



A short guide to public authorities' annual review of progress on the statutory equality and good relations duties

Guidance on completion of the Commission's template for reporting progress

February 2015

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

A short guide to public authorities' annual review of progress on the statutory equality and good relations duties

The aim of this guidance note is to set out the purposes for public authorities reviewing and reporting their progress annually, on fulfilling their statutory equality and good relations duties through their Equality Scheme arrangements and Disability Action Plans. It also provides guidance on completion of the reporting template produced annually by the Commission.

The section on completion of the revised template applies specifically to **Part A** of the template, which relates to progress on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Part B of the template relates to progress on Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended); **it has not been revised and guidance points on completion are retained within the template itself.**

Purpose of an annual review and reporting

The completion of an annual progress review and report enables public authorities to:

- fulfil commitments in approved Equality Schemes. The Commission recommends that one of a public authority's arrangements to assess its compliance with the duties under Section 75 (as required by Schedule 9 paragraph 4 (2) (a)) is a commitment in its Equality Scheme to conduct an annual review of progress on the implementation of scheme arrangements¹;
- present the actions, outcomes, impacts, and achievements by an authority to progress its agenda on these matters, in a comprehensive report for a range of stakeholders;
- support the mainstreaming of equality of opportunity and good relations through the public authority, through presenting how the authority focuses on, prioritises and addresses these matters and fulfils its statutory equality and good relations duties. It also enables engagement of all functional areas within an authority in its completion;
- identify and present good practice.

General points on completion of the template

The template includes a number of self assessment questions regarding progress on Section 75 and the implementation of Equality Scheme commitments in **Part A** and a number of questions regarding Section 49A and the implementation of Disability Action Plans in **Part B**.

The template is common for all public authorities, given that the duties apply to all. It reflects that most approved Equality Schemes are based on the Commission's

¹ See *Section 75: A Guide for Public Authorities (2010)*, page 36 for details

Model Equality Scheme (MES). The template uses terms that are consistent with the MES; other approved schemes contain comparable arrangements.

Progress can be reported to reflect appropriately:

- the size and scale of each public authority; and
- the complexity of functions with the public authority and the different degree of relevance the duties will have for each of those functions.

The template should be used and adapted to suit the circumstances of each public authority; the fulfilment of the duties varies widely between different public authorities. It provides the opportunity for different business areas across a larger public authority to provide information and examples of mainstreaming the duties, to reflect practice throughout the organisation. For smaller public authorities, the format enables the presentation of progress on key areas of the Equality Scheme commitments, and examples where they occur.

It prompts for those areas where there are scheme arrangements and commitments, but also asks about wider outcomes and impacts. The current template also maintains sections to enable the authority to report more widely on its equality and good relations agenda. Part A, section one is specifically designed to serve this purpose.

The format of the template does not limit the amount of information that can be presented in the text fields for any of the questions. These fields are provided to prompt for reporting progress, if any. Duplication should be avoided.

The report should be signed within the authority at the appropriate level to confirm the commitments made in the Equality Scheme to implement it effectively.

Role of the Commission

The Commission's role is to offer advice to public authorities and others in connection with the duties. Information provided in the report informs and assists this role, not only in advising individual authorities, but also in enabling the identification of trends in practice and good practice examples.

To assist public authorities in fulfilling the Equality Scheme commitment to review and report on progress annually, the Commission provides the report template for public authorities to use. The Commission recommends that public authorities publish their reviews, and submit them to the Commission, with a request for submission of completed reports by 31 August of each year.

The information from public authority reports also assists the Commission to fulfil its role to keep under review the effectiveness of the duties imposed by Section 75.

Guidance on completion of the Commission's template for reporting progress

Part A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and implementation of the approved Equality Scheme

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

This section asks about the impact of your equality and good relations focussed activities. It provides the opportunity to present the range of activities and practices occurring throughout your authority.

This section can be used to outline key projects and initiatives progressed during the year and report on the impact of this work on people, relating to the relevant Section 75 category (note: this section prompts for similar information to the executive summary in the previous version of the template).

Question 1 provides the opportunity to describe the public authority's work generally to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. This should be related to the duties to pay due regard/regard and implementation of Equality Scheme commitments, as appropriate.

Question 2 prompts for information on the implementation of the public authority's action plan/measures as committed to in the Equality Scheme. The Commission recommended these plans to public authorities as a way to show the impact and outcomes of the Section 75 duties on people. The response to this question provides the opportunity to show the out workings of those plans in terms of their impact.

For public authorities with an equality action plan/action measures in a separate document which shows progress, outcomes and impacts, this can be appended instead of completing this section.

Question 3 prompts for reporting specifically on **the impact of applying Equality Scheme commitments** to what has been reported for questions 1 and 2. It is to identify any examples of change to policies, practices and procedures and confirm the link to the impact and outcomes from fulfilling the statutory duties.

For example, in response to question one, information could be presented on the process of mainstreaming equality and good relations into a Corporate Plan and planning process, with the result of equality and good relations informing corporate priorities. The details provided for question 3 could reflect the application of equality scheme commitments to assessing and consulting on equality and good relations impacts which, informed the options considered when drafting of the corporate plan.

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

This section relates to reporting progress on what has been committed to in approved Equality Schemes, as well as developing and implementing action plans/measures.

The prompt for any details or examples for each question can also be used to reflect on progress that was reported in the preceding year, and intentions for the future year, if appropriate.

Questions 4 & 5 reflect general commitments from Chapter 2 of the MES. This will provide baseline information for 2014-15; these questions could be replaced in future templates.

Question 6 also reflects the general commitment in Chapter 2 of the MES, and should also provide information on trends and examples of **mainstreaming activities**.

Questions 7- 9 refer not only to scheme commitments on **action plans**, but also will provide a snapshot of activity and progress on implementing action plans for 2014-15. Collecting information on the implementation of these arrangements is a priority for the Commission. Question 7 should provide some quantifiable information to supplement the detailed progress on plans reported, which will vary according to each authority.

The MES commitments specifically include the **development** of an action plan/action measures and **reporting changes** to the plan in the annual progress report.

These questions are worded to enable authorities to report on how the processes and arrangements are being effectively implemented to achieve the desired results; whereas **question 2 enables a focus in reporting the outcomes and impacts on people**.

Please consider the following in the information provided:

- the inequality(ies) your actions intended to address
- Was it addressed or progress made towards addressing?
- How and when will your organisation know if the action had the intended impact?
- What results have you recorded/reported?
- What new or further actions have resulted from this?

Questions 10-14 on consultation reflect the wording of the MES commitments and seek to identify examples of good consultation practice on matters relevant to the Section 75 duties.

Question 12 reflects the recommended methods of consultation from the Commission's guidance, and seeks information on **how those methods have been**

used, having been offered. This will assist in understanding changes in preferred practices or advances in technology, informing the Commission's advice planning, as well as sharing good practice.

For example: Innovative practices can be reported when engaging with people from particular Section 75 categories, or the use of technology to overcome barriers to participation.

Questions 15-19 ask about the application of arrangements in the Equality Scheme to **assess and consult on the likely impacts of policies**, with particular reference to mainstreaming this within the policy development process.

Questions 15 and 16 will provide a snapshot of individual practices, as well as an indication of the extent of the relevance and contribution of the duties to policy development and policy change throughout the public service for 2014-15.

Question 17 asks about consultations undertaken in 2014-15 when it has been **relevant to your statutory equality duties, specifically in assessing the likely impacts of a policy**.

For example: this will be the list of those policies consulted upon for which the Equality Impact Assessment was presented for consultees to consider. It will also contain the **major** policies consulted upon, where screening templates were also presented; confirming the public authority had assessed the policy as relevant to Section 75, and an EQIA was not considered necessary.

Public authorities should **not** list consultations where the policy under consideration was screened out as not relevant; this information is contained in the regular screening reports and summaries published.

Question 18 asks about reviewing screening decisions in the reporting year. This is recommended in the Commission's guidance and is asked to identify whether stakeholders are raising any concerns about a screening decision with public authorities.

Question 19 asks for confirmation of those policies where decisions have been taken during the reporting year, with the appropriate assessment taken into account. If you undertake a different assessment methodology instead of an EQIA, the public authority must still have arrangements to publish the results of such assessments.

Questions 20-23 are about your scheme **monitoring commitments of policies adopted**, and are a priority for the Commission given the ongoing reporting of paucity of information and data availability.

Question 20 specifically asks about action by those public authorities committed to reviewing monitoring information in the first year following approval of the Equality Scheme. This will provide baseline information for 2014-15.

Question 23 prompts for examples of monitoring and data collection. Public authorities can report on relevant data sets and methodologies established during the reporting year.

Questions 24-25 reflect the MES commitment that **evaluation of staff training** on Section 75 will be reported on in a public authority's annual progress report. It is text only for the appropriate details to be reflected which are specific to each public authority.

Question 26 prompts for examples of action to improve **public access to information and services**. The question is worded to enable reporting of actions and improvements, to avoid duplication of information for questions 20-23.

Question 27 quantifies the number of times an individual or group has contacted a public authority to raise a **complaint** about the application or implementation of the Equality Scheme. Information should be provided here according to the procedure as set out in the Equality Scheme.

Section 3: Looking Forward

This section is intended to provide any information that would be useful to highlight to the Commission. This is included given the Commission's ongoing advice role, and ongoing engagement with public authorities. It is **not limited to the duties under Section 75**; it can be used to highlight points arising from any responsibilities under the equality legislation.

It is the opportunity to signal specific areas of potential advice needs. Through the use of standardised information at question 30, the Commission will be able to collate any trends to inform the Commission's service and advice planning. For example, this may highlight an issue for a sector where training could be planned.

You can detach this section and forward it separately to your Public Sector Team contact, rather than include it with your published and approved report.

Further information and advice

For further information and advice on the statutory equality and good relations duties please contact us at:

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