

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties

Annual Progress Report

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:	https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/daeras-equality-scheme
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 2024 and March 2025

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

- 1 In 2024-2025, 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.

Governance Structures

During this reporting period, DAERA's governance structures continued to ensure delivery of its equality and good relations duties, and diversity and inclusion priorities in line with its Equality Scheme commitment to having effective internal arrangements in place for ensuring effective compliance with the Section 75 duties.

The governance structures ensure that these functions are overseen and supported at a senior level within the Department, and that they continue to be mainstreamed and made central to policy development and the delivery of services. This approach has continued to contribute to enabling cultural change within DAERA by helping create a working environment where equality and good relations are embraced as core business values and are promoted and respected both within the Department and in our engagement with stakeholders and customers.

People Survey

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) People Survey (carried out biannually) is a survey of employees' attitudes to and experiences of working in the NICS. In the most recent survey, carried out in 2025, staff were asked questions on a range of topics and a high percentage continued to agree with positive "Inclusion and Fair Treatment" statements in the survey:

For example, when asked:

- "I think that my department respects individual differences (e.g., culture, working styles, backgrounds, ideas, etc.)," 74% of DAERA staff responded positively. This showed an increase of 2 percentage points from the 2023 survey; and
- "My department is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace," 71% of DAERA staff responded positively. This showed an increase of 3 percentage points from the 2023 survey.

New Equality and Diversity Working Group (EDWG)

Following the completion of an externally led board effectiveness review of the Departmental Board, it was determined that the EDWG should be recast to support the remit of the department's Capacity & Capability Committee which carries responsibilities including:

Ensuring that the department's people-related plans contain a clear commitment to improving equality, diversity and inclusion

Membership of the EDWG was also changed and now consists of the department's Champions¹ and staff who represent DAERA on the Department for Communities [Social Inclusion Strategy](#) steering groups. This will create a new departmental forum for sharing learning, providing a cohesive and focused approach to their roles, and including members with key equality roles in the department.

¹ Champions are members of staff who are designated to promote and champion specific diversity and inclusion initiatives

The terms of reference (ToR) of the recast EDWG have been agreed by senior management and EDWG members and incorporate responsibilities previously under the remit of the department's Equality and Diversity Sub-Group (EDSG) which has been stood down. The EDWG now meets bi-annually (or more frequently if required). The first meeting is scheduled to take place outside of the timescale of this report.

DAERA Equality Unit

Staff members in the DAERA Equality Unit are members of the cross-departmental Equality Practitioners' Group (EPG) and actively attend and participate in the NICS Equality Forum meetings. They are also members of the NICS Disability Staff Network which held its first in person staff event to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This event provided a key opportunity for the network to meet up, share experiences, raise awareness of issues and influence change. The theme of the Disability Staff Network Conference in December 2024 was Celebrate, Support and Challenge with 'Journey' a key thread running through the day.

Group Updates

The core Department's Groups were restructured in October 2023 and April 2025 to the following-

- Food and Farming and Rural Affairs Group (FFRAG), which includes the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE);
- Environment Marine and Fisheries Group (EMFG);
- Climate Change, Science and Innovation Group (CCSIG);
- Strategic Planning and Corporate Services Group (SPCSG);
- Veterinary Service Animal Health Group (VSAHG); and
- Estates Transformation and Windsor Framework Implementation Group (ETWFIG).

The following sections provide examples of our work in promoting equality of opportunity and good relations across the six groups and the department's two agencies, NIEA and Forest Service:

FOOD, FARMING & RURAL AFFAIRS

College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)

DAERA has a Widening Access and Participation Plan (WAPP) in place for the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) for 2023-2026. This plan ensures a strong commitment to increasing participation of under-represented groups. Current initiatives being implemented under the WAPP include bursaries, school and community outreach, male outreach and retention and attainment.

During the 2024/25 academic year, CAFRE's enrolments were 1,905, of which 43% were female. 23% of enrolments declared a learning need, disability, or medical condition.

As a demonstration of DAERA's commitment to ensure that its services are fully accessible to everyone, CAFRE's Student Support Officers provide information and advice to all students at induction and throughout the year at each of its 3 campuses. These officers are also available to provide targeted assistance to students who have additional needs.

CAFRE's Student Support Officers manage a comprehensive programme of support across all campuses. During the 2024/25 academic year the team has provided bespoke support to learners with learning needs, disabilities, or medical conditions. This support ranged from one-to-one mentoring, exam access arrangements and signposting to a variety of support services and initiatives to provide targeted advice and guidance. Learners who engage with Student Support have, where appropriate, reasonable adjustments in place. The team works in consultation with education programme managers to ensure that learners are supported to achieve their academic potential.

A series of student well-being days was delivered at each campus. These focused on specific themes including mental wellbeing, healthy eating, sexual health, substance misuse and smoking/vaping cessation. Events were supported by the local health and social care trusts, PHA and external organisations. The Student Support Services team ran a series of campaigns designed to increase awareness in the areas of road safety, mental well-being, building resilience, empowerment and sexual health.

Equine Assisted Therapy

During 2024-2025 CAFRE continued to progress this area of work. Staff from CAFRE's Equine Branch visited Stewarts Care Regional Equine Therapy Hub in Kilcloon, Co Meath in August 2024 to explore opportunities within this sector including student placement and employment opportunities. The OCN London Level 3 Award in Horse Handling and Behaviour in Equine Assisted Activities commenced with a new intake in June 2025. Quarterly meetings are ongoing involving representatives from DAERA, the Department of Justice and the Department of Health. In June 2025 two CAFRE staff visited St James' Community Farm in Belfast along with a representative from the Department of Health and a Social Worker working in the West Belfast General Practitioner Group Multi-Disciplinary Team. There is a proposal to visit the Bog Meadows, Belfast and Castlereagh Prison, Co. Roscommon. CAFRE Equine Branch staff continue to provide lecture input to the Ulster University Allied Health Practitioner Postgraduate Certificate Course in Advancing Practice for a module on Equine Facilitated Therapy.

NICCY Event

On 29 March 2025, DAERA hosted the "**Hear Our Voices**" event at the Greenmount campus. This event, organised by the youth panel of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young

PART A

People (NICCY) gave young people the opportunity to express how they feel about our environment and climate change through different mediums including music, dance, poetry interactive performances and costume design.

In his opening address, the DAERA Minister, Andrew Muir MLA, highlighted that young people have a critical role to play in helping shape climate policy and their voices matter and must be taken seriously. DAERA groups provided interactive exhibits and workshops during the afternoon session to gather views and develop ideas from the young people and these yielded inciteful outputs. Photos from the event are provided below:



Knowledge Transfer

On 12 February 2025, DAERA Minister Andrew Muir MLA launched a new [Knowledge Transfer Programme for Agri-Professionals](#) which included actions to increase participation of women in training. An outworking of this is the option for women to participate in women-only Business Sustainability Groups.

On 29 November 2024 the pilot [Farming for the Generations](#) scheme was also rolled out to help farming families explore how they best bring the next generation into the business. One of the foci of this pilot is to examine how female family members can be brought into family businesses. The findings of the pilot will inform a full scheme.

Agriculture and Environmental Schemes Directorate

As part of the Food and Farming and Rural Affairs Group, Agriculture and Environmental Schemes Division delivers [agriculture and environmental schemes grants](#) and subsidies to farm businesses. The annual Single Application and Map Service (SAMS), the Beef Sustainability Package (BSP) Portal and the Farming with Nature Transition (FwNT) Scheme Application (available in June 2025) provide farm businesses with online access to submit or opt in to a range of claims for Agriculture and Environmental Schemes, including the main agricultural subsidy scheme in Northern Ireland, the Farm Sustainability Transition Payment, and the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme, Suckler Cow Scheme and Farming with Nature Transition Scheme.

To improve accessibility for all customers (given the spatial nature of SAMS and the FwNT Scheme application, and 100% digital nature of all schemes) the Department has implemented a Digital Assistance (DA) strategy. This strategy set out the basis on which DAERA would provide Digital Assistance, beyond general help and guidance, to customers who had various accessibility issues when completing the claims themselves. DA has been provided in three ways:

- DA by telephone
Telephone assistance to help customers complete applications themselves, online. Advisory Service staff using 'Acquire' screen-sharing software, can screen share with applicants applying on SAMS or FwNT Scheme Application;
- DA face-to-face
In-person assistance provided by Veterinary Service Animal Health Group (VSAHG) Customer Services Branch (CSB) staff in DAERA Direct Offices (DDO). Customers complete applications themselves using their own DAERA Online Services account, or BSP Portal, on a DAERA computer. This is used where a customer confirms that they have for example a disability which makes it difficult for them to complete the claim but can travel to a DDO; or they do not have access to a computer or broadband internet at home; or that they lack the IT skills necessary to complete online applications themselves; or they have a complex mapping issue which cannot be addressed via DA by telephone; and
- DA by DAERA Agent
DAERA staff in the Customer Services Branches complete an application on behalf of the customer using information provided by them via telephone. This is to ensure accessibility for those customers with a physical disability or other medical reason that prevents them from attending their local DDO in person.

In addition to DA, the SAMS, FwNT Scheme application and BSP portal are routinely accessibility tested (annually for SAMS and FwNT and when changes are made to the Portal for BSP), leading to improvements in accessibility and usability for all customers. The outcome of the testing results in a published Accessibility Statement from the Internal UIUX (User Interface User Experience) Expert who will suitably word the Accessibility Statement, and ensures the Statement is updated and made accessible each time an evaluation is completed.

An annual Browser and device test is also carried out for SAMS. Supported Browsers & Devices webpage are made available and kept up to date so that customers can see which versions of browsers and devices can be used to access the Application.

The SAMS has a live chat facility allowing customers to communicate directly with advisory staff if they experience difficulties while completing their applications; there is speech software to read instructions to the user (including a link to a "how to" guide to use this features) to aid accessibility.

Agriculture and Environmental Schemes Division also provides detailed guidance training and information on the schemes offered on the DAERA website in line with DAERA's Accessibility Design Principles to ensure the widest range of customers can access the content.

ENVIRONMENT, MARINE AND FISHERIES GROUP (EMFG)

DAERA staff managing the [Public Angling Estate](#) (PAE) and [Portrush Coastal Zone](#) (PCZ) continue to focus on the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of our existing infrastructure to the benefit of all visitors. Accessible fishing stands have been added to some angling sites.



Photos clockwise from top left

Fishing stand at Queen Elizabeth Road Enniskillen, before and after accessibility works. Quoile River at Jaynes Shore construction work for disability access. Garvary Ballinamallard's new walkway.

Physical assets at PCZ including maintenance and enhancement of disability access and subtitling of most recent audiovisual displays. Additionally, initiatives such as JAM training for staff and tailored support to vulnerable groups touring the centre demonstrate continued commitment. PCZ toilets were upgraded with beacon style fire alarms to accommodate hearing impaired, and the disabled toilet had shelving, and a mirror added to accommodate stoma users.

STRATEGIC PLANNING & CORPORATE SERVICES

Public Appointments

DAERA has responsibility for the following non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs):

Executive NDPBs

- Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
- Agricultural Wages Board for Northern Ireland
- Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority

Statutory Advisory Body

- Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

DAERA is committed to fulfilling its Section 75 statutory duties in relation to its public appointments function and processes. The Department follows the [Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Northern Ireland](#) (the Code) which is prescribed and published by the

[Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland](#) (CPANI). The Department also adheres to the principles that underpin the appointments process including that of appointment on merit and equality of opportunity, through fair and open competition.

Each year, the Department provides CPANI with an annual statement confirming that all relevant public appointment processes conducted during the financial year have been compliant with the Code and the principles set out therein or, in the case of any instances of non-compliance, reports on any action taken or planned, to address any non-compliance.

Two public appointment processes were concluded within the reporting period. Minister Muir appointed a Chair (female) to the AFBI Board for three years from 1 November 2024 to 31 October 2027. A process to appoint a Chair and Deputy Chair to the CNCC resulted in the appointment of a Deputy Chair (female) from 1 March 2025 - 28 February 2028.

DAERA's Public Appointments Unit oversees a centralised approach to the planning, management, and delivery of public appointment competitions, taking steps to promote equality of opportunity throughout the appointments process.

Equality monitoring data is collected and used to inform the public appointments process on an ongoing basis. For each competition, the breakdown of current Board members is considered. Equality monitoring information is also shared with the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA). The information is used to research and monitor diversity in public appointments, and a composite analysis is published in a Public Appointments Annual Report for Northern Ireland which is available to the public. The details captured are used to address under-representation in future competition planning.

In an effort to attract a large and diverse applicant pool, equality statements are included on the job advert to welcome applications from any under-represented groups identified through monitoring information. The Public Appointments Unit is also proactive in its outreach efforts, maximising media opportunities and directly contacting a wide range of groups and organisations to advertise positions, tailored to each competition as appropriate. All potential applicants are provided with guidance on competency-based interviews and signposted to the CPANI workshops on public appointments.

The Department also operates the [Northern Ireland Civil Service Guaranteed Interview Scheme](#) (NICS GIS) in all its public appointment competitions and seeks to offer appropriate adjustments to facilitate participation in the appointment process. The GIS does not guarantee a job, but it is intended to ensure a guaranteed number of disabled applicants, who meet the minimum essential eligibility criteria for the role they have applied for, are offered an interview.

The Department is continuing its efforts to achieve the 50% gender balance target set by the Executive. With regard to DAERA's regulated bodies, of the 27 public appointments held as of 31 March 2025, 7 (25.92%) were held by women including two Chair and one Deputy Chair positions. This figure is expected to change as a result of appointments which are due to be made from a number of on-going public appointment processes. In seeking to address the under-representation of females in these processes, lawful measures were taken which sought to encourage applications from female candidates. This included promotional videos in which current female board members shared in their experience as a board member and the benefits which the role brings to them. The videos were shared alongside the advertisements on the DAERA Website and via social media channels.

Welcome statements were added to Candidate Information Booklets when advertising the vacant positions, as well as outreach to women's groups and networks. The gender balance of the appointments made as a result of the ongoing processes will be monitored.

Following conclusion, each public appointment process is reviewed. This helps to identify under-represented groups, signal any potential barriers and to continually improve the process and widen opportunities to participate for everyone.

Budget 2024-25

As part of Budget 2024-25, DAERA's Finance Division carried out Equality Screening and formal monitoring of equality implications was undertaken during the 2024-25 year.

ESTATE TRANSFORMATION AND WINDSOR FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

The DAERA estate consists of approximately 860 buildings spread across 240 sites, as well as 83,000 hectares of land with approximately 74,000 of this being forestry. While the scale of the DAERA estate is significant, it is also diverse with a wide range of accommodation including science, education, marine and agriculture facilities. In addition, DAERA staff occupy 19 properties across the office estate. They include DAERA's Headquarters buildings at Clare House, Belfast and Jubilee House, Ballykelly as well as a network of DAERA Direct Offices across Northern Ireland. DAERA has approximately 3800 staff in occupation across the office estate.



Photos clockwise from the top

Jubilee House, Ballykelly; CAFRE Greenmount Dairy Centre; and Clare House, Belfast

Estate Transformation Division (ETD) continues to work with relevant business areas to maintain and develop the estate and to ensure the maintenance of existing Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) measures.

The Division also arranges for work to be undertaken where it is identified that additional DDA measures are required and have recently commissioned DDA surveys at three Forest Service sites to review the existing DDA provisions and to consider any options for improvement.

CLIMATE CHANGE, SCIENCE & INNOVATION GROUP (CCSIG)

Climate Change Act

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (the Act) commits Northern Ireland to an ambitious target of Net Zero emissions by 2050. The Act contains further emissions reduction targets for 2030 and 2040 and a requirement for five yearly carbon budgets to be set. In

accordance with the Department's duty under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and the DAERA Equality Scheme, the equality implications of the proposed carbon budgets and 2040 emissions reduction target regulations were assessed and determined that there are no significant equality, human rights or good relations issues associated with the regulations.

Climate Action Plan

The [draft Climate Action Plan](#) was launched for a 16 week consultation on 17 June 2025. The consultation will provide a useful opportunity to begin important conversations with the public and stakeholders on the actions needed for Northern Ireland to achieve its net zero target by 2050. The Climate Action Plan team will co-ordinate and deliver a series of events, workshops, presentations and information sessions to stakeholders from across a range of sectors, backgrounds, communities and geographical locations around Northern Ireland. This engagement will consist of both in person and online events and the sessions will be tailored to each group or organisation. The Climate Action Plan team will reach out and aim to engage with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure everyone has a voice on this important issue. More details on this will be provided in the 2025/26 Annual Progress Report.

An overall EQIA of the draft Climate Action Plan has been drafted and can be found [here](#). The document highlights potential major impacts in respect of religious belief, political opinion, age, gender and disability. It concludes that the draft Climate Action Plan is expected to have an overall positive impact, however the potential opportunities and benefits associated with the sector policies and proposals differ across Section 75 categories. Examples of both positive and negative impacts have been identified and recognition given to the importance of consulting and engaging with individual and representatives of all section 75 groups.

The Human Rights Act 1998 has also been considered in the development of the draft Climate Action Plan and no adverse impact on human rights have been identified. The transition to carbon neutrality can be socially inclusive and can be used to positively promote human rights and maximise opportunities for vulnerable people, workers and communities.

Just Transition Commission

Regulations that will establish a new independent body to be known as the Just Transition Commission have progressed following a public consultation and Executive agreement on these will be sought shortly. The functions of the Commission will be to provide advice to Northern Ireland departments on how to ensure that proposals, policies, strategies and plans required under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) comply with the just transition principle and also to oversee the implementation of the just transition elements of this Act. In doing so, this should help to deliver benefits to section 75 categories e.g. through the creation of new jobs, improved housing and reduced fuel poverty.

To inform the development of the draft regulations, the Department held a 10-week public consultation on the establishment of the Commission between November 2024 and January 2025.

The consultation received 100 written responses. There was representation from civic society and specific representation from women's groups, rural and agriculture groups, environmental groups, local authorities, specific sectoral groups (e.g. finance, agriculture, academia, energy and transport etc) and statutory bodies (e.g. Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland).

Additionally, during the consultation, DAERA staff attended 12 engagement events, which included discussions with those sectors and groups specified for representation on the Commission by section 37(4) of the Act. The engagement sessions included meetings organised by stakeholder groups and organisations including the Climate NI Steering Group (CNI), the Utility Regulator (UR), academics through Queens University Belfast (QUB), the All Party Group on Climate Action, Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL), the NI Youth

Assembly, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), DAERA's Agricultural Policy Stakeholder Group, Rural Community Network, the Forum for Rural Community Organisations, Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster (YFCU), the NI Consumer Council and the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) to seek views from these organisations on the policy proposals.

NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT AGENCY (NIEA)

NIEA Regional Operations – Country Parks and Nature Reserves

Site management staff within the Regional Operations branch have largely continued to focus on the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of our existing infrastructure to the benefit of all visitors to our publicly accessible locations, with a number of site-specific projects outlined below:

Roe Valley Country Park

Local site managers continue to navigate the planning process, with planning permission currently being sought in respect of the installation of a new pedestrian footbridge onsite. The aim of this project is to improve accessibility for all while enhancing safety when traversing the currently mixed vehicle/pedestrian bridge forming part of Dogleap Road. The proposed new footbridge is aimed at providing enhanced visitor access through the park with the creation of a safe, contained, circular walking route for all visitors to continue to the existing public offering onsite.

Castle Archdale Country Park

The proposed refurbishment of the park's Duross Bay toilets is ongoing, including upgraded electrical connections. The service is intended to include enhanced provision for people with disabilities, which will include a "changing places" facility.

In summary, the above measures at NIEA Parks and Reserves shows the branch's commitment to providing positive outcomes in terms of improved inclusivity and accessibility at DAERA funded sites for people throughout Northern Ireland, in line with DAERA's commitment to ensuring accessible services for everyone.

Water Management Unit

A review and update of all Water Management Unit webpages is nearing completion to ensure that all pages are updated to pass WCAG 2.2 AA standards

FOREST SERVICE

Forest Parks and recreational facilities

Forest Service continues to promote the social use of the public forest estate through its ongoing sustainable forestry management. This includes working in partnership with local Councils and other organisations such as the National Trust.

New and enhanced recreation developments

In 2024-2025 Forest Service continued to facilitate recreational developments with partner organisations. This has resulted in enhanced visitor facilities in:

Pomeroy forest: Connecting Pomeroy Forest Trail

This project developed with our partner organisation Mid Ulster District Council and has resulted in a new shared space building acting as visitor centre and community centre. The forest trails have been upgraded with the Renardine trail developed into a children's magical storybook adventure trail with iconic sculptures, interactive fun/art pieces and natural inclusive play areas.

Pomeroy Forest Renardine Trail



Rostrevor Forest: Fallows Trail completion has resulted in improved walking routes allowing visitors to access all areas of Rostrevor Forest

Fallows Trail Rostrevor Forest



2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2024-25 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

In addition to the outcomes and impacts outlined in Part 1, the Department continued to progress its equality scheme commitments, which are prioritised as key business activities. During 2024-25, DAERA reflected its Section 75 obligations in its corporate business planning and achieved all targets set in relation to these.

The Department's [Annual Report & Accounts 2024-2025](#) reports on many of these interwoven into how we delivered the key actions in the Department's Business Plan and our ministerial priorities.

During the reporting period, the Department maintained a strategic focus on its equality obligations and ensured that these continued to be implemented throughout the DAERA business areas in line with the equality legislation and the departmental Equality Scheme. Staff were supported and guided through these processes by the DAERA Equality Unit. During this reporting period the team provided 100 written responses to screening and EQIA queries, 22 written responses to general queries and presented at the "Induction Session for Windsor Framework" staff in relation to the equality obligations.

As noted in Section 1, the EDSG and EDWG were reviewed and amalgamated into one EDWG which falls within the responsibility of the Capacity and Capability Committee. The Committee maintains a clear focus on 'ensuring the department's people-related plans contain a clear commitment to improving equality, diversity and inclusion.

While the day-to-day delivery of equality functions is mainstreamed within the various business areas throughout DAERA and its two agencies, the dedicated Equality Officer, supported by a deputy Equality Officer, assists the Department in meeting its equality obligations in line with its commitment to have the necessary resources in place to ensure compliance with the statutory duties. The Equality Officers, along with their line managers, are members of a NICS-wide Equality Practitioners' Group (EPG), which is responsible for sharing good practice across departments on implementation and application of the statutory equality duties.

In addition, members of the Equality Unit are serving members of the NICS Disability Staff Network and help to raise disability awareness across all the Departments. This good practice can then be disseminated within DAERA and used as a reference in providing advice and recommendations to senior management and/or the Minister. DAERA maintains a Section 75 consultee list, which is reviewed regularly. This is accessible to all staff and is used to maintain regular communication with Section 75 stakeholders, especially as policies are changed or reviewed. The results of equality screening exercises are shared with our Section 75 consultees as well as being published on the departmental internet page on a quarterly basis.

During 2024-25, the dedicated Equality Unit continued to fulfil its key role in disseminating information to business areas on equality related issues, quality assuring policy-screening exercises, including advice and support on how to conduct evidence-based screening.

The Equality Unit has also produced a number of videos which are a visual representation of the Department's Equality Scheme.

“Access All Areas: DAERA Equality Scheme in Action,” followed by our second production, entitled “Access all Ages,” and finally our third and final video “Mind the (Gender) Gap.” We have also produced an animation, “Advising You On Equality” to aid staff.

They can be viewed by clicking on the links below:

<https://vimeo.com/641092135> - Access all Areas.

<https://vimeo.com/761973145> - Access all Ages.

<https://vimeo.com/967954742> - Mind The (Gender) Gap

<https://vimeo.com/910481145> - Advising you on Equality

These videos demonstrate that the Department understands the important role it plays in building an equal and inclusive society.

A summary of [DAERA's Equality Scheme](#) has been made available to all DAERA staff, and the complete Equality Scheme can be accessed from the departmental internet page.

3 Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2024-25 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☒ Yes

☐ No (go to Q.4)

☐ Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

To improve accessibility for all customers, the Department has implemented a Digital Assistance (DA) strategy. This strategy set out the basis on which DAERA would provide Digital Assistance, beyond general help and guidance, to customers who had various accessibility issues when completing the claims themselves.

DA has been provided in three ways:

- DA by telephone
Telephone assistance to help customers complete applications themselves, online. Provided by Advisory Service staff using 'Acquire' screen-sharing software;
- DA face-to-face
In-person assistance provided by Customer Services Branch (CSB) staff in DAERA Direct Offices (DDO). Customers complete applications themselves using their own DAERA Online Services account on a DAERA computer. This is used where a customer confirms that they have for example a disability which makes it difficult for them to complete the claim but can travel to a DDO; or they do not have access to a computer or broadband internet at home; or that they lack the IT skills necessary to complete the SA online themselves; or they have a complex mapping issue which cannot be addressed via DA by telephone; and
- DA by DAERA Agent

DAERA staff (either Advisory Service or CSB) complete an application on behalf of the customer using information provided by them via telephone. This is to ensure accessibility for those customers with a physical disability or other medical reason that prevents them from attending their local DDO in person.

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):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

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 2024-25 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:

Job descriptions for relevant staff working in the Equality and Diversity Team include the following actions:

- Ensure that the Department fully complies with its statutory obligations, meets its Equality Scheme commitments and the targets in its Audit of Inequalities;
- Support the implementation of the Equality Scheme commitments across the Department;
- Ensure the Department complies with its statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. Monitor, manage and maintain the commitments set out in the DAERA Equality Scheme and published action plans. Provide advice to senior management and business areas on significant equality issues and lead on the preparation of regular and annual progress reports towards a range of relevant NI, UK and international equality targets;
- Provide a high-quality secretariat support to the Equality Diversity Working Group; promote Section 75 across DAERA business functions; engage regularly with colleagues in policy areas; maintain regular engagement with relevant external organisations; regular attendance and participation on inter-departmental groups/projects; progressing work on equality-related action plans; Section 75 awareness raising, and providing a quality assurance function to business areas; and
- Engage as appropriate with DAERA colleagues and others on the development of key strategies and policies; share best practice and report on the Department's progress towards its published targets, for example the Audit of Inequalities, commission, collate and quality assure returns and input from business areas and provide evidence-based recommendations and advice to senior managers on equality related issues.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2024-25 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:

All members of the Senior Civil Service were also required to include in their Personal Performance Agreements a specific objective relating to how, in leading to develop people and their capability, they would contribute to achieving the Civil Service ambition of being a diverse and inclusive workplace, through visible, inclusive, ethical leadership and

behaviours aligned to Code of Ethics values, including to ensure that diversity and inclusion is fostered in their division/group.

Extracts from the Equality Officer's and Deputy Equality Officer's personal performance agreement in 2024-25 respectively are as follows:

"To support the Minister, Departmental Board and the wider Department in ensuring the Department meets its equality obligations under Section 75 of the NI Act and through the commitments set out in our Equality Scheme and our published action plans."

"To support the Minister, Equality Officer, Departmental Board and the wider Department in ensuring the Department meets its statutory obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and through the commitments set out in our Equality Scheme and published action plans."

6 In the 2024-25 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
- ☒ Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- ☐ Yes, in some departments/jobs
- ☐ No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's corporate plan
- ☐ No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2024-25 report
- ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

As a public authority, DAERA has statutory equality obligations to meet under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. We take these responsibilities seriously and work hard to ensure that equality and good relations considerations are a core part of our business functions and all decision-making processes. Our Equality Scheme, Disability Action Plan and Audit of Inequalities set out the actions the Department has promised to take to meet its equality obligations. We are also committed to meeting the Department's sustainable development obligations and its obligations under the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016."

Relevant actions related to the Section 75 statutory duties are included within the Divisional and Branch Balance Scorecards. This management tool helps to ensure that these key objectives are progressed on behalf of the Department where possible. The Divisional Business Plan for DAERA's Central Management functions in 2023-24 included an objective to ensure the Department met its statutory obligations in respect of its Equality Scheme; Disability Action Plan; Audit of Inequalities and Children and Young People's Action Plan.

Equality action plans/measures

7 Within the 2024-25 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:

13

Actions ongoing:

10

Actions to commence:

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

The majority of the actions in the Equality Action Plan were implemented at the introduction of the scheme. The ongoing actions are those that are time bound for quarterly, bi-annual, and annual completion each year. There are no actions outstanding.

8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2024-25 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

None Identified

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2024-25 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 2024-25 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:

The Just Transition Commission (JTC) consultation conducted between November 2024 and January 2025 made considerable effort to engage with all the sectors required by the Climate Change Act as well as engaging with other sectors that would help the Commission (when established) to fully address the transformation required. This could be seen as promotion equality of opportunity to ensure that the membership of the Commission is as effective as possible. 12 consultation events took place and 100 responses were received – refer to Section (1) page 10 for further details. The summary of responses to this consultation were published in May 2025 and are being used to inform policy decisions and draft Regulations which is the next stage of the legislative process for establishing the JTC. Equality screening is currently being drafted and will be finalised prior to the draft Regulations being brought the Executive for approval during 2025/26. As such, further details on this will be provided in the 2025/26 annual progress report.

- 12** In the 2024-25 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 by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation

PART A

☒ Internet discussions

☐ Telephone consultations

☐ Other (*please specify*): Click or tap here to enter text.

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:

For the Just Transition Commission consultation engagement with targeted stakeholder groups - a number of these events were held in person as well as online and some were also open to the public. 12 events were held in total and 100 responses received.

13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2024-25 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2024-25 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)

[DAERA's Equality Scheme | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://daera-ni.gov.uk)

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

44

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2024-25:

10 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:

Consultation on a proposed Bill to amend legacy EU Common Market Organisation (CMO) Schemes

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

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

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 2024-25 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

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 2024-25 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:

DAERA Internet has recently been audited twice in the 2024/2025 period.

Audited by the Cabinet office in January 2025. This checked for accessibility issues and all issues have been fixed at this point.

DAERA Intranet was also independently audited in February 2025 after the migration of Drupal 10 and issues have also now been fixed.

- 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:

Click or tap here to enter text.

- 22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2024-25 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

Not applicable for the period.

- 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:

Not applicable for the period.

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 2024-25, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

A range of the training undertaken by DAERA staff in 2024-25 is outlined below:

- **Positive Mental Health Toolkit for All staff E-Learning**
This training is designed to give all staff an understanding of how mental health affects us, how we think and feel, and how we cope with life's ups and downs. On completion of the course staff should understand what mental health and stress is, be able to identify problems that can lead to stress, understand what they can do to manage stress and build resilience, and be aware of the many services available if they want to understand more about specific mental health issues. During 2024-25, 55 DAERA staff completed this training.
- **Positive Mental Health Toolkit for Line Managers E-Learning**
This training is aimed at line managers and is designed to raise awareness and promote understanding of mental health. On completion of the course line managers should understand what mental health is and define depression, anxiety, stress, and resilience; recognise internal and external factors that could cause mental health problems in the workplace; and have knowledge of how to create positive relationships with their team members and know what steps to

take to support their mental health issues. During 2024-25, 11 DAERA managers completed this training.

- **Disability Awareness for front line staff E-Learning**

The aim of this training is to increase staff knowledge of disability and to provide frontline staff with an introduction to disability awareness. The course is aimed at staff at all grades who are in, or new to a post that deals with the public. In 2024-25, 77 DAERA staff successfully completed this training.

- **Supporting Vulnerable People E-Learning**

This course has been designed to assist staff in supporting vulnerable people who may seek to use the services offered by the department. On completion of the course, staff should be able to describe and define what a vulnerable person is, recognise ways to identify vulnerable people, explain ways to support vulnerable people, including methods for dealing with third parties, and state the sources of help, advice, and support available in the NICS for employees. The course is voluntary and in 2024-25, 25 staff completed the training.

- **Unconscious Bias E-Learning**

This course aims to help staff discover what personal bias they may have, explore its causes, and consider some techniques to manage it. On completion of the course, staff should be able to define what Unconscious Bias is; explain how Unconscious Bias can influence in the workplace and state ways to tackle Unconscious Bias.

This mandatory course was rolled out to DAERA staff during 2017/18 for completion by all DAERA staff in management grades i.e., EOII and above and 1,629 staff successfully completed the training. During 2024-25 a further 47 staff completed this training.

- **Introduction to Section 75 E-Learning**

Staff who require this training are those with responsibility for policy development or policy review and staff involved with the implementation of Section 75 duties, whether directly or indirectly. The aim of this course is to familiarise participants with the two statutory duties as outlined in Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and the guidance provided by the Equality Commission NI. 34 DAERA staff completed this training between April 2023 and March 2024.

- **Section 75 Duties -Section 75 Duties and Equality Assessments**

This virtual classroom aims to provide you with an overview of how an Equality Impact Assessment should be conducted, using practical examples of real policies.

Course overview:

- Why screen? - link to equality scheme commitments;
- When should an EQIA be undertaken?
- Equality impact assessment - what to consider;
- Challenging the myths around EQIA's;
- Good Practice EQIA - Understanding the Screening Stages;
- Summary of ECNI S75 advice on EQIAs.

During 2024/25 5 DAERA staff completed this course.

- **Racial Equality NICS (e-Learning)**

The aim of this course is to ensure all NICS staff are aware of their role and responsibilities regarding mainstreaming Racial Equality. The course presents key ideas, awareness, and practical strategies for racial equality, that can be incorporated into your daily actions, policy decisions and communications. 6 DAERA staff completed this course during the reporting period.

- **Equality and Diversity Essentials (e-Learning)**

The course helps understand diversity and inclusion in its broadest sense; the different types of discrimination; the legal protection afforded under Northern Ireland anti-discrimination law to certain groups, and our individual responsibilities in creating an inclusive workplace where everyone feels valued, respected, and included. This course should be completed in conjunction with the module "Introduction to Diversity and Inclusion in the NICS" available on LInKS. 426 DAERA staff completed this course during the 2024-25 reporting period.

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:

This is covered in responses to question 24, above.

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

26 Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2024-25, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

To improve accessibility for all customers, the Department has implemented a Digital Assistance (DA) strategy. This strategy set out the basis on which DAERA would provide Digital Assistance, beyond general help and guidance, to customers who had various accessibility issues when completing the claims themselves.

DA has been provided in three ways:

- DA by telephone
Telephone assistance to help customers complete applications themselves, online. Provided by Advisory Service staff using 'Acquire' screen-sharing software;
- DA face-to-face
In-person assistance provided by Customer Services Branch (CSB) staff in DAERA Direct Offices (DDO). Customers complete applications themselves using their own DAERA Online Services account on a DAERA computer. This is used where a customer confirms that they have for example a disability which makes it difficult for them to complete the claim but can travel to a DDO; or they do not have access to a computer or broadband internet at home; or that they lack the IT skills necessary to complete the SA online themselves; or they have a complex mapping issue which cannot be addressed via DA by telephone; and
- DA by DAERA Agent
DAERA staff (either Advisory Service or CSB) complete an application on behalf of the customer using information provided by them via telephone. This is to ensure accessibility for those customers with a physical disability or other medical reason that prevents them from attending their local DDO in person.

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

- 27** How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2024-25?

Insert number here: 1

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

A formal complaint was made in relation to a breach of the Equality Scheme had occurred as a result of NIEA's decision to not conduct an equality screening or equality impact assessment in relation to:

- 1) The applications for abstraction and impoundment authorisation by Dalradian Gold Ltd at the proposed Curraghinalt Mine; and
- 2) The applications for consent to discharge made by Dalradian Gold Ltd.

OUTCOME

Following an investigation NIEA made the decision that in the case of the Dalradian Gold Ltd applications for both Consent to Discharge and Abstraction and Impoundment Licence applications, NIEA should carry out an Equality Screening due to the strategic nature of the applications and the high level of public interest.

Section 3: Looking Forward

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

The existing scheme is due for review in 2026.

- 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)*

No

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

- ☐ Employment
- ☐ Goods, facilities and services
- ☐ Legislative changes
- ☒ Organisational changes/ new functions

PART A

☒ Nothing specific, more of the same

☐ Other (please state):

Click or tap here to enter text.

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:

Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Fully achieved	Partially achieved	Not achieved
13	3	3

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:

	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
1	DAERA DISABILITY ACTION PLAN (DAP) Measure No. 7 Promote the social use of the DAERA estate, in particular the forest and country parks by proactively working with Councils and other organisations such as the National Trust, who liaise with disability interest groups to promote and increase awareness of accessible sites and facilities within	Increased numbers of visitors with a disability to the DAERA estate thereby helping to increase levels of physical and mental wellbeing. Forest Service provides signage in our forests to enable users to assess their ability to use paths using a recognised coloured coded method where a maximum of four categories of routes is provided. In 2024-25 Forest Service continued to facilitate	While visitor numbers are increasing, there are no definitive figures in relation to visitors with disabilities. Estate Transformation Directorate continues to work with relevant business areas to maintain and develop the estate and to ensure the maintenance of existing Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) measures. The Directorate also arranges for work to be

	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
	the Forest Service estate. DAERA will provide more disability friendly recreation facilities across these areas by promoting visits from groups which support those with special needs educational needs.	recreational developments with partner organisations. This has resulted in new facilities In Rostrevor Forest the Fallows walking trail was completed. These new facilities have resulted in increased usage of the forest by all sections of the community.	undertaken where it is identified that additional DDA measures are required.
2	DAERA DISABILITY ACTION PLAN (DAP) Measure No. 11 Through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme continue to create participation opportunities for people with disabilities through the provision of social farming opportunities	2024/2025 - Social Farming is an innovative use of agriculture to promote therapy, rehabilitation, social inclusion, education, and social services in rural areas. Central to the concept is a typical working farm, where people in need of support can benefit from participation in farm activities in a non-clinical environment.	Currently there are 17 social farms actively delivering across NI. Social Farming caters for an average of 93 participants weekly.
3	DAERA DISABILITY ACTION PLAN (DAP) Measure No. 11 Continue to facilitate rural community transport solutions by proving funding for the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) which benefits in the main the elderly and disabled.	2024/2025 - The 11 Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTP) are grant-funded by DfI, via the Rural Transport Fund, to deliver Dial-a-Lift (DAL) passenger transport services. DAL is a transport service for people living in rural areas who are unable to access or have trouble using public transport. DAL prioritises older people and those with a disability. The purpose of ARTS is to allow any passenger with a valid	Figures indicate that over 90% of the trips provided by RCTP's through Dial-a-Lift are ARTS funded trips. In 2024/2025, over 2,000 trips by individuals availing of the service were recorded across the 11 RCTPs.

	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
		SmartPass to travel free or half-fare on the DAL services provided by the RCTPs.	
4	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 15: Ensure the use of the Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) for each public appointment.	GIS is operated and promoted in every job advert and candidate information booklet for all public appointment competitions. Four public appointment processes concluded in the current financial year.	Increased opportunities for people with a disability to participate on the boards of public bodies.
5	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 16: Ensure a detailed appointments plan is prepared for all public appointment competitions for the DAERA statutory boards. They are: Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI); Agricultural Wages Board for NI (AWB); Livestock and Meat Commission for NI (LMC); Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority (NIFHA); Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC). DAERA will set out the steps in terms of outreach and process which will be taken to attract the best possible pool of applicants and	Appointment Plans are prepared for each public appointment process. Equality data is collected and monitored for each public appointment process and shared with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The information is used to research and monitor diversity in public appointments, and a composite analysis is published in a Public Appointments Annual Report for Northern Ireland which is available to the public.	Increased opportunities for people with a disability to apply for positions and therefore participate on the boards of public bodies if they are successful in the recruitment phase of a competition.

PART B

	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
	encourage applications from those with a disability.		
6	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 19: When reviewing forest plans, Forest Service will engage with people with disabilities and/or their representatives.	Forest Service published summary reports of consultation responses received from a wide range of stakeholders following scoping consultation exercises. Forest management plans for West Fermanagh and Armagh Forestry Planning areas were published on the DAERA website during the period. The forestry scoping consultations to inform the review of forest plans, were promoted as widely as possible through a range of communication methods, including the production of an Easy Read Companion. This was made available in printed format and online. Stakeholders invited to contribute to scoping consultations included groups representing LGBTQI+, disability, ethnic minority, women, and retired people's interests.	Increased opportunities for people with a disability and/or their representatives to participate in, and influence, the development of forest plans. Forests are managed to deliver of a wide range of ecosystem services and contribute to the health and well-being of all NI citizens.

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
7	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 2:	Staff will have an awareness of the needs of people with disabilities which results in a	All staff will have an awareness of the needs of people with disabilities.

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
	Disability Awareness training for all staff will be made available and staff will be actively encouraged to complete this training by management. This training will be recommended for all staff and in particular those in public facing roles.	better service to our customers, or colleagues, who at times may need additional assistance. Increased awareness of equality and disability issues, which, in turn, can lead to better outcomes for staff and customers across the Section 75 categories by completing the available training courses. Positive Mental Health Toolkit for Line Managers E-Learning This training is aimed at line managers and is designed to raise awareness and promote understanding of mental health. On completion of the course line managers should understand what mental health is and define depression, anxiety, stress, and resilience; recognise internal and external factors that could cause mental health problems in the workplace; and have knowledge of how to create positive relationships with their team members and know what steps to take to support their mental health issues. During 2024-25, 55 DAERA managers completed this training. Positive Mental Health Toolkit for All staff E-Learning	

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
		This training is designed to give all staff an understanding of how mental health affects us, how we think and feel, and how we cope with life's ups and downs. On completion of the course staff should understand what mental health and stress is, be able to identify problems that can lead to stress, understand what they can do to manage stress and build resilience, and be aware of the many services available if they want to understand more about specific mental health issues. During 2024-25, 11 DAERA staff completed this training. Disability Awareness for front line staff E-Learning The aim of this training is to increase staff knowledge of disability and to provide frontline staff with an introduction to disability awareness. The course is aimed at staff at all grades who are in, or new to a post that deals with the public. In 2024-25, 77 DAERA staff successfully completed this training. Supporting Vulnerable People E-Learning	

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
		This course has been designed to assist staff in supporting vulnerable people who may seek to use the services offered by the department. On completion of the course, staff should be able to describe and define what a vulnerable person is, recognise ways to identify vulnerable people, explain ways to support vulnerable people, including methods for dealing with third parties, and state the sources of help, advice, and support available in the NICS for employees. The course is voluntary and in 2024-25, 25 staff completed the training. Unconscious Bias E-Learning This course aims to help staff discover what personal bias they may have, explore its causes, and consider some techniques to manage it. On completion of the course, staff should be able to define what Unconscious Bias is; explain how Unconscious Bias can influence in the workplace and state ways to tackle Unconscious Bias. This mandatory course was rolled out to DAERA staff during 2017/18 for completion by all DAERA staff in management grades i.e., EOII and	

PART B

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
		above. During 2024-25, 47 staff completed this training.	
8	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 3: Participate in NICS JAM (Just-A-Minute) card initiative and roll out through DAERA.	Although the initiative has been in place from June 2019, it was relaunched on 31/03/23 and all DAERA staff were encouraged to complete or refresh their training. The aim is to ensure all staff understand that the JAM Card allows people with a communication difficulty to inform a service provider that they need Just-A-Minute of patience and understanding. DAERA was the lead Department within NICS with 89.50% of all staff trained.	This has been communicated to staff via internal communications and rolled out across the DAERA Direct Offices with posters distributed to Premises Officers to be displayed in all DAERA buildings.

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
9	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 6: Line managers to document all requests for reasonable adjustments and the outcomes, in compliance with data protection and records management policies.	Staff survey results and NICS HR figures for reasonable adjustment implementation. However, to note, NICSHR have begun the process of reviewing the Reasonable Adjustments Policy and this will be updated on in the subsequent report.	Line Managers have been compliant in their responsibilities for their staff.

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
10	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 9: Inland Fisheries attended Disability Shows and actively promoted angling to disability groups and individuals including increasing the awareness of the Inland Fisheries events small grant programme.	Inland Fisheries continue to promote reduced rate angling licence and permits. Queries on concessionary licences are answered regularly by Inland Fisheries staff, who make relevant anglers aware of their concessionary entitlements.	Increased sales of licences and permits for people with disabilities and increased participation by disadvantaged groups.
11	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 13: CAFRE welcomes applicants with disabilities to onto education programmes. Student Support Services are promoted through a range of measures; (e.g. publications, information packs, website, school careers talks, open day events).	The Student Support Service is actively promoted through CAFRE's ongoing programme of marketing and recruitment using a variety of online and offline channels. This raises awareness of the support available to potential applicants and existing learners to encourage applications. CAFRE is reviewing and improving the current Learner Management System to facilitate easier identification of students with learning needs and disabilities.	Positive approach to encouraging applicants with disabilities to enrol on courses

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

PART B

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
12	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 8: Inland Fisheries provides concessionary licences and permits to those over 60 years of age and those with disabilities in receipt of benefits specified in the Fisheries Regulations 2014. Online purchasing system for licences and permits (including telephone access) is designed to improve access for anglers, particularly those with, for	Increase participation in angling by those over 60 or with disabilities. In 2025 Minister Muir updated the pricing policy with the introduction of a combined concessionary season fishing rod licence for people aged 60 and over, and disabled people receiving a qualifying benefit. Children under 12 years old no longer require a DAERA permit to fish at a PAE Water. Purchasing of licences online interaction removes the physical barrier of travel and visiting a distributor to obtain a licence or permit. Both methods of purchasing are still available.	Youth and those with disabilities encouraged to fish and understand Marine Protected Areas.

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
	example, a disability or caring responsibilities. Provision of accessible fishing stands. The new MarPAMM (Marine Protected Areas Management and Monitoring) exhibition at Portrush Coastal Zone, completed in 2023-24, features an interactive 'sandbox' mapping game for young people. Branding banners of 'Angling For All' and our angling guides for anglers with disabilities are given equal space and promotion to our other guides at all events/shows attended. NIEA Regional Operations facilitate educational visits from schools and nurseries through the activity permit process, thereby ensuring any additional needs can be accommodated where possible.	There are 34 fishing platforms for anglers with disabilities at thirteen different waters across the Public Angling Estate. MarPAMM exhibition is positioned low to the ground, accessible to the youngest of visitors and anyone with mobility issues and can be moved on wheels to suit the audience. The tactile nature of the game makes it highly appealing to children with learning difficulties, combined with vibrant and colourful moving features such as sharks, turtles, rainfall and volcanoes. Since the downturn during the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a return to normalcy seeing a range of schools and educational organisations undertaking visits to NIEA parks and reserves.	

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
13	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 10 Improve awareness and take up of the NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) (2014-2020) funding opportunities by people with disabilities in the rural and farming communities. Take forward actions to remove those barriers which we are aware of which continue to prevent participation in RDP programmes.		Following EU Exit the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme has ceased. A new Rural Policy for Northern Ireland is currently being co-designed. It will be the subject of a public consultation later in 2025.
14	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 12: CAFRE actively promote that they will meet with students with a disability to discuss adaptations that may be useful. Reasonable adjustments will be made according to their needs to improve access to the college facilities across the campuses. Student Support Officers based at each campus provide arrange a wide variety of learning support for students,	CAFRE has improved support to students who declare learning needs or disability by employing an additional Student Support officer (SSO). During the 2024/25 academic year the team has provided bespoke support to learners presenting with learning needs or medical conditions. This support ranges from one-to-one mentoring, exam access arrangements or signposting them to a variety of services and initiatives to help them during their time at college. All learners engaging with Student Support have, where appropriate, reasonable adjustments in place	Improved access for students with disabilities to courses and facilities across CAFRE, thereby resulting in continued participation of students with a disability to courses and facilities, as well as new and additional students' who declare a disability.

PART B

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
	depending on their needs, to facilitate their continuation and achievement across the education programmes delivered at the College. In addition to this, CAFRE provides a signposting service to a wide range of support organisations at student health fairs.	and the team works closely with Programme Managers to ensure that these learners are supported to enable them to achieve their academic potential. Students are signposted to a wide range of support resources on the CAFRE website and CAFRE student Virtual Learning Environment.	

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

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
15	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 4: Improve staff awareness about disability issues through the diversity calendar of events. The Diversity Calendar is a	Communicating with staff via the use of newsletters, articles and events, to educate and raise staff awareness and understanding in relation to a number of Diversity and	Increased awareness for staff of the diversity of staff & customers and encouragement of inclusion for all.	Increased awareness for staff of the diversity of staff & customers and encouragement of inclusion for all.

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
	calendar highlighting the dates of various internationally recognised days and diversity themes throughout the year and although not specifically intended to improve staff awareness about disability issues there are many of these issues highlighted through internet articles and events.	Wellbeing issues, which, in turn, will lead to improved outcomes across the Section 75 categories.		
16	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 5: Implement the NICS Policy on reasonable adjustments by ensuring all line managers are knowledgeable of the disability duties and associated relevant legislation.	Staff survey results and NICS HR figures for reasonable adjustment implementation.	More staff declaring if they have a disability due to increased confidence in line management.	The 2023 NICS People Survey shows that 10% of staff felt discriminated against due to their disability. This figure remains the same as the 2021 Survey, however, the question does not correlate directly to the implementation of reasonable adjustment requests hence the 'not fully achieved' decision.
17	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 14: Establish a DAERA Disability Forum and encourage	A forum would support staff with disabilities and raise awareness within DAERA.	Members of the Equality Team are active members in the NICS Staff Disability Forum and share information etc. to all DAERA	Due to the formation of the NICS Staff Disability Forum (NICS SDF) and following consultation with NICS Disability Champion, Ronnie

PART B

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
	membership from Disability Led Groups, with the aim to identify and address any barriers to access or participation in DAERA and its range of services that may be faced by staff, customers, or stakeholders.		staff including management and SMT.	Armour, it was decided that a DAERA staff Disability Forum would be a duplication of any work undertaken and may even detract from the NICS SDF. However, Members of the Equality Team are active members in the NICS Staff Disability Forum and share information etc. to all DAERA staff including management and SMT. More recently key Equality Staff have successfully completed Employers for Disability NI (EFDNI) training and received Disability Positive Accreditation.

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

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
18	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 1: DAERA will make Senior Management Team & Departmental Board aware of the two duties and direct them to relevant available training.	The terms of reference (ToR) of the recast EDWG were produced and agreed by senior management and the new EDWG members. This new EDWG will replace the old Equality and Diversity Steering Group (EDSG). Due to the cessation of the EDSG and the recasting of the EDWG two meetings have not been held within this reporting period.
19	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 17: DAERA will promote identified opportunities on its working groups, steering groups, committees or similar within the disability sector and work with the sector and NICSHR and CPANI to encourage uptake of these opportunities.	DAERA has continued to promote public appointment opportunities across a range of media and via our equality networks and Section 75 consultee list, including to a range of disability groups. Our advertising and promotional communications also feature a welcome statement in respect of under-represented groups, including people with a disability. In relation to Public Appointments and CPANI, DAERA wants to extend its efforts to promote public appointments to people with disabilities. The intention is to implement some practical measures to help in this area. Planned work led jointly by the Equality Commission and CPANI was placed on hold. DAERA will actively support this work whenever it is resumed. This work will include supporting and promotion of work being undertaken by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (CPANI) including: • CPANI workshops for people who have a disability with the Equality Commission for NI (ECNI); • CPANI mentoring programme for disabled individuals who have an interest in serving on public bodies; • Monitoring and/or participating in CPANI's pilot project alongside TEO and Departments aimed at removing

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
		barriers to people who have a disability from the public appointments system. DAERA will also continue to monitor and review Board compositions and appointments to identify issues of representation and to support action to facilitate and encourage the participation of people with a disability.
20	DAERA Disability Action Plan (DAP) Measure No. 18: DAERA will work with NICSHR and offer up suitable placements through the NICS Work Experience Scheme for People with a Disability.	DfC lead on this initiative. The Department is awaiting further instructions from DfC on how they will be proceeding in the future and stand ready to fully engage with them at the appropriate time.

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

- **DAERA Website:** Regular monitoring and publication of standard of website accessibility; web accessibility testing as appropriate.
- **Facilities Management:** The effectiveness of the personal emergency evacuation plans is assessed with individuals during evacuations (practice and real) to ensure they meet all parties' needs.
- **CAFRE:** Specific training needs are discussed and assessed at the start of each academic year, and a training plan implemented to meet those needs. Review interviews with students availing of support services are held to establish if their needs are being fully met.
- **Equality and Diversity Working Groups (EDWG):** As detailed above, following the completion of an externally led board effectiveness review of the Departmental Board, board committee structures were revised and the work of EDSG and EDWG has now been mainstreamed and forms part of the responsibilities of a new Capacity and Capability Committee. This approach is intended to provide

PART B

the Champions and Representatives with a new departmental forum to share learning; provide a cohesive and focused approach of their role; and with both these in mind, enhance the effectiveness of the EDWG. The EDWG will act as a consultative forum to discuss and escalate issues in relation to disability and to consider staff and customer views.

(b) Quantitative

- **Facilities Management:** All personal emergency evacuation plans are assessed and tested twice yearly through practice evacuations. Monitoring and reviewing effectiveness of relocation projects to ensure no adverse impact on staff across the Section 75 categories.
- **CAFRE:** Training is provided for staff when it is identified that they will have students with specific difficulties. This is deemed the best approach as training can be tailored to the individual students' needs. The effectiveness of this training is monitored through interviews with the students to determine the level of satisfaction with the support they receive. CAFRE assesses the number of students availing of student support services.
- **Marine & Fisheries Directorate – Inland Fisheries (IF):** Issue concessionary licences to a range of groups, including disabled anglers. IF records the number of complimentary licences/permits issued.

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

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

PART B

2	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
3	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
4	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
5	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

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?

The current Disability Action Plan expired in December 2024. This plan is now being reviewed with all business areas, and we will go out for consultation with key stakeholders in due course.

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.