

**Equality Screening Template**

**Draft Strategic Plan 2025-2029**

**Part 1. Policy scoping**

This section asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

**Information about the policy**

Name of the policy

The Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland Strategic Plan 2025-2029.

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

New (the existing Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 expires on 31 March 2025).

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

Commissioners’ Strategic Plan 2025-29 sets out Commissioners’ strategic direction for the four year period. As guardians of merit, Commissioners uphold the principle that selection for appointment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service should be on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition. Commissioners have a vision of “A Civil Service for Northern Ireland which innovatively and effectively recruits and promotes the most talented and diverse people in a fair and inclusive manner which upholds the merit principle” and our mission is to “Ensure fairness and encourage innovation to give the public confidence in appointments to the Northern Ireland Civil Service”.

Our Strategic Plan 2020-2029 sets out four priorities to help us achieve our vision and mission, namely:

Priority 1: Safeguard an impartial and independent NICS

Priority 2: Support the NICS to attract the most talented and diverse people
Priority 3: Encourage innovation and influence positive change in recruitment to the NICS
Priority 4: Develop a diverse and supportive culture with an ethos of good governance

Each priority details a number of high-level activities which will provide direction for the work of Commissioners over the four year period. The Strategy will be supported by annual Business Plans which will set out how progress against the Strategy will be implemented and measured. Business Plans will be monitored and reviewed by Commissioners at their quarterly Business Meetings. Commissioners’ work is underpinned by the seven principles of public life, particularly integrity and objectivity, together with four additional values: independence, collaboration, innovation and quality.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy? If so, explain how.

Commissioners’ draft Strategic Plan 2025-2029, with its revised priorities, places a greater emphasis on ensuring that the NICS is representative of the increasingly diverse society it serves and also on ensuring that the Office of Civil Service Commissioners develops a diverse and supportive internal culture. Therefore, all Section 75 categories are likely to benefit as Commissioners’ focus on diversity, both in the NICS and internally, is enhanced.

Commissioners are independent of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and do not make appointments to the NICS themselves but, as regulators, they have a statutory duty to safeguard the Merit Principle which means the best person for the job is appointed, in fair and open competition. Commissioners are fully committed to promoting equality, diversity and good relations in all aspects of their work. Upholding the Merit Principle ensures that the best people are recruited for the posts available and will promote an effective Civil Service which reflects the diversity of Northern Ireland society (consistent with nationality requirements) and enjoys the confidence of the people it seeks to serve.

Commissioners support the application of positive actions to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities who may otherwise have difficulty gaining access to employment in the NICS. They welcome the fact that the effect of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is to ensure that the appointment of persons with a disability to situations in the NICS is in accordance with the Merit Principle.

Commissioners recognise that there may be times when it is appropriate to make appointments by Exception to Merit. These exceptions categories are set out in statute in the [Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland General Regulations 2007](https://www.nicscommissioners.org/publications/civil-service-commissioners-northern-ireland-general-regulations-2007) and details of how they may be applied are laid out in our [Recruitment Code](https://www.nicscommissioners.org/publications/recruitment-code-version-15-september-2023). From time to time, provision may be made for temporary or permanent appointments in the context of a particular and current government programme or initiative. Commissioners will work with the NICS through the Recruitment and Selection Development Group to determine when this exception may be used. Examples include those programmes designed to assist, for instance, people who are unemployed or people with disabilities who often have difficulty in gaining employment through the normal competitive process. Commissioners accept that the NICS should be able to employ individuals through government programmes or initiatives, adapting the principles of this Code, as appropriate.

By engaging with S75 groups and learning from their experiences and needs in relation to recruitment and selection, Commissioners seek to support the NICS in its development of innovative and inclusive recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland.

**Implementation factors**

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

Yes

If yes, are they, financial, legislative or other?

Please specify: financial and legislative.

**Main stakeholders affected**

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? Consider staff, service users, other public sector organisations, voluntary/community/trade unions and other stakeholders.

Staff, service users, other public sector organisations, voluntary/community/trade unions and potential applicants to the NICS.

##### [Other policies with a bearing on this policy](#Onefour)

What are they?

The Recruitment Code.

Who owns them?

Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland.

**Available evidence**

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

**Religious belief**

The 2021 Northern Ireland Census results demonstrate that 42.3% of residents identify as being of a Catholic religious belief, 16.6% Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 11.55% Church of Ireland, 2.35% Methodist, 6.85% other Christian. 17.3% were of no religion and 1.6% did not state a religion.

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that 50.1% of the NICS workforce were from a Catholic background compared to that of the economically active population with 54.1% of the workforce from a Catholic background. Excluded from these figures are staff whose background could not be determined which accounted for 4.7% of the NICS workforce.

**Political opinion**

The 2023 Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey found that 30% of respondents identified themselves as Unionist, 28% as Nationalist and 37% as Neither.

**Racial group**

According to the 2021 Northern Ireland Census, 96.55% of respondents described themselves as White, 0.76% as Mixed, 0.52% as Indian, 0.5% as Chinese, 0.42% as Black African, 0.28% as Other Asian, 0.23% as Filipino.

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that the proportion of staff who were from minority ethnic groups was 0.6%, lower that the economically active population figure of 3.0%.

**Age**

The 2021 Northern Ireland Census identifies 22.86% of the population as under 18, 33.98% aged between 18 and 45, 25% aged between 45-64 and 17.46% aged over 65.

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that 13.4% of NICS staff are aged 16-34 and the proportion of staff aged 55 and over is 28.8%. The NICS has an older age profile than that of the economically active (37.4% aged 16-34 and 17.2% aged 55+).

**Marital Status**

The 2021 Census in Northern Ireland reported that 45.77% of the population were married or in a registered same-sex civil partnership, 38.07% of the population were single, and 16.16% were separated, divorced or widowed.

**Sexual Orientation**

The 2023 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey found that 93% of the population identify as heterosexual, 4% as bisexual and 3% as gay or lesbian.

**Men and Women Generally**

According to the 2021 Northern Ireland Census results, 50.81% of the population are female and 49.19% are male.

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that females made up 50.2% of the NICS workforce in 2024, down from 50.5% in 2014 and similar to last year's figure (50.1%). It also closely matches the economically active population (49.5%). Within the most senior grades, female representation has increased since 2014 (34.9%) to 43.8% in 2024. However, it reports that males outnumber females at the most senior grades while the opposite tends to be true in the majority of junior grades.

**Disability**

The 2021 Census in Northern Ireland reported that 75.67% of the population consider their day-to-day activities are not limited by a long-term health problem or disability, compared to 24.33% who responded that it was limited a little or a lot.

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that the proportion of staff who declared a disability was 6.1%, lower than the figure of 10.2% for the economically active population.

**Dependants**

The 2021 Census in Northern Ireland reported that 69.33% of households have no dependent children, and 30.67% of households had one or more dependent children. 87.58% of the population provided no unpaid care, and 12.42% of the population provided unpaid care.

**Needs, experiences and priorities**

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories

**Religious belief**

Commissioners’ Strategic Plan aims to uphold the Merit Principle in Recruitment and Selection to the NICS; and to ensure that the best person for the job is appointed. No known needs/experiences/priorities in relation to the application of the Merit Principle.

**Political opinion**

Commissioners’ Strategic Plan aim to uphold the Merit Principle in Recruitment and Selection to the NICS; and to ensure that the best person for the job is appointed. No known needs/experiences/priorities in relation to the application of the Merit Principle.

**Racial group**

Commissioners’ Strategic Plan aims to uphold the Merit Principle in Recruitment and Selection to the NICS; and to ensure that the best person for the job is appointed. People from a minority ethnic background are under-represented in the NICS and a number of factors may impact on this, such as awareness of NICS careers, confidence in government, visible role models etc.

**Age**

Commissioners’ Strategic Plan aims to uphold the Merit Principle in Recruitment and Selection to the NICS; and to ensure that the best person for the job is appointed. The NICS has an older age profile than that of the economically active population. Young peoples’ perceptions of the civil service and awareness of NICS careers may impact on applications from this group.

**Marital Status**

No known needs/experiences/priorities. Commissioners’ Strategic Plan aims to uphold the Merit Principle in Recruitment and Selection to the NICS; and to ensure that the best person for the job is appointed. No known needs/experiences/priorities.

**Sexual orientation**

Commissioners’ Strategic Plan aims to uphold the Merit Principle in Recruitment and Selection to the NICS; and to ensure that the best person for the job is appointed. No known needs/experiences/priorities.

**Men and women generally**

Commissioners’ Strategic Plan aims to uphold the Merit Principle in Recruitment and Selection to the NICS; and to ensure that the best person for the job is appointed. Males outnumber females at the most senior grades while the opposite tends to be true in the majority of junior grades.

**Disability**

Commissioners’ Strategic Plan aims to uphold the Merit Principle in Recruitment and Selection to the NICS; and to ensure that the best person for the job is appointed. The proportion of staff who have declared a disability is 6.1%, lower than the figure of 10.2% for the economically active population. Disabled applicants may need reasonable adjustments to participate in recruitment and selection on an equal basis as those without a disability and to take up and retain employment.

**Dependants**

Commissioners’ Strategic Plan aims to uphold the Merit Principle in Recruitment and Selection to the NICS; and to ensure that the best person for the job is appointed. Persons with dependants may need flexible working arrangements.

**Part 2:** **Screening questions**

This section asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues.

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the nine Section 75 categories?

**Religious belief**

None – No negative differential impact. Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

**Political opinion**

None – No negative differential impact. Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

**Racial group**

None – No negative differential impact. Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

**Age**

None – No negative differential impact. Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

**Marital status**

None – No negative differential impact. Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

**Sexual orientation**

None – No negative differential impact. Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

**Men and women generally**

None – No negative differential impact. Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

**Disability**

None – No negative differential impact. Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

**Dependants**

None – No negative differential impact. Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?

All categories

Through engagement with S75 representative groups, Commissioner increase their understanding of barriers to recruitment and selection and seek to bring this understanding to their engagement with the NICS on recruitment and selection policy and procedures.

3 To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? minor/major/none

**Religious belief**

None – the policy does not impact on good relations between people of different religious beliefs.

**Political opinion**

None – the policy does not impact on good relations between people of different political opinion.

**Racial group**

None – the policy does not impact on good relations between people of different racial group.

**4** Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

**Religious belief**

No - This policy relates to the statutory functions of the Civil Service Commissioners in upholding the Merit Principle for appointments to the NICS and in hearing appeals from existing civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics. It does not provide opportunities to promote good relations between people of different religious belief.

**Political opinion**

No - This policy relates to the statutory functions of the Civil Service Commissioners in upholding the Merit Principle for appointments to the NICS and in hearing appeals from existing civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics. It does not provide opportunities to promote good relations between people of different religious belief.

**Racial group**

No - This policy relates to the statutory functions of the Civil Service Commissioners in upholding the Merit Principle for appointments to the NICS and in hearing appeals from existing civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics. It does not provide opportunities to promote good relations between people of different religious belief.

**Additional considerations**

**Multiple identity**

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?

(*For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).*

There will be no negative impact on any people with multiple identities.

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

Not applicable.

 **Part 3. Screening decision**

This section guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

An equality impact assessment is not required as the policy is not likely to have an adverse impact on any of the section 75 categories.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced.

As no adverse impact on any Section 75 categories has been identified there is no need for mitigations or the introduction of an alternative policy.

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

All public authorities’ equality schemes must state the authority’s arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Equality Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Equality Commission publication: Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.

**Mitigation**

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is ‘minor’ and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations? If so, give the **reasons** to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

N/A

**Part 4. Monitoring**

This section provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring. Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Equality Commission’s Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

The Equality Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance). Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

Please detail proposed monitoring arrangements below:

 N/A

**Part 5 - Approval and authorisation**

This section verifies the public authority’s approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

**Screened by**:

Name: Heather Caulfield

Title: Deputy Principal

Date: 9 December 2024

Signature: 

**Approved by:**

Name: Amanda Martin

Title: Secretary

Date: 10 December 2024

Signature: 

**Endorsed by**:

Name: Deirdre Toner

Title: Chairperson, Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland

Date: 3 April 2025

Signature: 

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be ‘signed off’ and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority’s website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.

**Annex 1**

**Screening flowchart *(taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (Appendix 1)).***

Policy Scoping

* + Policy
	+ Available data

Screening Questions

* Apply screening questions
* Consider multiple identities

Screening Decision None/Minor/Major

Mitigate

 Publish Template

Re-consider screening

Publish Template

for information

Publish Template

 EQIA

Monitor

**‘None’**

Screened out

**‘Major’**

Screened in for EQIA

**‘Minor’**

Screened out with mitigation

Concerns raised with evidence

Concerns raised with evidence re: screening decision