

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



June 2019

Corporate Plan 2019-2022

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Foreword

Equality matters to people in Northern Ireland, and it matters for society as a whole. For our society to flourish and succeed Northern Ireland has to be, and be seen to be, a welcoming place - a society which accommodates difference and diversity, where all our people feel secure and know they have equal access to education, a house and a job.

The Equality Commission plays a vital role in working to secure greater equality of opportunity and in challenging discrimination. This Corporate Plan sets out what the areas we aim to work on in the period 2019 – 2022 and how we plan to take this forward.

There is no doubt that, in the twenty years since the Northern Ireland Act 1998 made provision for the establishment of the Equality Commission, there have been some substantial improvements. For example, the scope of legislative protections against discrimination has broadened to include grounds of age and sexual orientation; attitudes to various equality groups are more positive; employment policies and practices have improved and important changes have been made to the way policies are developed and implemented by public authorities.

There is also no doubt that there is much still to be done to secure greater equality for all – across many public policy domains there are both enduring inequalities and in some cases emerging ones. Too often behaviours in the workplace and elsewhere are not conducive to building a more equal and shared society. The lives of many people are impacted adversely by inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination and we are aware that barriers and inequalities experienced by equality groups can be exacerbated by poverty and social exclusion. We are committed to highlighting this link and the continuing need for action to address poverty and social exclusion experienced by a range of equality groups.

The Commission is as committed as ever to use its powers and duties strategically to secure change. As Northern Ireland's equality body we know we have a central role in the architecture of the protections against unlawful discrimination and support for the promotion of equality of opportunity. We recognise the scope this gives us to challenge discrimination and to champion equality; we are determined to do this independently and robustly, particularly in the current political and economic context. We also

recognise the need for us to be creative and innovative about how we work, proactively identifying issues to be tackled and using our powers and duties in a coordinated, integrated way to best effect.

We appreciate the engagement we have had through public and targeted consultation on a draft Plan over the recent months, through meetings with key stakeholders and potential partners and through on-line responses to our draft Plan.

Over the consultation period, the Commission received 299 completed response forms, 122 from those representing organisations and 166 from individuals. The Corporate Plan pages on the website were viewed 1,700 times and the Corporate Plan e-zine was opened 1,166 times. In addition, there was substantial interest on Twitter.

The areas that we had identified to prioritise over the coming period arose from our statutory remit, from evidence of persistent inequality arising through our work over recent years on key inequalities and evidence from our day to day work - across legal, advice, policy, research, investigations, and communications.

During the course of the consultation, the importance of those areas of working to advance equality of opportunity in employment, in education and in access to services and participation was widely recognised, as was our priority of mainstreaming and championing equality. Queries were raised about the detail of what we propose to do, about the indicators to measure progress and many useful suggestions were made about focus. Some concerns were expressed about issues omitted from the Plan and many organisations and individuals highlighted issues of particular importance to them.

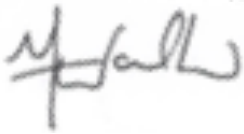
A clear message of support for the Commission exercising its powers as a strategic enforcement body came through the consultation also, in line with the Commission's thinking set out in the consultative draft where we indicated we will consider increased use of our enforcement powers, to tackle persistent inequalities.

In this final text, we have sought to address the comments received and we trust that the resulting Plan is clear and helpful in setting out what we plan to do over the coming three years.

The nature of the outcome-based process we are following means that as we roll out our work programmes there will further opportunities for consultation with partners and stakeholders and we will continue to refine our indicators and adapt our approaches to delivery.

Central to the implementation of this plan and our contribution to the delivery of equality outcomes will be the partnerships we maintain and develop with those in the best position to effect change,

as well as those individuals and their representative organisations who can also make common cause with us in identifying and working for the changes required. We look forward to building on the engagement we have had to date and working in partnership with those across the public, private and voluntary/ community sector who have roles to play in securing greater equality in Northern Ireland.



Dr Michael Wardlow
Chief Commissioner



Dr Evelyn Collins CBE
Chief Executive

Introduction

This is the first Corporate Plan for which the Commission has, itself, explicitly taken an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) approach to the development of performance measures. We welcomed the adoption of this approach to the Executive's Draft Programme for Government (PfG) with its focus on achieving outcomes that make a positive impact on people's lives and the potential this offers across the public sector to advance equality of opportunity for those who live with and experience inequalities, discrimination and the absence of good relations. That said, we also recognised, in our response to the Executive's consultation, that more needed, and still needs, to be done to ensure sufficient focus on equality across the PfG and that the high level commitments to equality are comprehensively mainstreamed into indicators, delivery plans and actions.

We also recognise that there has not been an Executive in place since January 2017 and this has impacted on the decisions that have been possible to take in relation to certain functions and policy areas.

Nevertheless, the NICS has continued to focus on the framework of twelve outcomes developed by the previous Executive and there is merit in progressing with the OBA approach to improving the wellbeing planning and delivery.

We aim to focus the organisation on making a difference, on improving the lives of those we serve, on identifying and measuring those actions that are most likely to effect and sustain change in the longer term. Central to this is the need for the development of clearer equality indicators aligned to the PfG, addressing data gaps and extending disaggregation of data by section 75 equality groups.

This will help to address persistent and deep-rooted inequalities that we have identified over the past decade through our work on mapping the key inequalities and developing policy recommendations across areas such as employment, education, housing and communities and participation in public life.

This Plan sets out a high level framework. It will be kept under review and further developed throughout its timespan and it will be supported by detailed annual business plans, evaluation, review and communication. Further development of our approach to OBA and our annual business plans will reflect and take account of new developments and changes in the wider environment.

Current context

Ten successive years of budget reductions and consequent reduced staffing levels requires us to prioritise the areas that we can work on to achieve change. Difficult choices have to be made and, in the course of planning for the next three years, we have reviewed the choices we have made in light of the views of key stakeholders and potential partners for change over the coming years.

The financial environment is not the only factor that is detrimental to the delivery of our objectives. Even the most cursory scanning of the horizon indicates that the wider political and policy environment within which we are setting out to deliver this Plan is not an easy one.

There remains great uncertainty as to what form the UK's exit from the European Union will take, including as to the impact of this on Northern Ireland. Irrespective of the outcome, the Commission will continue to play an important role in promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, in terms of the delivery of our statutory responsibilities. It will also continue with its challenge role, seeking to ensure the Government's commitment to no regression of hard won equality law and equality rights is delivered in practice. We will also want to see that any negative effects of Brexit are mitigated, particularly in respect of withdrawal of EU funding, potential for increased racism, and uncertainty for EU workers and their employers in key sectors of the economy.

We have also highlighted the need to protect the most vulnerable from the adverse impact of welfare reforms, including the impact on people with disabilities and women, and called for steps to mitigate these adverse impacts, most recently for the extension of the current time-limited measures.

Of course, the situation is exacerbated by the absence of an Executive, for such a long period since early 2017 and the resultant impact on decision making.

Whereas once key aspects of equality legislation in Northern Ireland were leading the way in securing protections, over recent years, particularly with the development of the 2010 Equality Act in the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland's legislation has failed to keep pace with newer developments.

Despite the lack of a functioning devolved administration, we will continue to create whatever opportunities we can to press for the legal reform and proactive policy initiatives that are essential to affecting change in the wellbeing outcomes of the most disadvantaged in our society and building a fairer and more equal and shared society that should be a key focus of the Executive's draft Programme for Government.

As an Arm's Length Body, operating with specific powers and duties derived from statute, we seek both to support the delivery of the PfG and to exercise our challenge function in relation to achievement of PfG outcomes.

It is anticipated that the political, financial and administrative uncertainty that has marked the past few years will continue into the period of this Corporate Plan. The economic and political uncertainty surrounding the UK's exit from the European Union is likely to carry on post-Brexit and the uncertainty around the governance of the devolved administration and the impact of this on public finances also seems set to continue.

About the Commission

Our commitment

We are committed to carrying out our functions in a way which will contribute to a more equal society.

Our Vision

Our vision is of a society in Northern Ireland where there is equality for all and a common understanding of the benefits of a more equal society.

Our Mission

Our mission is to improve people's lives through the effective implementation of our statutory responsibilities.

Values

In addition to setting out what we want to achieve, it is also important to say how we want to achieve it. In carrying out our work with and for others, we aim to adhere to the following values:

- openness, honesty and trustworthiness;
- integrity, courage and impartiality; and
- listening.

Principles

Our work is founded on a number of principles – we ensure that we:

- are accountable for our decisions and actions
- act on a strong evidence base
- provide an expert, relevant and responsive service to all
- respect all those who have dealings with us
- strive for excellence in all we do
- challenge inequalities actively
- are both leaders and partners in driving positive change on equality and good relations.

Our powers and duties

Our powers and duties come from a number of statutes which have been enacted over the last decades, providing protection against discrimination in employment and in the provision of goods, facilities and services on the grounds of age (in employment matters), disability, race, religion and political opinion, sex and sexual orientation. We also have responsibilities arising from the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in respect of the statutory equality and good relations duties which apply to public authorities.

The Commission, with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, has been designated under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (UNCRPD) as the independent mechanism tasked with promoting, protecting and monitoring implementation of UNCRPD in Northern Ireland

In general terms, our statutory remit provides that we are to:

- promote equality of opportunity and affirmative action
- work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment
- keep relevant legislation under review
- promote good relations between persons of different racial groups and good disability practice
- oversee the effectiveness of statutory equality and good relations duties on public authorities.

This statutory framework enables us to advance equality through a range of mechanisms.

This includes providing direct advice and support to individuals and assisting organisations to meet the requirements of equality law; producing publications and running conferences and seminars; undertaking research and education activities; influencing policy makers; assisting individuals with complaints of discrimination under the law; considering complaints alleging failures to comply with an approved Equality Scheme and conducting investigations.

We use a combination of our powers to encourage and to enforce changes to policy, practices and procedures in favour of greater equality and good relations and we will continue to do so. We are considering the increased use of our enforcement powers in the coming period, to tackle persistent inequalities.

Twenty years on

October 2019 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, one of the institutions created by the Northern Ireland Act 1998 as a consequence of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and the preceding White Paper Partnerships for Equality

Although it is clear that Northern Ireland remains a society scarred by political difference and social exclusion and where social disadvantage, inequality and prejudice remains a central fact of too many people's lives, since the Commission's establishment in October 1999, there have been significant achievements across the equality framework:

- extension of protection from unlawful discrimination to the grounds of age and sexual orientation;
- additional powers under disability legislation for the Commission;
- high levels of public awareness in Northern Ireland of the importance of equality issues and having legislation to address discrimination, as well as a high level of recognition of the benefit of having a more equal society;
- while more work needs to be done, there are more positive attitudes to vulnerable and minority groups in our society;

- improved working practices across the public and private sector and important changes to the way policies are developed by public authorities;
- a commitment to placing equality, sharing and respect for diversity at the centre of successive Programmes for Government.

In respect of the Commission, there exists:

- a high level of awareness of the protections and responsibilities provided under the current legal framework;
- a high public profile for equality and key areas of the Commission's remit;
- high levels of client/customer awareness of and satisfaction with the services provided by the Commission.

That said, more needs to be done to improve awareness of the Commission and its work, and to increase understanding and confidence in the work we do.

Over the period of our Corporate Plan 2016-19, we have:

- completed research and developed a series of policy recommendations to address key inequalities in education, employment, housing and communities and public participation;
- obtained a high profile for important legal casework dealing with age discrimination in employment, associative disability discrimination, providing reasonable accommodations for disabled people, sexual orientation and the provision of goods and services, pregnancy and maternity rights, sexual and other harassment;
- developed initiatives and strong engagement around major themes such as 'Expecting Equality', following our pregnancy and maternity at work investigation; 'Every Customer Counts', focusing on disabled people's access to goods and services; and jointly developing a Mental Health Charter addressing mental health in the workplace in partnership with prominent mental health NGOs;
- ensured that scrutiny of the UK under international frameworks such as UNCRRP, CEDAW, and CERD resulted in recommendations to advance equality in Northern Ireland;
- completed and published the results of public and stakeholder surveys into attitudes to minorities and recognised equality groups, attitudes to equality and satisfaction with the Commission and the services it provides;
- given advice to more than 3,300 people each year who believe they may have been discriminated against;
- ensured high levels of compliance with legislative duties on public authorities and registered employers and provided a training and advisory service to assist them to develop good equality processes and procedures;
- determined the issues and recommendations for public authorities to address so that they ensure the effective implementation of their statutory equality and good relations duties in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998
- used our enforcement powers under the statutory equality and good relations duties to challenge a number of public authorities on their compliance with the commitments made in their equality schemes;
- demonstrated high levels of assurance of good corporate governance and attained the Investors in People Gold award.

Financial context

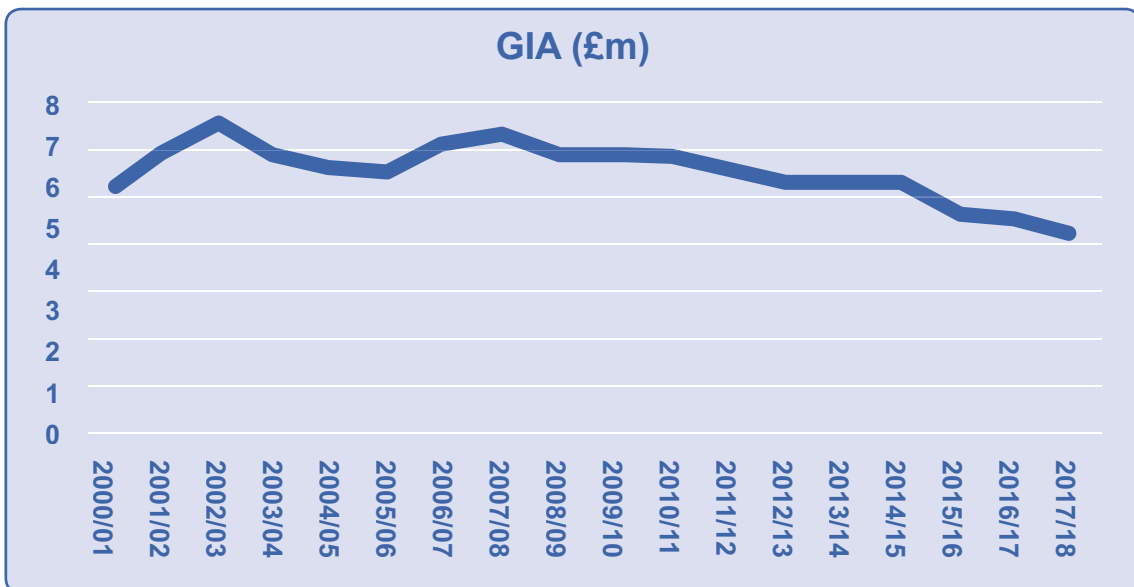
It is clear that the last three years has been the most difficult financial period in the Commission’s existence. Over the period of the previous Corporate Plan 2015 – 2019 the Commission’s total budget allocation fell from £5,755k to £5,041k, a reduction of 12.4%.

Over the period since it was established the Commission’s grant-in –aid has fallen by more than one million pounds, from £6,035k, in 2000/1 to the current figure of £4,956k; a reduction of nearly 20%. Ten years ago our budget was £7.3 million; this year it is just over £5m, a decline of 31%.

This reduction has occurred against the background of the extension, largely driven by developments in the European Union, of the Commission’s statutory responsibilities under anti-discrimination legislation on grounds of age, disability and sexual orientation.

It has also occurred within a context of increasing demand for our services promoting equality, combating discrimination and addressing key inequalities in our society.

The charts below provide an illustration of the scale of budget reductions since 2000-01.



The Commission has worked hard to mitigate the impact of such a scale of reduction, through increasing its efficiency and through sharing its accommodation and sharing its services with other smaller public bodies. This year we anticipate income of £432k from such sharing.

Over the period that we have been sharing our accommodation and services, in most years, the Sponsoring Department has provided for the Commission to retain the benefit of this. Without this flexibility the Commission's operational difficulties would have been even more difficult.

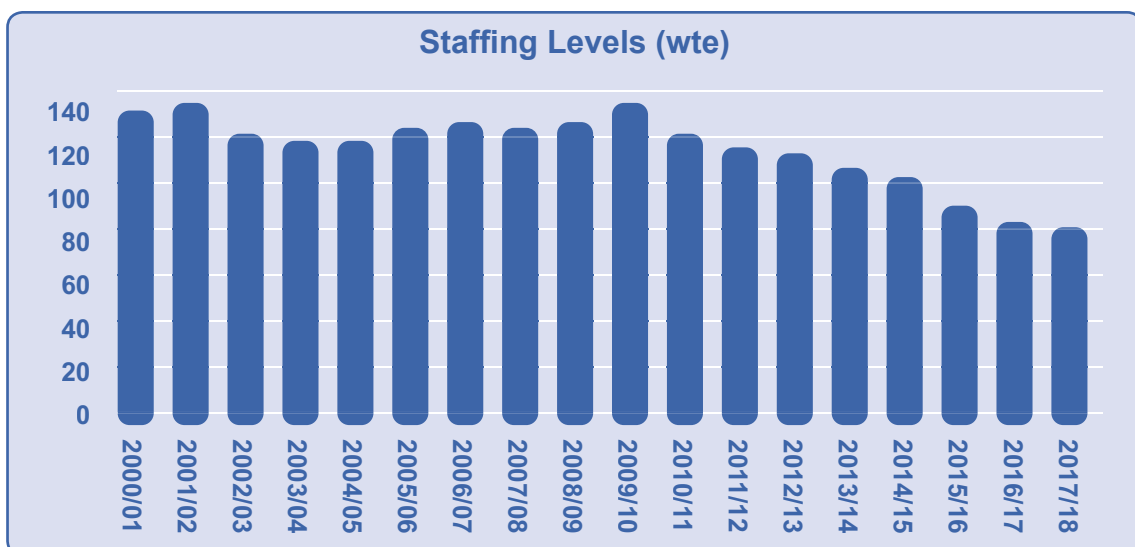
It is clear, however, that the scope for further sharing has reached its limit. During the course of this Plan, in 2021, the Commission may be required to move to other accommodation at the end of its lease and the assumption is that the sharing accommodation and services will no longer be possible.

It is unclear at present what the cost of the new accommodation will be. The Commission has been advised to make a planning assumption that it will not be less than the current cost. After staffing, accommodation is the largest area of expenditure for the Commission.

Given the dependence of the Commission on its staffing levels – two-thirds of the Commission's expenditure goes on staffing – it is no surprise that the budget reductions have had a major impact on the Commission's staffing levels.

Since 2015, the Commission has had to facilitate the Voluntary Exit of 33 of its staff, in order to live within its reduced budget allocations

At 31 March 2018, the staffing level (full-time equivalent) stood at 85. This is 57 (40.0%) staff less than the staffing complement of 143 that was allocated when the Commission was established.



Our strategic priorities 2019 – 2022

We have identified four areas as Strategic Priorities for our work in the period 2019 to 2022:

- **Employment**
- **Education**
- **Access and participation**
- **Mainstreaming and championing equality**

Each of these areas are linked both to draft Programme for Government (PfG) population outcomes and to our statutory responsibilities, ongoing work programmes and core business objectives.

These priority areas have been identified based on our statutory remit, from evidence of substantial and/or persistent inequality arising through our work over recent years on key inequalities and evidence from our day to day work and engagement with stakeholders. In identifying the outcome areas we have also attempted to focus on areas where we believe that, with the use of our powers and in partnership in others, we have the potential to make a difference.

As indicated earlier, there was general support for these areas as priorities for the coming period; there remains work to be done to refine how progress will be measured and this will need to be reviewed on a regular basis, as we begin to implement the Plan over the coming months.

Given the breadth and scope of the Commission's statutory remit, covering multiple equality grounds and duties ranging from the provision of advice, consideration of assistance for complainants to processing fair employment monitoring returns, not all of our work easily falls within the four areas. We will continue to fulfil our statutory functions while also seeking to focus specific attention on the four areas we have identified. The next section sets out why we have identified each area and provides information on what we plan to focus on to effect change.

Alignment with PfG population outcomes

The next section also sets out the alignment of the four priority areas with draft PfG population outcomes and sets out a number of specific strategic outcomes under each area, along with indicators and performance measures that focus on what needs to be achieved.

In doing so, we have used language and approaches derived from the outcomes based accountability process, which is driving the Executive's PfG and being rolled out across the wider public sector.

Strategic outcomes, indicators and performance measures

In the following section, a **Strategic Outcome** is a condition of wellbeing for one or more equality groups. We have identified a number linked to the outcomes of the PfG. An overall objective is to see similar strategic equality outcomes linked to every PfG outcome across all equality groups; all supported by data development plans and indicators to measure progress.

In this plan we have identified outcomes for some of the most persistent and challenging inequalities; those that, based on our remit, resources and opportunities for effecting change, we believe we should focus on over the next three years.

As can be seen, these are not outcomes that can be achieved solely, or even mainly, by the Equality Commission. We recognise that it is through encouraging others to focus on these and through working in partnership with others that progress can be made.

“By their very nature, these outcomes will be quite broad and multi-faceted in nature, and cannot be achieved by a single organisation, service or programme working in isolation. Rather, its achievement will take sustained and concerted action from many organisations, services and programmes and can only be delivered through effective partnership working across key stakeholders”¹.

We use **indicators** to describe measures that will help to quantify a change in the strategic outcome over time and provide an insight into what progress is being made.

We have suggested indicators that could be used to illustrate where we think change should occur. Change, or the lack of change, in an indicator will help us to review and reassess what needs to be done to effect the outcome.

Performance measures are indications, more directly within our control, of how well we are doing to effect improvements in the conditions of those who, in the course of our daily work, we serve. Throughout the course of the planning period, and beyond, we will be further developing our thinking on identifying those measures that best illustrate where anyone is better off as a direct result of our work.

For each of the first three key areas, we highlight a number of key strategic outcomes, indicators and performance measures for 2019 – 22. These have been worked on over the consultation period and will continue to be developed and refined over the course of the Plan’s delivery.

We will also be working on identifying those actions best placed to have a positive effect and developing report cards to demonstrate and communicate progress.

Where we need new or better data to develop our indicators and measures or new information to inform discussion about the causes of inequalities or to assist in identifying solutions, data development plans and research agendas will be developed.

Strategic Priority Areas and Strategic Outcomes

Employment

- More and better jobs for disabled people
- Increased access for women in employment
- Workplaces are welcoming and inclusive

Education

- Freedom from prejudice based bullying at school
- Address inequalities in attainment and access.

Access and participation

- Participation in public and political life
- Accessible facilities and services for disabled people
- Addressing housing needs and available, adapted housing for disabled people
- Access to Information and digital services

Mainstreaming and championing equality

- Mainstreaming equality
- Championing equality for all

Employment

It is generally accepted that improving access to, and progression within, employment is a key driver of economic and social well-being and presents a route to improved social mobility and inclusion. Tax and welfare reforms have however acted to further reduce the income of low income working age households, impacting on the poorest in society and curtailing employment as a route to social mobility for some.

Improved educational outcomes in terms of attainment levels and subject and career choices are a driver for increased equality. An individual's skills and knowledge are important in obtaining and retaining employment, as are an individual's personal circumstances (such as health, financial circumstances or caring responsibilities).

For particular groups of people there are very real barriers to participating in the workplace and appropriate support is required. For example, in order to ensure that those with caring responsibilities, predominantly women, can fully participate in the workplace they must have access to good quality and affordable childcare and for those with a disability, tailored support programmes are often required and should be available.

Alignment with Programme for Government Outcomes

Outcome 3:

We have a more equal society

Outcome 6:

We have more people working in better jobs

Outcome 10:

We have created a place where people want to live and work, invest and visit.

Strategic outcome:

More and Better jobs for disabled people

People with disabilities should have access to a range of appropriate and tailored support to enable them to obtain and retain good quality jobs. Such support includes government programmes providing job opportunities for disabled people to compete in open recruitment or employment support, positive action schemes and work placements. Employers are also required to ensure that people with disabilities are supported in the workplace in terms of putting in place appropriate reasonable adjustments.

Prevalence of disability increases with age: ranging from 5% among young adults to 67% among those who are older (85+). As Northern Ireland's over 65 population is set to increase sharply during the next ten years – and more than double in number over the next fifty years – and because the prevalence of disability increases with age, the number of disabled people, including those in the workplace, can be projected to grow in the next decade and beyond. People with disabilities face barriers to employment due to lack of adequate transport infrastructure and limited support in addition to barriers to access, physical and attitudinal.

People with a disability are more likely to be not working and not actively looking for work (economically inactive) than people without disabilities^{2, 3}; consequently, they are much less likely to be in employment than people without disabilities. In addition, the gap in the employment rate between people with and without disabilities is persistent, having shown little change between 2006 and 2016.

Even when educational attainment is accounted for, participation in employment is still lower for people with disabilities than non-disabled people with equivalent qualifications⁴.

In addition, disabled people are more likely to be in insecure employment and non-disabled people are more likely to work in high pay occupations than disabled people and disabled people more likely to be in low pay occupations.

Among people with disabilities, people with mental health disabilities and/or a learning disability are less likely to be employed⁵ compared to people with hidden disabilities, progressive or other disabilities, physical disabilities and / or sensory disabilities.

In 2016, the All Party Parliamentary Group in Disability reported on a Government target of halving the disability employment gap and set out a series of recommendations to achieve this (APPGD, 2016).

The Commission, informed by its partnerships with groups representing disabled people, will develop a programme of work to promote employability for disabled people. This will include partnering with the Department for Communities to promote employability and with employers to promote the disability legislative provisions.

Population indicators

Gap between employment rate for people with a disability and those without a disability.

Numbers of people in Government provided supported employment

Performance Measurement

Actions taken by employers in target workplaces to support and retain disabled people in the workplace

Numbers and percentages of individuals reporting that contact with the Commission helped.

Legislative and policy changes secured.

Evidence of utilisation of Commission generated research.

Profile and level of engagement with issue in media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers.

Strategic Outcome:

Increased access for women in employment

Women's access to employment should not be restricted by lack of childcare provision, employers' inflexibility in accommodating women's caring roles or stereotypical attitudes with regard to the jobs women are to be employed in.

Although the employment rate has increased for men and women, the male employment rate (72.7%) remains higher than the female (64.3%). Women and men are also concentrated in different occupational sectors, with the sectors where men are employed in being more likely to have better pay and prospects. This differential concentration also appears to be reflected in the pattern for apprenticeships.

Qualifications and confidence are an issue for women from disadvantaged backgrounds; low-skilled and low-paid jobs often do not allow women to afford paid childcare and may offer lower levels of flexibility to accommodate care giving⁶. In addition, the current social welfare system may inhibit labour market participation⁷.

Women are more likely to be in part-time employment than men⁸ and lone parents with dependent children are more likely to be in employment on a part-time basis⁹. Part-time working can negatively influence progression in employment¹⁰, with women, lone parents and carers sometimes perceived negatively for asking for flexible working¹¹. Women, lone parents and carers working part-time are also at risk of low pay and precarious employment, as many part-time jobs are typically associated with the minimum wage and atypical contracts¹².

Women are under-represented in industries associated with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) such as Manufacturing, Transport and Communication, Energy and Water and Construction¹³. Although the pattern shows evidence of change over the recent period, young women are less likely to choose to study STEM subjects at further and higher education compared to young men¹⁴ thus decreasing their availability for high-level STEM jobs¹⁵. In addition, stereotyping and bias and particularly within male-dominated engineering and technology sectors, has been cited as one factor presenting barriers for women within these industries¹⁶.

Women are under-represented in the highest paid and highest status occupations such as 'Managers and Senior Officials'¹⁷ and are over-represented in occupations that are more likely to be lower status and lower paid, such as 'Administrative and Secretarial', 'Personal Service' and 'Sales and Customer Service'¹⁸. Women are also more likely to report under-employment in their chosen occupation compared to men¹⁹ and remain disproportionately more likely to work in lower paid occupations.

Evidence from GB suggest that the position of women in higher paid occupations has improved over the recent past. The Commission will monitor this position in Northern Ireland and the impact of continued higher educational attainment by females on employment equality.

The Commission will promote action to ensure appropriate, flexible accessible and affordable childcare, including through an effective Childcare Strategy. We will also want to encourage action to challenge gender stereotypes, including in subject choice.

We will partner with business organisations and trade unions and develop programmes of employer work to promote greater flexibility within workplaces in terms of women accessing managing pregnancy/ maternity arrangements, promoting flexible working arrangements.

Population indicators

Gap between employment rates for women and men

Gap between full-time and part-time working for men and women

Pay levels of men and women and relative percentages in low-paid work

Performance Measurement

Actions taken by employers in target workplaces to address barriers and increase access for women in employment.

Numbers and percentages of individuals reporting that contact with the Commission helped.

Legislative and policy changes secured

Evidence of utilisation of Commission generated research

Profile and level of engagement with issue in media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers

Strategic Outcome:

Workplaces are Welcoming and Inclusive

A welcoming and inclusive working environment is one where all workers are treated with dignity and respect and are not subjected to harassment on any of the equality grounds.

We are aware that prejudicial attitudes in workplaces are experienced by people with disabilities, women, Trans people, lesbian, gay and bisexual people, people from minority ethnic groups, migrant workers and those of different religious beliefs. Work is necessary to establish data and baselines to facilitate monitoring in relation to these areas.

People with disabilities are more likely to experience prejudice in employment than those without disabilities²⁰. Among people with disabilities, people with mental health issues are most likely to be viewed negatively as a work colleague or boss²¹. This stigma and prejudice may impact on the ability of people with disabilities to sustain employment, with disability-related discrimination complaints representing the highest number of enquiries, with respect to employment, to the Equality Commission's Discrimination Advice Team.²²

Women experience prejudice, discrimination and harassment in the workplace; including discrimination due to pregnancy and maternity²³. Trans people face prejudice and hostility in employment and are less likely to be open about their gender identity in the workplace²⁴. Ignorance of Trans issues from employers and work colleagues is a key issue in Trans people participating in and sustaining employment²⁵.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people often face negative comments and bullying at work due to their sexuality²⁶, and may be reluctant to come out in the workplace due to fears of victimisation²⁷. This may impact on their ability to participate in employment, sustain employment and progress in employment²⁸. Many of the barriers and challenges in employment faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and Trans people can be linked back to negative experiences in education²⁹.

People from minority ethnic groups and migrant workers are subject to prejudice and discrimination in employment. Prejudicial attitudes have been expressed toward Irish Travellers, migrant workers and minority ethnic groups³⁰. Racial prejudice has been identified in accessing employment³¹ and in experiences of racial harassment and intimidation in workplaces³².

Prejudicial attitudes and/or discrimination on the grounds of religious belief may impact on experiences within the workplace. Prejudicial attitudes toward those of different religious beliefs is present in Northern Ireland, particularly sectarianism³³ and islamophobia³⁴. Prejudicial attitudes, harassment and, intimidation can create a climate of fear which can impact on a person's ability to sustain employment, particularly where individuals are reluctant to speak out due to fears of further victimisation.

The Commission is currently asking employers and employees to complete a survey to help us gain a better understanding of employees experiences within their workplaces and to help shape our work going forward. We will work with business and trade union organisations to develop a programme of work aimed at ensuring workplaces are inclusive and welcoming to all.

Population indicators

Proximity attitudes to equality groups in the workplace (EQA)

Opinion poll questions relating to workplaces being family friendly; welcoming and inclusive; experiencing/ witnessing unwanted/ inappropriate behaviour and perceptions of workplaces.

Performance Measurement

Actions taken by employers in target workplaces to address barriers and increase access for women in employment.

Numbers and percentages of individuals reporting that contact with the Commission helped.

Legislative and policy changes secured

Evidence of utilisation of Commission generated research

Profile and level of engagement with issue in media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers

Key actions and approaches to delivery

- **building networks for change** with partners and other change agents to identify and deliver improvements in the wellbeing of target groups;
- **advisory** work with employers/ public authorities focusing on encouraging employer practices which facilitate:
 - positive action measures to enable people with disabilities to access more and better jobs.
 - appropriate pre-employment and employment support programmes are in place for people with disabilities.
 - reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities in employment;
 - employment policies which enable women to access and retain more and better jobs – tackling low pay, flexible working and managing pregnancy and maternity in the workplace.
 - inclusive workplaces for all through policies and practices that effectively promote dignity and respect, including promoting employer and trade union commitments as evidenced by agreeing Joint Declaration of Protections and ensuring appropriate policies and training is in place.
- **support high levels of compliance** amongst those with responsibilities under the legislation and encourage the extension of good practice, deploying our powers appropriately – from advice and guidance through to compliance and enforcement.
- **providing legal assistance and advice to individuals**, with a particular focus on complaints with the potential to impact on strategic employment indicators, including access to work for disabled people, occupational segregation and combatting harassment.
- **using compliance and enforcement mechanisms** available through Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998, and relevant provisions under anti-discrimination law, including the strategic use of investigations, for maximum impact, to encourage changes in employer and public authority practices and behaviours.

- **advocating law reform and public policy change:** working with partners and decision makers to develop and secure adoption of recommendations to influence the development and implementation of gender equality legislation, including gender pay reporting Regulations; the development and implementation of a gender equality strategy to include measures to promote women's economic independence and the development and implementation of a Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland.
- **communicating the importance of equal opportunities in employment** – maintaining awareness and acceptance among employers and service providers of not only what is required but also the importance of equality and good relations to enhance organisational performance.
- **undertaking research** that contributes to our understanding of the issues and provides evidence for addressing gaps in equality data and to facilitate the identification of appropriate interventions.

Education

Education is central to determining an individual's life chances. It provides individuals with opportunities for social and economic mobility and is key to the provision of equality of opportunity.

The Commission recognises and reinforces the wider value of education, beyond solely the achievement of qualifications. It can provide exposure to literature, language, sport, activities, art, and music; as well as allowing individuals to develop an understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds.

We also know that there are a number of key inequalities in education. This has been an area of focus for us over the recent period, particularly with the publication of Key Inequalities in Education in Northern Ireland identifying inequalities relating to prejudice-based bullying, and in access to, and attainment in, education.

We are aware of the proactive steps taken by a range of bodies, including Government Departments and the education sector more broadly, to promote equality in education across the equality grounds.

Whilst we both recognise and welcome the progress made in advancing educational outcomes, it is clear however that significant challenges remain.

Alignment with Programme for Government

Outcome 3:

We have a more equal society

Outcome 5:

We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential;

Outcome 12:

We give our children and young people the best start in life.

Strategic Outcome:

Freedom from prejudice based bullying at school

Prejudice-based bullying at school can blight the lives of young people, negatively affecting their attendance and attainment as well as having a long-term impact on their life chances.

The Commission's *Statement on Key Inequalities in Education*³⁵ highlighted prejudice-based bullying as a persistent problem³⁶ for certain equality groups. For example, research has identified that over two fifths of minority ethnic students having been the victims of racist bullying and harassment³⁷; over six out of ten trans pupils, and students with same sex attraction have been called hurtful names related to their sexual or gender identity³⁸; over two fifths of pupils with a disability being bullied³⁹; and students with SEN also experience bullying.

In respect to racist bullying, NICEM⁴⁰ (2011) suggested that a barrier to addressing bullying in schools is that schools tend to lack knowledge of how to effectively confront the issue. Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project⁴¹ (2011) found that many students who have experienced homophobic bullying do not report incidents of bullying and harassment to school authorities.

The most frequently cited reason for this was that young people thought that the school would not take the incident(s) seriously. While simply missing school time is negatively correlated with educational attainment⁴², 2013 research notes “many young trans people in Northern Ireland are dropping out of education permanently because of the negative impact transphobic bullying has on their lives and the inability of schools to adequately support them”⁴³.

The need to tackle the high incidence of prejudice-based bullying, both within schools and the wider community, is a key challenge for Government and has been recognised as such by international treaty bodies, such as UNCRC Committee, CEDAW Committee, CERD Committee, and the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention on National Minorities (FCNM)⁴⁴.

We welcome that the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016⁴⁵ provides a definition of bullying, places new duties on Boards of Governors to prevent bullying and requires schools to record all bullying incidents including those motivated by prejudice. We are of the view that this legislation, if implemented effectively, has the potential to support the development of more inclusive learning environments.

Following engagement with stakeholders and wider consideration, we are of the view that there are immediate opportunities and/or a particular pressing need to tackle prejudice based bullying over the life of this corporate plan (2019-22). The Commission has set out a number of recommendations⁴⁶ in support of tackling prejudice based bullying at school for specific equality groups, within an overall context of incidences of bullying being reduced.

The Commission will continue to work with a range of key partners to support and challenge government and key public authorities, including the Department of Education and the Education Authority, to advance these issues, and further develop associated indicators.

Population indicators

Incidence of prejudice based bullying at school for target equality groups⁴⁷

Pupil willingness to report prejudice based bullying

Performance Measurement

Engagement with, and adoption of, Commission priority recommendations by Decision Makers

Positive advocacy by key partners, and positive engagement with issue in general debates / media.

Strategic Outcome:

Address inequalities in attainment and access.

Our 2017 *Statement on Key Inequalities in Education*⁴⁸ found that while overall levels of attainment are increasing, attainment gaps by gender, religion, ethnicity and disability are also widening⁴⁹.

For example, children from the Traveller community and Roma children have some of the lowest levels of attainment of all equality groups. Over the 2007/08-2014/15 period, anywhere between a half to over eight in ten Irish Traveller children left school with no GCSEs. This is in stark contrast to the proportions of all school leavers with no GCSEs, which has reduced from 3.5 percent in 2007/08 to 0.5 percent in 2014/15⁵⁰. Males continue to have lower levels of attainment than females, beginning in primary school and continuing throughout schooling to GCSE and A Level. Protestants continue to have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE, GCSEs including English and Maths, and A Level. Students with SEN or a disability have lower attainment levels than students without any SEN or disability.

People with fewer qualifications and skills are disadvantaged in civic / community life and are at a much higher risk of unemployment and low pay. Further, whilst socio-economic disadvantage is not a specified ground under the equality legislation, it is clear too that the barriers and inequalities experienced by equality groups are exacerbated by poverty and social exclusion. Although there have been overall improvements in education, Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) remains closely linked to lower levels of academic achievement. For example, 47% of FSME school leavers achieve at least 5 GCSEs at A*–C standard (including English and Maths) compared to 75.8% of those without FSME⁵¹.

The Commission considers, following engagement with stakeholders that there are immediate opportunities and a particular pressing need to secure change over the life of this corporate plan (2019-22) in relation to addressing inequalities in attainment and access experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children.

Further, to deliver benefits to children and young people from across all the equality categories the Commission considers that it is also important to ensure progress in advancing childcare and early-years provision; collaboration between schools, family and the wider community; and sharing learning from successful interventions.

- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has recommended⁵⁵ developing a centre to compile and promote high-quality evidence of ways schools can improve attainment. The Education Authority, through its regional role, has the potential to provide and oversee a formal mechanism to make possible the sharing of successful interventions.

Barriers to accessing education, and associated supports, impact on attainment outcomes. For example:

- Research in Northern Ireland has found that children who did not attend pre-school showed poorer cognitive and behaviour outcomes than their peers who attended pre-school⁵². European Commission research also found that children who attended high quality provision had better performance in school, and better economic and social outcomes in later life.⁵³
- The Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014⁵⁴ highlighted the benefits of broader family / community involvement, noting: *"It is clear that schools alone cannot break the cycle of low outcomes; there is a need for greater coherence and connection between the learners, their families, their communities, their schools and the wide range of agencies and health support service providers that play a significant part in their lives."*

The Commission wishes to see a narrowing of gaps in attainment and access experienced for target equality groups, in the context of continually improving standards overall⁵⁶.

The Commission will continue to work with a range of key partners to support and challenge government and key public authorities, including the Department of Education and the Education Authority, to advance these matters, and further develop associated indicators.

Population indicators

Gaps in attainment levels of target equality groups⁵⁷

Gaps in attendance levels of target equality groups

Gaps in children successfully transitioning from primary to post-primary for target equality groups

Performance Measurement

Engagement with, and adoption of, Commission priority recommendations by Decision Makers

Positive advocacy by key partners, and positive engagement with issue in general debates / media.

Positive advocacy by key partners, and positive engagement with issue in general debates / media.

Key actions and approaches to delivery

- **communicating the importance of equality in education** – maintaining awareness of the importance of equality of opportunity and good relations in education; and building support for our recommendations amongst key partners, policy makers and education providers.
- **advocating law reform and public policy change** – working with partners and decision makers to develop, refine and secure adoption of recommendations to improve to law and public policy.
- **support high levels of compliance** amongst those with responsibilities under the legislation; and encourage the extension of good practice, deploying our powers appropriately – from advice and guidance through to compliance and enforcement.
- **provide legal assistance and advice to individuals**, seeking to prioritise our focus on complaints aligned to the Commission’s strategic education outcomes.
- **using compliance and enforcement mechanisms** available through Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998, and relevant provisions under anti-discrimination law, including the strategic use of investigations, for maximum impact, to encourage changes in employer and public authority practices and behaviours.
- **undertaking research** that contributes to our understanding of the issues and provides evidence for addressing gaps in equality data and to facilitate the identification of appropriate interventions.

Access and Participation

At the core of building a better society for all is working to ensure that everyone has equality of opportunity not only in relation to employment and education but also in accessing goods, services and information. The ability and opportunity to participate fully in public life is also key to ensuring more diverse, representative and informed decision-making.

There are issues relating to the built environment, and shared, safe communities and accessible services, particularly for disabled people, older people and those from minority ethnic groups, we wish to see addressed, as well as ensuring equal access to information and digital services for all.

Inequalities in participation in public life are evident for a number of equality groups, - women, disabled people and individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds - and need to be addressed.

Work on these priorities will build on our role, jointly with NIHRC, as the Independent Mechanism for Northern Ireland (IMNI), to promote, protect and monitor implementation of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD); our recently published work on Key Inequalities in Participation and Public Life; and the introduction of the Public Bodies (Websites and Mobile

Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018, which will come into operation over the next two years.

Given our statutory roles in relation to some of these areas, as well as the scale of inequalities and barriers faced by people with disabilities, it is inevitable that work, with, and on behalf of, disabled people, to address these inequalities will be a primary focus.

Alignment with Programme for Government

Outcome 3:

We have a more equal society

Outcome 7:

We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other

Outcome 8:

We care for each other and those in need

Outcome 9:

We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity

Outcome 10:

We have created a place where people want to live and work, invest and visit

Strategic Outcome:

Participation in Public and Political Life

Our 2018 report on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life highlighted a number of areas of concerns regarding participation in public and political life by key groups. This included the following:

There is an under-representation of persons with a disability in applications and appointments to government public appointments.

The report noted that little improvement had been made in terms of the levels of appointments of persons with disabilities to government public appointments and within government public appointments over the period 2006 – 2016 (2% 2006 and 3% in 2016). There is also a consistent underrepresentation of persons with a disability as applicants to government public appointments ranging from 2% to 5% annually.

Women are underrepresented within elected positions in Northern Ireland. In elected positions - MPs (22%), MLAs (30%), Local Councillors (25%), and Council Mayor/Chairpersons (23%). Within government public appointments - in government public appointments (41%) and as publicly appointed chairpersons (24%).

There are no elected representatives from ethnic minority backgrounds. Currently, there is no political presence in terms of ethnic minorities within the Northern Ireland Assembly, and only one elected councillor from a minority ethnic community in all eleven Northern Ireland local Councils.

The Commission's work identified barriers to participation for all groups. These barriers included negative perceptions and/or stereotypes which exist about the skills, abilities and experience of certain equality groups; appointment processes that can place women and other under-represented groups at a disadvantage, for example, selection processes and application forms asking for formal qualifications and previous board experience and the use of jargon in the selection processes.

The reconciliation of family and working life represented a significant barrier for women as did the financial cost of participation in public life for a range of equality groups. Physical and communication barriers may also inhibit the participation of certain equality groups. Poor provision of accessible travel systems and accessible buildings could also limit attendance.

Certain equality groups may lack confidence and trust in politicians and the public bodies and there was also a lack of engagement and outreach by public and political institutions towards some equality groups and a lack of support for development skills, education, training, or capacity building.

Potential partners in contributing to impact on the following population indicators and assisting the Commission with the delivery of its performance outcomes could include the Commissioner for Public Appointments (CPANI), the Executive Office's Central Appointments Unit, Disabled People's organisations, other representative groups and others.

Key areas of work would include, supporting CPANI's promotion of diversity in public appointments, particularly the Executive's gender equality targets; delivery in a Northern Ireland context of recommendations from the Holmes Review 'Opening up Public Appointments to Disabled People' and the development of data to allow the assessment of diversity in life across other equality areas.

Population indicators

Representation of disabled people, those from minority ethnic groups and women in local government, the NI Assembly and as Members of Parliament.

Numbers and/or percentages of disabled people, minority ethnic communities and women in public appointments

Performance Measurement

Numbers of Government Departments and other public bodies with responsibilities with action plans and targets in place which are appropriately directed to the duties

Achievements against public authority action plan targets

Level of adoption of Commission and partner recommendations

Profile and level of engagement with issue in media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers

Strategic Outcome:

Accessible facilities and services for disabled people

“All disabled people having the same choice, control, dignity and freedom as any other citizen to achieve their goals at home, in education, at work, and as members of the community. This does not necessarily mean us doing things for ourselves but it does mean having the right to practical assistance based on our choices and aspirations.” This definition of independent living was originally developed by the Disability Rights Commission nearly twenty years ago and has been adapted or adopted by many disability rights organisations ever since.

The concept of independent living remains central to any assessment of increasing the choice and control of people with disabilities in their daily lives and removing the barriers to full participation; in employment, in education in accessing goods and services - both public and private – transport, health and social care, housing and physical space.

It will not be possible for one organisation to develop measures and monitor change across all aspects of life. However, over the coming period, the Commission will encourage the development by public bodies of objective and outcomes based metrics to supplement and better assist the understanding of the ‘life satisfaction and self-efficacy’ approach adopted in the PfG and address the limitations inherent in that approach.

Potential partners for impacting in this area will include Government Departments such as Infrastructure and Communities and public bodies such as local councils, Translink and private transport operators.

Important partnerships also need to be established with key representative organisations of disabled people such as the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) and Disability Action, as well as those groups representing specific areas of disability will also be crucial to affecting the changes necessary.

An initial task for any ‘network(s) for change’ will be establishing and refining the population indicators for allowing the measurement of well-being in this broad area and helping set the initial priorities.

Population indicators

Difficulties with Travel due to physical disability or long-standing health problem

Accessible facilities, services and public spaces

PfG life satisfaction and self-efficacy scores of those with a limiting long-standing illness

Performance Measurement

Improvements to scope of the legal framework

Improvements to the scope, quality and accessibility of statistics and data measuring the life chances and experiences of disabled people in Northern Ireland

Level of adoption of Commission recommendations

Profile and level of engagement with issue in media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers

Strategic Outcome:**Addressing housing needs and available, adapted housing for disabled people**

Housing is a basic human need and provides a foundation for family and community life. Good quality, affordable housing in safe, sustainable communities is essential to ensuring the health and well-being of individuals and a prosperous society.

Data set out in our 2017 Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities highlighted a number of inequalities. These included longer waiting times for social housing for Catholic household reference person applicants, limited access to appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers, vulnerability to racial attack of homes of minority ethnic and migrant groups and harassment of LGB people in their homes and neighbourhoods as well as issues about independent living for people with disabilities.

In consultation with stakeholders, the Commission identified a number of areas in which there was a pressing need and/or an opportunity to secure change. These included:

- advancing sharing in housing;
- addressing the longer social housing waiting list for Catholic households;
- disability related accommodation; and
- hate crime.

It is in these areas that the Commission will be attempting to focus its attention over the coming period and working with partners to challenge and support Government and others to secure the changes needed.

Key partners for change will include the Department for Communities, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), the NI Housing Council, Housing Associations and representative bodies of disabled people and other protected groups

Population indicators

Relative waiting times for those seeking social housing

Numbers of and expenditure on housing adaptations

Waiting times for housing adaptations

Performance Measurement

Improvements to scope of the legal framework

Level of adoption of Commission recommendations

Profile and level of engagement with issue in media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers

Strategic Outcome:

Access to Information and digital services

The digital transformation of Government services and the continuing extension of on-line services into all aspects of our lives will continue to be a major area for equality protection in the coming years, an area with the potential for providing significant opportunities as well as major challenges

In 2018, UK wide data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) found that there was lower usage of the intranet by people with disabilities and older people than the general population. Only 76.6% of adults with disabilities had used the internet in the previous three months compared with 93.9% of adults overall.

Although a gap remains the situation is improving. In 2011, it was reported that almost half of disabled adults had never used the Internet. In 2011, this represented 35.9 per cent of those who had a disability. Of those adults who reported no disability, 11.9 per cent of adults had never used the Internet.

The region, in 2011, where people were least likely to have used the Internet was Northern Ireland, where 28.6 per cent had never done so. (Disability Action, 2011). More recent research undertaken in 2016, shows that this was still the case (Digital resilience, Citizens Online, 2017). However NI is the region which has seen the largest internet usage since 2011. Unfortunately, disaggregation by disability status, on a regional basis remains a problem.

There is evidence of a residual urban/rural divide in relation to access to mobile communications and broadband, which will impact on protected and vulnerable groups in some rural areas. This is particularly important as the digital by default approach is rolled-out and there will be a need to ensure access for applicants and recipients of services and benefits are not differentially and doubly disadvantaged by a digital barrier.

At the core of meeting those challenges and providing the opportunities will be equal opportunity to access the services, both in terms of access to the intranet and the accessibility standards of the websites and mobile technology being used to allow access.

Key partners for our work will be the Government Digital Service, in the Cabinet Office, which has new statutory responsibilities and powers in relation to web accessibility, as well as the NICS's own Digital Transformation Service and Digital Inclusion Team, with its go ON NI initiative. Central to this work will be Disability Action and RNIB, as other organisations challenging the barriers put in the way of disabled peoples equal access to information and services.

Population indicators

Relative access to broadband

Levels of internet usage by disabled people and older people

Performance Measurement

Improvements to scope of legal framework

Level of adoption of Commission recommendations

Percentage public sector websites meeting accessibility standards

Profile and level of engagement with issue in media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers

Key actions and approaches to delivery

- **building networks for change** with partners and other change agents to identify and deliver improvements in the wellbeing of target groups
- **policy initiatives** to promote and support awareness, understanding, acceptance and adoption of priority recommendations, good practice and interventions to deliver the strategic outcomes in this area;
- **support high levels of compliance** from public authorities with statutory equality and disability duties, ensuring they have a plan in place and that measures are directed effectively to the duties, and amongst those with other responsibilities under the legislation.
- **encouraging the extension of good practice**, deploying our powers appropriately – from advice and guidance through to compliance and enforcement;
- **advisory work** – to support public authorities consideration of the equality issues in the development and implementation of policies, relating to key areas identified as priority equality issues and encouraging improvements in organisational practice;
- **using compliance and enforcement mechanisms** available through Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998, and relevant provisions under anti-discrimination law, including the strategic use of investigations, for maximum impact, to encourage changes in employer and public authority practices and behaviours.
- **providing legal assistance and advice to individuals**, with a particular focus on complaints in strategic outcome areas
- **communicating the importance of equal opportunities in access and participation** – maintaining awareness and acceptance among policy makers and service providers of not only what is required but also the importance of equality and good relations to enhance access and participation.
- **undertaking research** that contributes to our understanding of the issues and provides evidence for addressing gaps in equality data and to facilitate the identification of appropriate interventions.

Mainstreaming and Championing Equality

This strategic outcome area is different from those preceding it. Its focus is on working to encourage/ensure that the organisations that have responsibilities under the anti-discrimination and equality legislation mainstream equality in their policies and practices; and on working to highlight inequalities and champion the need for and benefits of equality for all.

We aim to build on our work over recent years to ensure more effective implementation of the statutory equality and good relations duties by public authorities. This will include through the implementation of the Programme for Government by Departments and others and through encouraging adoption of our recommendations, whether for changes in public policy, to organisational practices or changes to the equality law framework itself.

The following section separates this into two specific outcomes, in keeping with the rest of this Corporate Plan. However, we are not presenting any population indicators here, as the focus proposed and the opportunities to affect change over the course of the Corporate Plan have been developed with reference to the Commission deploying its unique powers and functions in these areas.

We propose to do this in conjunction with others and in partnership, to ensure that we deploy these powers to best effect, particularly where this can be done in support of a common cause. Our partners include the voluntary and community sector, business and employer organisations and those who have responsibilities under the legislation.

This outcome area also allows us to reflect the Commission's role in relation to its enforcement powers under the anti-discrimination and equality legislation, alongside our powers and duties to promote equality of opportunity. We continue to combine the deployment of these powers, recognising the effect of this when developing partnership working.

Alignment with Programme for Government

Outcome 3:

We have a more equal society

Outcome 9:

We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity and it contributes to other PfG outcomes, subject to the particular performance measures focusing on specific customer groups or equality groups.

Strategic Outcomes:

Mainstreaming equality

The Commission's evidence base, policy recommendations and guidance⁵⁸ highlight the importance of making equality considerations central to the business of **any organisation** in Northern Ireland, and success in this is more likely when there is leadership shown at all levels in the organisation, especially from senior leaders⁵⁹.

The importance of mainstreaming equality is further enshrined in the statutory equality and good relations duties on public authorities in Northern Ireland, requiring public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations, in carrying out their functions in Northern Ireland.

The Commission has a range of statutory roles relating to these duties on public authorities, such as to provide advice on the duties, as well as keep the effectiveness of the duties under review. Our recent report identified issues which require immediate attention by public authorities⁶⁰.

Action on these issues by public authorities, such as their equality assessments when planning and delivering their functions, should better enable them to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.

The Commission will continue to focus on these issues, focusing its efforts on building on its recent work to ensure that public authorities are mainstreaming equality effectively. This will include our programme of work to encourage leadership of the implementation of the duties; to promote training for staff in public authorities; and in the development, use and analysis of equality data by public authorities to inform equality assessments and subsequent monitoring.

We will focus also on areas where there are concerns and/or scope for improvement - such as in the application of equality assessment in the context of preparing budgets and budget allocation; and in key public policy areas such as welfare reform.

We will also work to encourage the sustained implementation of visible and positive leadership for equality across Government and public administration.

Performance Measurement

Quality and quantity of equality assessments published by public authorities, that contribute to their fulfilment of their S75 duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations

% of general public who perceive that public figures show leadership on equality matters

Levels of compliance with statutory requirements by employers

Level of adoption of Commission recommendations (including improvements to scope of legal framework)

Profile and level of engagement with issue in media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers

S75 enforcement related recommendations acted upon by relevant public authority

Strategic Outcome:

Championing equality for all

The Commission's vision is of a society in Northern Ireland where there is equality for all and a common understanding of the benefits of a more equal society.

As the statutory body charged with duties to promote equality of opportunity and work to eliminate discrimination, the Commission aims to provide authoritative comment on, evidence, benchmark and illustrate the scale and nature of inequalities blighting society in NI and also benefits of equality of opportunity to society. For example, we will continue to ensure the optimal use of the unique data available from the requirements on employers to monitor the community background and gender composition of their workforce.

The Commission's last Equality Awareness Survey showed that over half (57%) of respondents agreed, "*there are benefits of having a more equal society in Northern Ireland*"⁶¹, however only a third (33%) of respondents agreed that "*there is equality for all in Northern Ireland*"⁶².

In addition, the Equality Awareness Survey identified that the group most likely to be perceived as being treated unfairly was lesbian, gay or bisexual people (17%), followed by disabled people (10%) and people over 70 years (9%)⁶³. It is clear that more needs to be done to promote equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland.

The survey also illustrates how not only the understanding of how equality matters shape lives in NI and inequalities affect certain groups differs, but also that there is not a common understanding of these effects.

The Commission uses evidence to fulfil its statutory task of promoting equality of opportunity, and does so independently. We will focus on working to ensure that equality matters are centre stage in major events around us, such as:

- Brexit and ensuring that the 'no diminution' principle is protected in any Brexit/post Brexit environment; and
- setting agendas where the centrality of equality is of strategic importance and impact, such as in enhancing the understanding of the inequalities faced by certain groups, and specifically Travellers in year one of the Corporate Plan.

Performance Measurement

Proportion of the general public who identify particular equality groups as treated unfairly when compared with other groups in NI

% general public who consider there are benefits of having an equal society in NI.

Level of public support for equality

Level of adoption of Commission recommendations (improvements to scope of legal framework/ no-diminution)

Profile and level of engagement with issue in media and across key decision-takers and opinion formers

Key actions and approaches to delivery

- **engagement and influencing** of those in key leadership roles to build senior level support for a more equal society;
- **building networks for information sharing and change** with partners and other change agents to deliver law reform and mainstreaming of equality in key public policy initiatives;
- **policy initiatives** to promote and support awareness, understanding, acceptance and adoption of priority recommendations and good practice;
- **establish a framework to allow for the effective assessment of issues and strategic use of section 75 and other investigation powers** to intervene in a number of areas of strategic importance where, through deploying the range of our powers for maximum impact, to encourage changes in employer and public authority practices and behaviours
- **undertake research** that addresses evidence gaps and sets the agenda on a prioritised equality issue, as well as research that contributes to our understanding of the issues and provides evidence for addressing gaps in equality data and to facilitate the identification of appropriate interventions.
- **advisory work** – to support public authorities’ mainstreaming through the effective consideration of the equality issues in the development and implementation of policies relating to key areas identified as priority equality issues;
- **communications and public engagement strategies** to highlight and promote equality for all and support the Commission’s policy and research objectives and initiatives.

Resourcing the Plan

The Commission is committed to maintaining a modern, professional, fit for purpose organisation that provides value for money, while meeting the challenge of reduced funding.

We will:

- maintain effective corporate governance and risk management;
- demonstrate best practice as an employer and, as best we can, invest in our staff to ensure excellent service delivery;
- meet the challenges of financial constraint through continuous improvement and innovation;
- continue to build the Commission's digital platforms.

We will measure how efficient and effective we are as an organisation by measuring our performance in relation to:

- percentage of headline performance measures heading in right direction
- public confidence in the Commission
- levels of public support for equality
- stakeholder and customer satisfaction
- meeting our financial targets
- delivering high standards of governance and internal control.

Financial Review and forecast

In our planning assumptions, we have recognised that the economic climate in relation to public finances will continue to be difficult.

It is not clear what our budget allocation over the period of this Corporate Plan will be. Unlike other parts of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland Departments have not recently undertaken comprehensive spending reviews, which can forecast funding allocations for future years. The Commission has however been asked to work on the basis of further cuts in 2019/20 and beyond.

In March 2019, the Commission was provided with its opening budget allocation for 2019/2020 as set out below. This allocation represents £149k (3%) reduction on the 2018/19 opening net resource baseline and it reflects £346k in anticipated receipts and matched spending power.

An additional £150k Resource has been allocated to meet anticipated pressures in relation to the rise in Employer pension contributions that come into effect from 1 April 2019.

Opening budget allocations 2018/20

| Budget | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Resource | 5,302 | 5,303 |
| (receipts) | (346) | (346) |
| Capital | 0 | 0 |
| Depreciation | 85 | 85 |
| Total | 5,041 | 5,042 |

Continuing budget reductions will have a serious and adverse effect on what the Commission can deliver and on our future work. Although the Commission will strive to mitigate the impact of any further reductions on its service delivery and core responsibilities, it is inevitable that reductions of the scale we have experienced over the last decade will have consequences. It will result in further significant reductions in the Commission's staffing levels and impact on our service delivery and ability to fulfil our statutory obligations under the legislation over the course of this planning period.

We will continue to discuss the need for an adequate level of resources to deliver our statutory obligations with our Sponsor Department in the coming period as well as the need to ensure sustainability of work to promote equality and good relations and tackle discrimination in Northern Ireland.

Endnotes

- 1 Performance Management for Outcomes (NIAO,2018)
- 2 See Raeside, R., McQuaid, R., Canduela, J., Graham, H., Chen, T., Egdell, V. and Pearson, M. (2014) Employment Inequalities in Northern Ireland. ECNI: Belfast.
- 3 In addition, 75.5% of those without a disability were employed in Q1 2012 compared to 35.2% of those with a disability; and, 78.5% of those without a disability were employed in Q1 2016 compared to 35.1% of those with a disability in Q1 2016 .
- 4 MacInnes T, Tinson A, Gaffney D, Horgan G and Baumberg B (2014). Disability, long-term conditions and poverty, p33. New Policy Institute
- 5 In Q1 2016 32.6% of those with mental health and/or learning disabilities were in employment, compared to: 40.4% of those with physical and sensory disabilities; 45.7% of those with progressive or other disabilities and 55.1% of those with hidden disabilities.
- 6 McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) Child Care: Maximising the Participation of Women. ECNI: Belfast.
- 7 McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) Child Care: Maximising the Participation of Women. ECNI: Belfast.
- 8 See Raeside, R., McQuaid, R., Canduela, J., Graham, H., Chen, T., Egdell, V. and Pearson, M. (2014) Employment Inequalities in Northern Ireland. ECNI: Belfast. The Commission also found that between 2012 and 2016 the rate of part-time employment was a little under 40% (e.g. 39.3% in Q1, 2016) for women compared to a little under 10% (e.g. 9.5% in Q1, 2016) for men.
- 9 See Raeside, R., McQuaid, R., Canduela, J., Graham, H., Chen, T., Egdell, V. and Pearson, M. (2014) Employment Inequalities in Northern Ireland. ECNI: Belfast. The Commission also found that between 2012 and 2016, lone parents had the highest rate of part-time employment compared to other dependency groups. For example in Q1, 2016, 63.3% of lone parents with dependent children were in part-time employment compared to 24.1 of those who were married or cohabiting with dependent children; and 17.1% of those with no dependents.

- 10 See Employers for Childcare (2015) Striking the Balance: the impact becoming a parent has on employment, working life and career. Employers for Childcare: Belfast.
- 11 See Employers for Childcare (2015) Striking the Balance: the impact becoming a parent has on employment, working life and career. Employers for Childcare: Belfast and Carers UK (2016) State of Caring 2016. Carers UK: London.
- 12 See HC Women and Equalities Committee (2016) Gender Pay Gap 2nd report of session 2015-2016 and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2010) Cycles of poverty, unemployment and low pay. JRF: York.
- 13 The Commission found that between 2012 and 2016, women were under-represented in these industries, while there was a overrepresentation of men within these industries. For example, in Q1, 2016 men represented 81.9% of people employed in the 'Manufacturing' sector and 75.0% of those employed in the 'Transport and Communication' sector.
- 14 Burns, S., Leitch, R., and Hughes, J. (2015) Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland. ECNI: Belfast; and DEL (2013) Addressing Gender Balance – Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, p2. DEL: Belfast
- 15 STEM Business Group (2013) Addressing Gender Balance – Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). p1. DEL: Belfast
- 16 DEL (2013) Addressing Gender Balance – Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, p11. DEL: Belfast.
- 17 See Raeside, R., McQuaid, R., Canduela, J., Graham, H., Chen, T., Egdell, V. and Pearson, M. (2014) Employment Inequalities in Northern Ireland. ECNI: Belfast. For example the Commission found that in Q1 2016, men represented 61.6% of those in 'Managers and Senior Officials' occupations.
- 18 The Commission found that in Q1, 2016, women represented 73.4% of those in 'Administrative and Secretarial', 77.5% of those in 'Personal Service' and 59.6% of those in 'Sales and Customer Service' occupations.
- 19 NISRA (2015) Underemployment in Northern Ireland. NISRA: Belfast.
- 20 Raeside, R., McQuaid, R., Canduela, J., Graham, H., Chen, T., Egdell, V. and Pearson, M. (2014) Employment Inequalities in Northern Ireland. ECNI: Belfast.

- 21 ECNI (2012) Do you Mean Me? Discrimination: attitudes and experience in Northern Ireland. *Equality Awareness Survey 2011*. ECNI: Belfast; and ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2009. ARK www.ark.ac.uk/nilt June 2010;
- 22 Between April 2014 and March 2015, the Commission received 1380 legal enquiries on the grounds of disability (excluding SENDO). Enquiries on the grounds of disability represented 40.4% of total enquiries (n=3413) received during this period and the highest number of enquiries received on any of the equality grounds.
- 23 ECNI (2017) '*Gender Equality: Policy Priorities and Recommendations.*' Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Belfast. A recent investigation carried out by ECNI has highlighted experiences of unfair treatment of pregnant workers and mothers in the workplace. In particular, it found that a significant percentage (36%) of women participating in this investigation believed that they had been treated unfairly or disadvantaged at work as a result of their pregnancy or having taken maternity leave. See ECNI (2016) *Expecting Equality-Summary Report A Formal Investigation into the treatment of pregnancy workers and mothers in Northern Ireland workplaces*
- 24 See O'Doherty J (2016). [OUTstanding in your field: Exploring the needs of LGB&T people in rural Northern Ireland. The Rainbow Project](#): Belfast and; McNeil J, Bailey L, Ellis S and Regan M. (2013) *Speaking from the Margins: Trans Mental health and Wellbeing in Ireland*. TENI: Ireland.
- 25 See Gender Equalities Office (2011) *Transgender survey #3* and; McNeil J, Bailey L, Ellis S and Regan M. (2013) *Speaking from the Margins: Trans Mental health and Wellbeing in Ireland*. TENI: Ireland.
- 26 See Mc Dermott, M (2011) *Through Our Eyes. Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in the Workplace*; and, Guasp, A. (2013) *Gay in Britain. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People's Experiences and Expectations of Discrimination*. Stonewall: London.
- 27 Mc Dermott, M (2011) *Through Our Eyes. Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in the Workplace*
- 28 Mc Dermott, M (2011) *Through Our Eyes. Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in the Workplace*

- 29 O'Doherty J (2016). [OUTstanding in your field: Exploring the needs of LGB&T people in rural Northern Ireland. The Rainbow Project](#): Belfast, Page 54.
- 30 ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Time Survey, 2007. Attitudes to Minority Ethnic People. ARK, June 2008; and ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Time Survey, 2015. Attitudes to Minority Ethnic People. ARK, June 2016.
- 31 See Wood, C. and Wybron, I. (2015) Entry to, and progression in, work
- 32 Rogers, S. and Scullion, G. (2014) Voices for Change. Mapping the views of black and minority ethnic people on integration and their sense of belonging in Northern Ireland
- 33 Trademark ICTU Anti-sectarian Unit (2012) Sectarianism in the Workplace. Research on Sectarianism in the Private Sector Workplace. ICTU: Belfast.
- 34 ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Time Survey, 2007. Attitudes to Minority Ethnic People. ARK, June 2008 and ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Time Survey, 2015. Attitudes to Minority Ethnic People. ARK, June 2016. See also Weller P (2011) Religious discrimination in Britain: A review of research evidence, 2000-10. EHRC: Manchester.
- 35 ECNI (2017) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Education in Northern Ireland](#)
- 36 This finding is also reflected in the 2017 Young Life and Times Survey. Ark (2018) [Young Life and Times Survey Summary of Results](#)
- 37 NCB, NI and ARK YLT (2010) Attitudes to Difference: Young people's attitudes to, and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland. p.55..
- 38 O'Hara M (2013) Through our Minds: Exploring the Emotional health and Wellbeing of lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in Northern Ireland. The Rainbow Project: Belfast
- 39 RSM McClure Watters (2011) The nature and extent of pupil bullying in schools in the North of Ireland. DENI: Bangor.
- 40 NICEM (2011) [Promoting racial equality in NI post primary schools.](#)
- 41 Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project (2011) [Left Out of the Equation. A report on the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Young People at School](#)

- 42 McBride, R-S. (2013). [Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland](#). Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.
- 43 McBride, R-S. (2013). [Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland](#). Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.
- 44 See [Concluding Observations of Committee on Rights of the Child \(2016\)](#); [Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on UK \(2016\)](#); [Fourth Opinion on the United Kingdom of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities \(2017\)](#); and [Concluding Observations on UK, CEDAW Committee \(2013\)](#).
- 45 Northern Ireland Assembly (2016) [Addressing Bullying in Schools Act](#)
- 46 Further information on the Commission’s specific recommendations and priorities can be found at: <https://www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy>
- 47 ECNI Priority target groups for 2019-22 are: Minority Ethnic Groups (MEG); those with disabilities / special educational needs (SEN); Lesbian, Gay and Bisexuals (LGB); Females, Transgender.
- 48 ECNI (2017) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Education in Northern Ireland](#)
- 49 A summary of the findings of the Statement can be found in Section 2 of this paper.
- 50 DE supplied bespoke tables ‘Qualifications of school leavers by ethnic origin sub-categories (2007/08-2014/15)
- 51 DENI (2017) [Statistical bulletin 6/2016 Qualifications and destinations of Northern Ireland school leavers](#)
- 52 Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons et al (2010) Early Childhood Matters: evidence from the effective pre-school and primary education project, cited in [Northern Ireland Assembly Research Paper \(2013\) Early Years Provision, NIAR 68-13](#)
- 53 EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) [Final Report](#)
- 54 The Education and Training Inspectorate (2013) An Evaluation of Extended Schools - [Chief Inspector’s Report 2012-2014](#), p26

- 55 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016) [A prosperous, poverty free Northern Ireland](#)
- 56 Further information on the Commission's specific recommendations and priorities can be found at: <https://www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy>
- 57 ECNI Priority target groups for 2019-22 are: Travellers, Roma and Newcomers. The Commission also recommends priority action to address wider barriers which should benefit all pupils, inter alia, boys; those with disabilities/special educational needs (SEN); and those entitled to FSM including boys and Protestant boys. For further information see <https://www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy>.
- 58 For example, Section 75, A Guide for Public Authorities, ECNI, 2010 and A Unified Guide to Promoting Equal Opportunities in Employment, ECNI, 2013
- 59 Section 75 – Acting on the Evidence of Public Authority Practices, ECNI 2018, page 36; Section 75: Demonstrating Effective Leadership, ECNI, 2018
- 60 Section 75 – Acting on the Evidence of public authority practices, ECNI, 2018, page 36.
- 61 Only 2% disagreed, 12% neither agreed nor disagreed and 29% didn't know. See ECNI (2018) Equality Awareness in Northern Ireland: General public, p.45. ECNI: Belfast. Available at: <https://www.equalityni.org/Delivering-Equality/Equality-Awareness-Survey>
- 62 A fifth (20%) disagreed, 15% neither agreed nor disagreed and 33% didn't know. See ECNI (2018) Equality Awareness in Northern Ireland: General public, p.44. ECNI: Belfast. Available at: <https://www.equalityni.org/Delivering-Equality/Equality-Awareness-Survey>
- 63 ECNI (2018) Equality Awareness in Northern Ireland: General public, p.32. ECNI: Belfast. Available at: <https://www.equalityni.org/Delivering-Equality/Equality-Awareness-Survey>

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