



Five Year Review of Equality Scheme

Report
April 2016

Name of public authority

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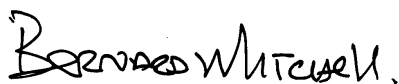
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Executive Summary

- a) To what extent has your public authority's approved scheme provided a workable basis for mainstreaming the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations into policy-making over the past five years?

The Northern Ireland Guardian ad Litem Agency (NIGALA) was established in 1996. NIGALA's equality scheme outlines how the Agency intends to meet its legislative duties and sets out its commitment to making equality an integral part of its work.

The NIGALA equality scheme provides the overarching framework for integrating equality and good relations considerations when devising and reviewing policies and practice developments. It is of note that, by virtue of the Agency's professional remit namely:-

"To advise the courts of children's wishes and feelings and to independently represent the interests of children in specified public law and adoption proceedings in Northern Ireland"

staff engagement and buy in to equality considerations is largely in the context of Human Rights legislation and the governing principles of the Children (NI) Order 1995 specifically Article 3 (3) the welfare checklist which replicates considerations relating to the Section 75 profile of the child/ren that the Guardian is appointed to represent in Court proceedings in tandem with a Solicitor.

The mainstreaming of screening has been progressing across the Agency with, for the most part, service and policy review and development benefiting from the process. It must be emphasised, however, that in respect of technical policies where there is no differential impact for example in respect of information governance, completing the lengthy screening template becomes a bureaucratic exercise with little added value. Likewise if an approved policy is being disseminated from the DHSSPS it should be agreed that the responsibility for screening lies with the governing body and does not require to be replicated within all the relevant organisations

The Agency has successfully integrated ongoing training commitments to raise staff and Board awareness in respect of the Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan. Targeted training to promote relevant staff's knowledge and skills in relation to undertaking screening and equality impact assessments has proved beneficial. It has become clear that ownership by the Senior Management Team in NIGALA is vital to effective mainstreaming.

Utilising National Disability Awareness days eg hearing loss, learning disability, sight impairment to profile and generate awareness have proved to be very effective. Staff have been enabled to reflect on the lived experience of an individual and be made aware of relevant

support services. Likewise the HSC Discovering Diversity e-learning modules have been of benefit in raising awareness and have been incorporated in mandatory e-learning for all staff.

A swapshop event was held on 2 February 2016 to share tools and techniques for engaging with and representing children's wishes and feelings with an input on Makaton and "Talking Mats" to reflect the importance of adapting communication for children with special needs and learning disabilities. A directory of regional resources and services aligned to S.75 has been compiled for staff to promote practice in respect of diversity when engaging with children, parents and carer's.

The profile of children has changed since the inception of the Agency in 1996. Work has been undertaken to refine our data capture in respect of children specific to the S.75 groupings with particular reference to ethnicity and disability. Robust data capture will inform and support staff training and development needs and ultimately promote diversity competence. The Agency has recently completed "An evaluation of Social Work Practice in the Agency in Working with Children and Families from Black Minority (BME) Communities".

The reason for placing particular emphasis on ensuring and assessing access to services (Section 8 of the scheme), as opposed to all aspects of service provision (that is the quality, experience and outcome of services alongside access), is unclear. The strategic focus within the NIGALA Public and Personal Involvement Strategy, emanating from the Health and Social Care Reform Act (NI) 2009, provides an opportunity to integrate equality considerations when actively engaging with key stakeholders and service users to reflect "inclusivity, equity and diversity" amongst other consideration. The requirement on public authorities to develop a programme of awareness raising on the Section 75 statutory duties (Section 3 of the scheme) results in significant effort and duplication within the HSC and across public authorities particularly in the context of financial austerity. It would be helpful if the Equality Commission devised materials and devoted resources to ongoing awareness raising in respect of the Section 75 duties.

It is of note that the good relations part of Section 75 has played a less prominent role than the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Agency appreciates that progress in this respect reflects a fundamental caution about a move away from the concept of a neutral work environment, given conflicting statutory requirements and the resulting risk of being in breach of these. The NIGALA would welcome further guidance, incorporating examples of good practice, in support of progressing the good relations agenda.

Integrating the range of equality directives within a diversity strategy and action plan could become a more meaningful manifestation and driver for implementation of a bespoke scheme proportionate to the size and reflective of the function of the Agency. It could also serve to bring together the range of equality related action plans currently in existence (including under Section 75, the Disability Discrimination Order, The Fair Employment and Treatment Order and

others). Experience has shown that the existence of separate plans cause confusion to both staff and external stakeholders.

b) What key lessons have been learnt over the past five years in terms of effectively implementing the approved equality scheme?

Overall, the implementation of Section 75 poses particular challenges for a small organisation in respect of both the resources required and the limited scope for effecting change given the Agency's legislative mandate as referenced earlier.

The Agency is part of the BSO equality unit consortium. The partnership approach together with other HSC organisations supported by a specialist unit allows the pooling of resources, creates economies of scale, enables the delivery of a rolling programme of training and the development of relationships with voluntary sector organisations. Most importantly, it facilitates shared learning and consistency where possible.

This partnership approach has also been beneficial to the organisation in facilitating and promoting regional work across Health and Social Care (HSC) in Northern Ireland, including the 11 partnership organisations and the 6 HSC Trusts. Collaborative work that has been progressed across HSC NI include, a Trans Employment Policy, an Accessible Formats Policy and the development of a suite of e-learning modules for staff on Diversity, Disability and Cultural Awareness.

The partnership organisations have also facilitated engagement with targeted Section 75 groups as and when relevant. This approach maximises our own internal resources, and is beneficial to community and voluntary groups, who have limited resources, thereby enhancing their capacity and willingness to participate.

NIGALA is of the view that the screening template is cumbersome and time consuming to complete and given the Agency's role and function has limited added value in terms of the equality agenda. NIGALA would welcome the option of using a screening assurance statement in completing screening of "technical" policies where there is no differential impact relative to the Section 75 groups.

Ownership amongst senior staff in NIGALA has improved over the last five years, as demonstrated by a year on year increase in the number of screenings being undertaken. All senior managers and corporate services staff have undertaken screening training to support screening as an integral component of policy development and review. Emphasis has been placed on integrating equality considerations within the Agency's Social Care Governance, Personal and Public Involvement and Quality 2020 agendas.

c) What more needs to be done to achieve outcomes for individuals from the nine equality categories?

The review of the Equality Scheme implementation has shown that it may be most effective for NIGALA to concentrate further efforts on:

- (1) Screening and Equality Impact Assessments
- (2) Monitoring
- (3) Engagement – using existing structure and processes, for example the NIGALA PPI strategy, to engage on equality issues rather than creating additional processes.

In respect to screening activity we will:

- Screen the 2016-17 Business Plan as a key mechanism to mainstream equality;
- Revisit the scope for introducing a shortened template for evidencing the screening of policies that do not impact on people; and
- Consider including a question about equality when engaging staff on any issues, including professional issues.

At a regional level, we will:

- Seek to engage with DHSSPS policy leads on equality issues at the consultation stage of strategies or policies, directly and through the regional equality and human rights steering group; and
- Seek to influence others by raising the need for the co-ordination of screening activities between the DHSSPS and HSC organisations as well as between individual HSC organisations, through the regional equality and human rights steering group.

With regards to individual groups, a focus on the following may contribute to positive outcomes:

Transgender/Sexual Orientation

- Implementation of a Regional Transgender Policy; and
- HSC LGB&T Staff Forum.

Disability

- Disability Staff Forum.

1. A general introductory statement specifying the purpose of the scheme and the public authority's commitment to the statutory duties

1a) To what extent were senior management involved in ensuring scheme compliance over the 5 year period and what further steps could be undertaken to ensure effective internal arrangements?

Prompts – Identify any changes to arrangements for managing scheme implementation, and what were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to monitoring scheme implementation?

The NIGALA's Section 75 equality implementation is supported by an Assistant Director having functional responsibility as a component of their strategic remit for taking a lead in co-ordinating and supporting the equality agenda. The equality lead participates in the Business Services Organisation's (BSO) Equality Unit consortium of organisations.

Throughout the five-year period the group met formally on a quarterly basis to share good practice, disseminate information through briefing papers, review of case law in the implementation of Section 75 and to plan joint work. At a strategic level, the Equality Unit has represented clients on regional groups, such as the Equality and Human Rights Steering Group convened by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS).

Members of the Senior Management Team were involved in a number of ways:

- Annual progress reporting: scrutiny of progress and direction setting for the coming year;
- Considering and taking action on Equality Scheme issues brought to the team by the equality lead and the Equality Unit at the BSO;
- Scrutiny of equality screenings on decisions brought before SMT.

Senior Managers played an important role by:

- Contributing to annual progress reporting by identifying relevant initiatives in their area of responsibility;
- Undertaking quality assurance of quarterly equality screening reports;
- Ensuring training of relevant staff.

The challenge going forward is that of managing equality obligations to ensure proportionality and relevance to the core function of the Agency. Work is progressing in aligning objectives within the NIGALA PPI Strategy and Social Care Governance Plan in relation to engaging with and representing children relative to Section 75.

- 1b) Outline annual **direct** expenditure of resources to ensure that the statutory duties were complied with, in terms of staff and money over the past 5 years, and comment on the extent that all necessary resources were allocated.

Prompts – Identify costs related to equality unit staff, use of consultants, allocation of budgets to training/publications/ research, extent of in-year bids and/or reallocation of resources. What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to monitoring resourcing? What could the public authority do in future to ensure effective allocation and monitoring of necessary resources?

The Agency has a nominated equality lead at Senior Manager level and a number of actions and initiatives require inputs across the Senior Management Team and Corporate Services. The Agency has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Business Services Organisation (BSO) for the provision of equality and human rights support services, along with 10 other regional Health and Social Care organisations. The Unit employs four members of staff, three at senior level and one administrator. The following table specifies the amount of the annual equality SLA over the past five years:

Year	Expenditure
2011/12	£8,730
2012/13	£6,840
2013/14	£6,601
2014/15	£6,697
2015/16	£6,855
total	£35,723

Overall, the partnership arrangements between the regional HSC organisations have produced significant economies of scale. Examples include the design and delivery of joint training and good practice initiatives for the organisations and holding two equality best practice conferences during the five year period.

It is unrealistic to solely cite costs associated with BSO Equality Unit SLA as capturing the expenditure associated with meeting the Agency's equality commitments. Significant time is devoted to customising and disseminating generic information/materials generated through the Equality Unit. While NIGALA has no definitive overall costs aligned with meeting equality obligations a range of practice developments have incurred significant cost. In order to improve our data capture in respect of children within our bespoke Guardian Case Information System (GCIS) a design specification was prepared with the information technology provider to capture and report on case data in respect of children's disability and ethnicity.

The Agency has employed a researcher to undertake a study of social work practice in respect of children from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Work is now progressing on reviewing our data capture in respect of disability. Both pieces of work will establish baseline information to support training and development needs and ultimately promote diversity competence underpinned by Section 75.

There are also costs associated with securing the services of interpreters and translators for parties in proceedings for whom English is not their first language.

2. An outline of how the public authority intends to assess its compliance with the Section 75 duties and for consulting on matters to which a duty under that section is likely to be relevant

2a) Outline impacts and outcomes (for the public authority and/or individuals from the nine equality categories) over the past five years and what further steps could be undertaken to build on these or address underreporting?

Prompt – Were outcomes delivered for all of the nine equality categories? Were annual progress reports critically reviewed before or after submission to the Commission? What examples of good practice from other public authorities could be adopted?

Outcomes for individuals from the nine equality categories

The following table provides an overview of key impacts and outcomes:

	Outline new developments or changes in policies, practices, service planning or delivery and the difference they have made
Persons of different religious belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRTPS facility to capture data to inform staff profile.
Persons of different political opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None.
Persons of different racial groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIGALA initiated “An Evaluation of Social Work Practice in the Agency in Working with Children and Families from Black Minority (BME) Communities”. A number of objectives have informed the study including considering the volume of cases referred to NIGALA from ethnic minority and foreign national populations in 2013/14; to generate knowledge from cases about cultural competence and its development in Guardian practice; to disseminate the findings of the study to the wider family justice

	<p>system to inform learning for social work practitioners, solicitors and the judiciary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible formats policy.
Persons of different age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guardian's represent children from 0-18years. NIGALA commissioned a voluntary organisation Voice of Young People In Care (VOYPIC) to undertake a scoping exercise to inform children's involvement. Work has been progressed on sharing tools and techniques for engaging with and representing children's wishes and feelings reflective of age and stages of development. • Focus groups were facilitated with the support of VOYPIC to engage with young people to inform the materials for the NIGALA Solicitor Panel reconstitution interviews in 2015.
Persons with different marital status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Persons of different sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Men and women generally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Persons with and without a disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2013 NIGALA published its 5 year Disability Action Plan which was reviewed in 2015. • NIGALA has undertaken a desktop review of data capture in respect of disability to inform revisions to information collated within the Guardian Case Information System (GCIS) which will inform staff training and development alongside the Agency's children's participation strategy. • Some staff have availed of training in using Makaton and Talking Mats to support communication and engagement with children and adults with a learning disability. • Accessible formats policy. • Profiling national disability awareness dayse.g. hearing loss, learning disability, sight impairment. • Facilitating a work placement as part of the HSC disability work placement scheme. • Completion of the HSC e-learning module on disability identified as mandatory for all staff during 2015/16.
Persons with and without dependants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRTPS data capture and provision of flexible working policies.

<p>General issues across all/several of the nine categories</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new electronic information system for reporting and recording Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence (HRPTS) was introduced. This enables Line Managers to access staff information more easily and to monitor use of a range of family friendly policies thereby ensuring consistent and equitable implementation of these. • Whilst completion of the equality and diversity section within HRPTS is voluntary, staff are encouraged to do so, thereby providing the Agency with up to date information to inform equality screening of relevant policies and decisions. • In 2014 the NIGALA devised and published its Accessible Formats Policy for the provision of information which supports the commitment to provide information in alternative formats.
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A directory of resources and services was compiled to assist staff access information in respect of the Section 75 groups.

Based on the analysis of the information in the table, the Agency recognises that fewer outcomes have been achieved for the following groups:

- Sexual orientation.

Outcomes for the Public Authority

The Agency's activities to deliver on the Section 75 commitments have also produced benefits for the organisation itself.

- Relationships with the voluntary sector have been developed beyond existing contacts. This has served to gain greater insights into the needs and experiences of diverse service users. Likewise, it has provided the organisation with an opportunity to impart further information on its role and activities with regards to health and social care in Northern Ireland.

2b) Outline the number of equality scheme related consultation exercises undertaken by your authority over the past five years. Set out the number and percentage related to screening exercises and to EQIAs and indicate the extent that your scheme helped you to engage with external stakeholders?

Prompt – Identify your authority’s most and least successful means of consultation in relation to s75 categories. Why were some means of consultation more or less successful in relation to particular equality categories?

Over the past five years, the Agency carried out one consultation exercise that was directly related to the Equality Scheme.

All screenings that NIGALA published in this period were included in quarterly equality and human rights screening reports, collated on our behalf by the BSO Equality Unit. These were issued to consultees with the invitation to comment.

The Equality Scheme contributed to both widening and strengthening our efforts to engage and consult: the maintenance of a Section 75 master consultation list helped us to include further groups in any mainstream policy consultations. Likewise, screenings contributed to identifying particular groupings for engagement. Given NIGALA’s specific legislative remit targeted consultations with key stakeholders prove beneficial. It is of note, however, that Solicitors and the Judiciary are key stakeholders neither of whom work within public authorities with equality obligations. Equality considerations are communicated and understood in terms of human rights obligations

Face-to-face engagement continues to be particularly effective both in eliciting views and in building relationships with those impacted by what we do.

2c) Indicate if your list of consultees was amended during the 5 year period and what further steps could be taken to develop your level of engagement and consultation?

Prompt - Outline the extent your authority did or did not move away from formal consultation and on what criteria was any such consultation targeted? To what extent were requests to be included and/or objections from those not included in the consultation process received and how were these addressed?

Over the five-year period, the consultation list was updated on a quarterly basis following the issuing of screening reports. Any requests by consultees to be added to or taken off the list were acted upon.

As indicated in the previous section NIGALA utilises focused engagement to add to inclusive formal consultation to reflect the Agency's remit as a regional organisation providing a service to children from 0-18 years as governed by The Children (NI) Order 1995 and The Adoption (NI) Order 1987.

The Agency is strongly of the view that integrating equality consideration within mainstream engagement linked with delivering on the PPI Strategy and the Social Care Governance Plan would result in more efficient and meaningful engagement. Ultimately equality considerations are accepted as being integral to stakeholder engagement and involvement

2d) To what extent did your authority consult directly with directly affected individuals as well as with representative groups, particularly in relation to young people and those with learning disabilities, and was this sufficient?

Prompt – How effective was your authority at providing feedback to consultees as a result of consultation exercises? What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to consulting directly with affected individuals? What could your authority do in future to provide effective consultee feedback?

With regards to decisions and policies impacting on staff, the Agency undertook direct one-to-one or focus group engagement and consultation with affected staff and involved the Trade Union representative.

In respect of policies and decisions impacting on services users the main focus for involvement and engagement is through the NIGALA PPI strategy rather than being related to the Equality Scheme. It must be emphasised that NIGALA's service provision is dictated by Court appointments and the changing demographics and profile of children. Devising a directory of resources and services related to Section 75 and developing tools and techniques for engaging with children incorporate equality considerations but are predominantly driven by developing social work practice.

The Agency, facilitated by the BSO Equality Unit, undertook direct engagement with a range of representative groups and individuals to inform the development of a Regional HSC Trans Employment Policy as well as the Accessible Formats Policy.

3. The Agency's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted on the promotion of equality of opportunity

3a) Outline and discuss the number of policies your authority subjected to screening over the past five years, setting out the number and percentage of 'policies screened in' on the basis of equality considerations and the percentage 'screened in' on the basis of the good relations duty.

Prompt - What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to screening in terms of, screening criteria and priority factors? Are there any other criteria which could usefully be included? What lessons are there regarding responsibility for screening at regional level and subsequent screening of local policy? What could your authority do in future to ensure effective screening arrangements? Set out in an appendix a list of all policies screened out during scheme implementation.

Over the five year period, the Agency screened a total of 28 policies. The table below provides further details. All these policies can be viewed on the joint screening website, facilitated by the BSO Equality Unit: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2166.htm> and will be provided as hard copy on request.

NIGALA	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015 (Q1)	Total
Total no of policies	0	2	9	12	5	28
Screening Decision 1 (screened in)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Screening Decision 2 (screened out with mitigation)	0	2	3 (33%)	7 (58%)	3 (60%)	15 (54%)
Screening Decision 3 (screened out without mitigation)	0	0	6 (67%)	5 (42%)	2 (40%)	13 (46%)

The Agency did not screen in any policies on the basis of the good relations duty.

As the above table indicates, the Agency has made progress during the five-year period in relation to the screening of policies and decisions.

Key factors contributing to this progress include:

- Risk Management;
- Staff training;

- Availability of a number of specialised resources on screening developed by the Equality Unit;
- One-to-one support and advice by equality professionals; and
- Designing and implementing assurance processes, such as:
 - a. Quality assurance by Directors/Assistant Directors of quarterly screening reports; and
 - b. Integration of requirement to provide information on the outcome of screening as part of submission of SMT and Board papers.

Staff value the centralised screening website maintained by the Equality Unit on behalf of all 11 regional organisations as a reference source.

The screening template has proved overly burdensome for technical policies that clearly do not impact on people. Feedback from staff and trade unions has indicated that they do not want the completed screening template attached to policies that are being issued for consultation.

The introduction of a shortened template for policies that do not impact on people would reduce the risk of screenings being perceived as a paper exercise by policy leads. It would also serve to target resources on screening where differential impacts are more likely and screening could make a difference.

Likewise it should be accepted that all regional policies should be screened by the DHSSPS and negate the need for duplicate screenings being undertaken by public authorities charged with adopting the policies. A lack of equality screening at national level likewise can pose problems, for instance as in the case of Agenda for Change where national policy sets travel rates and costs. The absence of local screening has resulted in differential impacts particularly for regional Agencies providing a front line service as staff are negatively impacted by the mileage rate thresholds.

To further strengthen screening activities, we will seek to introduce the following set of measures:

- Screening the Business Plan 2016/17 as a key mechanism to help mainstream equality by ensuring that all areas of work are screened;
- Revisit the scope for introducing a shortened template for evidencing the screening of “technical” policies that do not impact on people; and
- Consider including a question about equality when engaging staff on any issues, including professional issues.

- 3b) To what extent did your authority's consideration of the screening criteria **not** identify equal opportunity implications on any of Section 75 categories, but for which consultees then highlighted problems?

Prompt –Identify the extent the collection of quantitative and qualitative data informed screening processes. Outline the extent consultations with representative groups produced data to inform the screening process which was not otherwise available to your authority. Outline any difficulties in identifying policies and equality implications using the definition of policy set out in the Guide to the Statutory Duties.

In relation to screenings that are published as part of quarterly screening reports, NIGALA has to date received few comments from consultees. In the main, these were requests for further information and clarification rather than concerns as to a lack of consideration of particular issues.

The targeted consultation on the refined role of the Guardian elicited wide ranging responses and positively contributed to the finalised plans.

The evidence base for screenings of policies that impact on staff has become significantly more robust with the introduction of a new Human Resources IT system, the Human Resources Pay and Travel System (HRPTS). Since then, data on all nine Section 75 groups has been captured and drawn upon.

The Agency recognises that the quality of staff data is reliant on staff maintaining and completing all the available fields within their personal profile providing diversity data by means of a self-service. Staff completion rates are particularly low in relation to the categories of dependants, sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity.

In an effort to redress this, a dedicated campaign encouraging staff to complete the data was scheduled for Quarter 4 of 2015-16 providing assurances in respect of confidentiality and highlighting the benefits of robust data to inform staff profiles and the relevance to flexible working policies and reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Efforts to harmonise the collection of ethnic monitoring data across HSC IT systems, driven by the Health and Social Care Board in recent years, should assist in securing accurate and up to date data. Fundamental gaps remain in respect of equality data collection and collation at regional level in relation to other equality groups, including carers and sexual orientation. An agreed region wide IT data capture system should be promoted in order to understand the diversity of the population.

As regards data becoming available as a result of consultations, this mainly relates to qualitative data on the needs and experience of service users.

- 3c) Outline over the past five years how many EQIAs your authority commenced as a result of i) initial screening and ii) as a result of screening new/revised policies subsequently, and discuss the extent that your authority has become more effective at identifying equality of opportunity dimensions in its policies.

Prompt – Were changes made to the screening process? Outline any examples of any changes made to policies to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations, rather than to address any perceived differential impact, as a result of screening policies that were ‘screened out’?

NIGALA has not undertaken any EQIAs during the five year period.

- 3d) Outline over the past five year period the percentage of your authority’s initial EQIA timetable that reached i) stage 6 of the EQIA process i.e. decision making, and ii) stage 7 of the EQIA process i.e. annual monitoring & publication of results, and indicate the extent that your authority has become more effective at progressing EQIAs.

Prompt – Explain any slippage that occurred and what was done to rectify it. To what extent did you notify representative groups of this slippage and what was their reaction? What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to monitoring EQIAs?

Not applicable.

4. The Agency's arrangements for monitoring any adverse impact of policies adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity

4a) To what extent were sufficient arrangements put in place to collect data relating to the nine equality categories to monitor the impact of policies and what could your authority do in future to develop monitoring arrangements?

Prompt - What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to monitoring and developing new/additional quantitative data over the past five years. Did your authority consult its own employees or collaborate with other authorities to collect data? Did your authority engage with representative groups to develop monitoring arrangements?

Appropriate arrangements for monitoring staff impacts of policies were put in place with the introduction of HRPTS (see section 3b).

The quality of staff monitoring data (staff not completing the information on the system) may be due to fear of identification given the small size of the organisation. Anonymity is of particular importance, for instance, in uptake of independent staff counselling through Carecall or when reviewing or monitoring staff absence. Staff are aware of the importance of updating their profile and accessing flexible work policies in line with caring responsibilities for dependents and availing of support with reasonable adjustments.

NIGALA recognise that in the twenty years since the establishment of the organisation the profile of young people is changing. Progress on capturing data on ethnicity and disability to inform and support staff training and development is aligned to the Agency's PPI strategy to promote engagement and participation. Gender identity and sexual orientation issues are also prevalent and require staff to be confident and competent in understanding diversity issues as a core component of representing children and young people in court proceedings. It is of note that Guardians, all of whom are qualified and experienced social workers understand diversity as emanating from children's rights and welfare rather than from from the Agency's equality obligations.

The mainstreaming at DHSSPS-level of the requirement for HSC organisations to include equality data in relation to service reporting (including on performance) and the aggregation of such data for Northern Ireland as a whole could serve as a strong driver to progress equality monitoring.

5. The Agency's arrangements for publishing the results of equality impact assessments and of monitoring any adverse impact of policies adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity

5a) Indicate the number of reports published outlining the results of EQIAs and monitoring over the past five years, and outline what your authority could do in future in relation to improving the publication of EQIA results and monitoring.

Prompt – Identify the number of reports that were provided in alternative formats. What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to publishing the results of EQIAs and monitoring?

Not applicable

6. A commitment that in making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted by it, that the public authority shall take into account any equality impact assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy

6a) In terms of the number of EQIAs that reached stage 6 (i.e. decision making) to what extent were mitigation measures and alternative policies adopted?

*Prompt - Outline the extent to which your authority produced EQIAs that did **not** identify adverse impact on any of s75 categories, but which consultees then gave an indication of adverse impact of s75 category and/or proposed mitigation measures or alternative policies.*

Not applicable

6b) To what extent did consideration of EQIAs and consultations contribute to a change in policy, as opposed to policy decisions which would probably have been made in any event by your authority?

Prompt - Set out any key examples. What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to making a decision and taking into account an EQIA and consultation? What could your authority do in future to ensure decision making effectively takes these issues into account?

Not applicable.

7. The Agency's arrangements for training staff on issues relevant to the duties

7a) To what extent were sufficient arrangements put in place to develop and deliver a training programme in accordance with scheme commitments?

Prompt - Was the training programme focused on the initial period of scheme implementation or did it effectively cover all five years? To what extent were outside trainers from representative groups used in designing or delivering training? Was focused training for staff in management and roles associated with aspects of scheme implementation provided on an ongoing basis?

The Agency and its partners implemented a comprehensive training programme over the five-year period. A training plan was developed on an annual basis jointly by the Equality Unit and all partner organisations, thus ensuring ongoing learning and development of staff in relation to equality, good relations and human rights.

The following table gives an overview of the type of training and awareness raising delivered and its timing over the five year period.

Number of staff attending face-to-face training during the five year period by type of session.

NIGALA	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015 (Q1)
Equality Screening		8	2	5	
Board Equality Scheme Briefing Sessions	11				
Equality Awareness training	2	6			
Introduction to Screening Training			1		
Board Equality Screening		5		5	

Number of staff completing e-learning training during the five year period by module.

E-learning	2011-12	2012-13	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015 (Q1)
Module 1 to 4 – Diversity	3	1	0	1	1
Module 5 – Disability	5	2	0	1	1
Module 6 – Cultural Competencies	n/a	0	0	1	1

All training sessions were evaluated and evidenced that staff found the sessions effective in meeting the set aims and objectives.

A rolling programme of specialised training was provided on particular aspects of equality scheme implementation including screening and EQIAs.

The economies of scale achieved by the partnership arrangements were particularly pronounced in the area of training, allowing the Agency to meet the training needs of staff in a highly cost-effective manner. It also allowed shared learning across partner organisations. This has enabled more staff to avail of face-to-face classroom based training than may have otherwise been the case.

Alongside face-to-face training, considerable efforts were spent on developing e-learning programmes within the Discovering Diversity framework. The table above provides details on the number of staff who completed a range of modules within the framework.

Staff were also facilitated in accessing an e-learning programme on sexual orientation and gender identity, developed by the Public Health Agency.

Staff engagement on equality and diversity is largely from the perspective of their professional practice. A recent swap shop event was hosted to share resources and materials utilised to engage with and elicit children's wishes and feelings. Staff are committed to developing their repertoire of skills to promote the diversity component of their practice relative to Section 75. The refined data capture initially in relation to disability and ethnicity with inform targeted training.

7b) Have all staff received awareness training and what could your authority do in future to deliver an effective training programme?

Prompt – Does the authority have evidence that over the past five years staff understood their role in implementing the scheme? What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to communication and training?

Following initial focus on raising staff awareness on the Equality Scheme commitments (including through information materials in easy to understand format) efforts shifted in the latter part of the five year period to raising awareness on needs and experiences of one particular group under Section 75, namely people with disabilities. This was undertaken by a series of awareness days, aligned with international awareness days and weeks.

A core element of this work was to bring in speakers and service users via representative groups. Given the effectiveness of this format the Agency will explore the scope for building on this in relation to other Section 75 groups.

The existing e-learning portfolio will be supported by the development of a new module on general equality awareness.

There is an increased awareness of staff in NIGALA of equality issues, reflective of heightened public awareness generally, but also through equality training for staff.

NIGALA have been proactive in encouraging others to promote equality of opportunity through the dissemination of an awareness leaflet on Section 75 to the NIGALA Solicitors Panel.

Ownership amongst senior staff in NIGALA has seen significant improvement over the last five years, as demonstrated by a year on year increase in the number of screenings being undertaken. In addition to training, this could be attributed to a paper to SMT on 'Opportunities for Mainstreaming Equality', which led to a decision that the policy lead would be responsible for completing the screening. All SMT and Corporate Services staff have undertaken screening training.

The Agency is of the view that there is scope for the Equality Commission taking a strategic lead on devising a range of materials and disseminating generic information on the equality duties.

8. The Agency's arrangements for ensuring and assessing public access to information and to services provided by the authority

8a) To what extent were sufficient arrangements put in place to ensure and assess public access to information and to services provided by the authority?

Prompt - Was an audit of information provision undertaken? To what extent did you provide accessible formats without specific requests? What were the lessons learnt in terms of enablers and impediments to ensuring and assessing public access to information and to services? What could your authority do in future to ensure equality of opportunity in public access to information and to services?

All Section 75 related documents (including consultation documents, screening reports, correspondence with staff and service users) follow RNIB guidance. This involves, for instance, the use of Arial font size 14 and left alignment.

The Agency adopted an Accessible Formats Policy for written information. The policy seeks to ensure that the approach to the provision of information either in written or alternative format is accessible, clear, balanced, fair, transparent and accurate.

It spells out criteria for making documentation available in accessible formats. Within the priority areas as identified in the policy where it is more effective, cost efficient or timely to do so it commits to ensuring that a reasonable alternative is provided.

Staff Guidance provides practical advice. The template policy and guidance was developed and publicly consulted on regionally, with relevant adaptations by NIGALA.

The policy was supported by the development of summary information for staff, as well as a toolkit including a range of support products, such as practical guidance, flowcharts and monitoring databases.

Looking ahead, it will be vital that staff engage closely with individuals and representative groups to agree priorities in providing accessible information.

Issues relating to access to services were examined in the context of individual equality screenings.

9. The Agency's timetable for measures proposed in the scheme

9a) Outline the extent to which measures set out in the original timetable have been implemented. Any detailed information should be included in as an appendix to the report.

Prompt –Update any progress previously reported as underway or delayed. Has a mechanism been developed to report by exception i.e. on specific issues that have not been progressed?

NIGALA implemented the measures that were set out in the original timetable (as per the relevant Appendix in the Equality Scheme) as planned with one exception. This relates to monitoring.

While the audit of information system was completed within Year 1 of scheme implementation, the annual review and publication of monitoring information remains behind schedule.

- 9b) If your authority was to be reconstituted in the next five years what would be the main scheme actions/equality considerations that an incoming authority should address? Any detailed information should be included as an appendix to the report.

Prompt –Outline what arrangements could be put in place to transfer equality scheme knowledge.

The Agency would recommend that any incoming authority should pay particular attention to further embedding and mainstreaming work to ensure that equality is aligned to core business to avoid unnecessary duplication and reduce the associated bureaucracy.

Particular efforts should be placed on regional cooperation on equality screenings and EQIAs (top down and horizontally) as well as on monitoring.

10. Details of how the scheme will be published

- 10a) Were scheme commitments in this section delivered and what evidence supports this view?

NIGALA closely followed its commitments for publishing the scheme:

- Systems were put in place for making the scheme available on request in alternative formats. Providers of translation services and services to produce the scheme in further alternative formats (including Braille and formats for Young People) were identified.
- An Easy Read version and an easy to understand summary of the scheme were produced.
- The scheme and its alternative versions were published on the Agency's website.
- Communication on the availability of the scheme was disseminated widely including to consultees.

11. The Agency's arrangements for dealing with complaints arising from a failure to comply with the scheme

11a) Outline the number and nature of complaints received by your authority, and what your authority could do in future to develop its complaints handling process and learn from complaints.

Prompt – Outline the nature of complaints and scheme element e.g. screening, consultation. What effect did complaints have on the operation of your scheme?

A complaints procedure for dealing with Section 75 complaints is set out in the NIGALA Equality Scheme. The Agency did not receive any complaints under the terms of Section 75 throughout the five-year period. If any complaints are received under Section 75, they are directed to the Agency's Complaints Manager, who will report and monitor the level of complaints on an annual basis.

12. A commitment to conducting a review of the scheme within five years of its submission to the Equality Commission and to forwarding a report of this review to the Equality Commission

12a) What has been your authority's experience of conducting this review? To what extent has the Commission's guidance been useful in undertaking the review?

The review has proved to be both time and resource intensive. The template contains some 25 main questions plus a further 50 questions as prompts, which overall seems somewhat excessive and unwieldy. A theme-based approach (focusing, for instance, on ownership, equality proofing, monitoring and consultation) rather than following the intricate structure of the guidance on the form and content of Equality Schemes, would have been preferable.

The review has served as an opportunity to hold discussions with senior staff and to jointly reflect on progress on equality matters. This in turn helped to raise the profile of the equality mainstreaming agenda.