



Equality Screening Template – Section 75 of Northern Ireland Act 1998

Please complete the coversheet details below:

Policy title: Vocational Qualification Reform

Decision (delete as appropriate)

Policy screened out **without** mitigation or an alternative policy adopted

Contact: Rebecca Cope, Vocational Qualification Reform Branch

Date of completion: 1 September 2022

Content

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues.

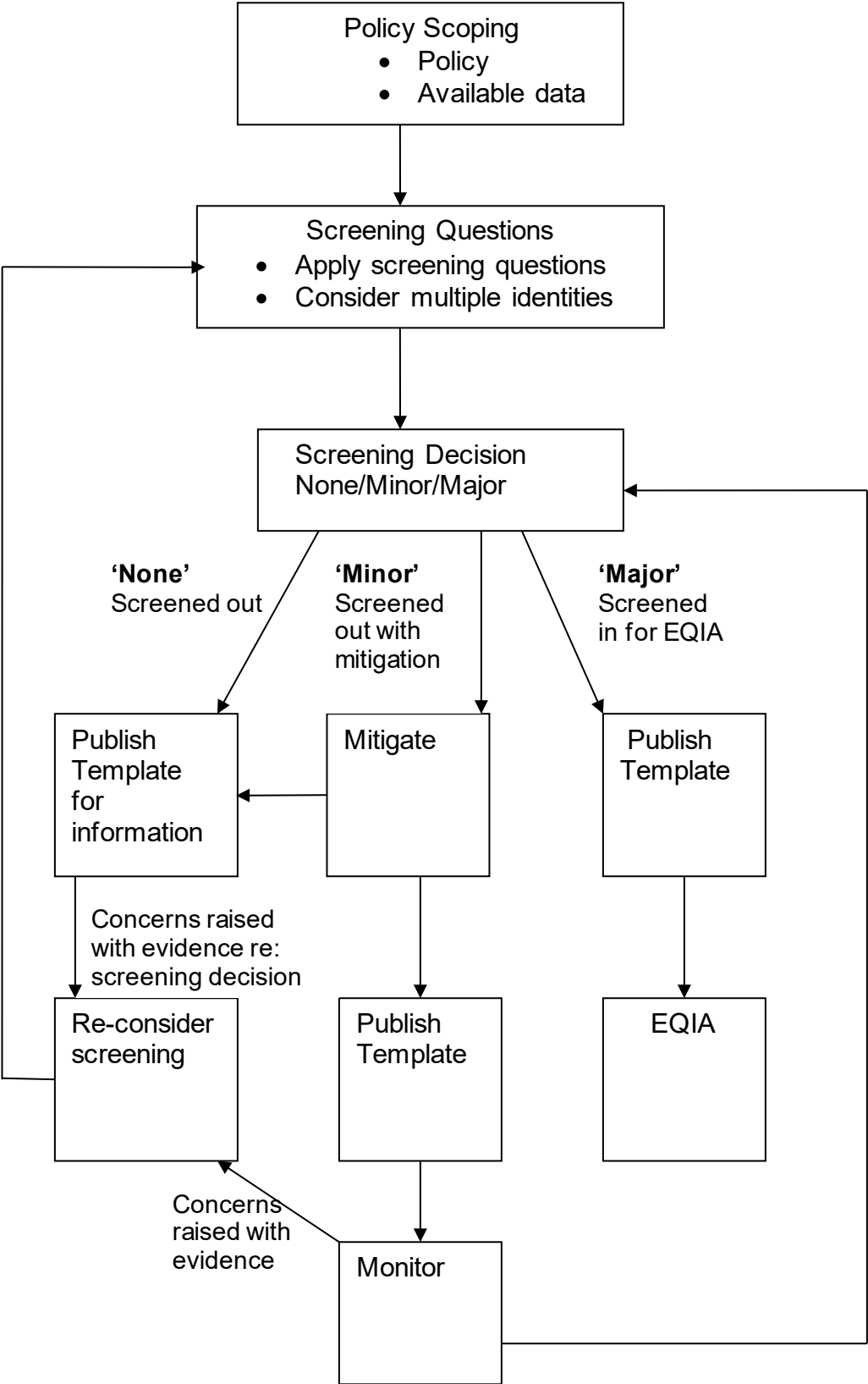
Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the

likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Approval and authorisation – verifies the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

Flowchart for the equality screening process and decision.



Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

Vocational Qualification Reform (VQR)

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

Revised

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

The overarching aim of the project is to reform Northern Ireland's vocational qualification (VQ) suite so that it will reflect not only the current policy landscape for VQs in the UK but also address the needs and challenges posed in a post-COVID and post-EU exit labour and training market. We have an opportunity to ensure that Northern Ireland has a high-quality vocational education system delivering vocational qualifications which are supported by key stakeholders and meet the needs of learners and the local economy. We want to ensure vocational qualifications are flexible and accessible to everyone.

Some of the key aims of the project include:

- A clearer and more navigable system;
- A suite of high quality vocational qualifications that meet the needs of the Northern Ireland economy, learners and employers; and
- A suite of qualifications that provide the skills needed by individuals to thrive in their lives and careers.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?
If so, explain how.

All Section 75 categories will benefit from the reform of vocational qualifications. It is intended that the policy will improve the vocational education system, providing a simplified, easier to access system that will not exclude nor segregate any particular group.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

Policy originated in Department for Employment and Learning. Any new or revised strategy or policy will be drafted by the Vocational Qualification Reform team, Department for the Economy (DfE).

Who owns and who implements the policy?

Department for Economy owns the policy and Vocational Qualifications Reform branch and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) Regulation as well as qualification providers such as colleges, schools and training organisations will be involved in implementation.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

If yes, are they (please delete as appropriate)

financial

legislative

other, please specify _____

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? (please delete as appropriate)

staff

service users

other public sector organisations

voluntary/community/trade unions

other, please specify _____

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

What are they?

- Independent Review of Education (DE)
- The Skills Strategy
- Apprenticeships NI
- The review of Further Education
- Traineeships
- The 10x Strategy

Who owns them?

The Department of Education is responsible for the Independent Review of Education. DfE are responsible for the other policies and reviews

DfE Higher Education and Further Education policies are all relative, however there are a range of initiatives within DfE and delivered by other organisations that can contribute to vocational qualification reform including those outlined above.

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data. The Commission has produced this guide to [signpost to S75 data](#).

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

In taking forward the vocation qualification review, information from a range of sources has been examined and used to inform its proposals. These comprise:

- Stranmillis Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement undertook a literature review of assessment in vocational qualifications;
- CCEA Regulation carried out research into other high performing vocational qualification systems; and
- DfE carried out three online stakeholder events (externally facilitated) with a range of key stakeholders, including Employers, Colleges, Training Providers, DE etc.

A project Board with representatives of a diverse range of views on vocational qualifications was established to inform the work of the review.

Religious belief evidence / information:

The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on religious belief. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

The revised system will put in place measures designed to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and help people into education and employment and promote good practices regardless of their religious belief.

The public consultation will be available to all interested stakeholders.

Political Opinion evidence / information:

The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on their political opinion. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

The revised system will put in place measures designed to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and help people into education and employment and promote good practices regardless of their political opinion.

MLAs from a range of political parties sit on the Economy Committee which is updated regularly with progress.

The public consultation will be available to all interested stakeholders.

Racial Group evidence / information:

The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on race. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

The revised system will put in place measures designed to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and help people into education and employment and promote good practices regardless of their political opinion.

The public consultation will be available to all interested stakeholders.

Age evidence / information:

The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on age. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

Vocational qualifications, levels 1-3, tend to attract aged 16–18-year-olds because of the systems entry criteria. However, this system offers a spectrum of support to all age groups, who can avail of vocational qualifications through various Department led programmes and a range of educational settings. One of the key principles of the VQ consultation is to ensure all qualifications support flexible delivery, access to all and encourage lifelong learning.

The revised system will put in place measures designed to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and help people into education and employment and promote good practices regardless of their age.

The stakeholder consultation will be available to all interested stakeholders

Marital Status evidence / information:

The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on marital status. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

The Department currently has no data on the participation of vocational qualifications by people of differing marital status.

The public consultation will be available to all interested stakeholders.

Sexual Orientation evidence / information:

The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on sexual orientation. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

The Department currently has no data on the participation of vocational qualifications by people of differing sexual orientation.

The public consultation will be available to all interested stakeholders.

Men & Women generally evidence / information:

The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on gender. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

The most recent Further Education statistical bulletin for 2020/21 has reported a near even split of enrolments between males (49%) and females (51%). Further education colleges are the biggest provider of VQs in Northern Ireland, therefore, these figures suggest that nobody will be adversely affected based on gender.

The current review will ensure access to VQs is available to everyone in this category. The public consultation will be available to all interested stakeholders.

Disability evidence / information:

The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on disability. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

However, it is worth noting, there is no comprehensive register of people with disabilities in Northern Ireland, and this is compounded by the fact that students must self-declare their disability. It is therefore difficult to accurately gauge the number of disabled students. Evidence from the NI Labour Force survey indicates that disabled people continue to be disadvantaged in terms of education, with 27% of working age, disabled people having no qualifications in comparison to 10% of people without a disability.

The public consultation will be available to all interested stakeholders.

Dependants evidence / information:

The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on having dependant responsibilities. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

The Department currently has no data on the participation by people with and without dependents.

The public consultation will be available to all interested stakeholders.

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Religious belief

The proposals contained within the consultation are intended to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and help individuals into employment and promote good employment practices, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

The consultation addresses access to VQ by delivering it through a range of educational settings, spread geographically throughout Northern Ireland that will have a positive effect in terms of promoting equality of opportunity between individuals of different religious beliefs in particular sections of the population which are under-represented.

Political Opinion

The proposals contained within the consultation are intended to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and help individuals into employment and promote good employment practices, irrespective of their political opinion.

The consultation addresses access to VQ by delivering it through a range of educational settings, widespread geographically throughout Northern Ireland that will have a positive effect in terms of promoting equality of opportunity between individuals of different political opinion in particular sections of the population which are under-represented.

Racial Group

The proposals contained within the consultation are intended to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning,

research and skills training; and help individuals into employment and promote good employment practices, irrespective of race.

The consultation addresses access to VQ by delivering it through a range of educational settings, widespread geographically throughout Northern Ireland that will have a positive effect in terms of promoting equality of opportunity between individuals of different race in particular sections of the population which are under-represented.

Age

Many people in the over 25 age group are reluctant to return to education as they see themselves as finished with it. Both adult returners and work-based learners fall into this category. One of the key aspects of the new Skills Strategy is to promote lifelong learning.

Likewise, one of the main principles of the VQ consultation is to ensure all qualifications support flexible delivery and access to all.

Marital status

A key feature of vocational education, and its qualifications, is inclusivity. The consultation aims to ensure vocational qualifications support flexible delivery and are for everyone. It also offers opportunities for those who have faced barriers in their educational journey and require an alternative pathway to reengage them in the education system regardless of marital status.

Sexual orientation

The proposals contained within the consultation are intended to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and help individuals into employment and promote good employment practices, irrespective of sexual orientation.

The consultation addresses access to VQ by delivering it through a range of educational settings, widespread geographically throughout Northern Ireland that will have a positive effect in terms of promoting equality of opportunity between individuals of different sexual orientation in particular sections of the

population which are under-represented.

Men and Women Generally

The policy will aim to raise aspiration and attainment targeted at individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and will have a positive effect in terms of promoting equality of opportunity regardless of gender.

Disability

The consultation will aim to raise aspiration and attainment targeted at individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and will have a positive effect in terms of promoting equality of opportunity regardless of disability by providing additional support in during periods of transition.

A key aim of VQ reform is flexibility. The flexibility offered by vocational qualifications ensures that all learners no matter their learning preference, ability or personal circumstances have the opportunity to access the qualifications they need. It is therefore important that all vocational qualifications delivered in Northern Ireland continue to accommodate reasonable adjustments where possible and can offer equal access to all learners.

Dependants

The proposals contained within the consultation are intended to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and help individuals into employment and promote good employment practices, irrespective of dependant responsibilities.

The consultation addresses access to VQs and highlights the importance of supporting inclusion by offering an alternative pathway for learners who prefer a more practical approach to learning or need more flexible delivery models such as part time study or in-work learning. The consultation promotes equality of opportunity between individuals with dependants in particular sections of the population which are under-represented, ensuring access for all.

Part 2. Screening questions

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the Screening Questions 1-4, which follow.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are

concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;

- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?

Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age**:

All age groups including adult learners will benefit from the reform of vocational qualifications. It is intended that the policy will improve the vocational education system, providing a simplified, easier to access system that will not exclude nor segregate any particular group

What is the level of impact? Minor positive / (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants**:

Those with dependants will benefit from the reform of vocational qualifications. It is intended that the policy will improve the vocational education system, providing a simplified, easier to access system that will not exclude nor segregate any particular group. What is the level of impact? Minor positive / (delete as appropriate)

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories? Yes/No

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of opportunity for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: All Section 75 categories will benefit from the reform of vocational qualifications. It is intended that the policy will improve the vocational education system, providing a simplified, easier to access system that will not exclude nor segregate any particular group.

Political Opinion –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on political opinion. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

Racial Group –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on Race. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

Age –

If Yes, provide details: All age groups including adult learners will benefit from the reform of vocational qualifications. It is intended that the policy will improve the vocational education system, providing a simplified, easier to access system that will not exclude nor segregate any particular group.

If No, provide reasons:

Marital Status –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on marital status. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

Sexual Orientation –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on sexual orientation. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

Men and Women generally –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on gender. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

Disability –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: The current vocational qualification provision does not exclude anyone based on disability. We do not envisage this will change because of VQ reform.

Dependants –

If Yes, provide details: Those with dependants will benefit from the reform of vocational qualifications. It is intended that the policy will improve the vocational education system, providing a simplified, easier to access system that will not exclude nor segregate any particular group.

If No, provide reasons:

3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**:

(insert text here)

What is the level of impact? / None (delete as appropriate)

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: At this early stage, the Branch is not aware of any evidence that potential outcomes will adversely affect good relations between people of different religious beliefs.

Political Opinion –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: At this early stage, the Branch is not aware of any evidence that potential outcomes will adversely affect good relations between people of different religious beliefs.

Racial Group –

If Yes, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: At this early stage, the Branch is not aware of any evidence that potential outcomes will adversely affect good relations between people of different religious beliefs.

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

- Nothing further to what has been outlined above

Part 3. Screening decision

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

- It is expected that the policy will have a positive impact contributing to overall equality of opportunity, and therefore an equality impact assessment is not required.
- The proposals contained within the policy are intended to help promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and help individuals into employment and promote good employment practices, irrespective of identity.
- The policy addresses access to VQ by delivering it through a range of educational settings, spread geographically throughout Northern Ireland that will have a positive effect in terms of promoting equality of opportunity between individuals. Therefore, all Section 75 categories will benefit from the reform of vocational qualifications. It is intended that the policy will improve the vocational education system, providing a simplified, easier to access system that will not exclude nor segregate any particular group.

The Department intends to issue a consultation on the policy later this year.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced - please provide details.

- Mitigation or alternative policies are not required as vocational qualification reform can make a positive contribution to overall equality of opportunity.

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

- Not applicable – equality impact assessment not required.

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of

opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

If so, **give the reasons** to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

- The review of vocational qualifications can make a positive contribution to overall equality of opportunity, therefore, mitigation or an alternative policy is not required. While this policy is not directly related to the promotion of good relations between different religious beliefs it would be hoped that by helping to integrate more people into sustained work, a consequence of this could be to improve good relations for people of within the relevant Section 75 groups. Therefore, mitigation or an alternative policy is not required.

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been '**screened in**' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

- N/A- Policy Screened Out

Priority criterion – Rating (1-3)

Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations -

Social need -

Effect on people's daily lives -

Relevance to a public authority's functions –

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

If yes, please provide details.

N/A

Part 4. Monitoring

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

- The strategy will be monitored throughout its further development and implementation to ensure any outcomes are identified and assessed for their impact on equality of opportunity.
- The proposed reforms are subject to consultation and may be amended in light of information obtained. If there are significant changes to the current proposals a revised equality screening will be undertaken.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by: Elaine Murphy

Position/Job Title: DP

Business Area/ Branch: Vocational Qualification Reform Branch

Date: 1 September 2022

Approved by: Rebecca Cope

Position/Job Title: G7

Business Area/Branch: Vocational Qualification Reform Branch

Date: 17 September 2022

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.