Currently, there is no political representation in terms of ethnic minorities within the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, previously (2007-2016) one MLA (Alliance party)⁶⁷ was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

- 6.16 Almost half (49%) of respondents to the Northern Ireland Life and Times (2017)⁶⁸ survey when asked to consider the participation of people from minority ethnic communities as politicians, reported their perception that they played '*hardly any*' role as politicians. 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that organisations and leaders in public life, should encourage members of minority ethnic communities to participate in public life.

- 6.17 Further, a NICEM study in 2014⁶⁹ found that: 'in relation to leadership, political parties, representatives and candidates, need to make greater efforts to represent all communities in Northern Ireland'; this included the views of minority ethnic communities who felt that their views were being ignored at this level.

- 6.18 Research by NICEM (2013)⁷⁰ also identified that political participation is not a priority issue for most minority ethnic

⁶⁶ The extension of the Sex Discrimination Election Candidates Act 2002 allows for positive action in relation to women's political participation and including all women shortlists.

⁶⁷ Northern Ireland Assembly (2017) They Work for You

⁶⁸ NILT (2017) Attitudes to Minority Ethnic People

⁶⁹ NICEM (2014) Voices for Change

⁷⁰ NICEM (2013) The experiences of ethnic minority women in Northern Ireland.

female respondents, with nearly all⁷¹ respondents having never considered standing for election.

Advance the active and meaningful participation of women in peace building and post conflict reconstruction.

- 6.19 The Commission continues⁷² to recommend steps, including temporary special measures, to increase the representation of women in political and public life, including in peace building and post conflict reconstruction in Northern Ireland.
- 6.20 We have welcomed initiatives designed to ensure greater involvement of women in peace building, including the 2014 publication⁷³ of a strategic guide and toolkit⁷⁴. This guide has recommended a gender mainstreaming approach including the inclusion of gender perspectives in all strategies, institutions and arrangements for peace building. The Commission was disappointed, therefore, to see that there was only one woman among the 15 appointments to the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition⁷⁵ established in 2016.
- 6.21 The guide also recommended greater support for women, women's groups and networks to manage the mental health challenges resulting from the conflict and civil unrest and the continuing challenges of paramilitarism and gender-based violence, abuse and threat. It is our understanding that, to date, this recommendation has not been actioned. We call on government to do so as a matter of urgency and to address other recommendations in the toolkit in respect of gender mainstreaming.
- 6.22 We also note the Executive response to the *Report of the Panel on Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups*⁷⁶ (2016) which recommended a programme for women in leadership as well as

⁷¹ NICEM (2013) The experiences of ethnic minority women in Northern Ireland. 90% of respondents to the study would not consider standing for election.

⁷² ECNI (2015) Gender equality policy priorities and recommendations

⁷³ Hinds B, Donnelly D (2014) [WPS Toolkit](#) 'Women, Peace and Security: Women's Rights and Gender Equality, developing and applying women, peace and security practice in Northern Ireland'.

⁷⁴ The toolkit was developed following a Women and Peacebuilding Project to put forward the imperative for involving women and to set out good practice models from across the public sector for involving women in peace building.

⁷⁵ Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition - www.fictcommission.org

⁷⁶ NI Executive (2016) [The Fresh Start Panel report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups](#)

in community development⁷⁷, by including such a programme in the associated Action Plan⁷⁸ (2016). We note the development of the Department for Communities' programme for 'Women in Community Transformation'⁷⁹, in response and look forward to the programme's report on progress.

Supporting Rationale

- 6.23 The Commission's 2019 CEDAW Shadow Report⁸⁰ recommended action, including via temporary special measures, to overcome key barriers to women's participation in, among other things, peace building. The CEDAW Committee, in its Concluding Observations in 2019⁸¹, called on the UK Government 'to ensure the participation of women in the post conflict reconstruction and peace-building processes in Northern Ireland, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).'
- 6.24 A 2014 *Inquiry into the position of women in Northern Ireland since the Peace Agreement*⁸² found that the legacy of violence and impact of the continuing violence had not been addressed and that women face barriers to participation in peace building and post conflict reconstruction, as well as in other areas of decision-making.
- 6.25 Barriers included the lack of affordable, accessible and appropriate childcare; the heavily male-dominated political institutions; and pressures that ensured their voices were silenced in local communities.
- 6.26 A 2015 UN commissioned study into the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325⁸³ highlighted that women's participation is key to sustainable peace. In particular, it noted that research comprehensively demonstrates that the

⁷⁷ Under the Fresh Start Agreement (at A3.9) there is a commitment for the 'development of a programme to increase the participation and influence of women in community development.' [DfC Website](#) (Accessed 21 May 2018)

⁷⁸ NI Executive (2016) [Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminology and Organised Crime](#)

⁷⁹ DfC (2017) [Programme for Women Involved in Community Transformation - Advert](#)

⁸⁰ ECNI (2019) [CEDAW shadow report](#)

⁸¹ CEDAW (2019) [Concluding Observations on UK, CEDAW Committee](#)

⁸² See NIWEP (2015) [An Inquiry into the position of women in NI since the Peace Agreement](#) Summary Report.

⁸³ [UN SCR 1325](#) (2000) on women, peace and security. UN SCR 1325 recognises that women and girls have critical roles to play as active agents in conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations, peace building and post conflict reconstruction. Other UN SCRs pertain including [UN SCR 2122](#) on involving women in decision-making in post conflict reconstruction. United Nations (2015) [Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing The Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325](#)

participation of women at all levels is key to the operational effectiveness, success and sustainability of peace processes and peace building efforts⁸⁴.

6.27 We note that, while Government has not implemented United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the UK's (2013) 7th and (2017) 8th Periodic Reports^{85, 86} record that: *“(n)evertheless, some aspects of UNSCR 1325, such as women’s participation in peace building and political processes, are relevant to all states.”*

⁸⁴ UN (2015) [Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing The Peace](#)

⁸⁵ Home Office (2013) UK CEDAW 7th Periodic Report

⁸⁶ GEO (2017) [UK CEDAW 8th Periodic Report](#)

7 Ensure access to the voting system by those with disabilities

7.1 Action is required to remove barriers across all stages of the electoral process to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote.

7.2 This section sets out recommendations to advance equality in access to the voting system. The recommendations should be read in tandem with the preceding recommendations to address key data gaps and the later cross-cutting recommendations to tackle barriers to participation.

Recommendation:

- remove barriers across all stages of the electoral process to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote.

7.3 While noting **the impact of substantial data gaps** regarding the participation of a range of equality groups across all areas of public life, the Commission's *Statement on Key Inequalities* identified as an inequality that **those with a disability are less likely to vote**. Aligned to this, we make the following policy recommendation.

Remove barriers across all stages of the electoral process to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote.

7.4 While research in relation to voting registration and exercise of voting rights is limited, it does consistently highlight those with

disabilities as facing barriers⁸⁷, and also highlights socio-economic disadvantage as a contributory factor⁸⁸.

- 7.5 We recommend that the government, political parties and civil society take action to promote the benefits of voting, remove barriers to accessing the voting system, and support those with disabilities and other under-represented groups to register and use their vote.
- 7.6 We urge prompt government action to give effect to the 2017 CRPD recommendation relating to voting, to *'take appropriate measures to secure accessibility for persons with disabilities'*⁸⁹.
- 7.7 We further recommend that government, political parties and candidates take action to give effect to the Electoral Commission's 2017 recommendations⁹⁰ to tackle the barriers to access to the voting system encountered by people with disabilities. We welcome the availability of online voter registration, and recommend that steps are taken to monitor its impact upon people with disabilities.

Supporting Rationale

- 7.8 In 2017, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in its Concluding Observations⁹¹, stated that it was:

'concerned at the lack of information on accessibility and reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities, during all stages of the electoral cycle, including the facilitating of their exercise of the right to vote, vote in private and be assisted by an assistant of one's own choice.'

- 7.9 In 2017, the Electoral Commission made a number of recommendations to government⁹² based upon research⁹³ it carried out following the June 2017 general election. They included:

⁸⁷ Electoral Commission (2011) Great Britain's Electoral Registers

⁸⁸ Electoral Commission (2011) Great Britain's Electoral Registers – young people, some minority ethnic groups, and those on low incomes were least likely to be registered to vote.

⁸⁹ UNCRPD (2017) [Concluding observations on the initial report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#) paragraph 61

⁹⁰ Electoral Commission (2017) [Elections for everyone](#)

⁹¹ UNCRPD (2017) [Concluding observations on the initial report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#) paragraph 60

⁹² Electoral Commission (2017) [Elections for everyone](#)

⁹³ Survey of 3500 voters across the UK. Electoral Commission recommendations were based on the barriers identified by people with disabilities who had taken part in the research.

- Make it easier to register to vote by reducing jargon.
- Make changes to election forms, such as polling cards and the postal vote process so they are more accessible.
- Provide greater flexibility and choice around where a person can vote⁹⁴.
- Extend the range of people who can assist a disabled person in casting their vote.

7.10 The Electoral Commission also recommended that political parties and candidates should produce more accessible format campaign information, and that it should be at the same time as standard format materials.

7.11 The Electoral Commission's research cited examples of complicated registration requirements, inaccessible polling stations, a lack of disability awareness of polling staff, and the need for more information on what to expect when voting.

7.12 In 2010, Scope's UK wide research⁹⁵ found that 6% of people with disabilities had their ability to vote questioned by polling staff at the 2010 General Election. 67% of respondents cited one or more barriers to voting, including not having accessible booths, inaccessible polling stations and a lack of hearing loops.

7.13 Disability Action also reported⁹⁶ (2010) that many people with disabilities were not able to access information from the Northern Ireland political parties in a format that suited their needs.

⁹⁴ This includes: choosing which polling station to vote in; voting on days other than on a Thursday, for example the weekend; and voting in mobile polling stations in hospitals, nursing homes or care homes and in remote areas

⁹⁵ Scope (2010) [Polls Apart 5 Opening Elections to Disabled People](#), page 13

⁹⁶ Disability Action (2010) [Review of the Accessibility of Political Party Information for People with Disabilities for the Westminster Elections May 2010](#); Harper, C, McClenahan, S, Byrne, B & Russell, H. (2012): ['Disability Programmes and Policies: How Does Northern Ireland Measure Up?'](#) ECNI, Belfast.

8 Tackle cross-cutting barriers to active participation

8.1 Steps should be taken to foster active participation; address structural barriers; meet physical access and communication needs; build capacity and overcome perceived barriers; and challenge stereotypes and prejudice.

8.2 The Commission is mindful that many identified inequalities are at least partially derived from a combination of barriers encountered by individuals from across the equality categories.

8.3 While the identification of key inequalities in our *Statement on Key Inequalities* was limited to where there was sufficiently robust data available, the associated barriers are often cross-cutting with a general applicability and so are presented here for broader consideration and action.

Recommendations:

- more effectively engage with, and foster the active participation of, people from across the full range of equality categories;
- address structural barriers which can deter individuals from a range of equality categories from participating in public life;
- meet the physical access and communication needs of prospective participants;
- build capacity, overcome perceived barriers and foster a sense of belonging;
- challenge stereotypes and prejudice.

More effectively engage with, and foster the active participation of, people from across the full range of equality categories.

- 8.4 The Commission continues to recommend the full and effective involvement of those from across the full range of equality categories in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of strategic actions; and to build capacity within relevant sectors.
- 8.5 The effective inclusion of individuals from across a range of equality categories will require specific and tailored steps to be taken. This will entail identifying, including with stakeholders, the specific barriers to participation which individuals from across a range of groups may face, and taking action to help overcome them.
- 8.6 Departments should aim, where they currently do not, to secure representative participation in decision-making of people from across the equality categories. Departments should identify and take the actions necessary to achieve this aim, across Strategies, and the development, delivery and review of government policy and services. Mechanisms, such as departmental champions, should be regularly reviewed to ensure their effectiveness.
- 8.7 The Executive Office's 'Practical Guide to Policy Making'⁹⁷ states that engagement is: 'firmly embedded in the culture of the public service in Northern Ireland and is particularly important in the context of the statutory duties on equality and good relations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998'.
- 8.8 While representative groups have produced ground specific guidance for public authorities aimed at ensuring more effective consultation and engagement, a range of research and publications (see below) highlight inconsistencies in levels of engagement and raise questions about the meaningfulness of engagement.

Supporting rationale

Gender

⁹⁷ TEO (2016) [Practical Guide to Policy Making](#)

- 8.9 The Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) has produced guidance⁹⁸ for public authorities and women’s organisations on consulting effectively with women. It provides suggestions for public authorities to ensure that consultation addresses the barriers women may face, and to improve the participation of disadvantaged and marginalised women. While recognising that improvements have been made, the guidance suggests practical ways to tackle longstanding barriers. These include: partnering with women’s organisation to secure the participation of affected women; planning engagement events which take account of women’s caring responsibilities by, for example, providing childcare; keeping language accessible and relevant, avoiding jargon; and demonstrating the input of the groups consulted with in the final policy.

Transgender people

- 8.10 While Northern Ireland specific guidance could not be identified, the Equality Network in Scotland produced guidance⁹⁹ in 2013 on engagement with trans people for public bodies. This includes ensuring trans representatives are part of the consultation process from the start, using anonymous surveys, speaking at representative group meetings, and being aware of the particular needs and experiences of transgender people.

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people

- 8.11 Stonewall’s 2013 ‘How to engage gay people in your work’¹⁰⁰ cited research findings¹⁰¹ that: ‘local LGB people may never have been enabled to play a part in their local services or their local community’. It further listed a range of survey findings demonstrating that LGB people may expect poorer access to public services and to experience discrimination. It concluded that involving them in policy development is therefore important, and this includes using mechanisms such as LGB advisory panels.
- 8.12 In 2013, the Equality Network in Scotland stated¹⁰² that ‘LGB and trans people can often have different experiences or be affected disproportionately by the way public services are

⁹⁸ WRDA (2018) Women at the heart of public consultation, a guide for public authorities and women’s organisations

⁹⁹ Equality Network (2013) [Engaging trans people](#)

¹⁰⁰ Stonewall (2013) [How to engage gay people in your work](#)

¹⁰¹ Citing the DCLG Citizenship Survey 2010

¹⁰² Equality Network (2013) <https://www.equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Community-Connections-1.-Engaging-LGBT-People.pdf>

delivered'. It cited the importance of building trust, managing expectations and providing feedback to participants.

Older people

- 8.13 Older people, although well represented in public appointments, report more generally that they feel they are not fully involved in policymaking. The 2016 Active Ageing Strategy¹⁰³ includes amongst its strategic aims: 'To achieve the active participation of older people in all aspects of life including ... the active participation and citizenship of older people in decision-making on policies and in the provision of services'¹⁰⁴.
- 8.14 Age NI's key indicators on the quality of older people's lives found that 'the percentage of older people who think that Government does not make a sufficient effort to listen to their needs and experiences' has remained high and broadly stable over time, with 80%¹⁰⁵ feeling this to be the case in 2011, and 77% of that view in 2014¹⁰⁶.
- 8.15 Additionally, 2015 research indicated that older people identified a number of specific barriers¹⁰⁷ to effective participation. These included: lack of training and education skills of older people and government staff involved with participation sessions; lack of experience; low self-esteem and confidence; physical barriers, for example - transport infrastructure may not facilitate attendance at the engagement events; and confidence, and lack of digital knowledge.

Younger people

- 8.16 The Commission's 2008 guidance to the public sector *Let's Talk Let's Listen*¹⁰⁸ explains why and how public authorities should consult with and involve children and young people.
- 8.17 The Ten Year Children and Young People's Strategy¹⁰⁹ led to the establishment of Champions in each Government Department with responsibilities which included to 'encourage

¹⁰³ OFMDFM (2016) Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2021

¹⁰⁴ OFMDFM (2016) Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2021 page 7

¹⁰⁵ Age NI (2011) Agenda for Later Life 2011

¹⁰⁶ Age NI (2015) Agenda for Later Life 2015: Public policy for later life in Northern Ireland

¹⁰⁷ Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds. ECNI

¹⁰⁸ ECNI (2008) Let's Talk, Let's Listen: Guidance for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people

¹⁰⁹ OFMDFM (2006) Our Children and Young People: Our pledge: a ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016

*departments to ensure children's and young people's interests are fostered and their views sought on policy and strategy issues*¹¹⁰.

- 8.18 Despite this, research carried out by Queen's University, Belfast¹¹¹ (2011) on engagement with young people noted inconsistencies on levels of engagement; of children not being consulted at the same time as adults; and has raised questions about the meaningfulness of engagement. NICCY has called upon government to '*give due weight to children and young people's views and track the impact of this on the development of the issues they engage with*'¹¹².

Disabled people

- 8.19 Research (2013) into factors essential for the successful implementation of national disability strategies¹¹³ identified consultation mechanisms as a key factor. It recommended that structures should be established that involve people with disabilities throughout the entire process from strategy development to monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

- 8.20 In its 2017 Concluding Observations, the UNCRPD Committee recommended that the United Kingdom:

'Establish mechanisms supporting the full participation of organisations of person with disabilities in the design and implementation of strategic policies aimed at implementing the Convention across the State party, through objective, measurable, financed and monitored strategic plan of actions'.

Minority ethnic groups

- 8.21 Watt and McGaughey¹¹⁴ (2006) set out that 'Engagement with minority ethnic and other interested parties is essential not only in planning service delivery, but also in monitoring and evaluating. ... A number of authors have emphasised the risk of relying on the same people when it comes to consultation with minority ethnic groups'.

¹¹⁰ Dr Bryne, B and Prof Lundy, L Queen's University of Belfast (2011) Barriers to Effective Government Delivery for Children in Northern Ireland

¹¹¹ Dr Bryne, B and Prof Lundy, L Queen's University of Belfast (2011) Barriers to Effective Government Delivery for Children in Northern Ireland

¹¹² NICCY (2018) [Statement on Children's Rights in Northern Ireland](#)

¹¹³ Flynn (2013) From Rhetoric to Action, Implementing the UNCRPD

¹¹⁴ Watt and McGaughey (2006) [Improving Government service delivery to minority ethnic groups](#)

- 8.22 This may be a particular issue in Northern Ireland where the minority ethnic community is relatively small at 1.8% of the population, but heterogeneous with different cultures, experiences and communication requirements within it.
- 8.23 2014 research¹¹⁵ found that people from minority ethnic groups who did not exercise their right to vote felt that political parties in Northern Ireland did not represent or understand their needs or interests. The same research reported that *'Participation and involvement were seen as ways to build individual capacity which should be encouraged'*.

Address structural barriers which can deter individuals from a range of equality categories from participating in public life.

- 8.24 Structural barriers can include recruitment criteria and processes; the requirement for previous experience; costs of participation and the balancing of family and working life.
- 8.25 Recruitment and selection processes, for example application forms, often asking for formal qualifications and previous board experience as essential or preferred criteria, may act as barriers to broader participation. We recommend that government departments take action to: focus on skills and experience *essential* for the role; place value on lived experience; provide associated opportunities for capacity building (e.g. training and/or board / work experience); and examine the costs associated with participation; to help overcome barriers and widen access.
- 8.26 The costs of participation and potentially limited remuneration for it may limit the opportunities for those from some equality categories to participate fully in public life. Furthermore, the impact of remuneration upon statutory benefit entitlement may deter people with disabilities and others from pursuing a paid participative role. Participation should be fairly remunerated, with clarity around its impact on statutory benefits.
- 8.27 The reconciliation of family and working life represents a significant barrier¹¹⁶. We reiterate our call for accessible,

¹¹⁵ Rogers, S & Scullion, G NICEM (Nov 2014) [Voices for Change: Mapping the views of black and minority ethnic people on integration and their sense of belonging in Northern Ireland.](#)

¹¹⁶ The Executive Office (2006/07-2015/16) The Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Reports and Employers for Childcare (2019) [Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey 2018](#)

appropriate and affordable childcare. More carer friendly policy and practices are needed.

Supporting Rationale

Recruitment and selection processes

- 8.28 Appointment processes associated with participation in public life can place under-represented groups at a disadvantage relative to experience requirements.
- 8.29 Similarly, the use of professional or technical language¹¹⁷ in the selection processes may act as another barrier as those from some equality categories may be less familiar with specific terminology¹¹⁸.
- 8.30 The Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments¹¹⁹ guides departments to ‘recognise that applicants may not be used to completing application forms. Forms must be clear and straightforward and should only ask what is truly required’. The 2018 Lord Holmes Review¹²⁰ recommended that Government ‘develop accessibility and openness standards for application packs’.
- 8.31 2013 research¹²¹ has identified that the cumulative impact of a lack of experience over time ‘...can act as a barrier to accessing future positions of leadership... as they are less likely to achieve senior positions from which board members are appointed’ – often referred to as the ‘leadership pipeline’.

Costs

- 8.32 The cost of participation may limit the opportunities for individuals from across a range of equality categories to participate fully in public life, either based upon a single or multiple identities. This is due to the financial resources often required to participate, and the sometimes limited remuneration available to those who may wish to participate.
- 8.33 Different levels of remuneration may demonstrate structural barriers. For example, in respect to government public

¹¹⁷ UNICEF, Children and young people: Participating in the decision-making process,

¹¹⁸ The Evaluation Trust and South West Foundation (2009) Engagement and Empowerment among older people: A case study. National Empowerment Partnership

¹¹⁹ Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (2016) Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments in Northern Ireland, Version JL2, para 3.21

¹²⁰ Cabinet Office (2018) [Lord Holmes Review, Opening up Public Appointments to Disabled People](#)

¹²¹ McQuaid R, Graham H, Shapira, M. (2013) [Childcare: Maximising the Economic Participation of Women](#)

appointments men have consistently been twice as likely to be in paid positions than women¹²².

- 8.34 The impact of remuneration upon statutory benefit entitlement may deter people with disabilities and others from pursuing a paid participative role. Scope's 2010 submission to the Access to Public Life Participation Fund¹²³ cited as a barrier to participation:

The complexity and inflexibility of the welfare benefits system. There is a lack of clarity among benefits advisors as to whether allowances received for public or elected duties should be taken into account when calculating benefit entitlements.

- 8.35 This has been a longstanding issue, being cited before the Select Committee on Public Administration in 2002¹²⁴ by the former head of the Disability Rights Commission. He outlined the case of an individual who was very well qualified for an appointment but had to resign from it because it would result in him losing benefits. He stated that: *'It also has to be recognised, and disabled people need to know it will be recognised, that serving the public, in one capacity or another, will not actually be a huge financial drain on people who, by and large, do not have the money to drain away from them in the first place'*.

- 8.36 Direct payments and self-directed support does not fund activities to the same extent as the now closed Independent Living Fund. As a result disabled people *'have less choice and control than was possible through support from the ILF'*¹²⁵.

Childcare / caring responsibilities

- 8.37 The current model of childcare provision, typically from 8am to 6pm, is insufficient. This is a particular issue for boards and committees which may sit outside normal working hours. Cost is a further issue, constituting the largest monthly outgoing for more than one third of families surveyed in 2018¹²⁶.

- 8.38 The Employers for Childcare 2018 Childcare Cost Survey¹²⁷ reported that 51% of those surveyed stated that they were not

¹²² The Executive Office (2006/07-2015/16) The Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Reports

¹²³ UK Parliament (2010) [Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation](#)

¹²⁴ UK Parliament (2002) [Select Committee on Public Administration, minutes of evidence 13.06.02](#)

¹²⁵ IMNI (2017) [Jurisdictional Parallel Report on Implementation in Northern Ireland: Working Paper](#)

¹²⁶ Employers for Childcare (2019) [Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey 2018](#)

¹²⁷ Employers for Childcare (2019) [Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey 2018](#)

accessing the childcare they required, with 74% citing costs and 21% of them citing opening hours as the cause.

- 8.39 The availability of appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare provision to meet the needs of all¹²⁸ children is a fundamental part of the process of assisting those with caring responsibilities - particularly mothers – to more fully participate in the economy¹²⁹ and in public life. Providing care to adult family members and others may also act as a barrier to participation.

Meet the physical access and communication needs of prospective participants.

- 8.40 Organisations have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people. This may require them to use appropriate rooms within a building to conduct a meeting, to change the venue itself in order to secure participation, and to give consideration to the provision of facilities within the building.
- 8.41 The Commission welcomes the progress of the provision of accessible transport in Belfast and Greater Belfast¹³⁰ but recommends the Department for Infrastructure give consideration to the extension of accessible public transport, particularly in rural areas.
- 8.42 Organisations should consider the communication needs of prospective participants, and produce materials in appropriate languages and accessible formats, or use a variety of dissemination channels.
- 8.43 As public services increasingly move to ‘digital by default’ whereby information is provided and accessed online, public bodies should ensure safeguards are in place necessary for individuals from across the Section 75 categories to participate fully. Particular issues may arise for those who do not have access to the internet or who may require assistance to use it.

¹²⁸ Particular needs exist for disabled children, children from minority ethnic communities and new residents and those living in rural communities and for different ages of children. See McQuaid R, Graham H, Shapira M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), commissioned by ECNI

¹²⁹ See McQuaid R, Graham H, Shapira M (2013), [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), commissioned by ECNI

¹³⁰ The Department for Infrastructure in 2018 introduced the Glider service between the East and West of Belfast to provide easy to use, efficient and accessible public transport

Supporting Rationale

Physical access and transport

- 8.44 Poor provision of accessible buildings and accessible travel systems can inhibit participation.
- 8.45 While an audit of the accessibility of public buildings in Northern Ireland has not been carried out, in 2013 Commission research¹³¹ measured access to services as experienced by people with disabilities. It identified the need for improvements to how the premises of service providers were used. This would include entry to and use of buildings' facilities. For example, consideration of the need for accessible facilities, such as, WCs and changing places toilets.
- 8.46 Accessibility audits of seven towns in Northern Ireland by IMTAC (Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee) in 2015 highlighted the persistence of a number of unnecessary physical barriers¹³².
- 8.47 A 2015 report¹³³ by Disabled People's Voices stated that while improvements had been made to public transport there was still *'some way to go before disabled people could travel routinely by bus or train'*.

Communication methods

- 8.48 Communication barriers can take a number of forms, such as failure to meet language requirements, including the need for sign language, note-takers or assistive technologies, and the 'digital by default' approach.
- 8.49 It was reported¹³⁴ in 2017 that Northern Ireland had only 15 qualified sign language interpreters to serve a population of 5000 sign language users.
- 8.50 2018 UK wide data from the Office for National Statistics¹³⁵ found that there was lower usage of the internet by older people and people with disabilities than in the general population overall. Only 76.6% of adults with disabilities had used the

¹³¹ ECNI (2013) [ABC – Audit, Benchmark, Change. State of Disability Access Report](#)

¹³² IMTAC (2015) [Valuing Pedestrian Journeys – Lessons Learned from 'Walking Audits'](#)

¹³³ Disabled People's Voices (2015) Northern Ireland – Our Lives, Our Voices, Our votes

¹³⁴ Disability Action (2017) [UNCRRPD Alternative Report](#) Citing Action on Hearing Loss website (2014)

¹³⁵ ONS (2018) [Internet Users in the UK: 2018](#)

internet during the previous three months, compared to 89.8% of the general population.

- 8.51 Internet *usage* decreases with age, with 37.6% of female and 51.3% of male 75s having recently used it, compared to over 99% of 16-34 year olds¹³⁶. The age and disability status of respondents was not disaggregated at a regional level, but Northern Ireland had the lowest recent internet usage of all regions¹³⁷.

Build capacity, overcome barriers and foster a sense of belonging.

- 8.52 We call for action to improve capacity building for under-represented groups. Capacity building opportunities (for example through training, board / work experience, and / or mentoring) aligned to common skills and experience criteria for public life posts should be delivered to overcome barriers and widen access.
- 8.53 Targeted actions to better understand and foster a 'sense of belonging' among under-represented groups should also be implemented to assist in overcoming perceived barriers.
- 8.54 Further, we call for action to engage with under-represented groups via promotion and outreach to raise awareness of the potential benefits for individuals and society, helping to overcome actual or perceived personal barriers to participation.

Supporting Rationale

- 8.55 Where participation is not fully representative, the breadth of knowledge, experiences, and potential viewpoints which may contribute to a board of a public body, or any decision-making process may be limited.
- 8.56 Those from certain equality categories, and / or more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, may not have the confidence in their ability to successfully apply for, or undertake, roles in public life. Any actual lack of skills or experience within under-represented groups may also impede broader participation in public life.

¹³⁶ ONS (2018) [Internet Users in the UK: 2018](#)

¹³⁷ ONS (2018) [Internet Users in the UK: 2018](#)

- 8.57 In 2016, the Northern Ireland Audit Office noted that lack of experience prevents those from under-represented groups from applying for board positions. It suggested a boardroom apprentice-type scheme¹³⁸.
- 8.58 Initiatives such as mentoring programmes can encourage and empower those from under-represented groups to participate in training and gain skills, capacity and practical experience of public appointments.
- 8.59 A number of mentoring programmes are currently in operation, seeking to broaden the pool of candidates for public life activities. Politics Plus provides a range of programmes to empower women across Northern Ireland¹³⁹. Another is the Boardroom Apprentice programme¹⁴⁰ which seeks to provide participants with knowledge and experience of the boardroom environment.
- 8.60 The Innovation Lab’s review of arms-length body sponsorship¹⁴¹ recommended ‘*a talent pool for Board appointments, with the intention of ensuring good governance skills*’. The report suggested that a talent pool could include people who had narrowly missed out on appointments to boards from previous competitions. While this would increase the number of those available for appointments, if based on a non-diverse pool of applicants, participation of under-represented groups would not be promoted.
- 8.61 Individuals from certain equality groups may lack confidence and trust in politics and in public bodies¹⁴². Participant confidence and trust can be undermined where, for example, “*young people have been able to influence, or even make decisions, [but where] barriers within complicated infrastructures have tended to limit implementation*”¹⁴³. The absence of effective promotion, engagement and outreach by public bodies and political institutions towards some equality

¹³⁸ NI Audit Office (2016) [Board Effectiveness: A Good Practice Guide, para 1.26](#)

¹³⁹ This includes The Next Chapter civic empowerment programme, Women in Politics Leadership Programme, Women in Public Life Programme and the Young Female Leaders Academy, encouraging young women to explore careers in politics and public life.

¹⁴⁰ [The Boardroom Apprentice](#) programme provides boardroom participation and training to ‘bridge the gap between aspiration and reality for those who wish to serve on Boards in the public and third sector’. ([Boardroom Apprentice](#) website accessed 09.05.19)

¹⁴¹ Department of Finance (2018) [Departmental Sponsorship of Arm’s Length Bodies Insight Report](#)

¹⁴² Ipsos MORI (2015) *Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds*. ECNI, Belfast.

¹⁴³ UNICEF (n.d.) *Children and young people: Participating in the decision-making process*,

groups, can also act as barriers to broader public participation^{144,145,146}.

- 8.62 Research has shown that “social capital and a ‘sense of belonging’ are understood to foster civic engagement in a modern society”¹⁴⁷.
- 8.63 For people to have a ‘sense of belonging’ they must be able to participate in society, in safety, free from intimidation and discrimination. Belonging must be based on equal participation and equal membership of the community.
- 8.64 The 2013 Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey highlighted that less than half of people with a minority ethnic background¹⁴⁸ felt a sense of belonging to Northern Ireland¹⁴⁹. The research also found that a sense of belonging was weaker among those who were wary of ethnic diversity¹⁵⁰; perhaps indicating that prejudice can arise as much from insecurity in group identity as from bravado¹⁵¹.
- 8.65 Stonewall’s (2013) ‘How to engage gay people in your work’¹⁵² cited research findings¹⁵³ that ‘while three in four heterosexual people felt a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, just over half of LGB people did’.
- 8.66 Outreach to raise awareness of public appointments can be beneficial to addressing under-representation on Boards. The then Department for Regional Development’s 2016 recruitment exercise for nine Non-Executive Members to the Board of Belfast Harbour Commissioners placed an emphasis on using all possible media opportunities and geographical locations.

¹⁴⁴ For example, O’Toole, T.; Dehanas, D.N.; Modood, T.; Meer, N.; and Jones, S. (2013) [Taking part: Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance](#).

¹⁴⁵ Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds

¹⁴⁶ Weller P (2009) How participation changes things: ‘Inter faith’, ‘multi faith; and a new public imaginary. In (eds) Adam Dinham, Robert Furbey, Vivien Lowndes, Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, Policies and Practices.

¹⁴⁷ Hayward, K., Dowds, L. and Shaw, C. (2014) [Belonging and Alienation in the new Northern Ireland](#).

¹⁴⁸ Among respondents from minority ethnic groups, the sense of belonging was much weaker with 41 per cent saying they probably or definitely felt a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood and 39 per cent saying probably or definitely felt a sense of belonging to Northern Ireland respectively

¹⁴⁹ See Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey at: Ark (2013) [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey](#)

¹⁵⁰ Those agreeing with the statement “In relation to colour and ethnicity, I prefer to stick with people of my own kind”

¹⁵¹ Hayward, K., Dowds, L. and Shaw, C. (2014): [Belonging and Alienation in the new Northern Ireland](#)

¹⁵² Stonewall (2013) [How to engage gay people in your work](#)

¹⁵³ Citing the DCLG Citizenship Survey 2010

After the recruitment there was an increase of female representation on the board by 20 percentage points¹⁵⁴.

Challenge stereotypes and prejudice.

- 8.67 Stereotypes and prejudice impact on participation in public life for those from across a range of equality categories. Assumptions may be made, for example about women, that they do not aspire to board directorships, or that they lack the necessary skills to sit on boards¹⁵⁵.
- 8.68 Action is needed across society, including by government, civil society and the media, to: encourage the participation and visibility of under-represented groups in public life; promote role models; and tackle the high level of prejudicial attitudes towards individuals associated with their equality group characteristics.
- 8.69 There is also a need to challenge stereotypes, including gender stereotypes relating to parenting and childcare responsibilities; support the sharing of family roles/responsibilities; and remove associated barriers to parents contributing to public life.
- 8.70 Wider societal prejudices and hate crimes must be tackled; including harassment both inside and outside the workplace; and bullying in schools.
- 8.71 The role of mass media cannot be ignored, for example in conveying the male dominated nature of public life¹⁵⁶. As such, local, national and social media, through positive and supportive portrayals, can have a profound impact on promoting positive public attitudes and encouraging representation.

Supporting Rationale

- 8.72 Negative perceptions / stereotypes exist about the skills, abilities and experience of certain equality groups. Negative or stereotypical attitudes can, for example, result in their being excluded from posts, including public life posts.
- 8.73 For example, a report (2015) by the European Institute for Gender Equality¹⁵⁷ has highlighted that “women are, throughout

¹⁵⁴ Prior to the 2016 recruitment exercise the Board was 23% female, following the competition the Board representation was 43% female

¹⁵⁵ Women’s National Commission (2009) [Women in public life](#).

¹⁵⁶ Northern Ireland Assembly (2013) Research and Information Paper [Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly. \(p14\)](#)

¹⁵⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality, (2015) [Gender Equality Index 2015](#).

all Member States, disproportionately responsible for caring and educating children, grandchildren and other dependents, as well as cooking and housework”.

- 8.74 A 2017 review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life¹⁵⁸ highlighted that social media was changing the way election campaigns were conducted and that *‘online intimidation was now a persistent characteristic of election campaigns for a large number of Parliamentary candidates, who can be subject to intimidatory messages 24 hours a day.’*
- 8.75 Beyond stereotypes and prejudice, individuals may also experience discrimination and harassment associated with their equality characteristics which may act as a barrier to participation in public life. The apprehension of fear, to self and property, is a barrier cited by those from certain equality groups¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁸ Committee on Standards in Public Life (2017) Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Cm9543)

¹⁵⁹ Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds. ECNI

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The Commission will continue to engage with government, relevant departments, elected officials and key stakeholders to ensure advocacy and adoption of our recommendations in support of addressing identified key inequalities.

Priority areas for action

- 9.2 The Commission considers, following engagement with stakeholders and wider consideration, that there are immediate opportunities and / or a particular pressing need over the current period to secure change in the following specific areas.

- **Improve equality data collection and disaggregation**
- **Increase diversity in government public appointments**
- **Increase diversity in political representation**

- 9.3 These will represent priorities for proactive action by the Commission now and over the coming period.

Wider Commission Recommendations (by Thematic area)

- 9.4 While the Commission will work to encourage prompt action to address the above, we also encourage action by government, officials and key stakeholders to advance our full range of recommendations with a particular focus on tackling the inequalities identified in our 2018 *Statement on Key Inequalities*¹⁶⁰.

- **Improve equality data collection and disaggregation:** Action should be taken to address identified gaps in equality data; and ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow meaningful equality analysis and public policy development.
- **Increase diversity in government public appointments:** We call for action to increase participation of those with disabilities; deliver on gender targets for boards and chairs;

¹⁶⁰ ECNI (2018) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland](#)

and implement a cross-departmental strategic action plan to advance participation more generally.

- **Increase diversity in political representation:**
There is a need to advance the participation of women and minority ethnic individuals in political life; and advance the participation of women in peace building.
- **Ensure access to the voting system by those with disabilities:**
Action is required to remove barriers across all stages of the electoral process to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote.
- **Tackle cross-cutting barriers to active participation:**
Steps should be taken to foster active participation; address structural barriers; meet physical access and communication needs; build capacity and overcome perceived barriers; and challenge stereotypes and prejudice.

Further information

9.5

For further information, visit
www.equalityni.org/ParticipationPolicy

May 2019