

LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report 2014-15

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

www.lra.org.uk

Signature:

This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between April 2014 and March 2015

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

- 1 In 2014-15, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

The Labour Relations Agency is an executive Non-Departmental Public Body, established in 1976 under the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 and continued by the Industrial Relations Order (Northern Ireland) 1992, and is sponsored by the Department for Employment and Learning. The Agency's principal activities are to assist employers, employees and their representatives to improve the conduct of their employment relations. The Agency provides effective, impartial and confidential services to those engaged in industry, commerce and the public services in Northern Ireland, those services include:

- ✓ Advice and assistance on all aspects of employment relations and employment practices
- ✓ Comprehensive conciliation, arbitration and mediation facilities for resolving both individual and collective disputes.

Without prejudice to the obligations above the Agency are required, under Article 69(3) of the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (as amended), to pay the Certification Officer's remuneration, allowances and provide human resources support services. The Certification Officer's functions are contained in the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (as amended) and in the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the Employment Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland, we are required to have due regard to the promotion of good relations and equality of opportunity towards persons of:

- ✓ people with different religious belief
- ✓ people of political opinion
- ✓ people of different racial groups
- ✓ people of different ages
- ✓ people of different marital status
- ✓ people of different sexual orientation
- ✓ men and women generally
- ✓ people with a disability and people without
- ✓ people with dependents and people without

The Agency incorporated several strategies into our Corporate Planning process for 2014-2017 mainstreaming equality and good relations. Specifically 'Strategic Aim 3: Support the operation of fair, harmonious and effective workplaces'. **The Agency's Corporate Plan is appended as Annex A in support of the report.**

PART A

2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2014-15 (or append the plan with progress/examples identified).

ACTION/MEASURE IN THE YEAR 2014-2015	THOSE AFFECTED	IMPACT
Fair Employment Monitoring Return	Staff and Applicants for Vacancies	Balance acceptable
Article 55 Triennial monitoring report	Staff and Applicants for Vacancies	In process of updating and re-issue
Equality included in report of Audit Committee Chair to Board	LRA Board, LRA Audit Committee, Section 75 Groups	Maintained Commitment
Review of Audit of Inequalities / Equality Risk Assessment	LRA Board, LRA Audit Committee, Section 75 Groups	Maintained Commitment
Annual Meeting of Board and Equality Commission (postponed to 2015-2016)	LRA Board and ECNI	Identify common areas of policy and practice
Board Training in Section 75 / Equality	LRA Board	Ensured strategic focus on Equality matters
Equality related objectives in Corporate / Business Plans	LRA Board and Senior Management Team	Ensures strategic focus on Equality matters
Equality embedded in Learning and Development Plan	LRA Staff	Assurance that staff receive continuous updates and refresher training regarding equality matters
Training on Equality commitments carried out for Board and Arbitrators in the reporting year	Board and Arbitrators	Embedding equality objectives at a strategic and operational level
Review of recruitment documentation to ensure disabled people are positively portrayed	LRA Staff and potential applicants	Ensured equality rights were embedded in strategic procedure
Corporate Social Responsibility Policy	Citizens and Stakeholders	Establishes a community dimension for the organisation

PART A

3 Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2014-15 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes No (go to Q.4) Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

- ✓ Our Consultation list was reviewed in the Autumn of 2014 and extended to include all new and emerging S75 Equality Groups, in particular representative groups within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people (LGBT) were updated
- ✓ The Agency training plan ensured refresher training on Section 75 was extended to Agency Board and staff
- ✓ Equality training further extended to approved Arbitrators

3a With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

The policy changes further embedded equality principles in all of the Labour Relations Agency policies and procedures and are considered to have a beneficial impact on all section 75 categories, for example, in recruitment, all panels will have a clearer focus on the needs of people presenting with access or mobility issues. In the case of Arbitrations, arbitrators will be more aware of their responsibilities in dealing with appeals involving a disability or indeed accommodating those with disabilities at appeal hearings.

3b What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)*

- As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

- As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

- As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

- As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details):*

- Other *(please specify and give details):*

Arrangements were put in place to facilitate flexible home working and travel to work arrangements for disabled staff.

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

- 4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2014-15 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*
- Yes, organisation wide
 - Yes, some departments/jobs
 - No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
 - No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
 - Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2014-15 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- 5 Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
 - No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
 - Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

- Disability Action Plan objectives were included in bi-monthly report to the Board. Audit of inequalities re-performed as part of risk register review.

PART A

- 6 In the 2014-15 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, in some departments/jobs
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2013-14 report
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Corporate Plan attached Annex A

Equality action plans/measures

- 7 Within the 2014-15 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed: Actions ongoing: Actions to commence:

Please provide any details and examples *(in addition to question 2)*:

All in Q2

- 8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2014-15 reporting period *(points not identified in an appended plan)*:

See Annex B (2014/15 Equality Risk Assessment)

- 9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2014-15 reporting period, the following have been identified: *(tick all that apply)*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
<input type="checkbox"/>	Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

10 Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)*

	<input type="checkbox"/>	All the time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never

11 Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2014-15 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

We have a consultation list and use this in the main for commentaries on screening exercises. We also put information such as this on our website and would have the intention of putting this on our intranet so that staff are also involved in the consultation process.

12 In the 2014-15 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: *(tick all that apply)*

- Face to face meetings
- Focus groups
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- Questionnaires
- Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation
- Internet discussions
- Telephone consultations
- Other *(please specify)*:

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees’ membership of particular Section 75 categories:

Response levels can be low but are generally in writing.

13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2014-15 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2014-15 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes No Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

The Agency utilises email as the preferred communication method of consultation but in tandem with publication on its website www.lra.org.uk

15 Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year *(as recorded in screening reports)*:

3

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2014-15:

0	Policy consultations conducted with screening assessment presented.
0	Policy consultations conducted with an equality impact assessment (EQIA) presented.
0	Consultations for an EQIA alone.

17 Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

None were issued for consultation because any matters relevant to section 75 had been subject to amendment and therefore these policies were screened out.

18 Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes No concerns were raised No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

19 Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2014-15 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

20 From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2014-15 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes No, already taken place
 No, scheduled to take place at a later date Not applicable

Please provide any details:

The specification for our new case management system was rigorously assessed for opportunities to include equality content and adjusted accordingly; this included a Helpline referral system.

21 In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

22 Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2014-15 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

In autumn 20014-15 the Agency undertook a risk assessment of its equality practices and procedures and included its findings in the Ira's corporate risk register which was approved by the Audit Committee and the Board. See appended Annex B.

- 23 Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:**

Implementation of a new IT Case Management System introduced now captures equality category data to enable service improvements

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

- 24** Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2014-15, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

EQUALITY RELATED TRAINING 2014/15

Topic	No. Staff Attendees
Women's Leadership Programme	1
Women's Leadership Conference	1
Dignity at Work	64
Equality for Migrant Workers Workshop	2
Section 75 Screening Training	14
Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties	2
Autism Workshop	1
Disability Discrimination Act	1
Working with those with Criminal Convictions	17
Mental Health Awareness	5
Disability Action Plans	1
Deaf Awareness	3
Shared Parental leave	4
Board Training on Section 75 Duties	15
Arbitrator Training on Section 75 Duties	20 (approx.)

- 25** Please provide any examples of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

Of particular note was the training aimed at a strategic level to the Board and appointed Arbitrators

Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)

- 26** Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2014-15, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

Internal monitoring of systems specifications led to fundamental design inclusions in the new case management system.

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

27 How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2014-15?

Insert number here:

0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Section 3: Looking Forward

28 Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

2017

29 Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

Review of Staff Survey results in relation to Equality related responses

30 In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2015-16) reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

- Employment
- Goods, facilities and services
- Legislative changes
- Organisational changes/ new functions
- Nothing specific, more of the same
- Other (please state):



LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY

CORPORATE PLAN

2014-2017

Enabling Effective Employment Relations

1. This Corporate Plan covers the three-year period from April 2014 to March 2017. It sets out how the Agency intends to contribute to improving employment relations by working in partnership with key stakeholders, clients, customers and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). Through improving employment relations the Agency aims to contribute to the Northern Ireland Executive's vision for 2030.

2. Workplaces in Northern Ireland (NI) are facing considerable challenges. While the local economy is showing signs of improvement, growth predictions for NI in 2013 and 2014 are below those of the UK. Productivity and overall employment rates remain significantly lower in NI than in the rest of the UK. Consequently improving employability, productivity and increasing employment opportunity remain economic and social imperatives.

3. It appears that over the 2014-2017 period government budgetary pressures will continue to have adverse impacts on both the private and public sectors. In the private sector it is estimated that the recovery in employment will be slow. In the public sector industrial relations are likely to be tested given the financial restraint and the considerable challenges of organisational change.

4. The purpose of this corporate plan is to contribute to the NI Executive's aim of developing the NI economy. We shall continue, alongside the NI Assembly, Executive and DEL, to contribute to policy formulation on the most appropriate employment relations system for Northern Ireland. We will promote effective employment relations and employment best practice by supporting positive relations between employers and workers while providing objective and fair means of redress in resolving disputes.

5. The challenge of supporting a growing economy are considerable, however the Agency Board, Management and staff are highly committed to ensuring the improvement of employment relations in Northern Ireland through our engagement with key stakeholders and in particular with the social partners.

Chairman
Jim McCusker

Chief Executive
Bill Patterson

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1. The Labour Relations Agency

1.1 Mission, Values and Equality

Mission Statement

1.1.1 To improve employment relations, promote best employment practice and resolve workplace disputes through the delivery of quality, impartial and independent services.

Core Values

1.1.2 The Agency will:

- be accessible;
- respond to customer needs;
- be open and accountable;
- act promptly;
- be professional;
- behave with integrity;
- maintain confidentiality;
- respect **diversity and opinions**;
- **value, consult and involve staff**;
- demonstrate value for money.

Equality Statement

1.1.3 The Labour Relations Agency, in line with our Equality Scheme as approved by the Equality Commission in May 2012, is fully committed to supporting the elimination of all forms of discrimination in employment and to using its services to help secure the objectives of fair employment, equal opportunity and good relations. **The Agency is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity, recognising diversity, treating everyone fairly and without discrimination.** As a provider of services the Agency includes equality of treatment as a fundamental principle of good employment relations and best employment practice. As an employer the Agency seeks to ensure that its employment policies, procedures and practices conform to good practice as outlined in relevant Codes of Practice. **The Agency by July of each year ensures that all its commitments set out in the Equality Scheme have been adequately addressed and that all necessary equality monitoring returns have been completed and issued.** The Agency's Equality Scheme is available on the Agency's website (www.lra.org.uk).

1.2 The Nature and Function of the Agency

1.2.1 The Labour Relations Agency (the Agency) is a non departmental public body. It has a Board comprising a Chairman and nine members. Members of the Board are public appointees appointed on the basis of their expertise in employment relations. Board members are drawn from business, the trades unions, management, the legal profession and academia. The Agency is independent of Government and is responsible for promoting the improvement of employment relations in Northern Ireland (NI). Employing 63 members of staff the Agency is sponsored by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

1.3 Corporate Governance

1.3.1 The Board of the Agency holds at least ten meetings per annum normally on a monthly basis and has appointed three committees, an Audit Committee, a Finance and Personnel Sub-Committee and a Research Committee all of which normally meet four times per annum. The establishment of the three committees assists the Board in meeting its statutory obligations and corporate governance commitments in overseeing the probity and regularity of funding as well as ensuring that appropriate resources are made available to allow for the effective management and delivery of Agency services.

1.3.2 The Board of the Agency ensures that the Agency fulfils its role as part of the NI economic and social infrastructure by partnering with other stakeholders, such as:

- Northern Ireland Committee of Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC ICTU);
- Confederation of British Industry (CBI);
- Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI)
- Invest Northern Ireland (INI);
- HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
- Department for Employment and Learning (DEL); and
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI).

1.3.3 The Chairman of the Board, Board Members and the Agency Chief Executive meet with the DEL Minister and DEL Permanent Secretary on an annual basis to review employment relations and the role of the Agency.

1.3.4 The Chief Executive (CEO) implements Agency policy and manages organisational performance through a Senior Management Team (SMT) comprising the CEO and three Directors. The CEO as Accounting Officer supported by the Director Corporate Services meets with our sponsoring Department, the Department for Employment and Learning, on a quarterly basis.

1.4 Agency Funding

1.4.1 At the time of writing the public sector in Northern Ireland is governed by the NI Executive Budget 2011-15 published on 7 March 2011. The backdrop was the significant reduction in the levels of funding available as a result of the UK Government's deficit reduction plan. The impact of this budget for DEL resulted in an estimated budget reduction in 2011-12 of some £24m less than that provided in 2010-11, some £32m less in 2012-13 and some £13m less in 2013-14. The allocation improves at the end of the period showing an increase of some £15m over the baseline for 2010-11 but in overall terms there is a cash reduction of some £53m over the four year period.

1.4.2 The Agency budget allocation from DEL 2010-11 was £3.745m. The Agency budget allocation 2011-12 through to 2014-15 is fixed at £3.545m per annum a reduction of 5.3%. Taking into account increases in the cost of living the Agency's discretionary spend has reduced by considerably more than 5.3%. At the time of writing there is no indication of an easing of the Agency's current budget allocation. The future budget allocation to the Agency remains uncertain for the period of this corporate plan. It is noted that the reduction in funding is limiting the Agency's contribution at a time when services to help the economy climb out of recession are most needed. It is Agency policy to seek to maintain its capacity to secure value for money employment relations services.

PART A

1.4.3 The Agency is currently in discussions with DEL in respect of the funding allocation to the Agency and in relation to the allocated resources required to meet the programmes of work set out in this corporate plan and in particular the additional work to be undertaken as a result of the DEL Review of Employment Law and the DEL McClure Watters Report on the support needed by SMEs. The Agency shares the view of the Minister that 'the focus should be on achieving the majority of any savings through improvements in efficiency rather than reductions to services and that we seek to protect jobs in the public sector at a time of limited employment opportunity in the private sector'.

1.4.4 In light of these priorities this Corporate Plan 2014-17 and the Agency annual Business Plans 2014-17 will remain subject to in-year review as informed by discussions with DEL.

1.5 Agency Workload Trends

1.5.1 The trends in relation to the demand for Agency services are set out in Illustrations 1-12 (see appendix). The points of note are as follows:

Helpline

The number of enquiries dealt with by the Agency Helpline 2012-13 was 56,727. This was the highest number of enquiries dealt with over recent years. The number of calls received is down from 27,730 during 2010/11 to 23,234 during 2012-13 (Illustration 1). This level of demand remains considerable.

Advisory In-Company Assistance

Over recent years in-company assistance has increasingly comprised complex work on employment handbooks. The volume of cases has steadied at around 220 cases per annum (Illustration 2).

Workshops/Seminars

From 2009/10 the number of workshops has reduced to an average of 15 per annum (Illustration 3). Given the reduction in workshops the range of good practice seminars was increased. During the 2012/13 performance year 171 seminars were held (Illustration 4).

WEB

The Agency website continues to see steady traffic volumes with 606,494 page views and 44,009 downloads during 2012-13.

Religious and Political Discrimination

The number of complaints of religious and political discrimination cases received by the Agency has remained on average at 150 cases per annum 2010-2013 (Illustration 5).

Individual Conciliation

Taking out 'bulk' cases (i.e. a high volume of cases all relating to the same dispute) the number of individual conciliation cases received by the Agency remains at a demanding level i.e. between 5000 to 7000 cases per annum (Illustration 6). The majority of cases relate to unfair dismissal.

Collective Conciliation

The number of collective conciliation cases dealt with by the Agency remains within the range of 15 to 30 cases per annum 2010-2013 (Illustration 10).

Arbitration

Illustration 11 indicates that 36 arbitration cases were received in 2010-11; 48 in 2011-12 and 36 in 2012-13.

Mediation

Mediation is a growing service with requests rising from 59 in 2011-12 to 85 in 2012-13.

Statutory Arbitration

Statutory arbitration is an area of work that will require promotion. During 2012-13 five cases were received with 3 hearings concluded.

1.5.2 The following points can be drawn from recent Agency workload trends:

- There continues to be high demand for the resolution of individual rights disputes with unfair dismissal cases being the most prevalent. Supporting pre-claim conciliation and gaining conciliation input at the earliest remains a priority.
- The Agency would hope to see an increase in demand for workshops once the impact of the recession has passed. However there is a need to build on seminar attendance with a more strategic approach to SMEs.
- Mediation (the resolution of inter- personal disputes) remains an increasing area of work. This illustrates the need to focus on the promotion and facilitation of in-house alternative dispute resolution systems.
- Agency services are most effective when practiced face to face however there remains the challenge of the digital world both internally and externally.

2. The NI Economy and Employment Relations

2.1 The LRA Contribution

2.1.1 A recent independent Social Return on Investment (SROI) study found that the Agency, on the basis of indicative data, had a positive economic and social return of one to ten, that is, for every pound invested in the Agency there was ten pounds worth of social value generated to employers, employees and the state in NI. There is a need to embed the SROI methodology in order to:

- (1) provide live data as the basis of measuring SROI;
- (2) develop a reliable platform for providing, on an ongoing basis, SROI values as a contribution to indicating Agency value for money and
- (3) use SROI indicators to improve added value.

2.1.2 On the wider front the Agency is committed to supporting and contributing to the NI Executive Economic Vision for the Northern Ireland economy of 2030 in being 'An economy characterised by a sustainable and growing private sector, where a greater number of firms compete in global markets and there is growing employment and prosperity for all'. In line with the vision for 2030 the Agency will contribute to the improvement of employment relations skills and thereby the employability and productivity of the NI workforce. The improvement of employment relations will also contribute to business growth. In particular the Agency will engage with the developing areas of the economy e.g. Telecommunications & ICT; Agrifood; Advanced Materials; Advanced Engineering; Creative Industries; Tourism; the Social Economy and the Rural Economy.

2.1.3 The work of the Agency also relates to the employment relations aspect of the following Programme for Government Public Service Agreement aim (PSA3).

Subject to economic conditions; increase employment levels and reduce economic inactivity by addressing the barriers to employment and providing effective careers advice at all levels.

2.1.4 The Agency contributes to this aim through promoting good employment relations practice and resolving employment disputes. Acknowledging the fact that the Northern Ireland regional economy is dominated by small and medium sized organisations (SMEs) the Agency will be devoting substantial resource and will pay particular attention to assisting and supporting SMEs through our information helpline and the delivery of regular workshops and seminars. We will continue to address critical employment issues through the publication of Codes of Practice, Good Practice Guidelines and the Labour Relations Agency WEB.

2.1.5 With regard to the public sector significant change will result from public spending efficiencies and from the ongoing impact of the Review of Public Administration. Recognising the significant role played by the public sector in Northern Ireland the Agency will assist public sector employers and trades unions in addressing the public sector change agenda. Change will impact across the public sector; however local government, housing and education are likely to be most affected.

PART A

2.1.6 Another major operational area for the Agency is dispute resolution. The Agency directly contributes to NI economic performance by resolving disputes as close to source as possible. Our extensive conciliation, mediation and arbitration services are in heavy daily demand. It is through the early, non-adversarial, resolution of employment disputes that considerable time and costs are saved for employers, employees and their representatives. Subject to the outcome of the current DEL consultation on the Review of Employment Law the Agency aims to expand its dispute resolution services, given the potential re-routing of tribunal claims, in the first instance, to the Agency.

2.2 The NI Economy and Labour Market

2.2.1 According to the DETI Monthly Economic Update – February 2014 Northern Ireland continues to be affected by challenging global and national economic conditions. The latest quarterly output figures for manufacturing, services and construction suggest that the local economy continues to struggle to make a firm recovery. The data continues to suggest that NI remains more adversely affected by current conditions than the UK overall.

LABOUR MARKET OVERVIEW (May – July 2013)

Measure	Value	Comment
Employment	807,000	Up 8,000 over the year
Employment Rate	67.6%	Below the UK average rate of 72.1%
Employee Jobs *	703,020	Over 3,000 more jobs in last quarter
Claimant Count **	58,700	Equivalent to 6.5% of NI workforce
Unemployment Rate	7.4%	Down 0.5 percentage points over yr
Economically Inactive	560,000	Rose by 5,000 over the year
Inactivity Rate	26.9%	Highest of UK regions – UK 22.1%
Redundancies ***	1,909	Decrease of 45% from previous yr

*Sept 2013

**Jan 2014

***Annual total up to end of Jan 2014

The local labour market reflects relatively little growth. The employment rate continues to be below the UK average. Economic commentators predict that the Northern Ireland economy will record lessor levels of economic growth in 2014 than the UK.

2.2.2 As the above Labour Market Overview reflects the NI economy is likely to remain in a fragile state in the short to medium term. It is also highly probable that cuts in public spending, however delivered, will impact adversely on economic performance. Significantly one of the keys in accelerating this growth will be improvements in employment relations skills. The promotion of greater employee engagement and voice in the workplace coupled with the implementation of good employment practice will enhance employer confidence in avoiding and dealing with employment disputes. Developments in these areas will contribute to creating the dynamic and innovative economy that lies at the heart of the aims of the NI Programme for Government.

2.3 Employment Legislation 2014-17

2.3.1 The employment law agenda for the Agency's Corporate Plan 2014-2017 will largely be determined by the outcome of the DEL public consultation on the Employment Law Review which closed on 5 November 2013. The review covers key issues such as:

- the re-routing of tribunal claims to the Agency/Early Conciliation;
- the development of a LRA neutral assessment service;
- the qualification period for claiming unfair dismissal and the compensatory award;
- the consultation periods and provisions regarding collective redundancies;
- compromise agreements introducing a law on protected conversations and
- the law on Public Interest Disclosure legislation:

The Agency will be paying particular attention to these issues between 2014 and 2015.

2.3.2 Other areas sit outside the DEL Review. They include:

- the right to request flexible working;
- the introduction of shared parental leave;
- pilot mediation schemes;
- a SME employment law compliance voucher scheme;
- SME good employment practice proposals;
- industrial tribunal procedures;
- developments in areas of regulation such as working time and the conduct of employment agencies and businesses and
- amendments to the TUPE Regulations paying particular attention to the implications for public sector employment relations and the NI Review of Public Administration.

Although no specific timeframe has been attached to this agenda it is likely to span 2014-2016.

2.3.3 Tribunal fees and changes to tribunal panel arrangements have been introduced in GB and are most likely to be the subject of discussion in NI. Bills currently before parliament in GB include:

- the draft – De-regulation Bill;
- the Growth and Infrastructure Bill and
- the Transparency of lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill.

2.3.4 In 2015 the employment law agenda will be subject to a new government however the future agenda stemming from GB is likely to include:

- amendments to working time provisions;
- industrial action related legislation and
- new legislation related to the Human Rights Act.

2.4 Employment Relations Challenges

2.4.1 Taking into account the above background, stakeholder and staff comments and the wider employment relations trends the core challenges for the Agency over the next three years are:

- Improving employment relations skills within the workplace.
- Facilitating the use of in-house alternative dispute resolution processes
- Supporting the growth areas of the NI economy
- Developing project partnerships with key stakeholders
- Supporting parties in dealing with public sector change
- Addressing the challenge of digital communications and social media
- The continuous improvement of Agency frontline services
- The development of Agency staff skills and capability

3. Strategic Aims and Objectives 2014-17

3.1 In meeting our statutory responsibilities and addressing the employment relations and public policy challenges facing the Agency our strategic aims and objectives for the 2014-2017 are:

Strategic Aim 1: Promote better performance in organisations through improved employment relations and more effective dispute resolution.

Strategic Objective 1: The Agency is the preferred choice when organisations seek guidance on employment relations issues.

Business Impact:

To promote the services of the Agency a promotional strategy will be developed through contact with stakeholders and be in place by 31 October 2014. Particular attention is to be paid to the private sector.

Strategic Objective 2: Help prevent and resolve individual and collective workplace employment disputes relating to employment relations and employment rights.

Business Impact:

The Agency will address the new service challenges deriving from the DEL Review of Employment Law 2013.

Strategic Objective 3: Enhance the capacity of SME and Micro organisations to demonstrate good employment relations as a contribution to sustainable growth.

Business Impact:

The Agency will have a SME and Micro support strategy in place by 30 September 2014. The strategy will be assessed by 31 March 2017. The Agency will consult with DEL in addressing the outcomes of the McClure Watters Report on SMEs.

Strategic Objective 4: Support public sector organisations as they address the major employment relations challenges deriving from the public sector reform agenda.

Business Impact:

The Agency will develop its engagement with public sector organisations and will have in place by 31 December 2014 a public sector support programme to be implemented 2015-17. The programme will be assessed by 31 March 2017.

Strategic Aim 2: Inform public policy and debate on the economic and social value of good employment relations.

Strategic Objective 5: Contribute to the development of public policy including the design and development of a system of employment relations for Northern Ireland.

Business Impact:

Throughout 2014-17 the Agency will respond to Government Consultation documents as appropriate. The Agency will continue to partner with related public bodies and by 30 September 2014 will have commenced an on-going programme of active engagement with policy developers and decision makers having an interest in workplace relations.

Strategic Objective 6: Build partnerships with key stakeholders to expand LRA's reach and influence in improving employment relations.

Business Impact:

The Agency will continue to build on current partnerships and will commence 1 April 2014 a process of dialogue with key stakeholders with a view to developing partnership arrangements.

Strategic Objective 7: Act as a creative and innovative influence in the employment relations field

Business Impact:

The Agency will continue its Membership of the International Agencies Group and the Employee Relations Institute. The Agency will disseminate new thinking through seminars, annual lectures and the holding of an employment relations conference during 2015/17.

Strategic Aim 3: Support the operation of fair, harmonious and effective workplaces.

Strategic Objective 8: Alternative dispute resolution processes e.g. conciliation, mediation and arbitration are the norm for the third party resolution of all employment relations disputes.

Business Impact:

The Agency will commence a programme for supporting the introduction of in-house dispute resolution processes by 30 September 2014. The programme will be assessed annually.

Strategic Objective 9: Enhance the employment relations skills of managers and in particular first line owner managers/supervisors

Business Impact:

The Agency will further develop its programme of events to enhance the people skills of first line owner managers/supervisors by 31 December 2014. The effectiveness of the events programme will be monitored with a final evaluation undertaken by 31 March 2016.

Strategic Aim 4: Optimise the contribution of Agency staff

Strategic Objective 10: Develop Agency staff to ensure they are able to make the very best of their skills and abilities

Business Impact:

Annual staff training plans linked to business performance will be assessed each year with revised annual plans being in place by 31 August of each year. A revised inventory of staff qualifications and skills will be established by 31 May 2014. The Agency will seek to gain iP silver status during 2015.

Strategic Objective 11: Comply with our statutory Equality obligations.

Business Impact:

By July of each year ensure that all commitments set out in the Agency Equality Scheme have been adequately addressed and that all necessary equality monitoring returns have been completed and issued.

Strategic Aim 5: Secure value for money.

Strategic Objective 12: Consistently look for efficiencies in all that we do without detriment to maintaining high standards of service delivery.

Business Impact:

By 31 May 2014 an efficiency review programme will be in place. By 31 March 2017 all Agency procedural and operational processes will have been reviewed and efficiencies demonstrated. The introduction and integration of new technology and information systems will be assessed in relation to improved effectiveness and efficiency e.g. the introduction of ICMS 2015/16, an Agency Intranet 2016/17 and the review of the IS/IT strategy 2016/17.

Strategic Objective 13: Ensure that the Agency operates in a sustainable and environmentally responsible manner

Business Impact:

By 30 November 2014 the Agency will undertake an energy usage review and by 1 January 2015 have an energy efficiency plan in place. By 31 March 2015 a fit for purpose premises review will be completed.

Strategic Objective 14: Demonstrate the value for money of LRA services

Business Impact:

An action plan for embedding Social Return on Investment will be in place by 30 June 2014 with the aim of using real values to demonstrate value for money by 31 March 2017.

Strategic Objective 15: To operate the best and most appropriate channels of communication for clients to promote good employment relations

Business Impact:

A review of Agency communications will be undertaken by 31 March 2015 with particular emphasis placed on internal and external electronic/digital communications.

4. Measuring Success

4.1 Over the period 2014-17 the Agency will be measuring its performance against the following indicators. The performance indicators will be subject to review through dialogue with customers and stakeholders and by the internal assessment of their effectiveness.

4.2 We will measure the success of our core services against:

- The percentage levels of user satisfaction with Agency services.
- Days saved by Industrial Tribunals.
- The percentage of pre-claim conciliation cases completed.
- The “lost call” rate of our Helpline.
- The percentage of delegates to Agency events reporting that their learning requirements had been met.
- The percentage of delegates to Agency events reporting that participation resulted in a review or change in policy or practice.
- The percentage of Agency customers who introduce/amend documentation following Agency assistance.

4.3 We will measure the success of our promotional work against:

- The levels of utilisation of Agency services.
- The levels of awareness of the Agency, its services and publications.
- The growth of our customer base.
- The percentage of conference/seminar delegates reporting that their thinking on employment relations had been influenced.

4.4 We will measure the success of organisational development initiatives against:

- The percentage of staff indicating satisfaction in staff attitude survey results.
- The percentage of staff indicating positive outcomes in staff stress surveys.
- The percentage of staff in each grade attaining accredited and /or professional status.
- The overall level of absence.

4.5 We will measure our governance and management performance against:

- The degree to which business plan objectives are met.
- Having in place comprehensive value for money indicators.
- Ratings in internal and external Audit Reports.
- Compliance recorded in stewardship statements to the Permanent Secretary.
- Declarations of weaknesses in Statements of Internal Control.
- The achievement of IS Security Accreditation.
- The % of annual funding spent/allocated.

5. Resourcing Challenges 2014-17

5.1 This corporate plan sets out our aims for 2014-17 given our current budget allocation of £3.545k. We acknowledge that decisions on priorities will have to be made and efficiencies realised over the lifetime of this plan.

5.2 During 2011-14 it has been Agency practice to manage efficiencies primarily through targeting our decreasing discretionary spend to high priority areas. This has been done alongside a policy of filling all establishment vacancies on a permanent and full time basis. If there is no change to the funding allocation over 2014-17 it is more than probable that vacant posts will not be filled either on a permanent full time basis or on fixed term or part-time bases. This eventuality will have a direct and immediate negative impact on the performance of the Agency.

5.3 The Agency appreciates that, in contrast to revenue funding, additional capital can become available and be efficiently managed in the short term. The Agency acknowledges the assistance and support of DEL in relation to giving notice of and support with additional capital. However the capital funding issue, whilst critical, does not address the heart of the matter. The more deep seated funding challenges facing the Agency relate to revenue and in particular the negative impact of depleting revenue on the capacity and capability of the Agency to maintain its staffing and skills levels and thereby maintain the standards of service required to effectively meet the objectives set out in this corporate plan. If the revenue challenge is not met the Agency will not have the capacity to maintain current services and to introduce new services such as the re-routing of tribunal claims to the Agency or undertake fresh good employment practice and ADR initiatives in relation to SMEs. Front line services will suffer if the revenue challenge is not met.

5.4 Should the above circumstances not be addressed the budget ceiling of £3.545m will precipitate a reduction in our capacity to contain efficiencies through the prudent management of discretionary spend, most likely with immediate effect from 1 April 2014. Should the above funding issues not be addressed the performance proposals set out in this plan will require fundamental review.

INDIVIDUAL RISK DETAIL Risk 8 – Equality

DESCRIPTION OF RISK:	The Agency fails to meet its equality statutory duties and equality best practice standards.			
	Likelihood (0 - 5)	Impact (0 - 5)	Score (0-25)	W_t
Inherent Risk	4	5	20	2
Residual Risk [Risk(t)]	2	4	2 x 2 x 4 = 16	
RISK WARNING SIGNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The Agency is challenged by ECNI. (b) The Board (sub-committees) is insufficiently aware and active regarding equality commitments. (c) Information for equality purposes cannot demonstrate Agency commitment (d) Agency services and procurement processes are not supportive of Section 75 categories. 			
UNDERLYING CAUSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Board unaware of Equality responsibilities (b) No provision for Board to systematically address equality agenda (c) Ineffective management of equality information capture and utilization (d) Equality culture not appropriately prioritised within Agency (e) HR Strategy and staff training insufficiently address equality. 			
CONTROLS IN PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Annual Board meetings with the Equality Commission. (b) LRA Equality Scheme and Annual Submissions to the Equality Commission. (c) Equality Commission involvement in the Agency's stakeholder strategy. (d) New systems incorporate Equality related fields (e) Equal Pay reviews and resultant ongoing inspection of salaries for anomalies. (f) Joint Advisory projects undertaken with ECNI . (g) Strong staff (etc.) awareness of the Equality and Rights agenda supported by L&D Plan. (h) Strong collective rights orientated working environment. (i) Arrangements for screening and equality impact assessments in place. (j) Annual review of Equality related risks with inclusion where appropriate in the Corporate Risk register (k) Board Equality training completed January 2014 (l) Equality built into checklists and guidance used for Corporate Planning. (m) Staff training on screening operational guidance received May 2014. 			
ASSESSMENT OF RESIDUAL RISK	Tolerate	Treat	Transfer	Terminate
ADDITIONAL ACTIONS REQUIRED TO FULLY MANAGE RISK (with key milestones by which action delivered)	<p>Inequality and equality monitoring data incorporated into Research Committee Planning considerations.</p> <p>Review of operational guidelines for equality content to be completed.</p> <p>Mandatory Equality training inclusion in annual training plan.</p> <p>Clear all items in the Disability Action Plan (2012-15) (Risk 8 Appendix overleaf)</p>			
TARGET(s) / RESPONSIBILITIES	<p>Board CEO & DCS and DCA DAS/ line managers.</p> <p>Individual Board and members of staff.</p>			

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

1. Number of action measures for this reporting period that have been:

2

Fully achieved

2

Partially achieved

0

Not achieved

2. Please outline below details on all actions that have been fully achieved in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
National ⁱⁱⁱ	Not applicable		
Regional ^{iv}	Not applicable		
Local ^v	Not applicable		

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

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	See Response to Question 24		

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

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Disability Focus Group	Promote awareness and focus the interests of disabled people in relation to the decision making process	The outcomes are a group who would champion disability issues, monitor and review progress against the objectives and targets with the Disability Action Plan
2	New Case Management System	Client data collation in respect of all Section 75 categories	Section 75 information more comprehensively monitored for policy development purposes

PART B

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to 'encourage others' to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Staff made additionally aware of potential Disability action improvements	Better facilities for disabled staff	Improved accessibility and relevant adjustments for disabled staff
2	Public Impact	Better facilities for clients	Improved accessibility to conference/training suites/meeting rooms

2 (e) Please outline any additional action measures that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
1			
2			

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

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones / Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1	Analysis of Staff Survey on attitudes to Disabled People	To ascertain staffs perceptions and needs regarding disability	Staff more attuned to disability requirements	Analysis transpired to be more complex than originally planned
2	Care provisions for disabled people in review of fire evacuation procedures; Emergency Voice Communications (EVC)	Compliance with Fire Risk Assessment recommendation	Safer arrangements for disabled persons during emergency evacuation	Business Case not completed

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

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1		
2		

PART B

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

Disability Focus Group

(b) Quantitative

Annual Equality related risk review

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

Please select

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1	Developed a revised Disability Action Plan for 2015-2018	Draft circulated to the Senior Management Team and the Disability Focus Group	January 2015

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation’s annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

Dependent on risk assessment scheduled autumn 2015

ⁱ **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

ⁱⁱ **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

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

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

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