



NORTHERN IRELAND
Legal Services
Commission

Draft Equality Scheme
November 2006



An executive summary of this document is also available in an accessible format if required i.e. Braille, large print, audio cassette or in a minority ethnic language.

Published November 2006



NORTHERN IRELAND
Legal Services
Commission

This document is the draft Equality Scheme for the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission and has been developed to provide a platform for consultation with interested individuals, groups and organisations.

All views and comments on this document are welcome. In addition, the Commission welcomes the opportunity to meet with any interested individuals or organisations to discuss this draft Equality Scheme and identify ways to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission is committed to meaningful consultation and would welcome feedback on how to facilitate participation in this process. Different formats of this document are available on request including summaries, Braille, audiocassette, minority languages, and electronic versions.



Sir Anthony Holland
Chairman



Gerry Crossan
Chief Executive

Foreword

The vision of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission is the promotion of fair and equal access to justice in Northern Ireland. We aim to ensure, in partnership with others, that the justice system is fair, accessible and affordable for all. The promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations are key values which underpin all of the work of the Commission. We are therefore delighted to present this Draft Equality Scheme which details how we will fulfil our obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

We are committed to mainstreaming equality of opportunity across all functions, powers and duties of the Commission. To achieve this goal, we will ensure that all Commissioners, managers and staff are aware the commitments contained within this Scheme and the need to implement these. Appropriate systems will be put in place to fulfil the commitments detailed in this scheme. This will include raining for all staff and Commissioners, meaningful and

inclusive consultation and effective policy screening, equality impact assessment and monitoring. We are also committed to ensuring that the necessary resources including people, time and money are put in place to enable effective and timely implementation of the Statutory Duties.

The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission is charged with the delivery of an exciting and challenging reform agenda which aims to ensure equitable access to justice. We welcome and invite all views on how to further promote equality of opportunity and good relations in our work and look forward to the feedback from the consultation process on this draft Scheme.

Sir Anthony Holland
Chairman

Gerry Crossan
Chief Executive

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1. Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission ('The Commission'), in carrying out all its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; between men and women generally; between persons with a disability and persons without; and between persons with dependants and persons without.

In addition, without prejudice to its obligation above, NILSC is required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

This draft Equality Scheme is presented in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to set out how NILSC will fulfil the Statutory Duties.

NILSC is committed to meaningful consultation and would welcome the opportunity to facilitate participation in this process. Different formats of this document are available on request including summaries, Braille, audiocassette, minority languages, and electronic versions.

All consultation responses and enquiries should be directed to:

The Secretary
Northern Ireland Legal
Services Commission
2nd Floor, Waterfront Plaza
8 Laganbank Road
Belfast BT1 3BN

Telephone: 028 9040 8888

Fax: 028 9040 8990

Email: accesstojustice@nilsc.org.uk

All views and comments will be considered. Views would be particularly welcomed on the following areas:

- Have the arrangements included in the Equality Scheme taken full account of requirements relating to training, publication of information and access to information and services?
- Are there group or organisations additional to those presented in Annex One with whom the Commission should be consulting?
- Are the arrangements for consultation appropriate and do they fully meet the needs of different individuals and groups and organisations?
- Are the Commission's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the impact of policies relating to the promotion of equality of opportunity appropriate and do they fully meet the needs of different individuals and groups?
- Are the timetables detailed in Section 9 appropriate?

To assist you, a return section is included at Annex 2.

2 Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission

This section briefly details the background, aims, objectives and structure of the Commission. A brief summary of the reform agenda is also provided. Further information is available at www.nilsc.org.uk or by contacting the Secretary to the Commission as detailed in Section 1.

2.1 Background

The Commission was established on 1st November 2003, under Article 3 of the Access to Justice (NI) Order 2003 as an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Northern Ireland Court Service. The Commission is responsible for the provision of legal aid services in Northern Ireland and improving the delivery of such services. In working towards the implementation of the Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, the Commission is charged with reforming legal aid services.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

The Commission's mission is to promote fair and equal access to justice and to help promote social inclusion in the provision of publicly funded legal services in Northern Ireland.

The Commission aims to provide high quality, customer focused services that target those in greatest need and demonstrate value for money.

Underpinning this mission and aim are a set of six core values which support the work of the Commission. These are:

- fairness and equity;
- integrity and honesty;
- responsiveness to customer needs;
- quality;
- valuing and developing staff; and
- openness and accountability.

2.3 Organisational Structure

The Commission is headed by the Chief Executive. There are four main business areas, each headed by a Director (with the exception of the Chief Executives Office). These are:

- **Chief Executives Office**, including internal Legal Advice to the Commission, Quality and Risk Assurance and the Secretariat to the Commission;
- **Corporate Services** including Human Resources, Finance and Information Technology;
- **Policy and Service Development** including Research, Partnership Working and the development of the Funding Code; and
- **Service Delivery** including Assessment, Adjudication and Processing of Legal Aid.

2.4 Current Delivery of Legal Aid in Northern Ireland

Legal Aid in Northern Ireland is awarded for either civil or criminal proceedings.

Applications for criminal legal aid are made to the court, which must be satisfied that it is in the interest of justice for the defendant to receive legal aid and that they satisfy the means test to enable them to obtain legal aid in the preparation and conduct of their defence.

The Commission is responsible for the administration of civil legal aid within Northern Ireland. The main pieces of legislation governing the award of civil legal aid are the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and the Legal Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. The Commission is now working towards the implementation of the Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

Civil legal aid may be granted for a range of proceedings, including, but not limited to the following areas:

- Adoption/Affiliation;
- Appeals;
- Assault/Battery/Trespass;
- Bail;
- Bankruptcy;
- Children’s Order;
- Contract;
- Criminal Injury;
- Divorce / Nullity;
- Employers Liability;
- Immigration;
- Injunction;

- Judicial Reviews;
- Maintenance/Other Matrimonial;
- General Negligence (Medical, Tripping and General);
- Road Traffic Accidents; and
- Wardship.

Under the current arrangements, there are three main types of civil legal aid. These include:

- **Legal Aid Advice and Assistance** - The Legal Advice and Assistance Scheme, also known as the “green form scheme” enables a solicitor to give advice and assistance for general legal problems up to a prescribed financial limit. The solicitor must satisfy themselves that the client meets the criteria for assistance; including financial eligibility and that it is reasonable, in the context of the case, for assistance to be provided. This scheme provides only for legal advice, not for court representation except in limited circumstances approved by a Resident Magistrate.
- **Assistance by way of Representation** - Assistance by way of representation (ABWOR) enables a solicitor to give advice and assistance for legal problems and to provide representation for most civil matters in Magistrates’ courts. To qualify for assistance, a solicitor must determine that the client meets the criteria for assistance; including financial eligibility and that it is reasonable in the context of the case, for assistance to be provided (the merits test). A person applying for ABWOR must show that there are

reasonable grounds for taking, defending or being a party to the proceedings to which the application relates.

- **Civil Legal Aid** - The Commission is responsible for granting or refusing civil legal aid in individual cases. A full civil aid certificate enables a solicitor to undertake all the work in a given case up to and including court proceedings. An applicant for civil legal aid must demonstrate that they are financially eligible and that it is reasonable for them to take, defend or be a party to proceedings. An applicant may be required to make a contribution towards their legal costs, based on an assessment of their means.

In cases where the assisted person has been successful, wholly or in part, in the proceedings or obtained an out of court settlement with the benefit of legal aid, statutory charge may be applicable.

2.5 Reform Agenda

In addition to assuming responsibility for the provision and improvement of legal aid services, the Commission is also charged with the reform of legal aid services.

The proposed reforms are set against the backdrop of emerging proposals for major changes in England, Wales and Scotland and will change significantly the way in which such services are delivered in Northern Ireland.

The Commission is taking forward reforms in the following five areas:

- **Managing Civil Costs** - reviewing the role of Legal Aid in money damages cases, setting fixed fees and ensuring prompt payment of fees in civil cases.
- **Quality** - developing a registration scheme for service providers wishing to offer legal services at public expense. The first phase of this project has been to map existing legal provision in the private and not-for-profit sectors with a view to identifying gaps in provision. This project is progressing with the objective of identifying potential pilot projects aimed at filling deficits in provision.
- **Access to Legal Aid** - investigating and simplifying the financial eligibility test, researching the eligibility criteria including access by different Section 75 groups, the coverage of these by the current Legal Aid Scheme and developing a Funding Code to refocus resources and ensure these are targeted to those most in need.
- **Legal Need, Services and the Development of Social Welfare Alternatives** - carrying out research on Legal Need in Northern Ireland and on the identification and delivery of alternative methods of dispute resolution.
- **Fundamental Legal Aid Review** - Commissioned by the Department for Constitutional Affairs to consider the long term future of the legal aid system and how best to provide publicly funded legal services in Northern Ireland to meet the Commission's aims and objectives. A number of strands of work have fallen to the Commission on completion of FLAR.

2.6 Impact of Reform

The reform of civil legal services aims to ensure the promotion of fair and equal access to justice in Northern Ireland. Historically, the system for award of civil legal aid services in Northern Ireland has not distinguished between different types of cases and consequently it has not been possible to target resources towards different types of proceedings or client groups. NILSC believes that effective targeting of resources towards priority groups, individuals and/or cases is essential in order to secure fair and equal access to justice.

One of the most significant developments is the establishment of the Funding Code which will identify priority areas for civil legal aid services and aims to ensure that resources are targeted towards those most in need. The Funding Code will be informed by research that has been undertaken by NILSC on Legal Need in Northern Ireland, which particularly focuses on the legal needs of different equality groups within Northern Ireland.

The promotion of equality of opportunity is a key value underpinning the development of the Funding Code and for reforming civil legal services in Northern Ireland. The Commission wishes to ensure that in the allocation of assistance for civil legal services in Northern Ireland that priority is afforded to the individuals, groups and cases most in need. This is a challenging and important task, which will allow greater flexibility in targeting civil legal aid services going forward.

3 Assessing Compliance and Consultation

The purpose of this section is to detail how the Commission will assess the extent to which it is complying with its Statutory Duties and to detail arrangements for consultation on relevant matters.

3.1 Internal Arrangements

The Chief Executive of the Commission will have overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Statutory Duties within the organisation.

The Director of Policy and Service Development will have primary responsibility for the management of the Statutory Duties and will be responsible for monitoring, reviewing implementation and reporting. All queries relating to the Statutory Duties should be directed in the first instance to the Director of Policy and Service Development.

The Commission is committed to ensuring that equality considerations are mainstreamed and that targets and objectives relating to the Statutory Duties are built into the 2006/2007 Business Plan. As part of the corporate planning process, objectives and targets relating to the Statutory Duties are and will continue to be developed. The Chief Executive and Directors will be updated on matters relating to the Statutory Duties on a quarterly basis and will be briefed on progress and any issues arising.

Individual staff job plans will include appropriate objectives relating to the

Statutory Duties and annual performance assessment will consider the extent to which these have been achieved.

The Commission's 2005/06 Annual Report is currently being finalised and will include a formal report on progress to date in implementing the Statutory Duties. All subsequent Annual Reports will also contain a report of progress against the implementation of the Statutory Duties.

3.2 Review of the Commission's Draft Equality Scheme

Following approval of the Draft Equality Scheme by the Equality Commission, a review of the progress made in implementing the Statutory Duties will be conducted annually. This review will be integrated into the Commission's corporate performance review processes and a report will be made annually to the Equality Commission by 31st July each year. The Commission will also liaise with the Equality Commission as appropriate to ensure that progress is maintained.

A comprehensive review of this Scheme will be conducted within five years of its submission to the Equality Commission. The review will take account of relevant Equality Commission guidance and will include an assessment of how the Commission has complied with its Section 75 obligations. Progress on equality of opportunity and good relations in relation to the main business and policy areas will also be considered.

3.3 Consultation Arrangements

The Commission recognises the importance of consultation in ensuring that policy and decision making is informed by the views of individuals, groups and organisations affected and in providing an opportunity for those affected by decisions to participate in policy making.

The Commission is committed to meaningful consultation and has already established the Voluntary Sector Forum which meets on a quarterly basis to inform policy making and practice within the organisation. In addition, the Commission has established the Civil Legal Services Stakeholder Group which brings together a wide range of interested parties from the legal profession, statutory and the not-for-profit sectors.

In particular, the Commission will ensure that policy screening and equality impact assessments are informed by consultation with those organisations and individuals listed at Annex One that wish to participate.

All consultation will be informed by the following principles:

- it will begin as early as possible and adequate time will be allowed for groups to consult amongst themselves as part of the process of forming a view. The Commission will aim to allow a minimum of 12 weeks for consultation;

- consideration will be given to the most appropriate methods of consultation depending on the circumstances. These may include but are not limited to face to face meetings, focus groups, discussion papers, written consultation or questionnaires;
- the accessibility of the language and the format of information will be considered to ensure that there are no barriers to the consultation process and information will be available in accessible formats on request;
- specific training will be considered to ensure that those facilitating consultations have the necessary skills to communicate effectively with consultees;
- appropriate measures will be taken to ensure full participation in any meetings that are held recognising the needs and customs of different groups and individuals; and
- relevant quantitative and qualitative data will be provided to consultees to ensure consultation is meaningful and informed.

3.4 List of Consultees

A list of the individuals, groups and organisations the Commission proposes to consult with on matters relevant to the Statutory Duties is included at Annex One. These groups and organisations will also be consulted on the Draft Equality Scheme. This is not an exhaustive list and the Commission is happy to take views from all interested groups/ individuals.

All consultations will be publicly advertised and the list of potential consultees amended to include any additional individuals or organisations that express an interest in being consulted on relevant matters.

The Commission recognises that responding to consultations can place a significant resource burden on organisations. In designing consultations, NILSC will seek to minimise this burden by asking organisations and individuals to indicate the areas they are interested in and by ensuring that consultation documentation, while being comprehensive, is as concise and relevant as possible.

In relation to assessments which deal with the promotion of good relations, the Commission will consult with the Community Relations Council and other relevant organisations.

4 Arrangements to Assess Impact of Policies

This section details the arrangements for assessing and consulting on the impact of policies adopted and proposed to be adopted on equality of opportunity and good relations. This includes arrangements for screening, consulting on the likely impact of policies and undertaking equality impact assessments.

4.1 Policy Screening

A comprehensive policy screening exercise will be undertaken before April 2007 to identify and prioritise those policies which will be subject to a full equality impact assessment.

A systematic review of all existing and proposed policies will be conducted to identify and group key policy areas and assess their likely impact on equality of access to legal aid.

As required by the Equality Commission guidance, screening will include:

- the identification of all policies, written and unwritten;
- internal appraisal of the significance of equality of access and good relations for each policy, taking account of the screening criteria and prioritisation factors detailed below;
- production of a list of policies to be subject to equality impact assessment, together with a draft timetable for conducting the assessments, considering the opportunity for integrated equality impact assessments of related policies;
- consultation with Section 75 groups to seek their views on whether all policies have been identified, whether all equality impacts have been identified, and whether they agree with the list of policies to be subject to equality impact assessment and the proposed timetable;
- consideration of feedback from the consultation exercise; and
- provision of information to consultees on the conclusions reached detailing amendments made to the list of policies, and on the final equality impact assessment timetable, in a screening report.

4.2 Screening Criteria

Screening of each policy area will consider the following criteria:

- whether there is any indication or evidence of higher or lower participation or uptake by different groups;
- whether there is any indication or evidence that different groups have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the particular policy;
- whether previous consultations with relevant groups, organisations or individuals indicated that particular policies create problems that are specific to them; and
- whether there is an opportunity to better promote equality of access or good relations by altering the policy or working with others in government or in the larger community.

Where the answer to any of these four questions is affirmative, consideration will be given to whether to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment.

Available qualitative or quantitative will be considered during policy screening. In the absence of existing qualitative or quantitative evidence the Commission will make arrangements to obtain relevant information.

4.3 Consultation on Screening

As part of the policy screening process the Commission will consult with the organisations listed at Annex One. A detailed report of the screening exercise in the annual review report to the Equality Commission by July 31st 2007 detailing which policies will be subject to impact assessment. In the event that policies proposed by those consulted as appropriate for impact assessment have not been included, reasons will be given.

4.4 Future Screening Arrangements

Arrangements will also be put in place to ensure that policies proposed after April 2007 are screened as part of the policy development process and any identified as having significant implications for equality of opportunity, using the criteria outlined above, will be considered for full equality impact assessment.

On at least an annual basis, the Commission will provide a list of new and proposed policies to consultees and invite their views on the likely impact on equality of opportunity. New policies identified for equality impact assessment will be incorporated into the Commission timetable according to their priority.

4.5 Prioritisation of Policies for Equality Impact Assessment

Following screening, any policies which are identified as requiring equality impact

assessment will be prioritised based on the following criteria:

- effect on peoples daily lives;
- impact on social need;
- effect on economic, social and human rights;
- significance of the policy in terms of expenditure; and
- strategic significance of the policy.

In prioritising policies for equality impact assessment, consideration will also be given to harmonising equality impact assessments with wider policy developments as part of the reform agenda, and of planned policy consultations.

A draft timetable for equality impact assessments will be developed following the Commission's internal policy screening exercise to be conducted by April 2007. The proposed timetable will be subject to consultation with those identified in Annex One.

4.6 Consultation on Equality Impact Assessments

The Commission will consult with the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council on issues relevant to the implementation of the Section 75 obligations and will take account of proposals from such bodies relating to compliance with the Section 75 obligations.

All consultations will be carried out in accordance with the Equality

Commission's guiding principles and the Commission will consult on equality impact assessments with relevant public sector and non-governmental organisations. Consultees for equality impact assessments will be drawn as appropriate, from the organisations listed at Annex One and will be publicly advertised. This is not an exhaustive list and may be added to during the life of this scheme.

The Commission will aim to provide a period for response of at least twelve weeks. However, there may be exceptional circumstances when this timescale is not feasible. Where this is the case, the Commission is committed to ensuring that consultees have an opportunity to provide a meaningful and informed view.

5 Monitoring

This section details the Commission's arrangements for monitoring for adverse impact of policies adopted on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

5.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Monitoring

The Commission has already taken steps to improve monitoring through the commissioning of research on Legal Need in Northern Ireland considering the needs of all Section 75 groups. In addition qualitative data is already gathered through consultations and regular discussion with representatives of voluntary organisations and the legal profession.

However, notwithstanding this work, current internal data collection systems

are limited in the extent to which they facilitate monitoring of the adverse impact of policies. The Commission is committed to putting in place systems which will facilitate improved quantitative data to monitor adverse impact. These will take time to establish and the Commission, in the meantime, will seek to ensure that alternative qualitative and quantitative data sources are identified to inform screening and equality impact assessment.

By March 2007, the Commission will assess the extent of existing monitoring within each business area and the scope for extending it. The Commission will also make full use of information available from other sources including non-governmental organisations, the Equality Commission, and research conducted on behalf of other legal aid bodies in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

6 Publication of Assessments and Monitoring

This section details the Commission's arrangements for publication of the outcomes of screening, equality impact assessment and monitoring.

6.1 Publication

The Commission will make available publicly the outcome of any equality impact assessment and of any monitoring of adverse impact of policies on the promotion of equality of access. This material will be accessible on the Commission website at www.nilsc.gov.uk. It will also be available in printed and

summary form, Braille, pdf, audio cassette and minority languages on request from NILSC. Consideration will also be given on how to best communicate material to young people and those with learning disabilities, after liaising with representative organisations.

6.2 Equality Impact Assessment

As required, published documentation in relation to an equality impact assessment will include:

- the aims of the policy;
- details of the outcome of the assessment highlighting if an adverse impact has been identified;
- available monitoring data;
- details of any consideration given to mitigate any adverse impact of the policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity; and
- details of any consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.

In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted by NILSC, any equality impact assessment and consultation carried out will be taken into account. NILSC are aware of the importance of this commitment in implementing the Statutory Duties.

7 Training

This section of the Scheme details the Commission's arrangements for providing

an effective communication and training programme on the content of the Equality Scheme for all staff and Commissioners.

7.1 Training and Communication

NILSC will ensure that all staff receive a programme of relevant communication and training on the Section 75 obligations, the requirements of this Equality Scheme and the arrangements for screening and equality impact assessment, appropriate to their grade and responsibilities. All staff and Commissioners will be provided with a copy of this Scheme along with a joint letter from the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Commission detailing their commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity and asking that all staff and Commissioners read the Scheme.

A detailed training and communication plan will be developed to include:

- regular communications to staff and commissioners on the implementation of the Statutory Duties;
- awareness training for all staff to ensure they understand the requirements of the Statutory Duties and their role in implementing the scheme;
- detailed training for managers, Commissioners and all staff involved in research data collection, policy development, consultation, training and evaluation; and
- development of Section 75 induction training for all new staff to the

Commission.

All staff will receive training by April 2007 and a review will be carried out to establish further training needs beyond that date. Training carried out will be evaluated to determine how effective and appropriate it is and the outcome of this review will be contained in the first annual report to the Equality Commission.

8 Public Access to Information and Services

This section details Commission's commitment to ensuring that the services and information it provides are accessible and take into account the needs of different equality groupings.

8.1 Promoting Effective Communication

The Commission is committed to effective communication with the public and recognises that proactive steps are required to ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information and services. A number of areas have been identified which the Commission particularly seek to address in communications. These are:

- It is recognised that individuals and groups have different needs in relation to information and the Commission is committed to making information available in a range of formats on request including summary, braille, electronic, large print, audio cassette and minority ethnic languages;
- it is further recognised that young people and those with learning

disabilities may have communication needs that cannot be solely addressed through the provision of information in different formats. The Commission is committed to ensuring that services and information are available to these groups and will liaise with representative organisations to develop effective ways to achieve this goal; and

- to ensure effective communication for people with sensory disabilities and those with a first language other than English, the Commission will endeavour to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to ensure effective communication, including the provision of translation services where appropriate.

The Commission is conscious of the need to ensure that information and services are accessible across Northern Ireland and that all geographical, religious and political beliefs are covered. In placing advertisements for consultations on screening and equality impact assessment, the Commission will aim to ensure that the media employed are inclusive and cover all groups and communities.

The Commission intends that all of its services are fully accessible to all parts of the community, including ensuring that its offices are physically accessible to all. Equality impact assessments will highlight any factors which create differential impact by making a service linked to a particular policy less accessible to particular groups.

9 Timetable

This section provides a summary timetable for the Commission’s implementation of the Statutory Duties.

9.1 Summary Timetable

The timetable on the following page summarises the measures that the Commission proposes to take during the three years following approval of this Scheme.

Area	Timescale
Development of Draft Equality Scheme	November 2006
Consultation on Draft Equality Scheme	November 2006 - February 2007
Equality Impact Assessment on Funding Code (see Section 9.2 below)	November 2006 - February 2007
Submission of Draft Equality Scheme to Equality Commission	March 2007
Development of Monitoring Framework	December 2006 - February 2007
Screening of existing policy areas	December 2006 - March 2007
Staff Training and Evaluation	January 2007 - March 2007
Annual Review of Progress	Annually from April 2007
Annual Report to Equality Commission	Annually from July 2007

9.2 Proposed Equality Impact Assessment on the Funding Code

Notwithstanding the draft nature of this Scheme, the Commission intends to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed draft Funding Code for Civil Legal Aid Services.

The reform and legislative agenda already established already commits the Commission to conducting a policy consultation on these proposals between November 2006 to February 2007. Given the strategic importance of these reforms and feedback received from an initial consultation from Section 75 groups, it is proposed to conduct an equality impact assessment to ensure that equality of opportunity is fully promoted in the development and implementation of such proposals. Harmonising the timescales for the policy and equality impact assessment consultations will assist with avoiding duplication of the consultation process.

10 Publication of the Scheme

This section details the Commission's arrangements for publicising the Draft Equality Scheme.

10.1 Arrangements for Publication

Following Equality Commission approval of this Scheme it will be available in final formation on the Commission's website at www.nilsc.org.uk and available on request in print, summary, electronic, Braille, audiocassette and minority language formats on request.

These can be obtained from the Secretary of NILSC at:

Northern Ireland Legal
Services Commission
2nd Floor, Waterfront Plaza
8 Laganbank Road, Mays Meadow
Belfast, BT1 3BN

Telephone: 028 9040 8888

Fax: 028 9040 8990

Email: accesstojustice@nilsc.org.uk

The Commission will issue a press statement and place prominent advertisements when the scheme is approved by the Equality Commission. All individuals/organisations participating in the consultation and those at Annex One will be offered a copy of the final Equality Scheme in a format of their choice.

11 Complaints

This section details the arrangements for notifying the Commission in the event that it is believed there has been a failure to comply.

11.1 Complaints Procedure

If a person believes that they have been directly affected by a failure of the Commission to comply with this scheme, they should in the first instance, bring their complaint to the attention of:

The Secretary
Northern Ireland Legal
Services Commission
2nd Floor, Waterfront Plaza,
8 Laganbank Road, Mays Meadow,
Belfast, BT1 3BN

Telephone: 028 9040 8888
Fax: 028 9040 8990
Email: accesstojustice@nilsc.org.uk

An initial internal investigation of the complaint will be conducted and a written response will be issued to the complainant within 20 working days. The Commission is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity

and hope, in the event of a complaint being made that it can be resolved through this procedure. In the event that internal processes do not resolve the complaint, the Commission will inform all complainants of the procedure for pursuing the complaint further with the Equality Commission, as set out in Schedule 9, paragraph 10 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Commission will co-operate fully with the Equality Commission in the event of such an investigation being required.

12 Review of Scheme

A review of this Scheme will be conducted within five years of submission of this scheme to the Equality Commission and a report of this review will be forwarded to the Equality Commission and made publicly available through the mechanisms detailed in Section 10 of this report.

The review will consider the extent to which the scheme has been effective in meeting the Statutory Duties and in ensuring the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.

Annex One: Consultation List

This is the list which will be used for the Commission consultations on matters relating to the Statutory Duties. This is not an exhaustive list and will be amended during the lifetime of the Scheme as necessary.

Advice NI	Committee on the Administration of Justice
Age Concern Northern Ireland	Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
Alliance Party	Community Relations Council (CRC)
Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union	Council for the Homeless (Northern Ireland)
Association of Chief Officers of Voluntary Associations	Democratic Unionist Party
Baha'i Office for Northern Ireland	Derry Well Woman
Barnardos NI	Disability Action
Belfast Hebrew Congregation	Down's Syndrome Association
Belfast Traveller Education & Development Group	East Belfast Community Development Agency
British Deaf Association (NI)	Employers Forum on Disability
Bryson House	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Carafriend	Equality Forum NI
Carers Northern Ireland	Falls Community Council
Child Poverty Action Group	Falls Women's Centre
Childcare NI	Family Planning Association Northern Ireland
Children in Northern Ireland	Fermanagh Women's Network
Children's Law Centre	Foyle Women's Network
Chinese Welfare Association	Gay and Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland
Church of Ireland	General Consumer Council for NI
Citizens Advice Northern Ireland	Gingerbread NI
Coalition on Sexual Orientation (CoSO)	Help the Aged, Northern Ireland
	Housing Rights Service
	Indian Community Centre

Institute of Directors (NI Division)	Northern Ireland Court Service
Labour Party	Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association
Labour Relations Agency	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
Law Centre (NI)	Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
Law Society of Northern Ireland	NSPCC
Lesbian Line	NUS USI Northern Ireland Student Centre
Local Government Staff Commission	Omagh Women's Area Network
Local Solicitor Associations	Parents Advice Centre
MENCAP	POBAL
Methodist Church in Ireland	Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Mid-Ulster Women's Network	Press for Change
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre	Progressive Unionist Party
Newry & Mourne Senior Citizens' Consortium	Putting Children First
Newry & Mourne Women	Queer Space
Newtownabbey Senior Citizens' Forum	Relate
NI Anti-Poverty Network	Roman Catholic Church
NI Human Rights Commission	Royal National Institute for Deaf People
NI Islamic Centre	Royal National Institute for the Blind
NI Women's Aid Federation	Rural Community Network
NIACRO	Rural Development Council
NIPSA	Save the Children
North West Community Network	SDLP
North West Forum of People with Disabilities	Sense NI
Northern Ireland African Cultural Centre	Sikh Cultural Centre
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health	Simon Community NI
Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions	Sinn Fein
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities	Sperrin Lakeland Senior Citizens' Consortium
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action	Staff Commission for Education & Library Boards

The Blind Centre (NI)
The Cedar Foundation
The General Council of the Bar of
Northern Ireland
The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
The Rainbow Project
The Women's Centre
The Workers Party
Traveller Movement NI
UK Unionist Party
Ulster Democratic Party
Ulster Peoples College
Ulster Scots Heritage Council
Ulster Unionist Party
ULTACH Trust
UNISON
West Belfast Economic Forum
Women's Aid
Women's Forum
Women's Information Group
Women's Resource and Development Agency
(WRDA)
Women's Support Network
Youth Council for NI

Annex Two: Response Return

1. Have the arrangements included in the Equality Scheme taken full account of requirements relating to training, publication of information and access to information and services?

2. Are there groups or organisations additional to those presented in Annex One with when the Commission should be consulting?

3. Are the arrangements for consultation appropriate and do they fully meet the needs of different individuals and groups?

4. Are the Commission's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the impact of policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity appropriate and do they fully meet the needs of different individuals and groups?

5. Are the timetables detailed in Section 9 appropriate?

6. Please include any further comments you wish to make with respect to the Commission's Draft Equality Scheme.



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