

June 2025



Department of  
**Finance**  
An Roinn  
**Airgeadais**  
[www.finance-ni.gov.uk](http://www.finance-ni.gov.uk)

# **Consultation on an 'Audit of Inequalities' and associated 'Action Plans'**

(closing date for receipt of responses  
is 25 August 2025)



## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Department of Finance (the 'Department') aims to help the Northern Ireland Executive secure the most appropriate and effective use of resources and services for the benefit of the community. In pursuing this aim, the key objective of the Department is to deliver quality, cost effective and efficient public services and administration in the Department's areas of executive responsibility.
- 1.2. The Department provides the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and other public bodies with money, staff, professional services and business support systems, helping them to deliver excellent, value for money public services. We do this by:
  - **Managing public money** – effectively allocating resources to where they are most needed to support the delivery of public services;
  - **Supporting our people** – recruiting, developing and supporting the best people for the NICS and providing opportunities for individuals to reach their full potential;
  - **Transforming and innovating** – improving effectiveness across the public sector by transforming the way we work;
  - **Providing evidence and insights** – supporting evidence-based policy and informing public debate, through high quality, trusted, meaningful data, evidence and research; and
  - **Delivering public services** – collecting rates revenue to provide funding towards public services such as health, education and infrastructure, as well as council services.
- 1.3. In undertaking these actions, the Department has statutory duties arising from Section 75(1) and 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which are to have:
  - due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and
  - regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
- 1.4. The Equality Commission (the 'Commission') requires each Public Authority to produce an Equality Scheme (the 'scheme') setting out how they will meet these statutory duties, which should be approved by the Commission. The Department's current scheme is available on our website at [Department of Finance Equality Scheme](#). It describes the arrangements the Department has established and which it is obliged to apply and follow as a means of fulfilling its statutory duties.
- 1.5. The scheme refers to the work of individual business areas within the Department, in support of our statutory duties, being found in an audit of inequalities ('audit').

## **2. EXISTING s75 ACTION PLAN**

- 2.1 The existing s75 Action Plan, can be accessed on our website at [Department of Finance Equality Scheme](#).
- 2.2 This s75 Action Plan covered the period 2018-2023 (extended to 2024) and was developed following an audit of inequalities undertaken within DoF. Key policy areas addressed in the Action Plan included:
  - Human Resource Management – for example, s75 data gaps and under-representation of groups within the NICS; and
  - Services to the Citizen – for example, access to digital services and legislative differentiation due to marital status/ gender.
- 2.3 Progress against these actions were reported to the Commission in the Department's annual progress reports; these are available on our website at [Annual Report to the Equality Commission](#).

## **3. 2024 AUDIT OF INEQUALITIES**

- 3.1. The Department has since undertaken a further audit of inequalities in 2024, analysing the work of the Department to determine which of its business areas impact upon equality and good relations, and to scrutinise those areas where improvement could be made. This analysis included a review of our existing s75 Action Plan, and our Disability Action Plan<sup>1</sup> ('action plans'), considering progress made and outstanding action.
- 3.2. In addition, as the Department has responsibility for delivering the Civil Service's equality, diversity and inclusion agenda as an employer, an assessment of the profile of the Civil Service workforce across the Section 75 groups (where available) was undertaken, taking into consideration the latest (i) [Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2023 report](#) and (ii) statutory monitoring reports ([Article 55 and gender reviews](#)). Feedback from external benchmarking exercises such as the Diversity Mark; Stonewall Workplace Equality Index; Onus Workplace Charter and Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive Accreditation, as well as feedback from staff networks, has assisted in identifying areas of inequalities to address to help fulfil the Civil Service's commitment of being a diverse and inclusive employer.
- 3.3. As noted above, throughout the period of the existing plans (2018-2024), significant progress has been made by the Department through delivery

---

<sup>1</sup> Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act places a duty on public authorities to prepare a plan outlining how they propose to have due regards to the need to: i. promote positive attitudes towards disabled people, and ii. encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

of these action plans, progress which has been reported to the Commission on an annual basis. The following section provides an overview of the key themes emerging from our 2024 audit, which have informed our new s75 Action Plan and Disability Action Plan (attached at **Annex A** and **Annex B**).

## **Findings of audit**

### **NICSHR and People and Organisational Development**

3.4. The function of the Department that has the most potential to see s75 impact is in servicing the NICS as an employer. Since the last audit, changes were made to the human resources service delivery model. A further reorganisation in 2022 led to the formation of two separate and specialist HR and organisational development functional areas:

- **NICSHR** – the Civil Service’s HR shared services function provides operational advice and service to government departments including employee relations, Occupational Health Service and Wellbeing and Learning; Resourcing, Civil Service Pensions and HR Business partnering; and
- **People and Organisational Development** - responsible for all Civil Service HR, Pay and Industrial Relations policy and is responsible for the new five-year Civil Service People Strategy (2025-2030) and a range of associated strategic HR interventions/projects. People and Organisational Development delivery includes significant activity relating to HR policy; workforce analytics and statistics; pay; industrial relations; talent management; and diversity and inclusion.

3.5. Since the last audit, the Department has worked with these two functional areas to deliver key interventions and actions to strengthen the NICS’ commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion:

- **Diversification of the NICS workforce** - a concerted effort has been made since the last audit to diversify the NICS workforce through:
  - delivery of a range of initiatives to expand the NICS resourcing mix - new entry routes to the Service through apprenticeship schemes; a Graduate Management Programme and a Skills Academy; increased student placement offerings and external recruitment; and removal of qualifications for general service entry grades;
  - delivery of a programme of outreach to under-represented groups including disabled people; young people; LGBTQ+ and minority

ethnic communities, as well as increased engagement with the education sector;

- expansion of advertising channels, positive action advertising and targeted advertising to help attract the widest applicant pool;
  - launch of a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for disabled applicants;
  - development of a Ring-Fencing Policy for successful disabled applicants; and
  - facilitation of work experience opportunities.
- **Increased visibility and understanding of diversity & inclusion** – attendance at a comprehensive series of events (including PRIDE, Belfast Mela, the Harkin International Summit), alongside communications and initiatives to raise awareness and understanding of diversity and inclusion across the NICS.
  - **Policy and Peer Support** - existing policies have been updated to ensure they use inclusive language; a range of new policies and provisions have been introduced including a Menopause Policy; Domestic and Sexual Abuse Policy; enhanced paid special leave arrangements for victims of domestic and sexual abuse; for those who experience pregnancy loss through miscarriage (which extends beyond the statutory provision of parental bereavement leave for a baby stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy); as well as two weeks' paid paternity pay; NICS Trans Equality Policy and Transitioning at Work Guide; Guide for Allies; as well as development of resources to support an inclusive workplace culture including an LGBTQ+ Role Models Guide; Neurodiversity Line Managers' Toolkit; Guide for Supporting Carers and an Inclusive Language Guide. In recognition of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the organisation established a new Disability Staff Network and Race and Ethnicity Network which joined the existing LGBTQ+ Network and Women's Network. More recently a Cancer Support Network and Student Network have been established.
  - As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the organisation also adapted to new ways of working and implemented a new Hybrid Working Policy accompanied by new Connect2 regional hubs which provide flexible working options for colleagues, helping reduce their travel time and supporting better work life balance.
  - **External benchmarking** - the NICS continues to benchmark its employment practices via independent external assessments including the Diversity Mark for gender initiatives; the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index in respect of LGBTQ+ initiatives; the Onus

Workplace Charter regarding domestic and sexual abuse support; and Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive accreditation. In recognition of the interventions delivered to support inclusive workplaces, the NICS has achieved a number of accolades including Stonewall's Silver Employer Award, the Platinum Onus Workplace Charter on Domestic Violence and the Silver Diversity Mark. The NICS was also awarded the 2022 CIPD NI award for best Diversity and Inclusion initiative for the work undertaken to provide domestic and sexual abuse support. In 2023, the NICS was awarded the CIPD Award for Best Resourcing and Talent Management Strategy in recognition of the collaboration between DoF, DfE and TEO to develop and deliver the NICS Skills Academy.

- With regard to **learning and development**, NICS HR has undertaken a number of steps to address its training materials/ delivery methodologies being seen to be unsuitable for those staff with a disability and/ or with dependents. Some of those steps have been:
  - to ask staff on their enrolment for training to provide details of any specific needs (disability requirements/ adjustments). As a consequence, course materials/ methodologies and venues are adapted to ensure needs are met.
  - regional training and virtual learning options/ events exist, where possible. All L&D e-Learning products and virtual events can be adapted to be compatible with screen reading software, if required, for staff with visual or hearing impairments.
  - start times are normally 9.30 to accommodate staff and many courses are also scheduled on different weekdays to accommodate alternative working patterns. Again, virtual events are available.
  - the Civil Service has a policy in place to cater for childcare provision.

3.6 Since the last audit there have been positive changes in the NICS workforce composition, specifically, in areas identified in the previous audit of inequalities for example,

- the number of NICS staff from a minority ethnic background has increased from 0.3% in 2017 to 0.5% in 2023;



- female representation at senior levels has risen from 37.6% in 2017 to 42.8% in 2023;
- female representation in NICS apprentices increased as a result of the introduction of the new Procurement and Operational Delivery apprenticeship schemes in 2021 (17% increase in female representation at 1 April 2022); and
- the community background representation in certain General Service grades and Specialist and Technical groups has improved, for example the proportion of Roman Catholics at Grade 5+ level has increased from 39% in 2017 to 41.3% in 2023.

3.7 It should be noted the Covid-19 pandemic impacted recruitment activity which limited potential further changes in workforce composition – for example in the calendar year 2019 there were 839 appointments made, whereas there were 135 made in 2020. The NICS also has a high proportion of Agency Workers (14.5% at March 2024).

3.8 There remain areas of inequalities that continue to impact upon the work of the Department for the **Civil Service as an employer**. These include:

- An improved reasonable adjustment process to better support disabled applicants and colleagues and to meet the duty under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995);
- Under-representation of males and females in certain General Service grades and Professional and Specialist groups;
- Community background imbalances in certain General Service grades and Professional and Specialist groups;
- The Civil Service has an older age profile than the comparator economically active population aged 16-64 years;
- The proportion of Civil Service staff who have declared a disability is lower than the economically active population; and
- The equality composition overall of the Civil Service workforce could be more diverse.

The Department has set goals and timetables to address the existing inequalities listed above, available in sections 3.24 and 4.23 of the [NICS 2019 Workforce Review](#). The next review is anticipated to be published in Spring 2025 subject to Ministerial approval.

3.9 The audit has also identified **continued gaps in s75 data**, particularly with regard to:

- Disability data (at 1 January 2024 data was missing for 44.5% of NICS staff); and
- Sexual orientation data (at 1 January 2024 data was missing for 66.4% of NICS staff).

To help address these gaps, a communications campaign was launched in November 2023 to increase declaration rates of equality data to help provide an evidence base to monitor progress and inform future actions. This campaign helped reduce the level of missing data from January 2023 to January 2024, with a reduction of 2% for disability data and 7% for sexual orientation data. Further action however is required.

3.10 NICSHR is responsible for policy areas such as civil service pensions and learning and development. The audit found that, **in respect of pensions**, NICSHR had introduced legislation to remedy discrimination caused by transitional protections introduced as part of Pension Reforms. Further areas of inequality identified relate to issues of:

- male survivors of opposite sex marriages & civil partnerships being treated less favorably than survivors in same sex marriages & civil partnerships, and
- same-sex partners being excluded from spousal benefits paid before December 2025.

Legislation will be introduced in later in 2025 to address these issues, however, in the interim, NICSHR apply the policy intent.

3.11 NICSHR is addressing the over 40% of working days lost due to mental health related absence in a number of ways, including but not limited to the recent launch of a Health and Wellbeing strategy and Action Plan, with a focus on what is impacting the mental health of our staff. NICSHR has recently developed Management Information dashboards, to identify areas with higher levels of absence related to mental health much earlier and allowing NICSHR to be more proactive in implementing appropriate support interventions. NICSHR has also initiated a cross-departmental Mental Health Forum, to share learning and best practices across the NICS and to identify evidence-based effective interventions.

### **Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency**

3.12 Action had been taken to address the low level of data available to its statisticians in the areas of sexual orientation and political opinion. This



work included engagement with various section 75 groups in planning for, and running, the 2021 Census.

- 3.13 NISRA is working with the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to ensure that (where they exist) cross-government harmonised standards and guidance for s75 variables are reviewed, refined and updated to reflect the needs of NI users. These are promoted as the default definitions, question and output categories in government surveys and increase the usefulness of data collected across different surveys (in the UK and NI) and in different regions by improving comparability.
- 3.14 NISRA statisticians, in conjunction with policy colleagues, have developed [Guidance on the collection and reporting of section 75 categories](#) which includes recommended questions for monitoring and reporting on s75 groups. This will further improve coherence, comparability and suitability across NI data sources.
- 3.15 Previous surveys of all NISRA users indicated provision of an excellent service to Government, Academia, business and the general public, and maintenance of high customer satisfaction and return customers from all s75 groups. Notwithstanding this indication, NISRA plan to continue to raise awareness of NISRA, increase trust in, and the value placed on, its statistical/ research products by all sections of the NI population.

### **Finance Division**

- 3.16 Since the last audit, Finance Division has engaged with the Equality Commission to ensure its development of an annual budget for the Department of Finance is consistent with our Equality Scheme commitments. In doing so, more informed and better budgeting decisions should be made.

### **Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services**

- 3.17 Although improvements have been reached due to actions taken after our last audit, access to government services remains an area of inequality, particularly with regard to those within the 'Age' and 'Persons with a disability' s75 groups. The actions planned are:
- Digital Inclusion Programme activities, including Safer Internet Day, Get Online Week, Positive Ageing Programme and similar initiatives with organisations to encourage digital participation. The Go ON NI programme highlights the benefits of being online, and brings together

all the initiatives, places and tools to help and encourage off-liners to become internet beginners.

- Increased working in partnership with organisations represented on the Digital Assist Steering Group, to deliver bespoke training, awareness and information sessions; continuing working relationships with Age Friendly Network and inroads into other organisations.
- Engagement with organisations representing elderly, socially excluded and people with disabilities organisations on further training/ awareness and review of signage and communications; sharing good practice with other public facing areas of the Department.

### **Strategic Policy and Reform (SPAR)**

3.18 The work of SPAR involves providing economic advice in response to various requests from its stakeholders, including the Finance Minister, HoCS, Permanent Secretary, Senior Management Team, Supply and other Departments. It should be noted that the guidance involved with providing such advice includes recognition of s75 requirements.

### **Land and Property Services**

3.19 Although the audit did not produce evidence of inequality on s75 grounds in LPS's operational delivery, it does continue to work across its functional areas to make things easier for its customers in response to the needs of particular customer groups, for example permitting payment of rates by cheque, providing tailored support, staggered public office opening hours, translation services etc.

3.20 LPS is also committed to further improving its understanding of its customers to help inform design and delivery of its services to meet their needs. Work is underway to develop a new strategic business plan for LPS, which will include business and transformation activities to improve the administration of rates and services to meet the needs of all customers. As part of this, the customer complaints procedures will be reviewed and updated and a Frontline Customer Framework will be developed, with inbuilt consideration given to vulnerable customers. LPS will continue to engage directly with the community through their well-established LPS Outreach team, helping to ensure a clear and consistent pathway for communications.

LPS also have a Corporate Style Guide which details standards to be adhered to by all staff in all written information and communication

activities in line with accessibility standards, to ensure it meets s75 commitments.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 As part of our commitment within the Department's Equality Scheme, we are consulting on these renewed action plans, the purpose of which is to seek your views to inform their finalisation and our compliance with our statutory duties for the benefit of the public in Northern Ireland.

##### **Questions**

- 4.2 To aid your consideration of the action plans and inform your response, the following questions might be helpful:

Question 1 – do the proposed action plans demonstrate the Department's commitment to complying with its statutory duties?

- to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations; and
- the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

Question 2 – are the proposed actions appropriate to meet that compliance? If not, why and what actions should the Department be taking?

- are there any further actions required, or
- are any of the proposed actions not required?

#### **5. CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

- 5.1 This consultation has been issued by the Department of Finance and is also available on our website at [Department of Finance Consultations](#).
- 5.2 The Department looks forward to receiving your comments and views. Please send them to [equality@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:equality@finance-ni.gov.uk).

We ask you to exercise care and refrain from the inclusion of any potentially defamatory material as we may publish responses on the Department's website. Should we do so, we will not publish the names or contact details of respondents but will include the names of organisations responding.

Your opinions are valuable to us. Thank you for taking the time to read this document and respond.

- 5.3 If you require a hard copy of this consultation document or have any other enquiries, please e-mail your request to [equality@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:equality@finance-ni.gov.uk) or you can write to us at:

Central Support Team  
Department of Finance  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Craigantlet Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Upper Newtownards Road  
Belfast  
BT4 3SX

The Department will consider all the responses to this consultation received on or before the closing date, **Monday 25 August 2025**. ***Submissions made after this date cannot be considered.***

## **6. NEXT STEPS IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

- 6.1 We will consider the responses received to this consultation and provide the Minister with a summary of responses, seeking his agreement of a consultation response document and action plans for delivery. This consultation response will be published on the Department's website.
- 6.2 We will also provide a copy of the consultation response document to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Finance Committee and directly to our equality consultees.
- 6.3 All information received during this consultation will be handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

## **7. CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 If you ask for your response to be regarded as confidential and not to be published within the Department's consultation response document, you will be asked to explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential.
- 7.2 Notwithstanding the above, information provided in response to this consultation, including personal data, will be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection ACT

2018 (DPA), the EU General Data Protection Regulation, and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004). If we receive a request for disclosure of confidential information, we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

- 7.3 The Department will process your personal data in accordance with the law and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties. The Department's privacy notice is available on the [Department of Finance website](#).



# **DRAFT DoF Section 75 Action Plan 2025-30**

## POLICY AREA: Recruitment, Advertising, Marketing and Outreach

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:** To diversify the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) workforce so that it is more reflective of the society it serves.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Under-representation of Protestants and Roman Catholics in General Service grades and Professional and Specialist groups as identified in the <a href="#">NICS 2019 Workforce Review</a> .	Persons of different religious belief	<p>By Autum 2025, deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity informed by data.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels, as well as Positive Action Advertising to target under-represented groups.</p> <p>Review and analyse the community background composition and submit a Fair Employment Return to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on an annual basis.</p> <p>Review workforce composition and employment practices affecting recruitment, promotion etc by community background every 3 years, as required under Article 55 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.</p>	People and OD NICS HR	Ongoing	Encourage applications from under-represented groups to try and address religious imbalances and help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	The NICS monitors the community background composition of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- its workforce on an annual basis<sup>2</sup>;</li> <li>- the applicant pool in each recruitment competition using statistics published on an annual basis<sup>3</sup>;</li> <li>- its workforce and applicant flows on a tri-annual basis (NICS Workforce Review).</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Statistics](#)



		<p>Develop an Affirmative Action Plan to address objectives and agreed positive action measures.</p> <p>Engage with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) on an annual basis to review and assess progress.</p>				
Under-representation of males and females in certain General Service grades and Professional and Specialist groups as identified in the <a href="#">NICS 2019 Workforce Review</a> .	Men and women	<p>By Autum 2025 deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity informed by data.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels as well as Positive Action Advertising to target under-represented groups.</p> <p>Review and analyse the community background composition and submit a Fair Employment Return to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on an annual basis.</p> <p>Review workforce composition and employment practices</p>	People and OD NICS HR	Ongoing	Encourage applications from under-represented groups to try and address gender imbalances and help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	The NICS monitors the gender composition of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- its workforce on an annual basis<sup>4</sup>;</li> <li>- the applicant pool in each recruitment competition on an annual basis<sup>5</sup>;</li> <li>- its workforce and applicant flows on a tri-annual basis (NICS Workforce Review<sup>6</sup>).</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Statistics](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Article 55 and gender reviews](#)

		<p>affecting recruitment, promotion etc by gender as part of the tri-annual Workforce Review.</p> <p>Develop an Affirmative Action Plan to address objectives and agreed positive action measures.</p> <p>Engage with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) on an annual basis to review and assess progress.</p>				
The NICS has an older age profile than the comparator economically active population aged 16- 64 years.	Persons of different age	<p>By Autumn 2025, deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity informed by data including strengthening existing links with the education sector, in particular post primary school children.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels, as well as Positive Action Advertising to reach a wide an applicant pool as possible.</p> <p>Revise and promote the NICS Work Experience Scheme to increase uptake.</p>	People and OD NICSHR	Ongoing	Encourage applications from under-represented groups to diversify the age composition of the NICS workforce and help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	The NICS monitors the age profile of: - its workforce on an annual basis <sup>7</sup> ; - the applicant pool composition of each recruitment competition using statistics published on an annual basis <sup>8</sup> .

<sup>7</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Statistics](#)

		<p>Expand the entry routes to the NICS by increasing apprenticeship offerings via the new NICS Apprenticeship Policy; and development of new pre-employability and employability schemes.</p> <p>Deliver annual recruitment competitions for paid 51-week student placements across a range of disciplines – seeking feedback from each cohort of students via a formalised student network to deliver continuous improvement and make the NICS a more attractive employer option for young people.</p>				
Under-representation of minority ethnic people in the NICS workforce.	Persons of different racial groups	<p>By Autumn 2025, deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach informed by data.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels as well Positive Action Advertising to reach a wide an applicant pool as possible.</p> <p>Targeted outreach activity to schools and colleges with a high proportion of minority</p>	People and OD NICSHR	Ongoing	Encourage applications from minority ethnic applicants to diversify the equality composition of the workforce and help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	The NICS monitors the ethnicity composition of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- its workforce on an annual basis<sup>9</sup>;</li> <li>- the applicant pool composition of each recruitment competition using statistics published on an annual basis<sup>10</sup>.</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Statistics](#)

		<p>ethnic students with a specific focus on young people aged 12-18 years to raise awareness of the NICS work placement scheme and increase uptake.</p> <p>Deliver the commitments as a Race at Work Charter signatory to create an inclusive workplace for minority ethnic communities.</p>				
Under-representation of disabled people in the NICS workforce.	Persons with a disability	<p>By Autumn 2025 deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity, including strengthening existing links with the disability sector.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels, as well as Positive Action Advertising to target under-represented groups.</p> <p>Targeted outreach activity with the disability sector to raise awareness of the NICS work experience scheme for disabled people and increase uptake.</p>	People and OD NICS HR	Ongoing	Encourage applications from under-represented groups leading to an increase in the representation of disabled people in the NICS applicant pools and workforce so that the NICS will be more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	<p>The NICS monitors the disability composition of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- its workforce on an annual basis<sup>11</sup>;</li> <li>- the applicant pool of each recruitment competition using statistics published on an annual basis<sup>12</sup>.</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Statistics](#)

		Develop and implement a new NICS ring-fencing policy for successful disabled applicants.				
The NICS workforce could be more diverse and reflective of the society it serves as outlined in the latest <a href="#">Equality Statistics for the NICS 2024 report</a> and <a href="#">Article 55 and gender reviews</a> .	All	Design and deliver new NICS Employability Programmes to opportunities to those furthest removed from work with an initial focus on care experienced and disabled people.	People and OD NICSHR	Ongoing	A broader resourcing mix to expand entry routes to NICS employment to help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	The NICS monitors the equality composition of its workforce on an annual basis <sup>13</sup> .

---

<sup>13</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

## POLICY AREA: Diverse, supportive and inclusive workplaces

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:** To provide a supportive and welcoming workplace for all with an evidence base available to monitor progress and inform future actions to ensure the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is an inclusive employer and is reflective of the society it serves.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Data for the NICS workforce is limited in the areas of sexual orientation and disability preventing an accurate understanding of the composition of the NICS workforce and areas where affirmative action measures are required.	Persons of different sexual orientation	<p>Deliver an annual communications campaign to increase declaration rates of sexual orientation and disability data amongst the NICS workforce.</p> <p>Monitor data completion rates on an annual basis to assess improvements in data levels and to inform future actions.</p>	People and OD	Ongoing	Increase declaration rates of equality data to provide an evidence base to inform future positive action measures.	<p>The NICS monitors the sexual orientation composition of its workforce on an annual basis<sup>14</sup>;</p> <p>Census 2021 sexual orientation data will allow an assessment once more internal data is available<sup>15</sup>.</p>
Reasonable adjustment process for disabled applicants and colleagues requires improvement.	Persons with a disability	Undertake a comprehensive review of the reasonable adjustment process and deliver improvements through a co-design approach with key stakeholders including colleagues with lived experience which includes development of a new policy, procedure and range of	People and OD NICSHR	Summer 2025	To provide an effective and efficient reasonable adjustment process for users which is compliant with legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995); reflects best	<p>The NICS monitors the disability composition of its workforce on an annual basis<sup>16</sup>;</p> <p>Census 2021 disability data will allow an assessment once more internal data is available<sup>17</sup>.</p>

<sup>14</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Census 2021 main statistics sexual orientation tables](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Census 2021 main statistics sexual orientation tables](#)

		learning resources to improve awareness and understanding across the Service.			practice and supports service delivery / business needs and to better equip line managers with the relevant knowledge and skills in this area.	
Over 40% of working days are lost due to mental health related absence.	Persons with a disability (mental health)	<p>Launch and deliver a Health and Wellbeing strategy and Action Plan, with a focus on what is impacting the mental health of staff.</p> <p>Develop a cross-departmental Mental Health Forum.</p>	NICSHR	Ongoing	<p>To support good mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and promote Mental Health awareness and improve the mental health of our staff.</p> <p>To share learning and best practices across the NICS and to identify evidence-based effective interventions.</p>	Use of Management Information dashboards, to identify areas with higher levels of absence related to mental health.



## POLICY AREA: Statistics and research

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:** NISRA outputs, from all areas of government and beyond, provide an accurate and reliable base against which government policies and other decision making can be tested in order to determine whether such policies and other decision making is fair and equitable in consideration of all Section 75 groups.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Data limitations may affect the ability to accurately assess equality impact of policies or decisions. This could potentially lead to an inequality given the gaps in robust s75 monitoring data.	All	<p>Engage with various section 75 groups in planning for and running data collections such as the census.</p> <p>Engage with the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to ensure that (where they exist) the cross-government harmonised standards and guidance for s75 variables reflect the needs of NI users. These are promoted as the default definitions, question and output categories in government surveys and increase the usefulness of data collected across different surveys (in the UK and NI) and in different regions by improving comparability. As part of the actions to improve the UK's inclusive data holdings, these standards are</p>	NISRA	Ongoing with Census data collected once every 10 years.	Development and inclusion of relevant s75 questions (and corresponding outputs) in the Census, Social Surveys and Administrative systems (including NIMDM - Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures) for analysis throughout the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and wider.	<p>NISRA Customer Surveys<sup>18</sup> - used to assess user satisfaction with NISRA's services and products, with the aim being to provide a high quality service which is responsive to and meets the needs of Users following proactive engagement.</p> <p>Census benefits realisation will evaluate the usefulness and reach of section 75 outputs from Census 2021.</p>

<sup>18</sup> [NISRA Customer Satisfaction Survey](#)

		<p>being reviewed, refined and updated.</p> <p>NISRA statisticians in conjunction with policy colleagues to maintain the <a href="#">Guidance on the collection and reporting of section 75 categories</a>. This will further improve coherence, comparability and suitability across NI data sources.</p>				
Data limitations may affect the ability to accurately assess equality impact of policies or decisions on minority ethnic groups. This could potentially lead to an inequality given the gaps in robust ethnic equality monitoring data.	Ethnicity	<p>Ethnic Equality Monitoring (EEM) questions to be added as optional pages on Citizen Space platform to enable activity owners and survey designers to include any/all of the five recommended ethnicity questions into their survey, ensuring they align with best practice EEM questions.</p>	Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services	2025/26	Increase awareness of EEM to improve ethnicity data collection and provide a reliable evidence base to inform policy and decision-making.	<p>1. Number of surveys/consultations incorporating Ethnic Equality Monitoring (EEM) questions.</p> <p>2. Survey response rates on EEM questions.</p>

## POLICY AREA: NISRA

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:** To manage production and dissemination of official statistics and social research on NI in keeping with the Code of Practice for Statistics. The Code of Practice exists to provide equity in terms of access to statistical outputs and to maintain public confidence in official statistics in terms of trustworthiness, quality & value.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Potential for inequality in terms of access to statistical outputs.	All	Analyse module responses (on awareness of NISRA, trust in NISRA statistics and importance of NISRA statistics) by other s75 variables available in the overarching Continuous Household Survey (CHS) survey data to identify any inequalities. If inequalities are identified, consider how these can be addressed through NISRA's dissemination strategy and/ or ongoing user engagement, and continue to monitor as part of the analysis of future runs of the Public Awareness of and Trust in Official Statistics survey.	NISRA	Annually	Raise awareness of NISRA, increase trust in and the value placed on NISRA statistical/ research products by all sections of the NI population.	Annual Public Awareness of and Trust in Official Statistics survey <sup>19</sup> analyses public trust in NISRA statistics, and public value placed on NISRA statistics.

---

<sup>19</sup> [Public Awareness of and Trust \(Confidence\) in Official Statistics \(PCOS\)](#)

## **POLICY AREA: Financial Planning**

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Coordination and monitoring of the Department's budget**

<b>Issue to address</b>	<b>S75 categories involved/ affected</b>	<b>Action(s)</b>	<b>Owner(s)</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Intended outcome</b>	<b>Monitoring progress</b>
Potential equality impacts arising from changes in budgetary allocation to Departmental business areas.	Staff members and all groups linked to provision of external services – recruitment, LPS, IT, NISRA	Ensure processes are in place to identify potential equality impacts arising from budgetary allocations to Departmental business areas.	Finance Division with input from business areas	Annually for budget exercise and reviewed on an ongoing basis if any significant changes to budget in-year.	Effective assessment of potential equality impacts arising.	Monitoring feedback from Equality commission/ other stakeholders on quality of information included in screening/ impact assessment.

## POLICY AREA: Services to the Citizen

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:** Deliver high quality, efficient and effective services to the citizen, NICS departments and the wider public sector.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Inequitable access to online Government Services.	Age; Persons with a disability.	<p>Digital Inclusion Programme activities, including Safer Internet Day, Get Online Week, Positive Ageing Programme and similar initiatives with organisations to encourage digital participation.</p> <p>Digital Inclusion Programme activities are available for those with disabilities and their carers, and are developed in conjunction with disability organisations.</p> <p>As Government Services modernise and move online as digital first, the Go ON NI<sup>20</sup> programme offers the upskilling required for citizens to effectively use these services. This is carried out in liaison with the Libraries NI Network, SCNI and Business in the Community (BITC) and including the Digital Assist</p>	Digital Security and Finance Shared Services (DSF)	By 31st March each year.	<p>Delivery of annual training and upskilling reached through all Go ON NI Programmes.</p> <p>Year on year increase in internet usage for those aged 50-64 and 65+.</p> <p>Encourage people with disabilities to make use of more online services.</p>	<p>Number of activities and evaluation results.</p> <p>Monitoring year on year increase in internet usage.</p>

<sup>20</sup> [nidirect Go ON NI](#)

		Steering Group (DASG) partners.				
Inequitable access to Government Services.	Age; Persons with a disability.	Increased working relationships and working in partnership with organisations represented on the DASG, to deliver bespoke training, awareness and information sessions.	Digital Security and Finance Shared Services (DSF)	By 31st March each year.	Quarterly DASG meetings.  Continuing working relationships with Age Friendly Network and inroads into other organisations.	Review of year on year progress and achievements.
Inequitable access to Government Services.	Age; Persons with a disability.	Engage with elderly, socially excluded and people with disabilities organisations on further training/ awareness and review signage and communications. Share good practice with other public facing areas of the department.	Digital Security and Finance Shared Services (DSF)	By 31st March each year.	People with a learning difficulty, Autism or a communication barrier supported in accessing government services.	Analyse feedback gathered through continual engagement with stakeholders.

## POLICY AREA: NICS Pension Provision (employer)

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:** To ensure administration of the NICS Pension Schemes is achieved, maintaining conformity with both generic and general pensions legislation by amending scheme rules to reflect government policies.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
<p>McCloud ruling deemed transitional protections introduced as part of Pension Reforms was unlawful.</p> <p>Goodwin ruling (male survivors of opposite sex marriages &amp; civil partnerships are treated less favourably than survivors in same sex marriages &amp; civil partnerships – provision must be made to remove the discrimination) &amp; Walker rulings (schemes must provide same-sex partners and same sex spouses with the same survivor benefits as opposite sex married couples to</p>	All	Appropriate legislation in place to address any discrimination.	Pensions Division	All 'in scope' members must have received a Remedy Service Statement by 31 March 2025 or the primary legislation governing the remedy provides some mitigating scope to modify remedy deadlines for delivery of remedy statements in the event this is required and justified by the Department.	Legislation in place to address any potential inequality and parity with GB Civil Service maintained.	Ongoing monitoring to ensure inequalities are removed.



remove discrimination).				Legislation due to be laid later in 2025, in the interim the policy intent is applied.		
----------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

## POLICY AREA: Land & Property Services (LPS)

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:** Fully understand the needs of customers and be adaptive to changing customer needs.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Potential for some s75 groups to not fully avail of relief/support measures due to lack of s75 data held on rating system.	All	<p>Collect data on the customer experience (including s75 data) and gain fuller understanding of customer needs.</p> <p>Respond to customer feedback and be adaptive to changing customer needs.</p>	LPS	Annually	<p>LPS aims to ensure the services they provide support all their customers in an increasingly digital environment.</p> <p>They want to understand customer needs and experience, which will inform service design and delivery.</p> <p>In terms of policy development and evaluation, they aim to better understand which s75 groups are impacted so that due regard can be given to s75 matters when conducting screening or impact assessments where required under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.</p>	<p>Consideration will be given to how the customer's experience can be improved.</p> <p>LPS do this through the Nova Programme and BAU.</p> <p>Work is underway to develop a new strategic business plan for LPS, which will include business and transformation activities to improve the administration of rates and services to meet the needs of all customers.</p>

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

### DoF Disability Action Plan 2025-30

Measure	Performance Indicators/Target	Timescale	Intended Outcome	Responsibility
<b>Awareness Raising and Training</b>				
Lead and oversee the development and delivery of an annual NICS-wide programme of disability awareness training in conjunction with Employers for Disability NI.	Annual internal evaluation survey.	31 March each year.	Deeper awareness and understanding of disabilities to support a disability inclusive workplace.	People and Organisational Development
Lead the NICS participation in the JAM (Just a Minute) initiative via co-ordination and promotion of the training.	Quarterly monitoring of completion rates.	Quarterly reviews.	Customers and colleagues have a positive and inclusive experience in their interaction with the NICS.	People and Organisational Development
Deliver an annual calendar of diversity days to increase understanding and awareness of disabilities and intersectional diversity issues.	Feedback from colleagues via diversity staff networks.	31 March each year.	Increased awareness and understanding of staff of diversity issues to support an inclusive workplace for all.	People and Organisational Development
Develop and deliver new learning resources for line managers and staff on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reasonable adjustments;</li> <li>Dignity at Work; and</li> <li>Bullying and Harassment.</li> </ul>	Completion rates.	March 2026.	Increased awareness and understanding of the duty to make reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and what may constitute disability discrimination.	People and Organisational Development NICSHR
Continue to ensure mandatory completion of the NICS Equality Diversity and Inclusion e-learning modules.	Completion rates.	Ongoing.	All colleagues understand the role they play in achieving an inclusive workplace and how their behaviours directly influence and shape the working environment for them and their colleagues.	Line managers NICS HR People and Organisational Development

<p>Front-line staff to be trained to deal with customers with a disability through completion of the following e-learning courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disability Awareness for front-line staff;</li> <li>Supporting Autistic People;</li> <li>Supporting Vulnerable People.</li> </ul> <p>Induction for front-line staff to include 'Every Customer Counts'.</p>	<p>Number of staff trained.</p> <p>Customer surveys/ feedback.</p>	<p>Priority 1 training (0-4 months)</p> <p>Complaints dealt with within customer service standards timescales.</p> <p>Customer surveys carried out every year.</p>	<p>Improved service for customers with disabilities.</p>	<p>Line managers and customer service teams.</p>
<p>Provision of advice and support to staff on health related matters, including promoting positive mental health, through NICS Well and in line with the NICS Mental Health Strategy (strategy under development).</p>	<p>Publication of the NICS Well Newsletter 'Well Times'.</p> <p>Well Champions Conference.</p> <p>Delivery of a series of internal communications and events, including celebration of specific diversity days to raise awareness and understanding of issues and the support available.</p>	<p>Quarterly.</p> <p>Annually.</p> <p>Annually.</p>	<p>Increased awareness of health conditions; how to manage them and the support available to those affected.</p>	<p>NICSHR</p> <p>People and Organisational Development</p>
<b>Recruitment, career progression and development</b>				
<p>Deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity, including strengthening existing links with the disability sector.</p>	<p>Delivery of a programme of outreach initiatives.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>	<p>Increased applications from disabled people leading to a higher representation of disabled people in the NICS applicant pools and workforce so that the NICS will be</p>	<p>People and Organisational Development</p> <p>NICSHR</p>

			more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	
Conclude development of and launch of a new Ring-Fencing Scheme (RFS) policy as a positive action measure.	Offers of appointment to successful disabled applicants.  Representation of disabled people in the NICS workforce.	June 2025.	To guarantee offers of appointment to a minimum number of disabled applicants who have demonstrated, through the relevant selection process, that they meet the required standard for appointment which alongside the existing Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) will support the employment of disabled people.	People and Organisational Development NICSHR
Design and deliver new NICS Employability Programmes to those furthest removed from the labour market with an initial focus on disabled people and care experienced.	Number of participants in the NICS Employability Programme.	March 2026.	Increased representation of disabled people in the NICS workforce.	People and Organisational Development
Promote and develop the work experience programme, providing meaningful placements for disabled people.	Number of requests and work experience placements facilitated.  Feedback from participants, disability support organisations and hosting business areas.	Annually.	Increased applications for, and facilitation of work experience placements for disabled people.	People and Organisational Development.
Undertake a comprehensive review of the reasonable adjustment process and deliver improvements through a co-design approach with key stakeholders including colleagues with lived experience.	Increased disability declaration rates as a result of confidence in the process. Improved understanding and engagement with the reasonable adjustment process. Feedback from disabled colleagues and line managers.	Summer 2025.	To ensure equality of opportunity and removal of barriers to employment for disabled applicants to support colleagues to perform their duties and maintain work.	People and Organisational Development

Participation and Engagement				
Development of a NICS-wide Mental Health Strategy.	1. Establish Mental Health forum (internal partners) to connect all NICS mental health activities. 2. Connected links developed with external partners (Inspire/Charity for Civil Service Servants) 3. Mental Health Strategy developed and implemented.	Continuous	To encourage our people to be healthy with a sense of wellbeing and to enable them to be their best in the workplace.	NICSHR
Include in the appointment plan for each new DoF public appointment competition a section on 'diversity' and, within the application process, consider measures that encourage people with a disability to apply, for example by utilising the Guaranteed Interview Scheme. TEO report on applications: <a href="#">Public appointments reports</a>	Percentage of people with a disability applying for DoF public appointments.	Continuous – an appointment plan is a required element of every public appointment competition.	Greater diversity in DoF public appointments.	Relevant public appointment Sponsor Branch.
Digital Inclusion Programme activities specifically targeted at disabled people and their carers and developed in conjunction with disability organisations.	Number of activities and evaluation results.	Annually.	People with disabilities make more use of online services.	DSF

Carry out regular website accessibility audits and annual content reviews of the DoF website, working with content owners to address findings.	Audit results, business area engagement and user feedback.	Annually.	Ensure DoF website meets accessibility standards.	CAED
Make sure content owners abide by the nidirect style guide before we publish content. Regular website accessibility audits, weekly reviews of auto-compliance software and annual content reviews of the nidirect website, working with content owners to address findings.	Audit results, web accessibility testing platform, business area engagement and user feedback.	Continuous	Make sure nidirect website meets accessibility standards.	nidirect CET





Department of

**Finance**

An Roinn

**Airgeadais**

[www.finance-ni.gov.uk](http://www.finance-ni.gov.uk)