

Equality in Participation in Public Life

Draft Policy Positions and Recommendations

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Contents

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
2	BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	1
	WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE'	1
	THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY IN PARTICIPATION	2
	STATEMENT ON KEY INEQUALITIES IN PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE (DRAFT) AND ASSOCIATED RESEARCH.....	2
	POLICY PROPOSALS: ADVANCING PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE	4
	OVERARCHING ISSUES FOR ATTENTION.....	4
	KEY THEMES: ACTIONS TO ADDRESS IDENTIFIED INEQUALITIES.....	4
3	ENSURE EQUALITY DATA COLLECTION AND DISAGGREGATION IS SUFFICIENT TO IDENTIFY INEQUALITY, DEVELOP ROBUST POLICY INTERVENTIONS, AND ENSURE THE DELIVERY OF PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT (PFG) OUTCOMES.....	6
	ADDRESS IDENTIFIED GAPS IN EQUALITY DATA ACROSS A NUMBER OF AREAS OF PUBLIC POLICY.....	6
	ENSURE THAT DATA IS SUFFICIENTLY DISAGGREGATED TO ALLOW FOR MEANINGFUL EQUALITY ANALYSIS, TO BETTER INFORM PUBLIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT.....	7
4	TACKLE OVERARCHING BARRIERS TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION INCLUDING: STRUCTURAL BARRIERS; PHYSICAL AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS; PERSONAL CAPACITY AND PERCEIVED BARRIERS; AND STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE.	8
	MORE EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE WITH, AND FOSTER THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF, PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE FULL RANGE OF EQUALITY CATEGORIES.	8
	ADDRESS STRUCTURAL BARRIERS WHICH CAN DETER INDIVIDUALS FROM A RANGE OF EQUALITY CATEGORIES FROM PARTICIPATING IN PUBLIC LIFE.....	13
	MEET THE PHYSICAL ACCESS AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS.....	16
	BUILD CAPACITY AND OVERCOME PERCEIVED BARRIERS	17
	CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE	19
5	GOVERNMENT PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS: SUPPORT THOSE WITH DISABILITIES; DELIVER ON GENDER TARGETS FOR BOARDS AND CHAIRS; IMPLEMENT A CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGY TO ADVANCE PARTICIPATION MORE GENERALLY.	21
	ESTABLISH AND PROMOTE SUPPORT MEASURES, TO FACILITATE THE PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.	22
	ENSURE EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF AN ACTION PLAN TO ACHIEVE THE EXECUTIVE'S TARGET FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN BOARD AND CHAIR PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS.....	23
	IMPLEMENT A CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGY TO ADDRESS UNDER-REPRESENTATION AND SUPPORT PARTICIPATION, INCLUDING TO IMPLEMENT THE 2014 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.....	25
6	ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES: ADVANCE THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MINORITY ETHNIC INDIVIDUALS IN POLITICAL LIFE; ADVANCE THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PEACE BUILDING.	28
	ADVANCE THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN, AND INDIVIDUALS FROM MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS, IN POLITICAL LIFE.....	28
	ADVANCE THE ACTIVE AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PEACE BUILDING AND POST CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION.	31
7	VOTING: ENSURE ACCESS TO THE VOTING SYSTEM FOR THOSE WITH DISABILITIES	35
	REMOVE BARRIERS ACROSS ALL STAGES OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS TO ENSURE THAT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CAN EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE	35
8	CONCLUSION.....	38
	OVERARCHING ISSUES	38
	KEY THEMES: ACTIONS TO ADDRESS IDENTIFIED INEQUALITIES.....	39
	IMPLEMENTATION AND NEXT STEPS.....	39

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Participation in public life includes the way in which people contribute to, or are involved in, public decision making (such as board membership). It can also include the way in which people can participate in political life (e.g. as political representatives; members of political fora). This involvement can be at various levels.
- 1.2 Diversity in public life, and ensuring the participation of people from all types of backgrounds including those protected by the equality laws, enhances the decision-making processes and provides for greater accountability. It is also vital to people's sense of status and belonging as well as helping to counteract negative attitudes and behaviours that different groups might experience.

Draft Policy Proposals: Advancing participation in public life

- 1.3 In parallel to the Commission engagement on a draft 'Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland'^{1,2}, the Commission has also identified the following draft recommendations for public policy intervention, to address the noted key inequalities and to advance equality within participation in public life.
- 1.4 The Commission's recommendations are grouped into two 'overarching issues' and three 'key themes':

Over-arching Issues

- 1.5 We propose the following actions to address two key over-arching issues:

¹ ECNI (2018) Draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland

² While noting the impact of significant and specific data gaps; the draft Statement proposes the following as key inequalities or inequalities: Government public appointments: under-representation of persons with a disability; Government public appointments: under-representation of women; Elected positions in NI: under-representation of women; Elected positions in NI: there are no elected representatives within the Northern Ireland Assembly from minority ethnic backgrounds (under-representation of those from ethnic minority backgrounds); Voting: those with a disability are less likely to vote.

Ensure equality data collection and disaggregation is sufficient to identify inequality, develop robust policy interventions, and ensure the delivery of Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes

- 1.6 Action is required to:
- Address identified gaps in equality data across a number of areas of public policy;
 - ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow for meaningful equality analysis, to better inform public policy development

Tackle over-arching barriers to active participation including: structural barriers; physical and communication needs; personal capacity and perceived barriers; and stereotypes and prejudice.

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

Key Themes: Actions to address identified Inequalities

- 1.8 We propose action in the following areas to address the draft key inequalities and inequalities identified the Commission's *draft* 'Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland':

Government Public Appointments: support those with disabilities; deliver on gender targets for boards and chairs; implement a cross-departmental strategy to advance participation more generally.

- 1.9 Action is required to:

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

Elected Representatives: advance the participation of women and minority ethnic individuals in political life; advance the participation of women in peace building.

1.10 Action is required to:

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

Voting: Ensure access to the voting system for those with disabilities

1.11 Action is required to:

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

Implementation and next steps

1.12 It is intended that these draft policy recommendations, in tandem with the draft Statement on Key Inequalities, will both support and challenge government and key partners to address key inequalities in participation in public life.

1.13 While the Commission would urge prompt action to address and implement these draft recommendations, we will for the next short while also continue to engage with a range of key stakeholders to further refine our proposals and recommendations. We would invite your feedback before 31 July 2018. Please contact dhowe@equalityni.org to provide views or arrange a meeting.

2 Background and Context

What do we mean by ‘Participation in Public Life’

- 2.1 Participation in public life includes the way in which people contribute to, or are involved in, **public decision making** (such as board membership). It can also include the way in which people can participate in **political life** (e.g. as political representatives; members of political fora).
- 2.2 This involvement can be at various levels including community (such as membership of a community organisation or school board of governors); regional (e.g. election as a local councillor) and national (e.g. election as an MP)³.
- 2.3 The Commission’s 2007 ‘Guide for Public Authorities – Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People and Encouraging the Participation of Disabled People in Public Life’⁴ noted that ‘public life’ is:
- “...a very broad term, which includes government public appointments; the House of Lords; Local Strategic Partnerships; community associations or fora; community police liaison committees; neighbourhood watch committees; citizens panels; public bodies’ focus or working groups; school Boards of Governors, school councils; youth councils; user groups for a service provided by a public authority. This is not an exhaustive list.”⁵*
- 2.4 Further, the Commission’s (2008) ‘Guidance for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people’ set out that ‘*active participation*’ means not only engaging with people when developing policies, but also giving them the opportunity to take part in decision-making. This may include involving people in formal decision-making structures and activities⁶.

³ Summarised from ECNI (2007) [A Guide for Public Authorities – Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People and Encouraging the Participation of Disabled People in Public Life](#)

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

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Summarised from ECNI (2008) ‘Guidance for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people’.

The value of diversity in participation

- 2.5 Diversity in public life and ensuring the participation of people from all types of backgrounds, including those protected by the equality laws, enhances the decision-making processes.
- 2.6 It provides for greater accountability along with having more representative groups of people influencing and shaping the decisions that affect all our daily lives.
- 2.7 The social, economic and political context of Northern Ireland has changed considerably since the Commission produced its first Statement of Key Inequalities in 2007⁷. In particular, Northern Ireland has a changing demographic profile with increasing numbers of young people, and an increasing proportion of those from minority ethnic group (MEG) communities among the general population.
- 2.8 Participating in public life by serving on a board or standing for election allows individuals to make a valuable contribution, and for society to benefit from that contribution.
- 2.9 The public profile involved can lead to people from specific groups acting as positive role models for others and can thereby encourage a wider diversity of people to participate in public life. It can also encourage others to participate, perhaps by exercising their right to vote in elections.
- 2.10 Diversity can also help transform attitudes and behaviours and create an environment for equal respect. Participation in public life is vital to people's sense of status and belonging⁸.

Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life (draft) and associated research

- 2.11 To underpin its work, the Commission has developed a draft 'Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland'⁹. The Commission is currently engaging on the draft Statement and the proposed key inequalities therein.
- 2.12 The Commission's draft Statement draws on research¹⁰ conducted on its behalf by Ipsos MORI in 2015. The research

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

⁸ ECNI (2007) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#). ECNI, Belfast.

⁹ ECNI (2018) Draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland

¹⁰ Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds. ECNI

investigated the extent of participation of the different Section 75 groups in public life in Northern Ireland.

- 2.13 The Ipsos MORI research sought to examine participation by the nine Section 75 equality categories¹¹ across nineteen areas^{12 13} considered to comprise key areas of public life, as aligned to the Commission's definitions.
- 2.14 While noting the impact of significant and specific data gaps on the ability to identify key inequalities; and distilling key barriers to participation; the Commission's draft Statement proposes the following as **key inequalities** for attention:
- Government public appointments: under-representation of persons with a disability;
 - Government public appointments: under-representation of women;
 - Elected positions in NI: under-representation of women;
 - Elected positions in NI: there are no elected representatives within the Northern Ireland Assembly from minority ethnic backgrounds (under-representation of those from ethnic minority backgrounds).
- 2.15 The Commission's *draft Statement* also proposes the following as an **inequality**:
- Voting: those with a disability are less likely to vote.
- 2.16 It is the Commission's intention that its draft, and subsequently finalised, Statement (and associated underlying research), will inform the work of government, relevant Departments and stakeholders over the coming period. It is our hope that the evidence and analysis therein will further assist them to identify

¹¹ The nine equality categories covered by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 are: gender; racial group; disability status; sexual orientation; religious belief; political opinion; age; marital status; and dependency status.

¹² The nineteen areas were derived from Commission guidance. The Commission acknowledges in its guidance that the list is not exhaustive; but it provides a number of examples of public life

¹³ The areas IPSOS MORI sought to consider were: government public appointments; the House of Lords; local Strategic Partnerships; community associations or fora; community police liaison committees; neighbourhood watch committees; citizen's panels; public bodies' focus or working groups; school Boards of Governors, school councils; youth councils; user groups for a service provided by a public authority; elected representatives; members of political fora; access to the voting system; judges (e.g. magistrates); jurors; litigants (access the law and courts); recruitment and selection panels; and public bodies focus/working/advisory groups.

and adopt actions to address the identified key inequalities; and to mainstream equality considerations into the development and review of public policy and service delivery.

Policy Proposals: Advancing participation in public life

- 2.17 In parallel to engagement on the draft Statement, the Commission has also published the draft policy positions set out in this document.
- 2.18 Developed from a range of research and evidence sources including the draft Statement noted above, and the Commission's wider work over a number of years, this draft policy position paper sets out the Commission's views on specific policy positions and recommendations for action to tackle the identified key inequalities and wider issues.

Overarching issues for attention

- 2.19 We call for action to address two key overarching issues for attention:
- **Ensure equality data collection and disaggregation** is sufficient to identify inequality, develop robust policy interventions, and ensure the delivery of Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes
 - **Tackle overarching barriers to active participation** including: structural barriers; physical and communication needs; personal capacity and perceived barriers; and stereotypes and prejudice.

Key Themes: Actions to address identified Inequalities

- 2.20 We call for prompt action to address the draft key inequalities and inequalities identified in the Commission's draft 'Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland':
- **Government Public Appointments:** support those with disabilities; deliver on gender targets for boards and chairs; implement a cross-departmental strategy to advance participation more generally.

- **Elected Representatives:** advance the participation of women and minority ethnic individuals in political life; advance the participation of women in peace building.
- **Voting:** Ensure access to the voting system for those with disabilities.

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

2.22 While the Commission would urge prompt action to address and implement these recommendations, we will for the next period, as with our work on the above draft Statement, continue to engage with a range of key stakeholders to further refine our proposals and recommendations.

2.23 We expand below on each of these proposed key themes and proposals, setting out associated policy recommendations and supporting rationales.

3 Ensure equality data collection and disaggregation is sufficient to identify inequality, develop robust policy interventions, and ensure the delivery of Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes.

Draft Recommendations: Action is required to:

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

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

- 3.1 There are significant and specific data gaps across all areas of public life in relation to the participation of those from across the nine equality categories.
- 3.2 Only three of nineteen areas of public life examined¹⁴ by Ipsos MORI collected and report quantitative data on a regular basis, namely: government public appointments; elected representatives; and access to the voting system.
- 3.3 There is a complete absence of data for the specific Section 75 grounds of marital status, dependent status and sexual orientation, across all areas of public life.

Supporting Rationale

- 3.4 Comprehensive equality data is necessary to shape, refine and evaluate the impact of strategies, programmes and policies.

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

- 3.5 The paucity in monitoring and reporting participation in public life has substantially impacted upon the extent to which the Commission's draft Statement and underpinning research could identify inequalities in participation in public life in Northern Ireland. The ability to develop targeted and evidenced based policy solutions is thus similarly impacted.

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

- 3.6 There is very limited disaggregated data, across all grounds, which prevents an examination of potential inequalities encountered as a result of multiple identities (e.g. barriers faced by young, single mothers).
- 3.7 Even in the areas of public life where data is collected, namely government public appointments, elected representatives and the voting system, the availability of data is often limited, patchy and often not disaggregated¹⁵.

Supporting Rationale

- 3.8 The ability to develop targeted and evidence based policy solutions is further impacted by a lack of disaggregated data.
- 3.9 A lack of data disaggregation negatively affects not only the degree to which specific inequalities in participation in public life can be assessed and monitored, but also impacts on the ability to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of specific actions taken by public authorities and others to address specific inequalities.
- 3.10 The lack of disaggregated data regarding participation in public life further impacted upon the extent to which the Commission's research could robustly identify inequalities.
- 3.11 It also affects public authorities with respect to the implementation of their statutory duties under the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and also Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

¹⁵ The monitoring of ethnicity and disability within participation in public life does not allow for disaggregation by categories. For example, 'white' category by nationality would enable the experiences of Eastern European migrants and other minority ethnic groups such as Travellers to be determined. Similarly, disaggregated beyond the classification of 'disability'.

4 Tackle overarching barriers to active participation including: structural barriers; physical and communication needs; personal capacity and perceived barriers; and stereotypes and prejudice.

- 4.1 The Commission is mindful that many of the identified inequalities are at least partially derived from a combination of barriers encountered by individuals from across the equality categories.
- 4.2 While the identification of key inequalities was limited to where there was sufficiently robust data available, the associated barriers are often overarching and cross-cutting with a general applicability and so are presented here for broader consideration and action.

Draft Recommendations: Action is required to:

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

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

- 4.3 Further action is needed to ensure effective engagement across the full range of equality categories.

- 4.4 The effective inclusion of individuals from across a range of equality categories will require specific and tailored steps to be taken. This will entail considering the specific barriers which individuals from across a range of groups may face, and taking action to help overcome them.
- 4.5 The Executive Office’s Practical Guide to Policy Making¹⁶ states that engagement is: ‘firmly embedded in the culture of the public service in Northern Ireland and is particularly important in the context of the statutory duties on equality and good relations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.’
- 4.6 While representative groups have produced ground specific guidance for public authorities aimed at ensuring more effective consultation and engagement, there is however a range of research and publications (see below) highlighting inconsistencies in levels of engagement and raising questions about the meaningfulness of engagement.

Supporting rationale

Gender

- 4.7 The Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) has produced guidance¹⁷ for public authorities and women’s organisations on consulting effectively with women. It provides suggestions for public authorities to ensure that consultation addresses the barriers women may face, and to improve the participation of disadvantaged and marginalised women. While recognising that improvements have been made, the guidance suggests practical ways to tackle longstanding barriers. These include: partnering with women’s organisation to secure the participation of affected women; planning engagement events which take account of women’s caring responsibilities by, for example, providing childcare; keeping language accessible and relevant, avoiding jargon; and demonstrating the input of the groups consulted with in the final policy.

Trans people

- 4.8 The Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) has written that: ‘the development of transgender policy work across [UK] government has declined because the politicians

¹⁶ TEO (2016) [Practical Guide to Policy Making](#)

¹⁷ WRDA (2018) Women at the heart of public consultation, a guide for public authorities and women’s organisations

and civil servants now believe that recent legislation has greatly improved the entitlements of gender non-conforming people...'

- 4.9 The Equality Network in Scotland has produced guidance¹⁸ on engagement with trans people for public bodies. This includes ensuring trans representatives are part of the consultation process from the start, using anonymous surveys, speaking at representative group meetings, and being aware of the particular needs and experiences of trans people.

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people

- 4.10 The Commission continues to recommend the effective involvement of LGB people in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of strategic actions, and to build capacity within the LGB sector.
- 4.11 Stonewall's 'How to engage gay people in your work'¹⁹ cited research findings²⁰ that: '*local LGB people may never have been enabled to play a part in their local services or their local community*'. It further listed a range of survey findings demonstrating that LGB people may expect poorer access to public services and to experience discrimination. It concluded that involving them in policy development is therefore important, and this includes using mechanisms such as LGB advisory panels.
- 4.12 The Equality Network in Scotland suggested²¹ that 'LGB and trans people can often have different experiences or be affected disproportionately by the way public services are delivered.' It cited the importance of building trust, managing expectations and providing feedback to participants.

Older people

- 4.13 Older people, although well represented in public appointments, report more generally that they feel they are not fully involved in policymaking.
- 4.14 The 2016 Active Ageing Strategy²² includes amongst its strategic aims: 'To achieve the active participation of older people in all aspects of life including ... the active participation

¹⁸Equality Network (2013) [Engaging trans people](#)

¹⁹ Stonewall (2013) [How to engage gay people in your work](#)

²⁰ Citing the DCLG Citizenship Survey 2010

²¹ Equality Network (2013) <https://www.equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Community-Connections-1.-Engaging-LGBT-People.pdf>

²² OFMDFM (2016) Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2021

and citizenship of older people in decision-making on policies and in the provision of services.²³ We recommend that Departments identify and take steps to ensure that this aim is fulfilled, not only in the delivery of actions associated with the Strategy; but across the development, delivery and review of all Government policies and services more generally.

- 4.15 Age NI's key indicators on the quality of older people's lives found that 'the percentage of older people who think that Government does not make a sufficient effort to listen to their needs and experiences' has remained high and broadly stable over time, with 80%²⁴ feeling this to be the case in 2011, and 77% of that view in 2014²⁵.
- 4.16 Additionally, 2015 research indicates that older people identified a number of specific barriers²⁶ to effective participation. These include: lack of training and education skills of older people and government staff involved with participation sessions; lack of experience; low self-esteem and confidence; physical barriers, for example - transport infrastructure may not facilitate attendance at the engagement events; and confidence, and lack of digital knowledge.

Younger people

- 4.17 Research²⁷ on engagement with young people has noted inconsistencies on levels of engagement; of children not being consulted at the same time as adults; and has raised questions about the meaningfulness of engagement.
- 4.18 The Ten Year Children and Young People's Strategy led to the establishment of Champions in each Government Department with responsibilities which included to "*encourage departments to ensure children's and young people's interests are fostered and their views sought on policy and strategy issues*"²⁸.

²³ OFMDFM (2016) Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2021 page 7

²⁴ Age NI (2011) Agenda for Later Life 2011

²⁵ Age NI (2015) Agenda for Later Life 2015: Public policy for later life in Northern Ireland

²⁶ Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds. ECNI

²⁷ Dr Bryne, B and Prof Lundy, L Queen's University of Belfast, Nov 2011, Barriers to Effective Government Delivery for Children in Northern Ireland, published by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

²⁸ Dr Bryne, B and Prof Lundy, L Queen's University of Belfast, Nov 2011, Barriers to Effective Government Delivery for Children in Northern Ireland, published by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

- 4.19 Given noted inconsistencies, we would therefore also welcome an evaluation of the effectiveness of the ‘Departmental Children’s Champions’.
- 4.20 The Commission’s 2008 guidance to the public sector ‘Let’s Talk Let’s Listen’²⁹ explains why and how public authorities should consult with and involve children and young people.
- 4.21 Despite this, research carried out by Queen’s University of Belfast³⁰ in 2011 identified a number of issues with public sector engagement with children and young people, including:
- inconsistencies between and within departments on levels of engagement with children and young people.
 - questioning how meaningful engagement has been.
 - children not being consulted with at the same time as adults.

Disabled people

- 4.22 Research into factors essential for the successful implementation of national disability strategies³¹ identified consultation mechanisms as a key factor. It recommended that structures should be established that involve people with disabilities throughout the entire process from strategy development to monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.
- 4.23 In its 2017 Concluding Observations, the UNCRPD Committee recommended that the United Kingdom:

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

Minority ethnic groups

- 4.24 Watt and McGaughey³² (2006) argued that: ‘Engagement with minority ethnic and other interested parties is essential not only

²⁹ ECNI, May 2008, Let’s Talk, Let’s Listen: Guidance for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people

³⁰ Dr Bryne, B and Prof Lundy, L Queen’s University of Belfast, Nov 2011, Barriers to Effective Government Delivery for Children in Northern Ireland, published by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

³¹ Flynn (2013) From Rhetoric to Action, Implementing the UNCRPD

³² Watt and McGaughey (2006) [Improving Government service delivery to minority ethnic groups](#)

in planning service delivery, but also in monitoring and evaluating. ... A number of authors have emphasised the risk of relying on the same people when it comes to consultation with minority ethnic groups.’ This may be a particular issue in Northern Ireland where the minority ethnic community is relatively small at 1.8% of the population, but heterogeneous with different cultures, experiences and communication requirements within it.

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

- 4.25 Structural barriers can include recruitment criteria and processes, the requirement for previous experience, costs of participation and the balancing of family and working life etc.
- 4.26 Recruitment and selection processes, for example application forms, often asking for formal qualifications and previous board experience³³ as essential or preferred criteria, may act as barriers to broader participation. A closer consideration of skills and experience *essential* for the role; and the provision of associated opportunities for capacity building (e.g. training and/or board / work experience) may help to overcome barriers and widen access.
- 4.27 The costs of participation and potentially limited remuneration for it may limit the opportunities for those from some equality categories to participate fully in public life. Furthermore, the impact of remuneration upon statutory benefit entitlement may deter people with disabilities and others from pursuing a paid participative role.
- 4.28 The reconciliation of family and working life represents a significant barrier³⁴, as does the limited availability of accessible, appropriate and affordable childcare. There is a need to develop carer friendly policy and practices and to address the point that the more limited availability of childcare outside normal working hours, when boards or committees may sit, could deter those with caring responsibilities.

³³ Common Purpose (2009) Diversity of representation in public appointments: A study by Common Purpose

³⁴ The Executive Office (2006/07-2015/16) The Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Reports

- 4.29 Further, whilst there has been an increase in the number of childcare places in Northern Ireland over the last decade, the cost of childcare remains high, and is higher than in other parts of the UK^{35 36 37}.
- 4.30 Research³⁸ has identified that the cumulative impact of a lack of experience over time ‘...can act as barrier to accessing future positions of leadership... as they are less likely to achieve senior positions from which board members are appointed’ – often referred to as the ‘leadership pipeline.’

Supporting Rationale

Recruitment and selection processes

- 4.31 Appointment processes associated with participation in public life can place under-represented groups at a disadvantage relative to experience requirements.
- 4.32 Similarly, the use of professional or technical language³⁹ in the selection processes may act as another barrier as those from some equality categories may be less familiar with specific terminology.⁴⁰

Costs

- 4.33 The cost of participation may limit the opportunities for individuals from across a range of equality categories to participate fully in public life, either based upon a single or multiple identities. This is due to the financial resources often required to participate, and the sometimes limited remuneration available to those who may wish to participate.

³⁵ In 2014, the overall number of day care places in NI was 56,140 – up 17% from the level recorded in 2004 (47,939). In 2015 the average weekly amount of childcare charges paid in Northern Ireland was £113 and the average weekly increase in Child and Working Tax Credits awards was £76 for families benefiting from the childcare element. [£93 and £61 in the UK respectively] [DETI \(2015\) Women in NI Department for the Economy](#)

³⁶ In 2013 childcare in Northern Ireland cost nearly half (44%) the average income, compared to 33% in GB and 12% across the EU as cited in McQuaid R, Graham H, Shapira M (2013), [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), commissioned by ECNI

³⁷ 25% of respondents to the Employers for Childcare [2015 Childcare Costs Report](#) said their childcare bill exceeded their rent or mortgage payment with the average mortgage payment at £139 per week compared to £164 per week for an average full time childcare place.

³⁸ McQuaid R, Graham H, Shapira, M. (2013) [Childcare: Maximising the Economic Participation of Women](#)

³⁹ UNICEF, Children and young people: Participating in the decision-making process,

⁴⁰ The Evaluation Trust and South West Foundation (2009) Engagement and Empowerment among older people: A case study. National Empowerment Partnership

- 4.34 Different levels of remuneration may demonstrate structural barriers. For example, in respect to government public appointments men have consistently been twice as likely to be in paid positions than women⁴¹.
- 4.35 The impact of remuneration upon statutory benefit entitlement may deter people with disabilities and others from pursuing a paid participative role. Scope's 2010 submission to the Access to Public Life Participation Fund⁴² cited as a barrier to participation:

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

- 4.36 This has been a longstanding issue, being cited before the Select Committee on Public Administration in 2002⁴³ by the former head of the Disability Rights Commission. He outlined the case of an individual who was very well qualified for an appointment but had to resign from it because it would result in him losing benefits. He stated that: *'It also has to be recognised, and disabled people need to know it will be recognised, that serving the public, in one capacity or another, will not actually be a huge financial drain on people who, by and large, do not have the money to drain away from them in the first place.'*

Childcare

- 4.37 The availability of appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare provision to meet the needs of all⁴⁴ children is a fundamental part of the process of assisting those with caring responsibilities - particularly mothers – to more fully participate in the economy⁴⁵ and in public life.

⁴¹ The Executive Office (2006/07-2015/16) The Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Reports

⁴² UK Parliament (2010) [Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation](#)

⁴³ UK Parliament (2002) [Select Committee on Public Administration, minutes of evidence 13.06.02](#)

⁴⁴ Particular needs exist for disabled children, children from minority ethnic communities and new residents and those living in rural communities and for different ages of children. See McQuaid R, Graham H, Shapira M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), commissioned by ECNI

⁴⁵ See McQuaid R, Graham H, Shapira M (2013), [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), commissioned by ECNI

Meet the physical access and communication needs of prospective participants.

- 4.38 Organisations have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people. This may require them to use appropriate rooms within a building to conduct a meeting, or to change the venue itself in order to secure participation.
- 4.39 The provision of accessible public transport, particularly in rural areas, is also key to being able to participate in public life.
- 4.40 Consideration of the communication needs of prospective participants will facilitate organisations to produce materials in appropriate languages and accessible formats, or to use a variety of dissemination channels.
- 4.41 As public services increasingly move to ‘digital by default’ whereby information is provided and accessed online, safeguards are necessary to ensure that individuals from across the Section 75 categories can participate fully. Particular issues may arise for those who do not have access to the internet or who may require assistance to use it.

Supporting rationale

Physical access and transport

- 4.42 Poor provision of accessible buildings and accessible travel systems can inhibit participation.
- 4.43 While an audit of the accessibility of public buildings in Northern Ireland has not been carried out, in 2013 Commission research⁴⁶ measured access to services as experienced by people with disabilities. It identified the need for improvements to how the premises of service providers were used.
- 4.44 Accessibility audits of seven towns in Northern Ireland by IMTAC (Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee) in 2015 highlighted the persistence of a number of unnecessary physical barriers⁴⁷.
- 4.45 A 2015 report⁴⁸ by Disabled People’s Voices stated that while improvements had been made to public transport there was still

⁴⁶ ECNI (2013) [ABC – Audit, Benchmark, Change. State of Disability Access Report](#)

⁴⁷ IMTAC (2015) [Valuing Pedestrian Journeys – Lessons Learned from ‘Walking Audits’](#)

⁴⁸ Disabled People’s Voices (2015) Northern Ireland – Our Lives, Our Voices, Our votes

‘some way to go before disabled people could travel routinely by bus or train’.

Communication methods

- 4.46 Communication barriers can take a number of forms, such as failure to meet language requirements, including the need for sign language, and the ‘digital by default’ approach.
- 4.47 It was reported⁴⁹ in 2017 that Northern Ireland had only 15 qualified sign language interpreters to serve a population of 5000 sign language users.
- 4.48 2016 UK wide data from the Office for National Statistics⁵⁰ found that there was lower usage of the internet by older people and people with disabilities than in the general population overall. Only 71% of adults with disabilities had used the internet during the previous three months, compared to 87.9% of the general population.
- 4.49 In Northern Ireland, in 2012/13 61% of those in the 60-69 age bracket had access to the internet, but this dropped dramatically to 28% for those aged 70 and over. This contrasts with over 90% of the under 40s having access. These differences may be driven by, and contribute to, lesser familiarity with related technologies⁵¹.
- 4.50 Internet usage decreases with age, with 38.7% of over 75s having recently used it, compared to 99.2% of 16-24 year olds. The age and disability status of respondents was not disaggregated at a regional level, but Northern Ireland had the lowest recent internet usage of all regions.

Build capacity and overcome perceived barriers

- 4.51 There is a need to develop skills and provide capacity building to under-represented groups. The provision of capacity building opportunities (e.g. training and/or board / work experience) aligned to common skills and experience criteria for public life posts may help to overcome barriers and widen access.
- 4.52 Similarly, seeking to engage with under-represented groups via promotion and outreach could raise awareness of the potential

⁴⁹ Disability Action (2017) [UNCRPD Alternative Report](#) Citing Action on Hearing Loss website (2014)

⁵⁰ ONS (2016) [Internet Users in the UK: 2016](#)

⁵¹ Age UK , [Introducing another World: older people and digital inclusion](#), page 5

benefits for individuals and society, helping to overcome personal perceived barriers to participation.

- 4.53 Developing targeted actions to better understand and foster a sense of ‘belonging’ among under-represented groups may also assist in overcoming perceived barriers.

Supporting Rationale

- 4.54 Where participation is not fully representative, the breadth of knowledge, experiences, and potential viewpoints which may contribute to a board of a public body, or any decision making process may be limited.
- 4.55 Those from certain equality categories, and / or more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, may not have the confidence in their ability to successfully apply for, or undertake, roles in public life. Any actual lack of skills or experience within under-represented groups may also impede broader participation in public life.
- 4.56 Individuals from certain equality groups may lack confidence and trust in politics and in public bodies⁵². Participant confidence and trust can be undermined where, for example, *“young people have been able to influence, or even make decisions, [but where] barriers within complicated infrastructures have tended to limit implementation.”*⁵³ The absence of effective promotion, engagement and outreach by public bodies and political institutions towards some equality groups, can also act as barriers to broader public participation.^{54,55,56}
- 4.57 Research has shown that “social capital and a ‘sense of belonging’ are understood to foster civic engagement in a modern society.”⁵⁷

⁵² Ipsos MORI (2015) *Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds*. ECNI, Belfast.

⁵³ UNICEF (n.d.) Children and young people: Participating in the decision-making process,

⁵⁴ For example, O’Toole, T.; Dehanas, D.N.; Modood, T.; Meer, N.; and Jones, S. (2013) [*Taking part: Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance*](#). University of Bristol.

⁵⁵ Ipsos MORI (2015) *Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds*. ECNI, Belfast.

⁵⁶ Weller, P. (2009) How participation changes things: *‘Inter faith’, ‘multi faith; and a new public imaginary*. In (eds) Adam Dinham, Robert Furbey, Vivien Lowndes, *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, Policies and Practices*. Policy Press: University of Bristol.

⁵⁷ Hayward, K., Dowds, L. and Shaw, C. (2014): *Belonging and Alienation in the new Northern Ireland*. Available at: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update93.pdf>

- 4.58 For people to have a ‘sense of belonging’ they must be able to participate in society, in safety, free from intimidation and discrimination. Belonging must be based on equal participation and equal membership of the community.
- 4.59 The 2013 Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey highlighted that less than half of people with a minority ethnic background⁵⁸ felt a sense of belonging to Northern Ireland⁵⁹. The research also found that a sense of belonging was weaker among those who were wary of ethnic diversity⁶⁰; perhaps indicating that prejudice can arise as much from insecurity in group identity as from bravado⁶¹. Stonewall’s (2013) ‘How to engage gay people in your work’⁶² cited research findings⁶³ that *‘while three in four heterosexual people felt a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, just over half of LGB people did.’*

Challenge stereotypes and prejudice

- 4.60 Stereotypes and prejudice impact on participation in public life for those from across a range of equality categories. Assumptions may be made, for example about women, that they do not aspire to board directorships, or that they lack the necessary skills to sit on boards⁶⁴.
- 4.61 There is a need to encourage the participation and visibility of under-represented groups in public life; to promote role models; and tackle the high level of prejudicial attitudes towards individuals associated with their equality group characteristics.
- 4.62 There is also a need to challenge stereotypes, including gender stereotypes relating to parenting and childcare responsibilities; support the sharing of family roles/responsibilities; and remove associated barriers to parents contributing to public life.

⁵⁸ Among respondents from minority ethnic groups, the sense of belonging was much weaker with 41 per cent saying they probably or definitely felt a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood and 39 per cent saying probably or definitely felt a sense of belonging to Northern Ireland respectively

⁵⁹ See Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey at: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/comrel.html>

⁶⁰ Those agreeing with the statement “In relation to colour and ethnicity, I prefer to stick with people of my own kind”

⁶¹ Hayward, K., Dowds, L. and Shaw, C. (2014): Op. Cit.

⁶² Stonewall (2013) [How to engage gay people in your work](#)

⁶³ Citing the DCLG Citizenship Survey 2010

⁶⁴ Women’s National Commission (2009) [Women in public life](#).

- 4.63 Wider societal prejudices and hate crimes must be tackled; including harassment both inside and outside the workplace; and bullying in schools.
- 4.64 The role of mass media cannot be ignored, for example in conveying the male dominated nature of public life⁶⁵. A lack of visible female role models within politics at a local and national level can act as a deterrent to women's participation⁶⁶. As such, both local and national media, through positive and supportive portrayals, can have a profound impact on promoting positive public attitudes and encouraging representation.

Supporting Rationale

- 4.65 Negative perceptions / stereotypes exist about the skills, abilities and experience of certain equality groups. Negative or stereotypical attitudes can, for example, result in their being excluded from posts, including public life posts.
- 4.66 For example, a report (2015) by the European Institute for Gender Equality⁶⁷ has highlighted that “women are, throughout all Member States, disproportionately responsible for caring and educating children, grandchildren and other dependents, as well as cooking and housework”.
- 4.67 Beyond stereotypes and prejudice, individuals may also experience discrimination and harassment associated with their equality characteristics which may act as a barrier to participation in public life. The apprehension of fear, to self and property, is a barrier cited by those from certain equality groups⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ Northern Ireland Assembly (2013) Research and Information Paper [Women in Northern Ireland. \(p14\)](#)

⁶⁶ Women's National Commission (2009) [Women in public life.](#)

⁶⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality, (2015) [Gender Equality Index 2015,](#)

⁶⁸ Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds. ECNI

5 **Government Public Appointments: support those with disabilities; deliver on gender targets for boards and chairs; implement a cross-departmental strategy to advance participation more generally.**

- 5.1 This section sets out recommendations to advance equality in government public appointments. It should be read in tandem with the earlier overarching recommendations to address key data gaps and tackle cross-cutting barriers to participation.

Draft Recommendations: Action is required to:

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

- 5.2 While noting significant and specific data gaps regarding the participation of those from a range of equality categories across all areas of public life, the Commission's draft Statement of Key Inequalities proposes the under-representation of **those with a disability** and **women** within government public appointments as key inequalities. Accordingly, we propose recommendations as set out below towards addressing these inequalities.

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

- 5.3 The Commission has identified that specific barriers to participation include physical and other accessibility issues; lack of capacity-building; and wider support⁶⁹.
- 5.4 Support measures to tackle the under-representation of disabled people could include:
- Consulting with disability stakeholders on how to secure greater participation levels;
 - Encouraging stakeholders to promote the participation of disabled people;
 - Developing supported work and boardroom initiatives to build experience, capacity and skills.
 - Address physical, communication and other access issues, including covering the reasonable additional costs associated with the participation of a person with disabilities.

Supporting Rationale

- 5.5 The Commission’s 2012 ‘How does Northern Ireland measure up?’⁷⁰ report identified participation in public life as one of three priority areas where further action was key to the implementation of the State’s obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
- 5.6 A 2015 report by the organisation Disabled People’s Voices⁷¹ reported that disabled people did not feel that they had the same opportunity as their non-disabled peers to be involved in public life.
- 5.7 The underrepresentation⁷² of persons with disabilities in government public appointments has remained reasonably consistent over the period 2006-2014 (2%)⁷³. However, during the period 2008 - 2014, there was an observed trend of a

⁶⁹ ECNI (2018) Draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life

⁷⁰ ECNI (2012) [How Does Northern Ireland Measure Up?](#)

⁷¹ Disabled People’s Voices (2015) Our lives, our voices, our votes

⁷² When compared to persons with disabilities share of the population which is 21%. NISRA (2011) Northern Ireland 2011 Census Population Tables, [Table KS301NI: Health and provision of unpaid care](#)

⁷³ Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds.

decreasing number of applications to government public appointments from persons who had declared a disability.

- 5.8 In 2014, CPANI reported that previous diversity initiatives during the period 2008 - 2011 had made no impact on the number of persons with disabilities serving on public boards⁷⁴. Repeating the same type of actions is therefore unlikely to increase representation.

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

- 5.9 The Commission has welcomed that, in March 2016, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed targets for the appointment of women to public bodies. In particular we welcomed that by 2017/18 there should be gender equality for all appointments made in year, and that by the year ending 2020-21 there should be gender equality for all appointees in post, reflected in both board membership and at chair level⁷⁵.
- 5.10 We note however that progress in this regard may have been limited by the absence of Assembly Ministers since January 2017 to make appointments.
- 5.11 We therefore urge the prompt implementation of a timetabled action plan setting out key milestones to deliver on the agreed targets.

Supporting Rationale

- 5.12 The vision in the now expired Northern Ireland Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016 states⁷⁶:

Men and women will be able to realise their full potential to contribute equally to the political, economic, social, (including caring roles) and cultural development of Northern Ireland and benefit equally from the results.

⁷⁴Commissioner for Public Appointments (2014) [Underrepresentation and Lack of Diversity in Government Public Appointments in Northern Ireland](#).

⁷⁵ CPANI Annual Report 2015/16, page 8

⁷⁶ NI Executive (2010) [Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016](#)

- 5.13 A 2013 review of the Strategy noted feedback from stakeholders that ‘progress against it had been limited and implementation and monitoring could be improved’⁷⁷.
- 5.14 In 2015 Ipsos MORI research reported the continuing underrepresentation of women, compared to their share of the population, in government public appointments (36%) and as publicly appointed chairpersonships (21%)⁷⁸. This was a slight increase in representation since the inequality was highlighted in the Commission’s 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities⁷⁹. The Commission, through its own analysis of government public appointment data, found this was also evident between 2014 and 2016, although to a lesser extent⁸⁰.
- 5.15 In terms of remuneration for their role/contribution, during the period 2006/07-2015/16 men have consistently been nearly twice as likely to be in paid positions when compared to women⁸¹. When considering remunerated chair positions, this increases to more than three times as likely⁸². CPANI (2015) notes the slow progress towards appointing more women, particularly as chairs of public boards⁸³.
- 5.16 The report⁸⁴ of the then Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland in 2014 stated that the statistics on women, as well as other groups, in public appointments were not improving. While we welcome progress since that report, women continue to remain under-represented⁸⁵, particularly as regards the roles of chairs and vice chairs⁸⁶.
- 5.17 Concerted action will be required to achieve the targets agreed by the Executive in March 2016 for the appointment of women to public bodies, and to address the range of political; socio-

⁷⁷ At page 5

⁷⁸ This inequality is derived from analysis of OFMDFM Government Public Appointment data by Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds. ECNI, Belfast.

⁷⁹ ECNI (2007) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#). ECNI, Belfast.

⁸⁰ The Commission found the percentage of public appointments held by women to be 38% in 2014/15 and 41% in 2015/16. However, due the introduction of new disclosure conditions the data pertaining to the percentage of chairpersonships held by women in 2015/16 is not publicly available. See TEO (2014/15 - 2015/16) [The Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Reports](#)

⁸¹ TEO (2006/07-2015/16) [The Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Reports](#)

⁸² Overall during the period 2006/07-2014/15 women account for less than a quarter (23%) of remunerated chair positions.

⁸³ CPANI (2015) ‘Guardian of the Public Appointment Process’ [Under-representation and lack of diversity in public appointments in Northern Ireland](#).

⁸⁴ CPANI (2014) Report on Under-Representation and Lack of Diversity in Public Appointments in Northern Ireland

⁸⁵ 40% in 2015 compared to 33% in 2011.

⁸⁶ 22% of chairs were women in 2015. [NI Assembly \(2017\) The Representation of Women in Public Life](#)

economic; ideological and psychological barriers impacting on women's participation in public life at board and chair level. These are wide-ranging, including being part of the networks that gain access to boards, the availability of childcare and the confidence of individuals.

Implement a cross-departmental strategy to address under-representation and support participation, including to implement the 2014 recommendations of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

- 5.18 Ensuring representative participation of individuals from across the full range of Section 75 equality categories in public appointments would help to ensure a more informed policy decision-making process.
- 5.19 Actions should seek to not only address under-representations and known barriers, but also to raise awareness of opportunities and their relevance to members of specific equality categories (see recommendations to address barriers further above).
- 5.20 The Commission considers that such actions could be advanced via a cross-departmental strategy which would also include actions to implement the 2014 recommendations of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland. These recommendations included, for example: using the Public Appointments Forum to address under-representation at an NICS, rather than departmental, level; making board diversity public policy and setting measurable goals; and taking a centralised approach to raising awareness of public appointments.
- 5.21 It is our understanding that an Executive level five-year cross-departmental diversity strategy for public appointments is currently in draft form. We urge early publication and implementation of the Strategy with associated actions, targets and review mechanism.

Supporting Rationale

- 5.22 In 2014, the Commissioner for Public Appointments stated that: "our public boards are missing out on skills, knowledge and

perspectives that exist throughout the community. This is not conducive to optimal performance by our boards...”⁸⁷

5.23 In 2015 the Commissioner for Public Appointments further stated that⁸⁸: “it is clear that little progress has been made by Government on implementing my January 2014 report⁸⁹.... there is no indication... that a focussed, coordinated programme to implement the recommendations is imminent”.

5.24 A cross-departmental strategy would provide a government wide approach to addressing the under-representation of groups such as women and people with disabilities, and to giving consideration to the groups, such as LGB and gender identity, where monitoring data is not collected. Such a strategy would require clear actions, timelines, review mechanisms and measures of success.

Gender and Disability

5.25 Arguments in support of actions to address under-representations of women and those with a disability are already set out in the paragraphs just above and so are not repeated here.

Young people

5.26 In 2011/12 only 1% of appointments to public boards in Northern Ireland were to people under the age of 30. Although appointments of people within this age band increased in 2013/14⁹⁰ to 4%, this was still considerably lower than other age bands. In 2014, the Commissioner for Public Appointments (NI) reported that when younger people (under the age of 30) were asked why they had not applied for a public appointment opportunity they indicated that they were “reluctant to submit themselves to a recruitment process that they see as ‘not for them’ ”⁹¹.

Minority ethnic groups

5.27 The Commission notes that 2% of applications for public appointments came from minority ethnic communities during

⁸⁷Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (2014) Under-representation and lack of diversity in public appointments

⁸⁸ Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland (2014) Annual Report 2014/15.

⁸⁹ In 2014, the Diversity Working Group set out 26 recommendations for action with an expectation that the Executive and the Departments would begin to implement the recommendations.

⁹⁰OFMDFM (Mar 2014) The Public Bodies and Public Appointments annual report 2013/14

⁹¹ The Commissioner for Public Appointments NI (Jan 2014) Under-representation and lack of diversity in public appointments in Northern Ireland

2013-14. However only 1% of appointments (1 male and 1 female) comprised members of ethnic minority communities during this period⁹².

- 5.28 We have already noted further above the importance of a 'sense of belonging'⁹³ to the participation of those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Other groups

- 5.29 While sufficient data does not exist to form a view with regards to any under-representation or otherwise of wider equality groups, for example LGB or Transgender, we note and recommend action to address the barriers often faced by individuals from across wider grounds.
- 5.30 For example, specific barriers for LGB and Transgender persons participating in public life include: the fear of being 'outed'; negative media stereotyping; the fear of vandalism, violence or abuse⁹⁴; and the general public being 'uncomfortable' with having a Transgender person in the highest elected position⁹⁵.

⁹² Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister (2014): [Public Bodies and Public Appointments](#), Table 8B, page 24.

⁹³ ECNI (2014) [Response to consultation on OFMDFM draft Racial Equality Strategy](#)

⁹⁴ Ryri, I.; McDonnell, S.; Allman, K. And Pralat, R. (2010) [Experiences of and barriers to participation in public and political life for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.](#)

⁹⁵ ECNI (2018) [A Question of Attitude](#) _ECNI, Belfast.

6 Elected Representatives: advance the participation of women and minority ethnic individuals in political life; advance the participation of women in peace building.

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

Draft Recommendations: Action is required to:

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

- 6.2 While noting significant and specific data gaps regarding the participation of a range of equality groups across all areas of public life, the Commission's draft *Statement* proposes as key inequalities the under-representation of **women** and those from **minority ethnic backgrounds** within elected positions. Aligned to these, we make the following policy recommendations:

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

- 6.3 Our draft Statement on Key Inequalities found a key inequality as regards the under-representation of women and minority ethnic groups within elected positions in Northern Ireland.
- 6.4 This under-representation means that, in addition to there being fewer women and minority ethnic groups in elected chambers, the bodies that are made up from elected members, such as

the Assembly scrutiny committees, or bodies that have elected member representation, such as the Policing Board⁹⁶, will also have a similar under-representation.

- 6.5 We call on government and political parties to take prompt steps to further promote and support the participation in political life of women, and those from minority ethnic groups, by actively tackling the barriers they may face (see earlier discussion). We also recommend actions to develop and broaden candidate pools.
- 6.6 In relation to women specifically, we recommend steps, including the adoption of temporary special measures, to increase the representation of women in political life⁹⁷. We welcome the positive action measures taken by local government at elected member, officer and service delivery level through the Women in Local Councils initiative, including the creation of gender champions, the development of family friendly operating and working practices and training and mentoring⁹⁸. We suggest that consideration is given to the adoption of a framework of a similar nature at Assembly and Executive level.
- 6.7 Particular consideration is also required in relation to those with multiple identities such as women with a minority ethnic background or women with disabilities. Specific, tailored responses to address the barriers they face to participation may be required.

Supporting Rationale

Women

- 6.8 In elected positions - at Westminster, in the Northern Ireland Assembly and in local government⁹⁹ - there has been a

⁹⁶ Five of 19 Policing Board Members are women (26%) – 3 of 9 independent members (33%) and 2 of 10 political members (20%) See Potter, M (January 2014): Review of Gender Issues in Northern Ireland

⁹⁷ In terms of temporary special measures, ECNI has welcomed the extension of the Sex Discrimination Election Candidates Act 2002 which allows for positive action in relation to women's political participation and including all women shortlists. CEDAW stipulates that States parties 'shall take all appropriate measures' to achieve equality between women and men including through the use of temporary special measures.

⁹⁸ The recent local government elections resulted in a marginal increase in women elected (25% against 23.5% at the last election in 2011 and 21% in 2005) but four of the eleven new council chief executives designate are women, an increase from three in the previous 26 councils. NISRA (2015) Women in NI Department for the Economy

⁹⁹This inequality is derived from analysis of OFMDFM Government Public Appointment data by Ipsos MORI (2015) Inequalities in Participation in Public Life: An Investigation of the Nine Section 75 grounds. ECNI, Belfast.

persistent underrepresentation of women when compared to their share of the population¹⁰⁰.

- 6.9 Whilst the recent (2017) increase in female representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly is to be welcomed¹⁰¹, the Northern Ireland Assembly still has the lowest female representation (30%) when compared with other devolved legislatures in the United Kingdom¹⁰².
- 6.10 It is internationally recognised that societies' needs are better served where there is a diverse political representation. Further, it has been shown¹⁰³ that gender balance in parliamentary bodies raises the profile of social policy generally and women's rights issues particularly.
- 6.11 The Commission's Equality Awareness Survey (2011) demonstrated high levels of support for more female MLAs, with two thirds (63%) of those surveyed indicating they would like to see an increase in the number of female MLAs¹⁰⁴.
- 6.12 The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement¹⁰⁵ committed Government to work for the right of women to full and equal political participation and the advancement of women in public life. This commitment is reiterated in the Stormont House Agreement¹⁰⁶.
- 6.13 In 2015, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee concluded¹⁰⁷ that the *'under-representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland is a serious issue which must be addressed urgently.'* In our 2014 evidence¹⁰⁸ to the Committee, we cited actions to increase female representation within parties such as challenging negative stereotypes, and engaging with women's groups. We also drew on actions in other jurisdictions to encourage participation, such as development schemes and mentoring programmes.
- 6.14 The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 amends the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 to exempt the selection of election candidates from the provision of the

¹⁰⁰ Women account for 51% of the Northern Ireland Population, source NISRA (2012) 2011 Census

¹⁰¹ Following the 2017 elections.

¹⁰² Northern Ireland 30%, Scotland 35%, Wales 48%.

¹⁰³ Inter Parliamentary Union (2010) [Gender Sensitive Parliaments](#)

¹⁰⁴ ECNI (2011) Equality Awareness Survey, Do You Mean Me?

¹⁰⁵ 1998 [Good Friday / Belfast Agreement full text](#)

¹⁰⁶ 2014 [Stormont House Agreement full text](#)

¹⁰⁷ Assembly and Executive Review Committee (2015) Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly. (p1)

¹⁰⁸ ECNI (2014) [Evidence to the AERC Committee](#)

Order. This enables political parties to use positive discrimination¹⁰⁹ for the promotion of women candidates over men. However, while this provision has been extended to 2030, it has never yet been used in Northern Ireland.

Minority ethnic groups

- 6.15 Currently, there is no political representation in terms of ethnic minorities within the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, previously (2007-2016) one MLA (Alliance party)¹¹⁰ was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 6.16 More than two-fifths of respondents to the Northern Ireland Life and Times (2015)¹¹¹ survey when asked to consider the participation of people from minority ethnic communities in public life, reported their perception that they played ‘hardly any’ role as politicians or as school governors.
- 6.17 Further, a NICEM study in 2014¹¹² found that: ‘in relation to leadership, political parties, representatives and candidates, need to make greater efforts to represent all communities in Northern Ireland’; this included the views of minority ethnic communities who felt that their views were being ignored at this level.
- 6.18 Research by NICEM (2013)¹¹³ also identified that political participation is not a priority issue for most minority ethnic female respondents, with nearly all¹¹⁴ respondents having never considered standing for election.

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

- 6.19 The Commission continues¹¹⁵ to recommend steps, including temporary special measures, to increase the representation of

¹⁰⁹ The extension of the Sex Discrimination Election Candidates Act 2002 allows for positive action in relation to women’s political participation and including all women shortlists.

¹¹⁰ Northern Ireland Assembly (2017) They Work for You

¹¹¹ In 2015, 42% of respondents replied that ‘hardly any’ members of minority ethnic communities participate in politics in Northern Ireland and 43% of respondents noted that ‘hardly any’ members of minority ethnic communities act as school governors, see NILT (2015) Attitudes to minority ethnic people

¹¹² NICEM (2014) Voices for Change.

¹¹³ NICEM (2013) The experiences of ethnic minority women in Northern Ireland.

¹¹⁴ In 2013, 90% of respondents to the NICEM (2013) The experiences of ethnic minority women in Northern Ireland. study would not consider standing for election.

¹¹⁵ ECNI (2015) Gender equality policy priorities and recommendations

women in political and public life, including in peace building and post conflict reconstruction in Northern Ireland.

- 6.20 We have welcomed initiatives designed to ensure greater involvement of women in peace building, including the 2014 publication¹¹⁶ of a strategic guide and toolkit¹¹⁷. This guide has recommended a gender mainstreaming approach including the inclusion of gender perspectives in all strategies, institutions and arrangements for peace building.
- 6.21 The Commission was disappointed, therefore, to see that there was only one woman among the 15 appointments to the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition¹¹⁸ established in 2016.
- 6.22 The guide also recommended greater support for women, women's groups and networks to manage the mental health challenges resulting from the conflict and civil unrest and the continuing challenges of paramilitarism and gender-based violence, abuse and threat. It is our understanding that, to date, this recommendation has not been actioned. We call on government to do so as a matter of urgency and to address other recommendations in the toolkit in respect of gender mainstreaming.
- 6.23 We also note the Executive response to the *Report of the Panel on Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups*¹¹⁹ (2016) which recommended a programme for women in leadership as well as in community development¹²⁰, by including such a programme in the associated Action Plan¹²¹ (2016). We note the development of the Department for Communities' programme

¹¹⁶ Hinds B, Donnelly D (2014) [WPS Toolkit](#) 'Women, Peace and Security: Women's Rights and Gender Equality, developing and applying women, peace and security practice in Northern Ireland'. This Strategic Guide and Toolkit to Developing and Applying Women, Peace and Security Practice in Northern Ireland/Ireland was commissioned by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI). It is the culmination of the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project funded by the Special EU Programmes Body responsible for Peace III funding in Northern Ireland/Ireland.

¹¹⁷ The toolkit has been developed following an extensive Women and Peacebuilding Project to put forward the imperative for involving women and to set out good practice models from across the public sector for involving women in peace building.

¹¹⁸ Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition - www.fictcommission.org

¹¹⁹ NI Executive (2016) [The Fresh Start Panel report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups](#)

¹²⁰ Under the Fresh Start Agreement (at A3.9) there is a commitment for the 'development of a programme to increase the participation and influence of women in community development.' [DfC Website](#) (Accessed 21 May 2018)

¹²¹ NI Executive (2016) [Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime](#)

for ‘Women in Community Transformation’¹²², in response and look forward to the programme’s report on progress.

Supporting Rationale

- 6.24 The Commission’s 2013 CEDAW Shadow Report¹²³ stressed that it was vital for Government to identify and implement positive action measures to ensure meaningful participation by women in peace building¹²⁴ and political processes here¹²⁵.
- 6.25 The CEDAW Committee, in its Concluding Observations in 2013¹²⁶, called on the UK Government “to ensure the participation of women in the post conflict process in Northern Ireland, in line with Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)”.
- 6.26 A 2014 *Inquiry into the position of women in Northern Ireland since the Peace Agreement*¹²⁷ found that the legacy of violence and impact of the continuing violence had not been addressed and that women face barriers to participation in peace building and post conflict reconstruction, as well as in other areas of decision making.
- 6.27 Barriers included the lack of affordable, accessible and appropriate childcare; the heavily male-dominated political institutions; and pressures that ensured their voices were silenced in local communities.
- 6.28 A 2015 UN commissioned study into the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325¹²⁸ highlighted that women’s participation is key to sustainable peace. In particular, it noted that research comprehensively demonstrates that the participation of women at all levels is key to the operational effectiveness, success and sustainability of peace processes and peace building efforts¹²⁹.

¹²² [DfC \(May 2017\) Programme for Women Involved in Community Transformation - Advert](#)

¹²³ ECNI (2013) [CEDAW shadow report](#)

¹²⁴ CEDAW’s [General recommendation 30](#) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post conflict situations sets out that women’s participation is a prerequisite for democracy, peace and gender equality.

¹²⁵ ECNI has called on Government to identify and implement positive action measures that will work towards meaningful participation by women in public and political life and processes in Northern Ireland. ECNI (2013) [CEDAW shadow report](#)

¹²⁶ CEDAW (2013) [Concluding Observations on UK, CEDAW Committee](#)

¹²⁷ See NIWEP (2015) [An Inquiry into the position of women in NI since the Peace Agreement](#) Summary Report.

¹²⁸ [UN SCR 1325](#) (2000) on women, peace and security. UN SCR 1325 recognises that women and girls have critical roles to play as active agents in conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations, peace building and post conflict reconstruction. Other UN SCRs pertain including [UN SCR 2122](#) on involving women in decision making in post conflict reconstruction

¹²⁹ UN (2015) [Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing The Peace](#)

- 6.29 We note that, while Government has not implemented United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the UK's (2013) 7th and (2017) 8th Periodic Reports^{130, 131} record that:
“(n)evertheless, some aspects of UNSCR 1325, such as women’s participation in peace building and political processes, are relevant to all states.”

¹³⁰ Home Office (2013) UK CEDAW 7th Periodic Report

¹³¹ GEO (2017) [UK CEDAW 8th Periodic Report](#)

7 Voting: Ensure access to the voting system for those with disabilities

- 7.1 This section sets out recommendations to advance equality in access to the voting system. It should be read in tandem with the earlier overarching recommendations to address key data gaps and tackle cross-cutting barriers to participation.

Draft Recommendations: Action is required to:

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

- 7.2 While noting significant and specific data gaps regarding the participation of a range of equality groups across all areas of public life, the Commission's draft Statement proposes as an inequality that **those with a disability are less likely to vote**. Accordingly, we propose recommendations as set out below.

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

- 7.3 While research in relation to voting registration and exercise of voting rights is limited, it does consistently highlight those with disabilities as facing barriers¹³², and also highlights socio-economic disadvantage as a contributory factor¹³³.
- 7.4 We recommend that the Government, political parties and civil society take action to promote the benefits of voting, remove barriers to accessing the voting system, and support those with disabilities and other under-represented groups to register and use their vote.
- 7.5 We urge prompt government action to give effect to the 2017 CRPD recommendation, with regards to exercising the right to

¹³² Electoral Commission (2011) [Great Britain's Electoral Registers](#)

¹³³ Electoral Commission (2011) [Great Britain's Electoral Registers](#) – young people, some minority ethnic groups, and those on low incomes were least likely to be registered to vote.

vote, to *‘take appropriate measures to secure accessibility for persons with disabilities’*¹³⁴.

- 7.6 We further recommend that government, political parties and candidates take action to give effect to the Electoral Commission’s 2017 recommendations¹³⁵ to tackle the barriers to access to the voting system encountered by people with disabilities.

Supporting Rationale

- 7.7 In 2017, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in its Concluding Observations¹³⁶, stated that it was:

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

- 7.8 In 2017, the Electoral Commission made a number of recommendations to government¹³⁷ based upon research¹³⁸ it carried out following the June 2017 general election. They included:

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

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

¹³⁴ UNCRPD (2017) [Concluding observations on the initial report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#) paragraph 61

¹³⁵ ¹³⁵ Electoral Commission (2017) [Elections for everyone](#)

¹³⁶ UNCRPD (2017) [Concluding observations on the initial report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#) paragraph 60

¹³⁷ Electoral Commission (2017) [Elections for everyone](#)

¹³⁸ Survey of 3500 voters across the UK. Electoral Commission recommendations were based on the barriers identified by people with disabilities who had taken part in the research.

- 7.10 The Electoral Commission's research cited examples of complicated registration requirements, inaccessible polling stations, a lack of disability awareness of polling staff, and the need for more information on what to expect when voting.
- 7.11 Further back, in 2010, Scope's UK wide research¹³⁹ found that 6% of people with disabilities had their ability to vote questioned by polling staff at the 2010 General Election. 67% of respondents cited one or more barriers to voting, including not having accessible booths, inaccessible polling stations and a lack of hearing loops.
- 7.12 In 2010, Disability Action also reported¹⁴⁰ that many people with disabilities were not able to access information from the Northern Ireland political parties in a format that suited their needs.

¹³⁹ Scope (2010) [Polls Apart 5 Opening Elections to Disabled People](#), page 13

¹⁴⁰ Disability Action (2010) [Review of the Accessibility of Political Party Information for People with Disabilities for the Westminster Elections May 2010](#)

Harper, C, McClenahan, S, Byrne, B & Russell, H. (2012): ['Disability Programmes and Policies: How Does Northern Ireland Measure Up?'](#) ECNI, Belfast.

8 Conclusion

8.1 While noting significant and specific data gaps regarding the participation those from a range of equality categories across all areas of public life; and also highlighting a number of cross-cutting barriers to participation; the Commission's draft *Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life* also proposes the following **key inequalities** for attention:

- Government public appointments: under-representation of persons with a disability;
- Government public appointments: under-representation of women;
- Elected positions in NI: under-representation of women;
- Elected positions in NI: there are no elected representatives within the Northern Ireland Assembly from minority ethnic backgrounds (under-representation of those from ethnic minority backgrounds).

8.2 The Commission's draft *Statement* proposes also proposes the following **inequality**:

- Voting: those with a disability are less likely to vote.

8.3 Aligned to these draft key inequalities, we propose the following as recommendations for public policy intervention:

Overarching issues

8.4 Action is needed to address two key overarching issues:

- **Ensure equality data collection and disaggregation** is sufficient to identify inequality, develop robust policy interventions, and ensure the delivery of Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes
- **Tackle overarching barriers to active participation** including: structural barriers; physical and communication needs; personal capacity and perceived barriers; and stereotypes and prejudice.

Key Themes: Actions to address identified Inequalities

- 8.5 We call for prompt action to address the draft key inequalities and inequalities identified the Commission's *draft* 'Statement on Key Inequalities in Participation in Public Life in Northern Ireland':
- **Government Public Appointments:** support those with disabilities; deliver on gender targets for boards and chairs; implement a cross-departmental strategy to advance participation more generally.
 - **Elected Representatives:** advance the participation of women and minority ethnic individuals in political life; advance the participation of women in peace building
 - **Voting:** Ensure access to the voting system for those with disabilities

Implementation and next steps

- 8.6 It is intended that these draft policy recommendations, in tandem with the draft Statement on Key Inequalities, will both support and challenge government and key partners to take action to address key inequalities in participation in public life.
- 8.7 While the Commission would urge prompt action to address and implement these draft recommendations, we will for the next short while also continue to engage with a range of key stakeholders to further refine our proposals and recommendations.
- 8.8 We would invite your feedback before 31 July 2018. Please contact dhowe@equalityni.org to provide views or arrange a meeting.