



PUBLIC AUTHORITY PROGRESS REPORT

1 APRIL 2005 – 31 MARCH 2006

**Report to the Equality Commission on progress in the
implementation of our equality and good relations duties
under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**

This report can be found on the EONI website www.electorlofficeni.gov.uk
and can also be made available in alternative formats on request

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Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

- Outline evidence of progress made in developing equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2005-06. Your response should include any targets for 2006-07.
- Please provide details of the **direct** resourcing of Section 75 work during 2005–06. This should include staff appointed/directed (*not names*) and details of any budget allocation, to specifically deliver equality scheme commitments.

(Enter text below)

- The EONI's 2005-08 Corporate Plan and 06/07 Annual Business Plan include objectives to ensure that staff have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with section 75. Objectives are met through the EONI's Quality Service Strategy involving training for new employees and performance management. Although section 75 issues are carefully considered in relation to all the objectives and targets set out in the plan, a number are directed specifically at one or more of the section 75 groups or to meeting our Equality Scheme commitments. These include –
 - To undertake outreach programmes, before, during and after the 2006 canvass aimed at bringing on to the Register people who persistently fail to register.
 - To provide standard forms in Braille and large type on request and in languages other than English, where reasonably required.
 - To produce, by end March 2007, plans whereby voters with disabilities can gain appropriate and satisfactory access to polling stations and area electoral offices.
 - To publish the EONI's Annual Equality Report by autumn 2006.
 - To complete, by the end of 2006, an assessment, as agreed with the Equality Commission, of the impact on both the staff and its customers of information and communication technology within EONI.

- To maintain and build on the EONI's network of contacts with outside organisations and representative groups and establish new contacts as required.

An Equality Steering Group continued to drive forward the implementation of commitments outlined in the EONI's Equality Scheme.

- There was no direct resourcing of section 75 work during 2005-06. Staff costs with regard to the running of the Equality Steering Group to deliver equality scheme commitments are met from the EONI running costs budget. Progress in developing equality and good relations objectives has been an integral part of the day-to-day work across the EONI through mainstreaming section 75 obligations – it is not considered that there is any need for a separate budget. The Chief Electoral Officer is fully committed to making any necessary additional resources available.

Section 2: Screening & Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

2a) If a Screening Report has not yet been submitted to the Commission please advise us on the current position with regard to producing this report and forwarding to the Commission.

(Enter text below) Submitted (insert date).

2b) If a Screening Report and EQIA Timetable has **previously been submitted** to the Commission please provide an update (**using the matrices in Appendix A**) of policies subject to EQIA during 2005-06, new/proposed/revised policies screened during 2005-06, ongoing EQIA monitoring activities and 2006-07 EQIA timetable.

- Please see Appendix A. An EQIA was carried out on the function of preparing and maintaining an accurate electoral register and following consultation the EONI concluded that the function did not have an adverse differential impact on individuals in any of the section 75 categories.

- The EONI Equality Scheme timetabled a monitoring EQIA on the introduction of the IT system during 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006. However, a new screening exercise was undertaken to consider the full implications and developments connected with EONI's new IT system which could not have been envisaged when the systems were implemented from 2002 onwards. The response date for the consultation on the re-screening exercise was 9 June 2006. The screening process disclosed no adverse differential impact on individuals in any of the section 75 groups. None of those consulted disagreed with this assessment. Accordingly it is not now considered that an EQIA is necessary and the CEO has determined that it will not be conducted.

Section 3: Training

- Outline staff and Management Board/Committee training during 2005-06 associated with the Section 75 duties/Equality Scheme requirements (Provide details of types of training provision e.g. general awareness raising, specialist training on EQIA, Screening and Consultation). Provide a summary of any training evaluations and comments on the benefits of such training.

(Enter text below)

- There were no new senior managers appointed during the year. The EONI continues to provide Equality Awareness training as part of an induction programme for all new employees. Training needs identified for 2005/06 led to the provision of section 75 awareness training by an external consultant for 10 new recruits. Improvements will be made as a result of the evaluation of this training.
- On 28 March 2006 EONI managers attended training on how public authorities provide services to minority ethnic groups. The training highlighted some of the emerging findings from research into how public

authorities provide services for minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. The training involved workshops on mainstreaming, targeting, benchmarking and engagement and concluded with recommendations for discussion by the groups in attendance.

Section 4: Communication

- Provide details of how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the statutory duties during 2005-06.
- Provide details of any review of communication activities during the year to ensure effective communication on progressing the statutory duties.

(Enter text below)

- The EONI communicated progress on the delivery of statutory duties during 2005-06 mainly through our website . The website links to the Equality Scheme and consultation information. The EONI also placed advertisements in the local press as part of the consultation process and ensured that information was available in accessible communication formats.
- The EONI is reviewing its strategy of internal and external communication with stakeholders as part of an Equality Action Plan process.

Section 5: Data Collection & Analysis

- Describe any systems that were established during 2005-06 to supplement available statistical and qualitative research, including consideration given to using internal organisational data and external networks.
- Describe any systems established during the year to monitor the future adverse impact of policies that were subject to EQIA.
- Detail any research undertaken/commissioned during 2005-06 to obtain data/information relating to the nine equality categories.

(Enter text below)

- EONI did not establish any further systems to supplement current statistical and qualitative data.
- Following the 2005 combined elections EONI reviewed the returns made by polling staff and their supervisors. This was entered on to a dedicated polling place database. The information was reviewed and assessed to determine locations used for polling which are unsatisfactory requiring some alterations or even replacement. This is to facilitate those in three of the section 75 categories – disabled, persons with dependents and the elderly. This work is ongoing.
- EONI takes on board statistics and qualitative data provided by the Electoral Commission’s subcontracted statisticians in relation to under-representation on the electoral register by young people, those in disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities. With this evidence EONI will target such groups to increase their representation on future registers.

Section 6: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

- Outline what action has been taken during 2005-06 to develop arrangements for the provision of information in accessible formats.
- Detail any initiatives/steps taken to improve access to services.

(Enter text below)

- The EONI provides a commitment that all materials can be provided, on request, in a range of alternative formats including Braille, disk, and audiotape, large print and minority languages. This has recently been incorporated within the accessibility of recruitment documentation for permanent and casual staff. The importance attached to this facility has been highlighted with its inclusion in the Business Plan 2006/07.

- During 2005 the EONI installed a range of ICT developments to provide enhanced communications for the visually and aurally impaired including a telephone/information service with a central enquiry text phone facility and induction loops at all Area Electoral Office public counters.

Section 7: Complaints

- Identify, during 2005-06, the number of section 75 complaints:
 - received by the authority;
 - resolved by the authority;
 - which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant; and
 - which were referred to the Equality Commission.

(Enter text below)

- The EONI have a complaints procedure in place and it is set out in our Equality Scheme. No section 75 complaints were received in 2005/06.

Section 8: Scheme Timetable

- Provide an update of your equality scheme implementation timetable (covering all the scheme commitments), identifying any changes since your previous report. Please detail any planned actions outstanding.

(Enter text below)

- The EQIA on the function of preparing and maintaining an accurate electoral register has been completed and was submitted to the Equality Commission in November 2005. The monitoring EQIA on the introduction of the IT system will now be undertaken.
- The time-tabled monitoring EQIA on the effect of outreach measures in advertising for and recruiting staff to carry out registration duties, man Polling Stations and provide the Electoral Office with clerical staff has been postponed to 06/07to facilitate the upgrade of the relevant software

package to process monitoring information on staff re-appointed during 2005 and 2006.

- The timetable for Year 5 is as follows:

Year 5 (1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007)

- Carry out induction equality training for new staff
- Screen any new policies, powers, duties and functions
- Carry out an EQIA on the effect of outreach measures in advertising for and recruiting staff to carry out registration duties, man Polling Stations and provide the Electoral Office with clerical staff (by 31 March 2007).
- Carry out Equality Commission's guidance on 5 years review of the operation and effectiveness of the equality scheme in promoting equality of opportunity and good relations in the work of the Electoral Office.
- Publish Review Report.

Section 9: Consultation, Participation and Engagement

- Provide details of the processes adopted to engage with representative groups during 2005-06.
- Outline measures taken to enhance the level of engagement that were successful and unsuccessful.

(Enter text below)

- EONI consults key stakeholders both by seeking their views in writing and by attending meetings with them. Both have provided to be successful.
- The EONI continues to engage with representative groups and arrange meetings where considered necessary. In 2005-06 there was pro-active engagement with many disability groups prior to and after the 2005 May elections and also with ethnic minority groups and those representing young people in advance of and during the 2005 Canvass period.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

Provide details of steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

(Enter text below)

- A key element in implementing and progressing the good relations duty is that the work of the EONI is underpinned by strategies targeted at improving registration levels among all groups in Northern Ireland. Although no specific steps to progress the good relations duty have been taken this year, many work streams have had the effect of maintaining and establishing good relations.

Section 11: Additional Comments on Mainstreaming

The main aim of the statutory duties is to mainstream equality of opportunity and good relations considerations into the functions of the authority, leading to better policies and service delivery. Please provide any additional information/comments you think may be relevant.

(Enter text below)

During 2005/06 the EONI implemented a Planning & Resources Group which met at least on a monthly basis. The aim of the meeting is to be pro-active and to ensure equality issues are integrated within items discussed on the agenda including estate management issues, policies and procedures. The EONI continues to have regular meetings of the Senior Management Team and Area Electoral Officers to facilitate the mainstreaming of equality and good relations issues in the discussion of electoral administration and equality matters.

Section 12: Concluding Questions

12A) Does the authority believe its work on implementing the statutory duties during 2005-06 produced positive benefits for the organisation? **YES** if yes please complete the following
NO

	Very noticeably	Noticeably	No real change
i) Increased awareness of equality issues in policy making	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii) Increased ability to ensure policies are designed and targeted to reflect equal opportunities objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii) Increased awareness of good relations issues in policy making	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv) Increased ability to ensure policies are designed and targeted to reflect good relations objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
v) Increased awareness of equality issues in service delivery	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
vi) Increased ability to ensure services are designed and targeted to reflect Section 75 requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>

12B) Does the authority believe its work on implementing the statutory duties during 2005-06 produced positive benefits for groups within the Section 75 categories? **YES** if yes please complete the following
No

	Very noticeably	Noticeably	No real change
Persons of different religious belief	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Persons of different political opinion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Persons of different racial groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persons of different age	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persons with different marital status	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Persons of different sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Men and women generally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Persons with and without a disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persons with and without dependents	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>

QUESTION 12C

If you answered yes to QUESTION 12 B, for each of the categories where a noticeable or very noticeable change has occurred, please give examples of those changes to policies or practices which have resulted in positive change. If the change was a result of an EQIA please tick the appropriate box in column 3:

	Policy or Practice	Tick if result of EQIA
Persons of different religious belief	•	
Persons of different political opinion	•	
Persons of different racial groups	• Extended range of languages on flash cards.	
Persons of different age	• Outreach measures to schools	
Persons with different marital status	•	
Persons of different sexual orientation	•	
Men and women generally	•	
Persons with and without a disability	• Accessibility improvements	
Persons with and without dependents	• Flexible Working Arrangements	

Appendix A

Screening & EQIA Update

Please enter details relating to the authority's progress using the following matrices.

i) EQIA Timetable – 2005-06

Title of policy EQIA underway during April 2005-March 2006	Stage (as per Steps 1-7 of EQIA Process) As at end March 2006	If joint-EQIA please state partner authorities	Outline any adjustments to policy intended to benefit individuals from the nine equality categories and outline the relevant categories affected.	Were adjustments to policy a result of <u>A</u> ssessment of <u>a</u> dverse impact/ <u>C</u> onsultation, or <u>B</u> oth <i>Please enter A, C or Both</i>	If EQIA decision making stage completed, is amended policy being implemented? <u>Y</u> es/ <u>N</u> o
1.Function of Preparing and maintaining an accurate electoral register	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2.Introduction of the IT System	New screening exercise undertaken – see section 2				
3.Outreach measures in advertising for and recruiting staff to carry out registration duties,	Temporarily delayed to 06/07 due to implementation of				

main Polling Stations and provide the EONI with clerical staff	monitoring database for registration and election staff				
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ii) Ongoing Screening Activities 2005-06

Title of policy subject to screening during April 2005- March 2006	If joint policy please state partner authorities	Was initial screening decision changed following consultation? <u>Yes/No</u>	If Screening completed is policy being subject to EQIA? <u>Yes/No</u>	If EQIA planned indicate year for assessment
1. Introduction of the IT system	N/A	No	No	N/A
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

iii) Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities 2005-06

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring during April 2005- March 2006	If joint policy please state partner authorities	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased
1. Polling Station Scheme	N/A	Reduced	Reduced
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

iv) 2006-07 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2006 – March 2007	Existing or New policy? Please enter E or N below.	If joint-EQIA please state partner authorities	Please indicate expected date of completion of EQIA Stage 6 i.e Decision making stage
1. Outreach measures in advertising for and recruiting staff to carry out registration duties, main Polling Stations and provide the EONI with clerical staff	E	N/A	31 March 2007