



**Equality Scheme
for
Northern Regional College**

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

***This document can be made available in a range of formats on request.
Please contact us with your requirements:-***

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Foreword

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act¹.

In our equality scheme we set out how Northern Regional College proposes to fulfil the Section 75 statutory duties.

We will commit the necessary resources in terms of people, time and money to make sure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that the equality scheme is implemented effectively and on time.

We commit to having effective internal arrangements in place for ensuring our effective compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties and for monitoring and reviewing our progress.

We will develop and deliver a programme of communication and training with the aim of ensuring that all our staff and board members are made fully aware of our equality scheme and understand the commitments and obligations within it.


We, the Governing Body and Principal of Northern Regional College, are fully committed to effectively fulfilling our Section 75 statutory duties across all our functions (including service provision, employment and procurement) through the effective implementation of our equality scheme.

We realise the important role that the community and voluntary sector and the general public have to play to ensure the Section 75 statutory duties are effectively implemented. Our equality scheme demonstrates our commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. It also offers the opportunity to people who perceive that we have not complied with our equality scheme to make a complaint.

On behalf of Northern Regional College and our staff we are pleased to support and endorse this equality scheme which has been drawn up in accordance with Section 75 of and Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and with reference to the Equality Commission guidelines.

Chair 

Date 17 October 2022

Principal 

Date 7 October 2022

¹ See section 1.1 of our Equality Scheme.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

1.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires Northern Regional College to comply with two statutory duties:

Section 75 (1)

In carrying out our functions relating to Northern Ireland we are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- men and women generally
- persons with a disability and persons without
- persons with dependants and persons without.

Section 75 (2)

In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland we are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

“Functions” include the “powers and duties” of a public authority². This includes our employment and procurement functions.

Please see below under “Who we are and what we do” for a detailed explanation of our functions.

How we propose to fulfil the Section 75 duties in relation to the relevant functions of Northern Regional College

1.2 Schedule 9 4. (1) of the Act requires Northern Regional College as a designated public authority, to set out in an equality scheme how it proposes to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75 in relation to its relevant functions. This equality scheme is intended to fulfil that statutory requirement. It is both a statement of our arrangements for fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties and our plan for their implementation.

1.3 Northern Regional College is committed to the discharge of its Section 75 obligations throughout the organisation. The Governing Body of the College agree to commit the necessary available resources in terms of people, time and money to ensure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that our equality scheme can be implemented effectively and on time.

Who we are and what we do

1.4 Northern Regional College is the main provider of further education across four of the 11 council areas in Northern Ireland, covering a population of over 560,000. The College offers a comprehensive range of qualifications for school leavers, full and part-time courses for adults, apprenticeships, professional qualifications and university accredited courses as well as providing a range of business services to support the business community.

² Section 98 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

There are currently six campuses, two in Ballymena (Farm Lodge and Trostan Avenue), Ballymoney, Coleraine, Magherafelt and Newtownabbey. However, an exciting £84 million campus development is underway to redevelop the Coleraine and Ballymena campuses, which will see a move from six to four campuses by 2024.

1.5 The College is an incorporated College of Further and Higher Education, which is governed by a Governing Body, appointed by DfE to serve a term of 4 years. The College's Governing Body comprises of members appointed by the Minister for the Economy, staff and students of the College, the Principal and members co-opted by the Governing Body. There are three sub-committees of the Governing Body: Audit & Risk Committee, Resources Committee and Education Committee.

1.6 The Principal/Chief Executive of the College, who is also the Accounting Officer, is responsible for the operational management of the College, while the Governing Body provides governance and the strategic direction for the College.

1.7 The College performs a number of principal roles:

- The provision of academic, vocational and community education throughout the towns and hinterland of Ballymena, Magherafelt, Newtownabbey, Coleraine and Ballymoney.
- The provision of Apprenticeship and Traineeship courses.
- The provision of specific tailored courses for business and industry.

1.8 In performance of the above roles Northern Regional College carries out functions in the following areas:

- The acquisition and maintenance of premises and equipment to provide suitable accommodation and facilities in which the learning experience can take place.
- The recruitment and ongoing staff development of suitably qualified and experienced staff to deliver the education and training associated with the courses offered and to support this learning process.
- The recruitment of students onto courses designed to meet their specific needs.

1.9 To support and implement the above functions/services, Northern Regional College operates within policy guidelines laid down by the Department for the Economy (DfE), and according to policies as agreed through sectoral negotiation and through the College's Governing Body.

1.10 The organisational chart is set out in Appendix 1.

Chapter 2 Our arrangements for assessing our compliance with the section 75 duties (Schedule 9 4. (2) (a))

2.1 Some of our arrangements for assessing our compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties are outlined in other relevant parts of this equality scheme

In addition we have the following arrangements in place for assessing our compliance:

Responsibilities and reporting

2.2 We are committed to the fulfilment of our Section 75 obligations in all parts of our work.

2.3 Overall responsibility for the ensuring effective implementation of our equality scheme lies with the Principal who is accountable to the College's Governing Body for ensuring the development, implementation, maintenance and review of the equality scheme in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, any good practice or guidance that has been or may be issued by the Equality Commission and for the mainstreaming of equality throughout the functions within the College.

2.4 The College's Equality Officer has a key oversight and reporting role on behalf of the Principal and Governing Body and through links with various managers in the College and other regional Colleges (NI Further Education Equality Forum) keeps the Principal and Governing Body apprised of progress and compliance on a regular basis and a formal report will be presented to the Governing Body at year end. Arrangements exist to ensure that any non-compliance issues are escalated to the Principal outside these timescales if required.

2.5 The Principal will keep the current reporting and management arrangements under review and take action to improve the current arrangements when necessary.

2.6 The College's Equality Officer will be the first point of contact for the Scheme. If you have any questions or comments regarding our equality scheme, please contact the Equality Officer Fiona McDowell at the address given below and we will respond to you as soon as possible:

Fiona McDowell
Northern Regional College
2 Coleraine Road
Ballymoney
BT53 6BP
Telephone: 028 2766 0411
Mobile: 07971824334
E-mail: equality@nrc.ac.uk

2.7 Objectives and targets relating to the statutory duties will be integrated into our strategic and operational business plans³.

³ See Appendix 4 'Timetable for measures proposed' and section 2.14 of this equality scheme.

2.8 Employees' job descriptions reflect their obligation to the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties and implementation of the equality scheme.

2.9 Staff will provide evidence of examples of how they promote equality, inclusion and learning in the curriculum through the 'Improving Quality: Raising Standards' self-evaluating process.

2.10 Northern Regional College will prepare an annual report on the progress made on implementing the arrangements set out in this equality scheme to discharge our Section 75 statutory duties (Section 75 annual progress report).

2.11 The Section 75 annual progress report will be sent to the Equality Commission by 31 August each year and will follow any guidance on annual reporting issued by the Equality Commission.

2.12 Our Section 75 annual progress reports are available to view on our website www.nrc.ac.uk or by contacting our Equality Officer (contact details as set out at paragraph 2.6).

2.13 The College will liaise closely with the Equality Commission to ensure that progress on the implementation of our equality scheme is maintained.

Action plan/action measures

2.14 Northern Regional College has developed an Equality Improvement Plan to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. This Plan is set out in Appendix 6 to this equality scheme but will not form part of the approved Equality Scheme.

2.15 To enable the College to link its Equality Improvement Plan with the Corporate Planning cycle the plan will be reviewed and updated annually in keeping with the College's business planning cycle.

2.16 We have consulted on our Equality Improvement Plan as part of the consultation process for the Equality Scheme.

2.17 We will monitor our progress on the delivery of our action measures annually and update the Equality Improvement Plan as necessary to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to our functions and work. The College will inform the Equality Commission of any changes or amendments to action plans through the Annual Progress Report.

2.18 Our Section 75 annual progress report will incorporate information on progress we have made in implementing our Equality Improvement Plan action measures.

2.19 Our Equality Improvement Plan will be available on our website www.nrc.ac.uk or by contacting the Equality Officer using the contact details set out at 2.6 above.

Chapter 3 Our arrangements for consulting

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (a)) - on matters to which a duty (S75 (1) or (2)) is likely to be relevant (including details of the persons to be consulted).
(Schedule 9 4. (2) (b)) on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by us on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

3.1 We recognise the importance of consultation in all aspects of the implementation of our statutory equality duties. We will consult on our equality scheme, equality impact assessments and other matters determined by the College to be relevant to the Section 75 statutory duties.

3.2 We are committed to carrying out consultation in accordance with the principles as contained in the Equality Commission's guidance '*Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)*':

3.2.1 Initially all consultees (see Appendix 3), as a matter of course, will be notified (by email or post) of the matter/policy being consulted upon to ensure they are aware of all consultations. Thereafter, to ensure the most effective use of both our and our consultee's resources, we will take a targeted approach to consultation for those consultees that may have a particular interest in the matter/policy being consulted upon and to whom the matter/policy is of particular relevance. This may include for example regional or local consultations, sectoral or thematic consultation etc.

3.2.2 Consultation with stakeholders will begin as early as possible and periodically seek their views on their preferred consultation methods.

Methods of consultation could include:

- Face-to-face meetings
- Focus groups
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- Questionnaires
- Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/opt out of the consultation
- Internet discussions or
- Telephone consultations.

This list is not exhaustive and we may develop other additional methods of consultation more appropriate to key stakeholders and the matter being consulted upon.

3.2.3 We will consider the accessibility and format of every method of consultation we use in order to remove barriers to the consultation process for all affected groups and individuals.

Information will be made available, on request, in alternative formats⁴, in a timely manner.

3.2.4 Where necessary training will be provided to those facilitating consultations to ensure that they have the necessary skills to communicate effectively with consultees.

⁴ See Chapter 6 of our equality scheme for further information on alternative formats of information we provide.

3.2.5 The consultation period lasts for a minimum of twelve weeks to allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves as part of the process of forming a view. However, in exceptional circumstances when this timescale is not feasible (for example implementing EU Directives or UK wide legislation, meeting Health and Safety requirements, addressing urgent public health matters or complying with Court judgements), we may shorten timescales to eight weeks or less before the policy is implemented. We may continue consultation thereafter and will review the policy as part of our monitoring commitments⁵.

Where, under these exceptional circumstances, we must implement a policy immediately, as it is beyond our authority's control, we may consult after implementation of the policy, in order to ensure that any impacts of the policy are considered.

3.2.7 In some circumstances consideration will be given to the extension of the consultation period for example during holiday periods.

3.2.8 We are conscious of the fact that affected individuals and representative groups may have different needs. We will take appropriate measures to ensure full participation in any meetings held. We will consider for example the time of day, the appropriateness of the venue, in particular whether it can be accessed by those with disabilities, how the meeting is to be conducted, the use of appropriate language, whether a signer and/or interpreter is necessary, and whether the provision of childcare and support for other carers is required.

3.2.9 We make all relevant information available to consultees in appropriate formats to ensure meaningful consultation. This includes detailed information on the policy proposal being consulted upon and any relevant quantitative and qualitative data.

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

3.2.11 We provide feedback to consultees who responded to the consultation in a timely manner and feedback will be provided in formats suitable to consultees. (Please see also 6.3) A feedback report is prepared which includes information on the policy consulted upon, comments received and our consideration of and response to these comments. The feedback will be provided in formats suitable to consultees. (Please see also 6.3)

3.3 A list of our consultees is included in this equality scheme at Appendix 3 or by contacting the Equality Officer as documented in paragraph 2.6.

3.4 Our consultation list is not exhaustive and is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant to our functions and policies.

3.5 We welcome enquiries from any person/s or organisations wishing to be added to the list of consultees. Please contact the Equality Officer (contact details at 2.6 above) to provide your contact details and have your areas of interest noted or have your name/details removed or amended. Please also inform us at this stage if you would like information sent to you in a particular format or language.

⁵ Please see below at 4.27 to 4.31 for details on monitoring.

Chapter 4 Our arrangements for assessing, monitoring and publishing the impact of policies

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (b); Schedule 9 4. (2) (c); Schedule 9 4. (2) (d);
Schedule 9 9. (1); Schedule 9 9.(2))

Our arrangements for assessing the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted on the promotion of equality of opportunity (Schedule 9 4. (2) (b))

4.1 In the context of Section 75, 'policy' is very broadly defined and it covers all the ways in which we carry out or propose to carry out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland. In respect of this equality scheme, the term policy is used for any (proposed/amended/existing) strategy, policy initiative or practice and/or decision, whether written or unwritten and irrespective of the label given to it, e.g., 'draft', 'pilot', 'high level' or 'sectoral'.

4.2 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy, as required by Schedule 9 9. (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

4.3 The College uses 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. In carrying out these assessments we will relate them to the intended outcomes of the policy in question and will also take cognisance of the Equality Commission guidance:

- the guidance on screening, including the screening template, as detailed in the Commission's guidance '*Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)*' and
- on undertaking an equality impact assessment as detailed in the Commission's guidance '*Practical guidance on equality impact assessment (February 2005)*'.

Screening

4.4 The purpose of screening is to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

4.5 Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process. Policies which we propose to adopt will be subject to screening prior to implementation. For more detailed strategies or policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages, we will screen at various stages during implementation.

4.6 The lead role in the screening of a policy is taken by the policy decision maker who has the authority to make changes to that policy. However, screening will also involve other relevant team members, for example, equality specialists, those who implement the policy and staff members from other relevant work areas. Where possible we will include key stakeholders in the screening process.

4.7 The following questions are applied to all our policies as part of the screening process:

- 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)
- Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equality categories?
- 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)
- Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

4.8 In order to answer the screening questions, we will consider all relevant and available information and data gathered, both qualitative and quantitative. In taking this evidence into account we will consider the different needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 equality categories. Any screening decision will be informed by this evidence.

4.9 Completion of screening and taking into account our consideration of the answers to all four screening questions set out in 4.7 above, will lead 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 mitigation⁶ or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted
3. the policy has been 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.

4.10 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'minor' in respect of one, or more, of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we will consider measures that will mitigate the policy impact as well as alternative policies that might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity and/or good relations. In certain circumstances it may be necessary to proceed with an equality impact assessment rather than mitigate the impacts.

Where we mitigate we will outline in our screening template the reasons to support this decision together with the proposed changes, amendments or alternative policy.

This screening decision will be 'signed off' by those involved in equality screening the policy within the College.

4.11 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'major' in respect of one, or more, of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we will normally subject the policy to an equality impact assessment if the College still decides to proceed with that policy. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by those involved in equality screening the policy within the College.

⁶ Mitigation – Where an assessment (screening in this case) reveals that a particular policy has an adverse impact on equality of opportunity and / or good relations, a public authority must consider ways of delivering the policy outcomes which have a less adverse effect on the relevant Section 75 categories.

4.12 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'none', in respect of all of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, we will give details of the reasons for the decision taken. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by those involved in equality screening the policy within the College.

4.13 On all occasions as soon as possible following the completion of the screening process, the screening form will be signed off and approved by those involved in the equality screening process. At an appropriate time the equality screening form will be made available on our intranet site and on our website www.nrc.ac.uk and on request from the Equality Officer as per contact details at 2.6.

4.14 If a consultee, including the Equality Commission, raises a concern about a screening decision based on supporting evidence, we will review the screening decision.

Equality impact assessment

4.16 An equality impact assessment (EQIA) is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy, whether that policy is formal or informal, and irrespective of the scope of that policy. The primary function of an EQIA is 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.

4.17 Once a policy is screened and screening has identified that an equality impact assessment is necessary, we will carry out the EQIA in accordance with Equality Commission guidance if we decide to proceed with this policy. The equality impact assessment will be carried out as part of the policy development process, before the policy is implemented.

4.18 Any equality impact assessment will be subject to consultation at the appropriate stage(s). (For details see above Chapter 3 "Our Arrangements for Consulting").

Our arrangements for publishing the results of the assessments of the likely impact of policies we have adopted or propose to adopt on the promotion of equality of opportunity

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (d); Schedule 9 9. (1))

4.19 We make publicly available the results of our assessments (screening and EQIA) of the likely impact of our policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.

What we publish

4.20 Screening reports

The College will develop a screening template as a standard for all screening exercises. Once completed this template will be known as the College Screening Form for each screening exercise.

The College will publish all equality screening forms following each screening exercise to facilitate the communication of the outcome of the exercise.

These are published once completed. Screening forms detail:

- A statement of the aim(s) of the policy/policies to which the assessment relates
- Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact
- Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity;
- Screening decisions, i.e.:
 - whether the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment.
 - whether the policy has been 'screened out' with mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.
 - whether the policy has been 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.
- Where applicable, a timetable for conducting equality impact assessments

4.22 Equality impact assessments

EQIA reports are published once the impact assessment has been completed. These reports include:

- A statement of the aim of the policy assessed
- Information and data collected
- Details of the assessment of impact(s)
- Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact
- Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity
- Consultation responses
- The decision taken
- Future monitoring plans.

How we publish the information

4.23 All information published will be accessible and can be made available in alternative formats on request. Please see 6.3 below.

Where we publish the information

4.24 Screening Forms and the results of equality impact assessments will be available on our website www.nrc.ac.uk and by contacting the Equality Officer (contact details as set out at 2.6 above)

4.25 In addition to the above, screening forms (electronic link or hard copy on request if more suitable for recipients) which include all policies screened over a 3-month period will be available to those consultees who wish to receive a copy on a quarterly basis.

Our arrangements for monitoring any adverse impact of policies we have adopted on equality of opportunity

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (c))

4.27 Monitoring can assist us to deliver better public services and continuous improvements. Monitoring Section 75 information involves the processing of sensitive personal data (data relating to the racial or ethnic origin of individuals, sexual orientation, political opinion, religious belief, etc). In order to carry out

monitoring in a confidential and effective manner, the College follows guidance from the Office of the Information Commissioner and takes cognisance of the Equality Commission's monitoring guidance.

4.28 We are committed to monitoring policies with identified adverse impacts and to identifying opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with Equality Commission guidance

4.29 The systems we have established to monitor the impact of policies and identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations are:

- The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant primary quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories (where possible) on an ongoing basis
- The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant secondary sources of quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an ongoing basis
- An audit of existing information systems within one year of approval of this equality scheme to identify the extent of current monitoring and take action to address any gaps in order to have the necessary information on which to base decisions
- Undertaking or commissioning new data if necessary.

4.30 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.

4.31 We review our EQIA monitoring information on an annual basis together with other monitoring information.

Our arrangements for publishing the results of our monitoring (Schedule 9 4. (2) (d))

4.32 Schedule 9 4. (2) (d) requires us to publish the results of the monitoring of adverse impacts of policies we have adopted. However, we are committed to monitoring more broadly and the results of our policy monitoring are published.

4.33 EQIA monitoring information is published as part of our Section 75 annual progress report [see 2.7]

4.34 All monitoring information published is accessible and can be made available in alternative formats on request from the Equality Officer (contact details are set out at 2.6 above). Please see below at 6.3 for details.

Chapter 5 Staff training (Schedule 9 4.(2) (e))

Commitment to staff training

5.1 We recognise that awareness raising and training play a crucial role in the effective implementation of our Section 75 duties.

5.2 Our Governing Body and Principal wishes to positively communicate the College's commitment to the Section 75 statutory duties, both internally and externally.

To this end we have introduced an effective communication and training programme for all staff and will ensure that our commitment to the Section 75 statutory duties is made clear in all relevant publications.

Training objectives

5.3 The College will provide training for its staff which will aim to achieve the following objectives:

- to raise awareness of the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, our equality scheme commitments and the particular issues likely to affect people across the range of Section 75 categories, to ensure that our staff fully understand their role in implementing the scheme
- to provide those staff involved in the assessment of policies (screening and EQIA) with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively
- to provide those staff who deal with complaints in relation to compliance with our equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to investigate and monitor complaints effectively
- to provide those staff involved in consultation processes with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively
- to provide those staff involved in the implementation and monitoring of the effective implementation of the College's equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively.

Awareness raising and training arrangements

5.4 The following arrangements are in place to ensure all our staff and Governing Body are aware of and understand our equality obligations.

- We will develop a summary of this equality scheme and make it available to all staff.
- We will provide access to copies of the full equality scheme for all staff; ensure that any queries or questions of clarification from staff are addressed effectively.
- Staff in the College will receive a briefing on this equality scheme within 6 months after approval of the scheme.
- The Section 75 statutory duties form part of induction training for new staff.
- Focused training is provided for key staff within the College who are directly engaged in taking forward the implementation of our equality scheme commitments (for example those involved in research and data collection,

policy development, service design, conducting equality impact assessments, consultation, monitoring and evaluation).

- Where appropriate, training will be provided to ensure staff are aware of the issues experienced by the range of Section 75 groups.
- When appropriate and on an ongoing basis, arrangements will be made to ensure staff are kept up to date with Section 75 developments.

5.5 Training and awareness raising programmes will, where relevant, be developed in association with the appropriate Section 75 groups and relevant staff groups.

5.6 In order to share resources and expertise, the College will, where possible, work closely with other bodies and agencies in the development and delivery of training.

Monitoring and evaluation

5.7 Our training programme is subject to the following monitoring and evaluation arrangements:

- We evaluate the extent to which all participants in this training programme have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve each of the above objectives.
- The extent to which training objectives have been met will be reported on as part of the Section 75 annual progress report, which will be sent to the Equality Commission.

Chapter 6 Our arrangements for ensuring and assessing public access to information and services we provide (Schedule 9 4. (2) (f))

6.1 The College is 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. We keep our arrangements under review to ensure that this remains the case.

6.2 We are aware that some groups will not have the same access to information as others.

In particular:

- People with sensory, learning, communication and mobility disabilities may require printed information in other formats.
- Members of ethnic minority groups, whose first language is not English, may have difficulties with information provided only in English.
- Children and young people may not be able to fully access or understand information.

Access to information

6.3 To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, we provide information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable. Where the exact request cannot be met we will ensure a reasonable alternative is provided.

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 College liaises with representatives of young people and disability and minority ethnic organisations and takes account of existing and developing good practice.

We will respond to reasonable requests for information in alternative formats in a timely manner, usually within 10 working days

The College will take cognisance of the needs of children and young people, people with learning disabilities and minority ethnic communities when providing information.

6.4 In disseminating information publicly we will seek to advertise in the press where appropriate.

6.5 We seek to ensure that our website is accessible and provides information in an accessible format.

Access to services

6.6 The College is committed to promoting equality for all those who use our services and will do our utmost to make our services as accessible as possible to all service users across the Section 75 categories.

6.7 The College also adheres to the relevant provisions of current anti-discrimination legislation.

Assessing public access to information and services

6.8 The college has monitoring arrangements in place across all its functions to monitor service delivery in relation to access to information and services, to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.

Chapter 7 **Timetable for measures we propose in this equality scheme**
(Schedule 9 4. (3) (b))

7.1 Appendix 4 outlines our timetable for all measures proposed within this equality scheme. The measures outlined in this timetable will be incorporated into our business planning cycle.

7.2 This timetable is different from and in addition to our commitment to developing action plans/action measures to specifically address inequalities and further promote equality of opportunity and good relations. We have included in our equality scheme a commitment to develop an action plan. Accordingly, this commitment it is listed in the timetable of measures at Appendix 4. For information on these action measures please see above at 2.14 – 2.19.

Chapter 8 **Our procedure for equality scheme complaints** (Schedule 9 10.)

8.1 The College is responsive to the views of members of the public and will endeavour to resolve all complaints made to us.

8.2 Schedule 9 paragraph 10 of the Act refers to complaints. A person can make a complaint to a public authority if the complainant believes he or she may have been directly affected by an alleged failure of the College to comply with its approved equality scheme.

If the complaint has not been resolved within a reasonable timescale, the complaint can be brought to the Equality Commission.

8.3 A person wishing to make a complaint that the College has failed to comply with its approved equality scheme should contact:

Fiona McDowell
Northern Regional College
2 Coleraine Road
Ballymoney
BT53 6BP
Telephone: 028 2766 0411
Mobile: 07971824334
E-mail: equality@nrc.ac.uk

8.4 We will in the first instance acknowledge receipt of each complaint within 5 working days of receipt.

8.5 The Equality Officer will carry out an internal investigation of the complaint and will respond substantively to the complainant within one (1) month of the date of receiving the letter of complaint. Under certain circumstances, if the complexity of the matter requires a longer period, the period for response to the complainant may be extended to two (2) months. In those circumstances, the complainant will be advised of the extended period within one month of making the complaint.

8.6 During this process the complainant will be kept full informed of the progress of the investigation into the complaint and of any outcomes.

8.7 If dissatisfied with the outcome an appeal can be made to the Principal of the College who will review the complaint or nominate a senior manager to review the complaint.

8.8 In any subsequent investigation by the Equality Commission, the College will co-operate fully, providing access in a timely manner to any relevant documentation that the Equality Commission may require.

8.9 Similarly, the College will co-operate fully with any investigation by the Equality Commission under sub-paragraph 11 (1) (b) of Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

8.10 The College will make all efforts to implement promptly and in full any recommendations arising out of any Commission investigation.

Chapter 9 Publication of our equality scheme (Schedule 9 4. (3) (c))

9.1 The College's equality scheme is available in print form and alternative formats from:

Fiona McDowell
Northern Regional College
2 Coleraine Road
Ballymoney
BT53 6BP
Telephone Number: 028 2766 0411
Mobile: 07971824334
E-mail: equality@nrc.ac.uk

9.2 Our equality scheme is also available on our website at:
www.nrc.ac.uk

9.3 The following arrangements are in place for the publication in a timely manner of our equality scheme to ensure equality of access:

- We will make every effort to communicate widely the existence of our equality scheme. This may include a press release, advertisement in the press, through internet and intranet, publications, posters, induction materials, prospectus and information leaflets
- We will email a link to our approved equality scheme to our consultees on our consultation lists. Other consultees without e-mail will be notified by letter that the scheme is available on request. We will respond to requests for the equality scheme in alternative formats in a timely manner, usually within 10 working days.
- Our equality scheme can be made available on request in alternative formats such as Easy Read, Braille, large print, audio formats (CD, mp3, DAISY) and in minority languages to meet the needs of those not fluent in English.

9.4 For a list of our stakeholders and consultees please see Appendix 3 of the equality scheme.

Chapter 10 Review of our equality scheme (Schedule 9 8. (3))

10.1 As required by Schedule 9 paragraph 8 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 we will conduct a thorough review of this equality scheme. This review will take place either within five years of submission of this equality scheme to the Equality Commission or within a shorter timescale to allow alignment with the review of other planning cycles.

The review will evaluate the effectiveness of our scheme in relation to the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties relevant to our functions in Northern Ireland.

10.2 In undertaking this review we will take cognisance of the guidance issued by the Equality Commission. A report of this review will be made public and sent to the Equality Commission.

Appendix 1 Organisational chart

To view the Colleges Senior Management Team structure please visit <https://www.nrc.ac.uk/corporate/missions-and-values>

Appendix 2 Example groups relevant to the Section 75 categories for Northern Ireland purposes

Please note, this list is for illustration purposes only, it is not exhaustive.

Category	Example groups
Religious belief	Buddhist; Catholic; Hindu; Jewish; Muslims, people of no religious belief; Protestants; Sikh; other faiths. For the purposes of Section 75, the term “religious belief” is the same definition as that used in the <i>Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order</i> ⁷ . Therefore, “religious belief” also includes any <i>perceived</i> religious belief (or perceived lack of belief) and, in employment situations only, it also covers any “ <i>similar philosophical belief</i> ”.
Political opinion ⁸	Nationalist generally; Unionists generally; members/supporters of other political parties.
Racial group	Black people; Chinese; Indians; Pakistanis; people of mixed ethnic background; Polish; Roma; Travellers; White people.
Men and women generally	Men (including boys); Trans-gendered people; Transsexual people; women (including girls).
Marital status	Civil partners or people in civil partnerships; divorced people; married people; separated people; single people; widowed people.
Age	Children and young people; older people.
Persons with a disability	Persons with disabilities as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
Persons with dependants	Persons with personal responsibility for the care of a child; for the care of a person with a disability; or the care of a dependant older person.
Sexual orientation	Bisexual people; heterosexual people; gay or lesbian people.

⁷ See Section 98 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which states: “*In this Act... “political opinion” and “religious belief” shall be construed in accordance with Article 2(3) and (4) of the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998.*”

⁸ *ibid*

Appendix 3 List of consultees
(Schedule 9 4. (2) (a))

This consultation list is indicative and not exhaustive. It is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant to our functions and policies.

Age (older and younger people)

Age NI
Barnardo's
Extra Care
Include Youth
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People
Youth Link NI

Dependants

Carers NI
Family Support NI
Home Start
Parenting NI

Disability

Action on Hearing Loss
Action Mental Health
Autism NI
Disability Action
Guide Dogs for the Blind
MENCAP
National Deaf Children's Society
NI Dyslexia Society
Inspire
Praxis Care
Royal National Institute for the Blind
The Cedar Foundation

Education

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
Education Authority
Libraries NI
Ofqual (NI)
Stranmillis University College
Ulster University
Queens University
Belfast Metropolitan College
North West Regional College
Southern Regional College
South Eastern Regional College
South West College

Equality and Human Rights

Committee on the Administration of Justice
Equality Coalition
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Gender

Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network
Women's Resource & Development Agency
Women's Aid
SAIL NI
Transgender NI

Good relations

Co-Operation Ireland
Labour Relations Agency
Northern Ireland Community Relations Council
NI Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)

Political

Alliance Party
Democratic Unionist Party
Social Democratic and Labour Party
Sinn Fein
Ulster Unionist Party
Green Party in Northern Ireland
Traditional Unionist Voice
People Before Profit

Public Authorities

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Mid Ulster District Council
Northern Health and Social Care Trust
Department for the Economy
Police Service of Northern Ireland
Probation Board for Northern Ireland

Race

African & Caribbean Support Organisation NI
An Munia Tober
Bryson Intercultural
Chinese Welfare Association
Craigavon Traveller Support Committee
Indian Community Centre
NI Community of Refugees & Asylum Seekers Northern Ireland Council
Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association

Religious belief

Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum

Sexual orientation

Cara-Friend
The Rainbow Project
Gay & Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland

Unions

National Associations of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)
National Education Union (NEU)

National Union of Students (NUS)
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)
Unison
Unite the Union
University and College Union (UCU)

Appendix 4 Timetable for measures proposed
(Schedule 9 4.(3) (b))

Yearly

Equality Scheme Ref	Action	Responsible Person
Foreward and 1.3	Commit the necessary resources in terms of people, time and money to comply with Section 75 statutory duties and implement equality scheme.	Principal
Foreward And 5.4	Deliver a programme of communication and training for staff and board members on s75 obligations and equality scheme commitments.	Equality Officer
2.7	Integrate objectives and targets relating to the statutory duties into strategic and operational business plans	Principal
2.8	Monitor staff job descriptions to ensure they reflect their obligations to the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties and implementation of the equality scheme.	Equality Officer
2.9	Monitor staff reporting of equality examples through SER process to ensure that suitable examples are provided.	Quality Manager/ Equality Officer
2.11; 2.12	Draft and submit the annual report on progress to the Equality Commission by 31 August each year and post report on website	Equality Officer
2.14	Reference Equality in our Corporate Development Plan	Senior Leadership Team
2.15	Review Action Plan annually in line with corporate plan	Principal
3.1	Consult on EQIAs	Lead Policy Person with advice from Equality officer
3.4	Review consultation lists annually	Equality Officer
4.23	Publish screening results as per commitments	Equality Officer
4.28	Monitor policies with an adverse impact	Lead Policy Person
4.29	Review equality monitoring reports to inform management decisions.	Senior Management Team.
4.32	Publish monitoring results	Equality Officer
5.3	Take forward training actions as stated in Equality Scheme	Equality Officer
5.7	Monitor the effectiveness of equality training.	Equality Officer
6.1	Review the accessibility of the information provided by the College	Marketing & Communications, Student Services, Equality Officer
6.5	Continuously review website is accessible and the information posted on the website.	Head of IT, Head of Marketing & Communications

		and Head of Student Services
6.8	Monitor access to information and services	Quality Manager, Student Services, Marketing & Communications, Equality Officer
8.	Communicate complaints process and ensure process is accessible	Equality Officer
10	Review Equality Scheme	Equality Officer

Appendix 5 Glossary of terms

Action plan

A plan which sets out actions a public authority will take to implement its Section 75 statutory duties. It is a mechanism for the realisation of measures to achieve equality outcomes for the Section 75 equality and good relations categories.

Action measures and outcomes

Specific measures to promote equality and good relations for the relevant Section 75 and good relations categories, linked to achievable outcomes, which should be realistic and timely.

Adverse impact

Where a Section 75 category has been affected differently by a policy and the effect is less favourable, it is known as adverse impact. If a policy has an adverse impact on a Section 75 category, a public authority must consider whether or not the adverse impact is unlawfully discriminatory. In either case a public authority must take measures to redress the adverse impact, by considering mitigating measures and/or alternative ways of delivering the policy.

Affirmative action

In general terms, affirmative action can be defined as being anything consistent with the legislation which is necessary to bring about positive change. It is a phrase used in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (NI) 1998 to describe lawful action that is aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and fair participation in employment between members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.

Consultation

In the context of Section 75, consultation is the process of asking those affected by a policy (i.e., service users, staff, and the general public) for their views on how the policy could be implemented more effectively to promote equality of opportunity across the 9 categories. Different circumstances will call for different types of consultation. Consultations could, for example, include meetings, focus groups, surveys and questionnaires.

Discrimination

The anti-discrimination laws prohibit the following forms of discrimination:

- Direct discrimination
- Indirect Discrimination
- Disability Discrimination
- Victimisation
- Harassment

Brief descriptions of these above terms follow:

Direct discrimination

This generally occurs where a public authority treats a person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) another person, in the same or similar circumstances, on one or more of the statutory non-discrimination grounds. A decision or action that is directly discriminatory will normally be unlawful unless: (a) in an age discrimination case, the decision can be objectively justified, or (b) in any other case, the public authority can rely on a statutory exception that permits it – such as a *genuine occupational requirement exception*; or, a *positive action exception* which permits an employer to use “welcoming statements” or to take other lawful positive

action to encourage participation by under-represented or otherwise disadvantaged groups.

Indirect discrimination

The definition of this term varies across some of the anti-discrimination laws, but indirect discrimination generally occurs where a public authority applies to all persons a particular provision, criterion or practice, but which is one that has the effect of placing people who share a particular equality characteristic (e.g. the same sex, or religious belief, or race) at a particular disadvantage compared to other people. A provision, criterion or practice that is indirectly discriminatory will normally be unlawful unless (a) it can be objectively justified, or (b) the public authority can rely on a statutory exception that permits it.

Disability discrimination

In addition to direct discrimination and victimisation and harassment, discrimination against disabled people may also occur in two other ways: namely, (a) *disability-related discrimination*, and (b) *failure to comply with a duty to make reasonable adjustments*.

(a) *Disability-related discrimination* generally occurs where a public authority, without lawful justification, and for a reason which relates to a disabled person's disability, treats that person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) other people to whom that reason does not (or, would not) apply.

(b) *Failure to comply with a duty to make reasonable adjustments*:

One of the most notable features of the disability discrimination legislation is that in prescribed circumstances it imposes a duty on employers, service providers and public authorities to take such steps as are reasonable to remove or reduce particular disadvantages experienced by disabled people in those circumstances.

Victimisation

This form of discrimination generally occurs where a public authority treats a person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) another person, in the same or similar circumstances, because the person has previously exercised his/her rights under the anti-discrimination laws, or has assisted another person to do so. Victimisation cannot be justified and is always unlawful.

Harassment

Harassment generally occurs where a person is subjected to unwanted conduct that is related to a non-discrimination ground with the purpose, or which has the effect, of violating their dignity or of creating for them an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment cannot be justified and is always unlawful.

Equality impact assessment

The mechanism underpinning Section 75, where existing and proposed policies are assessed in order to determine whether they have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity for the relevant Section 75 categories. Equality impact assessments require the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Equality of opportunity

The prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between people on grounds of characteristics including sex, marital status, age, disability, religious belief, political opinion, dependants, race and sexual orientation. The promotion of equality of opportunity entails more than the elimination of discrimination. It requires proactive measures to be taken to secure equality of opportunity between the categories identified under Section 75.

Equality scheme

A document which outlines a public authority's arrangements for complying with its Section 75 obligations. An equality scheme must include an outline of the public authority's arrangements for carrying out consultations, screening, equality impact assessments, monitoring, training and arrangements for ensuring access to information and services.

Good relations

Although not defined in the legislation, the Commission has agreed the following working definition of good relations: 'the growth of relations and structures for Northern Ireland that acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society, and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms'.

Mainstreaming equality

The integration of equal opportunities principles, strategies and practices into the every day work of public authorities from the outset. In other words, mainstreaming is the process of ensuring that equality considerations are built into the policy development process from the beginning, rather than being bolted on at the end. Mainstreaming can help improve methods of working by increasing a public authority's accountability, responsiveness to need and relations with the public. It can bring added value at many levels.

Mitigation of adverse impact

Where an equality impact assessment reveals that a particular policy has an adverse impact on equality of opportunity, a public authority must consider ways of delivering the policy outcomes which have a less adverse effect on the relevant Section 75 categories; this is known as mitigating adverse impact.

Monitoring

Monitoring consists of continuously scrutinising and evaluating a policy to assess its impact on the Section 75 categories. Monitoring must be sensitive to the issues associated with human rights and privacy. Public authorities should seek advice from consultees and Section 75 representative groups when setting up monitoring systems. Monitoring consists of the collection of relevant information and evaluation of policies. It is not solely about the collection of data, it can also take the form of regular meetings and reporting of research undertaken. Monitoring is not an end in itself but provides the data for the next cycle of policy screening.

Northern Ireland Act

The Northern Ireland Act, implementing the Good Friday Agreement, received Royal Assent on 19 November 1998. Section 75 of the Act created the statutory equality duties.

Policy

The formal and informal decisions a public authority makes in relation to carrying out its duties. Defined in the New Oxford English Dictionary as 'a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government party, business or individual'. In the context of Section 75, the term **policies** covers all the ways in which a public authority carries out or proposes to carry out its functions relating to Northern Ireland. Policies include unwritten as well as written policies.

Qualitative data

Qualitative data refers to the experiences of individuals from their perspective, most often with less emphasis on numbers or statistical analysis. Consultations are more likely to yield qualitative than quantitative data.

Quantitative data

Quantitative data refers to numbers, typically derived from either a population in general or samples of that population. This information is often analysed by either using descriptive statistics, which consider general profiles, distributions and trends in the data, or inferential statistics, which are used to determine 'significance' either in relationships or differences in the data.

Screening

The procedure for identifying which policies will be subject to equality impact assessment, and how these equality impact assessments will be prioritised. The purpose of screening is to identify the policies which are likely to have a minor/major impact on equality of opportunity so that greatest resources can be devoted to improving these policies. Screening requires a systematic review of existing and proposed policies.

Schedule 9

Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 sets out detailed provisions for the enforcement of the Section 75 statutory duties, including an outline of what should be included in an equality scheme.

Section 75

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act provides that each public authority is required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:-

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status and sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to these obligations, each public authority in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Section 75 investigation

An investigation carried out by the Equality Commission, under Schedule 9 of the NI Act 1998, arising from the failure of a public authority to comply with the commitments set out in its approved equality scheme. There are two types of Commission investigation, these are as follows:

1. An investigation of a complaint by an individual who claims to have been directly affected by the failure of a public authority to comply with its approved equality scheme;
2. An investigation initiated by the Commission, where it believes that a public authority may have failed to comply with its approved equality sch

Appendix 6 5 Year Equality Improvement Plan 2022 - 2027

The Equality Commission recommended that the college take a systematic approach to examining our functions and how these relate to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. As a result of this process the College has drawn up this Equality Improvement Plan which identifies a range of actions/ action measures which will enable the college to address inequalities identified through internal and external research. The College will monitor progress on the delivery of this Equality Improvement Plan in conjunction with our Equality Scheme.

Action	Timescale	Responsible person/ Department	Outcome/ Measure	Equality Category
Monitor, review and utilise annual workforce and student data to inform policy development and marketing.	Annually by June	Head of HR and OD Head of Head of Performance and Planning	Improve identification of underrepresented groups. FEMR Article 55 CDR Return Learner Surveys Screening of policies	All
Further embed equality and diversity into the College and Curriculum through awareness raising and promotion.	Ongoing	Head of HR and OD Head of Teaching and Learning Excellence Head of Student Experience	Clear objectives and targets within curriculum QIPs. Self-Evaluation Reviews Exit Surveys Compliments & Complaints Student Surveys/ Focus groups Quality Improvement Plans	All
Recruit a Diverse student population.	Ongoing	Curriculum Heads of Department Head of Marketing and Communication Head of Student Experience	Have a diverse student population, impacting positively on everyone's learning and development.	All

		Head of HR and OD	Social Inclusion Programmes (College Connect) Training for Success/Traineeship/ Apprenticeship NI/ High Level Apprenticeship WAPP WSTEM	
Further develop student support mechanisms to reduce barriers to education and learning.	Ongoing	Head of Student Experience Head of HR and OD	Increase access to education and learning whilst promoting an environment which accepts and understands diversity. Education Support Northern Plus LGBTQIA+ Support Mental Health support Student Union Officers Digital Accessibility Carers support Student Finance	All

Monitor, Review and Update of Disability Action Plan.	Annually	Head of HR and OD Head of Student Experience	Improve college services, facilities, and buildings for disabled people Autism Friendly College Accessibility Audit Disability Confident Employer JAM Mental Health Charter Health & Wellbeing programmes Student involvement in internal Working Groups/Committees AccessAble Guides	All
Provide a range of Equality and Diversity training to all staff and students.	Ongoing	Head of HR and OD Head of Student Experience	Increase awareness of Equality and Diversity and compliance with policies. Induction for staff and students Tutorial programme Staff modules on - Disability Awareness/ SENDO Equality & Diversity Dignity at Work	All
Grow and enhance relations with local community groups	Annually	Head of Marketing and Communication Head of Student Experience Head of HR and OD	Increase and build upon community partnerships Community Education Schools Partnerships Good for Me Good for FE project Black FE Leadership	All

			LGBT Groups Disability Groups Carers Groups Volunteering Student Union	
Monitor, Evaluate and Review Equality Improvement Plan	Annually	Head of HR and OD	Update and review of action plan as necessary. Annual Progress Report Equality Action Plan Disability Action plan	All