

Consumer Council for Northern Ireland



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

Contact:

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Action Plan	As above ✓ Name: Telephone: Email:

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

<http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications/consumer-council-corporate-and-equality-plan-2011--2015/>

<http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications/the-annual-report-accounts-2014-15/>

<http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications/business-plan-for-2015-16-1/>

Signature:

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

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

This report reflects progress made between April 2014 and March 2015

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

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

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

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

The four core aims of the Consumer Council's Corporate Plan (2011–15) are to:

- Ensure public policy reflects the needs of today's and tomorrow's consumers.
- Champion and protect the interests of consumers.
- Inform and empower consumers.
- Ensure the Consumer Council is fit for purpose.

By undertaking extensive consumer research and engagement during corporate planning, the following priority groups were identified:

- Low income households.
- Older people.
- Younger people and students.
- Disabled people.

The Equality Scheme is aligned to the Corporate Plan to ensure consistency and to embed equality considerations into the Consumer Council's priorities, activities, key policies and services. In the context of the Consumer Council's statutory remit, it is recognised that being fit for purpose requires an unequivocal commitment to equality and good relations. The Consumer Council's work priorities are shaped by its statutory equality duties under Section 75 of the *Northern Ireland Act* and the *Disability Discrimination Act and Order*.

The Consumer Council's Outreach Strategy aims to reach out to all consumers in NI who need support with a focus on 'hard to reach' consumers and those in greatest need. This strategy is driven by the core aims of the Corporate Plan and the priority groups identified.

The Consumer Council builds equality into all policies, services and work programmes from the early stages of project planning and policy development.

The Consumer Council responds to government consultations, represents consumers' views and makes recommendations on public policy changes. Policy responses are available on the Consumer Council's website www.consumerCouncil.org.uk.

Key equality outcomes achieved during 2014–15 were:

- Redeveloped our website to further improve its accessibility for visually impaired consumers and those whose first language is not English. This went 'live' in April 2014. Equality categories impacted: disability and race.
- Put in place revised equality monitoring arrangements for our Consumer Support Service, which handles complaints from consumers in respect of energy, postal services, transport, and water. Equality categories impacted: all.
- Provided additional support to 53 vulnerable consumers who had complaints in respect of energy, postal services, transport, or water matters. Equality categories impacted: age and disability.
- Undertook a campaign in October 2014 to raise awareness of energy efficiency and 'switching' to increase the affordability of energy for consumers. This included two major 'Switch & Save' events, which were held in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Feedback from the events was positive and there was strong media interest in them. As part of this, two Switch On booklets on electricity and gas and home heating oil were published with shopping around and switching featuring prominently. Equality categories impacted: age, dependents, disability, gender, marital status, and race.
- Continued to be the complaint handling body for Regulation (EC) 1107 and Regulation (EU) 1177, which gives passengers rights to special assistance when travelling by air (1107) or by ferry (1177). Equality categories impacted: disability.

- We increased awareness of passenger rights following information campaigns aimed at airport users. There were 58,745 assistance requests for passengers with reduced mobility (PRM) at the three airports in NI (18% above average). The Consumer Council experienced a 15% increase in contacts about PRM rights. Equality categories impacted: disability.
- We carried out accessibility audits at Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport and made recommendations for improvement. Equality categories impacted: disability.
- We conducted 58 'outreach' events with priority and harder to reach groups to explain their consumer rights and promote the services offered by the Consumer Council. Equality categories impacted: age and disability.
- We delivered 13 Power to the Pocket events, attended by 113 consumers from the target groups of younger people; older people; disabled people; people living on a low income; and 'under-confident' internet users. These events demonstrate how consumers can save money, as well as promote awareness of rights. Equality categories impacted: age, dependents, disability, gender, marital status, and race.
- Updated and distributed 5,000 copies of the Consumer Council's Guide to Shopping Safely Online. This included a campaign targeting young people who are particularly vulnerable in this area. Equality categories impacted: age.
- Successfully lobbied Post Office Limited in respect of accessibility improvements when Armagh Post Office was moved to new premises. Equality categories impacted: disability.

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

See Q1 (above).

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

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

Please provide any details and examples:

The changes apply to policy, practice, procedures, and service delivery of bodies that the Consumer Council monitors rather than our own.

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

Please provide any details and examples:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

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

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

Please provide any details and examples:

Given our statutory role to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland, particularly vulnerable consumers, equality duties are mainstreamed in the work undertaken by most Consumer Council staff. However, Section 75 is not explicitly referenced.

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

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

Please provide any details and examples:

As Q4 above.

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

- ☒ Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan

PART A

- ☒ Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- ☐ Yes, in some departments/jobs
- ☐ No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
- ☐ No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2013-14 report
- ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The Corporate Plan for 2011–15, and annual business plans to implement this, include Equality Plans.

Equality action plans/measures

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

Actions
completed:

9

Actions ongoing:

3

Actions to
commence:

3

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

Successfully lobbied our parent department DETI to encourage applications from disabled people in respect of the public appointments process for a new Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Consumer Council.

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

Plans to relocate to new accessible premises was delayed in the planning year. Relocation took place in June 2015.

A number of other plans were delayed by resource constraints experienced during the year, including work to promote greater financial inclusion and providing work placements for disabled students.

PART A

- 9** In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2014-15 reporting period, the following have been identified: *(tick all that apply)*
- ☒ Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
 - ☐ Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
 - ☐ Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
 - ☒ Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

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

☒ All the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

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

User testing and signoff in partnership with RNIB on key accessibility features for the new corporate website for visually impaired users.

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

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

PART A

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

Consultation on the new website specifically targeted older and disabled users through focus groups.

Consultation on the Business Plan for 2015-16, which was conducted in 2014-15, attracted one response from a body representing a Section 75 category (the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland).

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

☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

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

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable – no commitment to review

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

As the Equality Scheme is integrated into corporate and business plan cycles, equality is mainstreamed into all our strategies that flow from these. In terms of our governance and employment policies, these are those of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and therefore subject to screening and equality impact assessment by the NICS.

In light of the above, no strategies or policies required screening or equality impact assessment by the Consumer Council during the last year.

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

0

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

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

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

Not applicable.

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

☐ Yes
 ☐ No concerns were raised
 ☐ No
 ☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

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

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

☐ Yes
 ☐ No
 ☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

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

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

☒ Yes
 ☐ No, already taken place

☐ No, scheduled to take place at a later date

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details:

We instigated new equality monitoring arrangements for users of our Consumer Support Service with effect from April 2014.

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

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The monitoring data showed that people from a BAME background appear to be underrepresented among the users of the service. Discussions are planned with representative bodies to discuss possible barriers to take-up and ways to promote availability of the service.

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

See Q21 above

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

See Q21 above

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

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

None undertaken in 2014-15 because of budget cuts. These funding issues have been overcome for 2015-16 and training is being resumed.

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

Not applicable.

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

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

See (21) above. While not a result of this monitoring, as part of the development of the new corporate website, we included a section on alternative languages. This provides all core information in the range of languages most commonly spoken in NI (based on advice from the Equality Commission).

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

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

Insert number here:

0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Section 3: Looking Forward

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

2016

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

A key focus will be consultation on the Consumer Council's new Corporate Plan, which is due to come into effect from April 2016.

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

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

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

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

7

Fully achieved

1

Partially achieved

2

Not achieved

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

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

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
National ⁱⁱⁱ	Designated complaint handling body for Regulation (EC) No. 1107/2006 (access to air travel).	This allows us to take complaints from passengers with reduced mobility and to work with the industry to improve services to disabled passengers.	98per cent customer satisfaction rating achieved.

PART B

	Designated complaint handling body for the Maritime Passenger Regulation (EU) No. 1177/2010 which provides protection for disabled ferry passengers	This allows us to take complaints from passengers with reduced mobility and to work with the industry to improve services to disabled passengers.	98 per cent customer satisfaction rating achieved.
	Encourage the participation by disabled people in public life by working with DETI to promote the appointment of disabled Council Members in line with the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.	The advertisements welcomed applications from disabled people and guaranteed interviews to disabled applicants.	Not known. The equality monitoring data is held by DETI.
	Launch the Consumer Council's new accessible corporate website.	The new website went 'live' in April 2014.	Accessibility features were signed off by visually impaired users and RNIB. The website was runner up and Highly Commended in the Website of the Year category at the Digital Advertising NI Awards 2014.

PART B

	Contributed to government policy proposals and practical initiatives designed to eradicate fuel poverty and improve the affordability of energy for consumers.	Conducted a programme of 'Switch & Save' events and published supporting guides.	While well received and attracting good media interest, switching levels remain stubbornly low in NI. This is an area of continuing attention by the Consumer Council and other key stakeholders.
	Promoted and improved awareness of passenger rights among passengers and service providers.	Airport accessibility audits and promotional campaigns.	There were 58,745 assistance requests for passengers with reduced mobility (PRM) at the three airports in NI (18% above average). The Consumer Council experienced a 15% increase in contacts about PRM rights.

PART B

	Implemented the final year of the Outreach Strategy (2012–15) to ensure that the Consumer Council connects effectively with consumers across Northern Ireland so that they understand how we can support them and we understand their needs. Disabled people were a specific target group.	We delivered 13 Power to the Pocket events, attended by 113 consumers from the target groups of younger people; older people; disabled people; people living on a low income; and ‘under-confident’ internet users. These events demonstrate how consumers can save money, as well as promote awareness of rights.	Evaluation shows increased knowledge of consumer rights and how to switch suppliers to save money.
Regional ^{iv}	Not applicable		
Local ^v	Not applicable		

PART B

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period? **None**

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	None		
2			

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period? **None**

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1			
2			

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

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	See 2(a) above in respect of the public appointments process.		

PART B

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above: **None**

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
1	We successfully lobbied Post Office Limited in respect of accessibility improvements when Armagh Post Office was moved to new premises.	Installation of power assisted doors at the new location; provision of one hour free car parking in a nearby car park for the first six months to help with the transition; engagement with Transport NI to seek to improve car parking in the vicinity.	A more accessible Post Office in Armagh.

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

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestonesvi / Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1	Conduct an accessibility audit of the Consumer Council's new accommodation arrangements.	We liaised closely with DFP to ensure that the Consumer Council's new premises designed to meet the highest standards of accessibility.	Fully accessible premises	Relocation was delayed until June 2015.

PART B

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

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1	Explore options to offer work experience to disabled students and trainees.	This work was put on hold because of severe budget cuts and other significant changes. We hope to resume this plan next year.
2	Review the equality composition of the Consumer Council's staff group and develop an affirmative action plan to address any under-representation, as appropriate.	This work was put on hold because of severe budget cuts (funds were needed to update the recruitment monitoring system), the lack of recruitment, and other significant changes. We hope to resume this plan next year.

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

(a) Qualitative

The Consumer Council uses focus groups of consumers to explore key policy issues.

(b) Quantitative

Complaints handling database

Consumer Outlook Index – every six months.

Other research commissioned to explore key policy issues.

PART B

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

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

Please select - not applicable as such, but the Consumer Council develops a new equality plan each year to address key emerging issues that have been highlighted by research or from our stakeholders.

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1			

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

Yes, see Q5 above.

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

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

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

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

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

^{vi} **Milestones** – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved.