

Equality Scheme for the North/South Language Body

Drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9
of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

Approved by the Equality Commission for Northern
Ireland in December 2013

SUMMARY

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(See page 2 for contact details.)

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1. Section 75 duties

Under Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the North/South Language Body is required to draw up an equality scheme setting out how equality of opportunity will be promoted through the implementation of all functions carried out in Northern Ireland.

Section 75 imposes a duty to promote equality of opportunity between people in nine categories and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.

The nine categories of people are –

- those with different religious beliefs, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status and sexual orientation
- men and women generally
- people with a disability and those without
- people with dependants and those without.

We are committed to the fulfilment of the Section 75 duties in all areas of responsibility. Responsibility for the effective implementation of the equality scheme lies with the Chief Executive Officers of the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge. This document summarises our equality scheme and sets out what we intend to do to implement it.

2. The North/South Language Body

The North/South Language Body is a single Body reporting to the North South Ministerial Council, but composed of two separate and largely autonomous agencies: the Ulster-Scots Agency, (Tha Boord O Ulstèr-Scotch) and Foras na Gaeilge. The Sponsor Departments for the Language Body are the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Northern Ireland and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in Ireland.

Ulster-Scots Agency

The Ulster-Scots Agency has responsibility for the promotion of greater awareness and the use of Ullans and of Ulster-Scots cultural issues, both within Northern Ireland and throughout the island.

The main functions of the Agency are:

- supporting communities engaged in Ulster-Scots activities through grant aid;

- developing the infrastructure and capacity in Ulster-Scots communities;
- expanding the range of opportunities for people to enjoy and participate in Ulster-Scots activities;
- mainstreaming Ulster-Scots through wider cultural activities;
- developing tourism products and opportunities in partnership with strategic partners;
- commemorating important anniversaries relevant to Ulster-Scots;
- removing barriers to participation in Ulster-Scots culture, especially for young children, people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic groups and those who are socially excluded;
- achieving international recognition and awareness of Ulster-Scots culture;
- increasing tuition in Ulster-Scots culture in schools at pre- primary, primary, post-primary and tertiary education establishments;
- making progress towards obtaining Part III status for the Ulster-Scots language under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

The Agency's main office is in Belfast and there is a subsidiary office in Raphoe (Co. Donegal). There are currently 18 staff in post and the organisation is headed up by a Chief Executive Officer and two Directors. The Agency, in partnership with the University of Ulster, has also established the Institute of Ulster-Scots studies at the Magee Campus.

Foras na Gaeilge

Foras na Gaeilge has responsibility for the promotion of the Irish language on an all-island basis. It has a role in advising administrations, North and South, as well as public bodies and other groups in the private and voluntary sectors, in all matters relating to the Irish language. It also undertakes supportive projects and grant aids bodies and groups throughout the island of Ireland.

The functions of Foras na Gaeilge are:

- promoting the Irish language;
- facilitating and encouraging its use in speech and writing in public and private life in the South and, in the context of Part III of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, in Northern Ireland where there is appropriate demand;
- advising both administrations, public bodies and other groups in the private and voluntary sectors;

- undertaking supportive projects and grant aiding bodies and groups as considered necessary;
- undertaking research, promotional campaigns, and public and media relations;
- developing terminology and dictionaries;
- supporting Irish medium education and the teaching of Irish.

The main office of the organisation is in Dublin with subsidiary offices in Belfast, Athboy (Co. Meath) and Gaoth Dobhair (Co. Donegal). There are currently 63 staff in post and the organisation is headed up by a Chief Executive Officer and four Directors.

3. Equality action plan

We are currently developing an action plan to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. This will be based on an audit of inequalities bringing together information across the Section 75 categories to identify the inequalities that exist for those affected by our policies.

4. Consultation

A commitment to full and meaningful consultation lies at the heart of our equality scheme. We recognise the importance of consultation on all matters relating to Section 75 duties and we will apply best practice guidelines when carrying out consultation. In particular, we will try our best to make all consultations timely, open and inclusive.

Our equality scheme contains a list of consultees (at Appendix 3) who will initially, as a matter of course, be notified of the matter being consulted upon to ensure they are aware of all consultations. Thereafter, to ensure the most effective use of our and our consultees' resources, we will take a targeted approach to consultation for those consultees that may have a particular interest in the matter being consulted upon.

We will apply the following principles when consulting –

1. We will begin as early as possible.
2. We will use different methods of consultation for different groups according to their needs – methods might include face to face

meetings, advisory groups, surveys, consultative panels and Internet discussions.

3. We will consider the accessibility and format of every method of consultation we use in order to remove barriers to the consultation process.
4. We will provide training to those facilitating consultations to ensure that they have the necessary skills to communicate effectively with consultees.
5. We will ensure that consultees are provided with appropriate information on our role and our approach to the Section 75 statutory duties in all consultation documentation and at all consultation meetings.
6. We will aim to allow 12 weeks for all consultations, where possible, and longer where a consultation period includes a holiday period.
7. We will take steps to make sure there is full participation at any consultation meetings – this will include careful consideration of, among other things, the time of day, the suitability of the venue, how the meeting is run and child care arrangements.
8. We will make all relevant information available to consultees in appropriate formats to ensure meaningful consultation and ensure that we provide sufficient information so that those we consult can consider the full implications of our proposals.
9. We will provide feedback to consultees in a timely manner.

5. Assessing the impact of policies

In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we will take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy.

We use the tools of **screening** and **equality impact assessment** to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.

(a) Screening

Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process by applying the following questions:

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? (minor/major/none)
2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equality categories?

3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (minor/major/none)
4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

In order to answer the screening questions, we gather evidence relating to the different needs, experiences and priorities of people in each of the Section 75 equality categories. Consideration of this evidence leads to one of the following three outcomes:

1. The policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment.
2. The policy has been 'screened out' with mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.
3. The policy has been 'screened out' without any mitigation.

Where we mitigate we will outline in the screening template the reasons to support this decision together with the proposed changes, amendments or alternative policy. Each screening template will be made available on our website and we will inform consultees of its availability.

(b) Equality impact assessment

If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'major', we will normally subject the policy to an equality impact assessment. This is a thorough and systematic analysis to determine the extent of any impact of a policy upon the Section 75 categories and to determine if the impact is an adverse one. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate the likely positive outcomes of a policy and to seek ways to more effectively promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Any equality impact assessment will be subject to consultation at the appropriate stage(s). The results of all equality impact assessments will be published on our website as soon as the process has been completed.

6. Monitoring

Monitoring can assist us to deliver better public services and continuous improvements. We monitor any adverse impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity of policies we have adopted. We are also committed to monitoring more broadly to identify opportunities to better

promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with Equality Commission guidance.

If over a two year period monitoring and evaluation show that a policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, we will ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for relevant equality groups.

Monitoring involves the collection, collation and analysis of data from primary and secondary sources and the commissioning of new data where necessary.

We review our monitoring information on an annual basis and include the results in our annual progress report to the Equality Commission, which is published on our website.

7. Staff training

We recognise that awareness raising and training play a crucial role in the effective implementation of our Section 75 duties. All staff have been made aware of the Equality Scheme and the duties imposed by Section 75 and we will make sure that all new staff are made aware as part of their induction. We also provide focused training for key staff who are directly engaged in taking forward the implementation of our equality scheme commitments. We evaluate the effectiveness of the training on a regular basis.

8. Access to information

We are committed to ensuring that the information we disseminate and the services we provide are fully accessible to all parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, we provide information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable. Alternative formats may include Easy Read, Braille, audio formats (CD, mp3 or DAISY), large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

The main medium for disseminating information about the work of each Agency is our respective websites:

www.ulsterscotsagency.org.uk

www.gaeilge.ie

9. Complaints

We are responsive to the views of members of the public. We will endeavour to resolve all complaints made to us in a timely manner and will co-operate fully with any subsequent investigation by the Equality Commission.

10. Review

We will review progress on implementing our Equality Scheme every year and report to the Equality Commission. We will also undertake a thorough review of the Equality Scheme after 5 years.