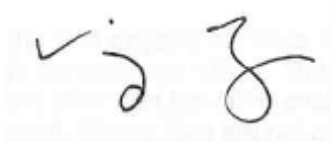
The Electoral Commission

Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties

Annual Progress Report

Contact:

• Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and Equality Scheme	Name: Julie Howell Telephone: Click or tap here to enter text. Email: JHowell@electoralcommission.org.uk
• Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Action Plan	As above ☒ Name: Click or tap here to enter text. Telephone: Click or tap here to enter text. Email: Click or tap here to enter text.
Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:	Northern Ireland Equality Scheme Click or tap here to enter text.
Signature: 	Vijay Rangarajan Chief Executive

This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between April 2025 and March 2026

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

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

1 In 2025-26, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

The Electoral Commission is an independent body established by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (The Act) and set up by the UK Parliament. We are accountable to three Governments by committing to Corporate Plans for each Parliament's term (excluding NI where electoral law is not devolved and remains reserved to Westminster). We regulate party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections. We work to support a healthy democracy, where elections and referendums are based on our principles of trust, participation, and no undue influence.

Our five-year Corporate Plan 2025-2030 embeds EDI further by aiming to overcome barriers to access and engagement, including improving voter information and democratic education. It embeds inclusion directly into the Commission's vision and values, positioning 'including everyone' as a core organisational principle. This creates a clearer mandate for accessible services, identifying barriers and inclusive behaviours across our culture, policy development and communications.

Our focus is to identify and remove barriers that prevent people from engaging in the democratic process. This work is particularly necessary as the UK Government plans to introduce votes at 16 throughout the UK, which already applies to devolved elections in Scotland and Wales.

Underpinning this important work is our staff, and it is essential we prioritise and invest in supporting and developing our staff, maintaining our rich diversity and creating an inclusive culture where people can thrive. As our current workforce is growing, we strive to be an employer of choice - attracting, retaining and developing diverse talent from across the UK.

In recognition of the progress made during the period, we were announced as finalists in the Engage Awards 2025 for the best EDI strategy award.

Examples of key policy developments include –

Implementation of the EDI strategy and NI Equality Scheme 2022-2027

The Commission prioritises Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) with three key strategic EDI objectives outlined below -

- Ensure that everyone who is eligible to participate in the democratic process can do so.

- Embed EDI in everything we do and treat our customers and partners fairly and with respect and have transparent decision-making.
- Provide equality of opportunity for everyone – treat staff fairly and with respect.

Responsibilities and reporting to fulfilling our Section 75 obligations

- The EDI team carried out EDI roadshows across Directorates to ensure staff are aware of their role in implementing the scheme.
- We have an EDI specific session in both our new joiner induction programme (reaching 80 permanent staff since April 2025) and management training, where our equality duties are explained.
- Regular meetings are held with action owners who are aware of their responsibilities within the EDI Action Plan, as it is now more meaningful, action-orientated, evidence-based and outcome-focused.
- We have two EDI working groups to ensure evidence-based decisions are made with regards to delivering our EDI plan and improving equality outcomes. The Executive Team (ET) and People, Culture and Remuneration (PCR) Committee receive quarterly progress reports on EDI.

Arrangements for assessing impact of policies /screening

- We have an equality impact assessment information page on our intranet, including guidance on the screening process, which all staff can access.
- The EDI team offer one-to one training on EQIAs, including why they are important, how to complete them, and provide appropriate support and guidance to policy owners.
- We are building on this work by reviewing and summarising guidance into an accessible, shorter format. We are also creating an e-learning module to complement this and support staff through assessing, completing, monitoring and updating EQIAs. This will be reported on in next year's report.

Learning and development of staff regarding our equality duties

- We have continued to invest in learning and development of our staff and the EDI and Learning, Culture and Capability teams have collaborated to ensure there is an enhanced offering of EDI training in this period.
- We have significantly increased the number of EDI-related training opportunities:
    - 2024: 8
    - 2025: 10
    - 2026 (so far): 25
- We collaborate with partner organisations such as Inclusive Employers, RNID or Stop Hate UK, and offer 'Learning Hours' and corporate training. We collect attendance data through our Learning Management System, and MS Teams. This only includes attendees who attend live, but we record everything where

possible and share in internal communications so staff can watch independently. This especially supports flexible working patterns and part-time workers. We can't collect data on who watches recordings.

- From our annual staff survey results, there has been a continuous upwards trend in staff who feel there is appropriate EDI training in place:
    - 87% in 2025 vs. 78% in 2024 and 47% in 2023.

Ensuring public access to information in NI

- In Northern Ireland our regulatory remit covers the electoral process comprising of the following elections;
    - Northern Ireland Assembly
    - UK Parliamentary and,
    - Local Government/ Council
- There were no Northern Ireland elections held in the reporting period, however planning has already begun for the combined elections to be held in May 2027, as these will be more challenging to deliver.
- We maintain a close working relationship with the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to support them in their role as Registration and Returning Officer for the region, alongside staff at the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.
- We ensure that stakeholders contribute to all aspects of the Commission's work in NI such as drafting the code of conduct for candidates. Key stakeholders include elected members and officials of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the UK Government, local authorities, relevant public sector departments including the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and voluntary bodies.
- We lead on election-related communications activity in Northern Ireland and public awareness information, working with a range of partner organisations across NI to promote voter registration and education. We also handle enquiries from the public and relevant organisations on electoral matters.
- The UK government has introduced the Representation of the People Bill. Some provisions in the bill will impact how voters, candidates and campaigners in Northern Ireland take part in elections.
- Many of the changes set out in the bill are important for making elections in Northern Ireland more accessible. They should strengthen the resilience and integrity of Northern Ireland's electoral system, tackle many of the threats it faces and improve how elections work for voters, campaigners, parties and administrators.
- Lowering the voting age to 16 for all UK elections will give an additional 1.7 million 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote. This would include around 50,000 16-and-17-year-olds in Northern Ireland.
- We work with the Northern Ireland Department of Education and the Department for the Economy to ensure young people get the support they need to develop their understanding of democracy. This will enable them to fully participate in elections.

- Our Improving Voter Education project is part of our broader commitment to ensure all young people are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate meaningfully in democratic life. To inform this work, we are conducting new research with teachers in Northern Ireland about their experience of teaching democratic education and gather data about their concerns.
- Priorities in NI during the period include using our position and influence to work with partners and stakeholders to address key issues
    - Mitigating candidate abuse (particularly for those most at risk – female candidates, ethnic minority candidates, disabled candidates, LGBT+ candidates)
    - Use of co-option of candidates (instead of holding a by-election, the nominating officer of a political party fills the vacancy) which risks removing democratic choice from voters
    - Promote canvass reform in advance of the required 2030 canvass
    - Aim to enhance the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register in NI
    - Increase political literacy with young voters

Examples of key service delivery developments include –

Corporate plan priorities -

Modernising the electoral system

- We jointly convened the Electoral Coordination and Advisory Board (ECAB), which brings together returning officers from across the UK, as well as representatives from the UK, Scottish, Welsh governments, the Association of Electoral Administrators, SOLACE, the Electoral Management Board in Scotland and the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland. ECAB's role is to provide strategic advice about the delivery of elections and live monitoring during election periods.
- In support of our equality obligations to promote equality of opportunity, the Board specifically sought to identify and take forward actions to help address challenges around resilience and capacity, including contingency planning, polling station staffing and suppliers.
- We continue to monitor the impact in respect of the Representation of the People Bill, including in NI. We are continuing to develop the EQIA assessments for the UK reform work as we get further clarity from the UK Government on their proposals. These will be updated as further information is obtained and signed off as part of the project documentation process.
- The bill also includes provisions to enable automatic or direct registration. As part of this, electoral registration officers would have a duty to register eligible voters without waiting for them to submit an application form. This could improve participation by removing a barrier to voting and making it more accessible. There are also opt-out provisions in the bill to protect vulnerable people who may not wish to be automatically registered.

- The aim is to improve the current system by linking electoral registration to other public services and using automated or more automated registration processes. This would help get people registered, promoting equality of opportunity reducing barriers to registration and alleviate the workload for electoral administrators.
- For May 2026 elections in GB, we introduced a more user-friendly candidate spending return in response to stakeholder feedback on accessibility and clearer legal guidance. We are now gathering feedback on the revised form and will make further improvements as needed to assist with future elections in NI.

Safeguarding and protecting the system

- In the period we published a new code of conduct for campaigners, developed jointly by the Commission and Electoral Office NI. This provided a guide for campaigners on what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour at polling stations and in the community in the lead-up to polling day.
- We consulted with all registered political parties in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Assembly Parties Panel, the Information Commissioner's Office, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Office on these proposals.
- We met with CEO of 50:50 Parliament (promoting participation of females in politics) to discuss candidate abuse and intimidation, updating them on our work to gather candidate experiences, our post poll reporting and recommendations we've made.
- To help tackle the issue of abuse and intimidation of candidates we have worked with partners, including the Jo Cox Foundation, the National Police Chiefs' Council, the College of Policing, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland to ensure that guidance is relevant and appropriate support is in place for those who are subjected to such harassment.

Leading an informed debate about the future of elections

- Preparing for the Representation of the People Bill impacting people in NI – key measures include
    - Votes at 16 – strong focus of our work streams promoting youth democratic education and engaging young people earlier.
    - Automatic registration – would significantly change how voters engage with the electoral process. It would also facilitate better quality of voter registration data.
    - Political Finance and Enforcement – changes to political finance laws which will have particular ramifications in Northern Ireland, and proposals for further enforcement powers of the Commission.
    - Voter ID changes – amendments across the UK may impact voter-ID criteria in NI.

- As set out in our corporate plan, voters are at the heart of our democracy and central to our work. Everything we do is to help people trust, value and take part in elections.
- We will examine the voter journey across all four nations, identifying barriers that exist and developing evidence-based recommendations to address, reduce, or mitigate those barriers. We will drive improvements through three key approaches:
    - Improving and adapting existing services and support.
    - Developing new resources and tools to better support voters.
    - Influencing policy, practice and partnership working through targeted recommendations and stakeholder engagement.
- Our corporate plan will also look to develop measures to assess the health of the democratic system and review whether intersectionality produces additional impacts.

Strengthening the Electoral Commission

- As part of our 'plan for growth' strategy we prioritised recruitment outside of our London office. As a result, the NI team grew from 8 FTE staff to 17 FTE staff in the period and continues to grow, which has meant expanding our offices and deepening understanding of the context in Northern Ireland across our functions.
- Collaborated with Learning, Culture and Capability team to continue with a yearly training plan: in light of the number of incidents involving violence against women and girls reported in the UK, but in particular within NI we rolled out Domestic Violence training for managers; Social mobility inclusion (guidance created on this); Stop Hate training was arranged following the notable increased levels of hate crime, including in NI, to provide additional support to staff who may experience it or witness it.
- 'Let's talk donations' training to provide context to legislation on political party finance and guidance including history in NI, relevant to our work.
- Internal Working Group helped in the delivery of our EDI Action Plan to ensure evidence-based approach is taken regarding initiatives and support available for staff.
- Increased staff numbers across the UK, increasing from 221 to 296 staff within the reporting period providing flexible working opportunities, including home working for new starters.
- New guidance on maintaining contact with prospective employees during long notice periods aimed to strengthen belonging from before day one and improve candidate retention. This supported a more inclusive recruitment experience by helping future colleagues feel welcomed, valued and connected ahead of joining.
- 80 staff have attended the induction in the reporting period with a number reporting to have joined our staff networks and signing up with Inclusive Employers, as a result.

- The 2025 People Survey results created an important mechanism for understanding staff experiences of inclusion, wellbeing, bullying and harassment, leadership and development. By gathering anonymous staff feedback at scale, it strengthened the evidence base for targeted action to improve workplace culture and EDI outcomes.
    - 'Committed to creating a diverse culture' up from 82% to 88% between 2024 and 2025
    - 'The Commission has a positive culture' up from 64% to 74% between 2024 and 2025.

- Responding to 2024 staff survey feedback from November 2025, we rolled out a pilot of arranging set start dates for new starts to create a more consistent and inclusive onboarding experience. By aligning induction, payroll and practical setup, the approach aimed to improve new starter experience, reduce avoidable barriers and reinforce the Commission's reputation as an organised and inclusive employer.
- Also in November 2025, the introduction of a new Employee Assistance Programme expanded access to wellbeing support for all staff, including counselling and digital wellbeing tools. This strengthened the Commission's wellbeing offer and contributed to a more inclusive culture by improving access to support for colleagues with different personal, financial and mental health needs.

Supporting voters and increasing participation across the UK

- Welcome to Your Vote Week was held nationally in March 2026. The event continued the Commission's work to engage young people in democracy through partnerships, research and region-specific activity across the UK. By targeting groups who may be under-represented in democratic participation and amplifying youth voice, the campaign supported more inclusive civic engagement and helped remove barriers for future voters.
- Welcome to Your Vote Week achieved substantial national reach:
    - 700,000+ young people engaged
    - 30,000+ educators and stakeholders supported
    - 1.3 million+ digital impressions
    - 60+ campaign partners
    - 440 participating organisations and individuals
    - 1 million+ reach through the Dismiss campaign

*Estimates based on survey responses, partner feedback, and modelling of school engagement. Figures represent overall reach and may include varying levels of engagement.

- Impact data for the UK indicates this work is strengthening participation: 83% of young people said they were more likely to register to vote and 78% reported a better understanding of why voting matters.

- We commissioned delivery partners across the UK to strengthen insight into the experiences of underrepresented groups, including LGBTQ+ people, visually impaired people and those with Special Educational Needs. A targeted approach has also been introduced to address a previous evidence gap relating to the Deaf community.
- Procurement of projects delivered by UK partners aimed at supporting under-registered groups, including those with protected characteristics, renters, people experiencing homelessness, disabled voters and the wider public via digital engagement in November 2025. Projects launched in early 2026 and will run until the end of the corporate plan period.

Supporting voters and increasing participation in Northern Ireland

- Targeted partnership work strengthened engagement with underrepresented groups and supported more inclusive participation. The **Democratic Education Forum (DEF)** is one of the most significant pieces of partnership work
    - Established and co-chaired the Northern Ireland Democratic Education Forum, bringing together over 50 organisations from the statutory, education, youth, community and civil society sectors to strengthen democratic participation and political literacy. Membership includes organisations such as CCEA, Department of Education, NICCY, NI Youth Forum, Include Youth, Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University, Electoral Office NI and a range of voluntary sector organisations. The Forum provides a mechanism for cross-sector collaboration, evidence sharing and coordinated preparation for future electoral reforms including votes at 16.
    - Delivered school assemblies, teacher training sessions, work experience opportunities and voting simulations to increase democratic knowledge and participation among young people in Northern Ireland.
- Targeted youth engagement in Northern Ireland through school assemblies, engagement events, teacher training and school-based activity significantly extended reach, including over 180 young people and educators, as well as engaging with more than 700 attendees at SistersIn celebration event and 1,140 primary pupils through live lessons on voting and having a voice.
- The NI team met with the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Include Youth, Diverse Youth and the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to explore industry views on implementation of votes at 16.
- Met NI Education Minister in June to discuss education and political literacy and votes at 16 for young people.
- The **Improving Democratic Education Project** evidences both equality and good relations outcomes, highlighting collaborative work with partners to ensure young people have greater access to democratic education and opportunities to engage with the democratic process.
    - Worked in partnership with NI Youth Forum and J2e to progress the Improving Democratic Education Project, supporting the development

of curriculum-linked democratic education resources for schools and educators in Northern Ireland in preparation for future electoral reforms.

- In Northern Ireland, youth engagement activity across a range of events reached more than 880 young people and educators, extending the reach of democratic participation messaging.
- Regular meetings are held with the Northern Ireland Assembly Parties' Panel (NIAPP) - meetings take place every quarter and EDI has been added as a standing item to the agenda with guest speakers invited to discuss a relevant EDI topic every meeting. This provides the opportunity to increase awareness of relevant and emerging issues with the NI Electoral Office and Political Parties in NI. Examples include –
    - Chris Quinn, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People, attended the October NIAPP to discuss votes at 16 and democratic education.
    - Mencap NI provided insights and shared lived experience of voter journey. They highlighted the need for improvements in easy-read manifestos and expressed their willingness to support parties in enhancing engagement with individuals with learning disabilities.
    - CEO from 50:50 NI attended NIAPP at end of June, to discuss candidate abuse and intimidation and recommendations we have made.
- We are preparing for language provision in Northern Ireland in light of the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022. Although the Commission will not be subject to the language standards introduced by the Act, we have undertaken a scoping exercise to understand good practice, practical implications and stakeholder expectations for example our partnership and education work. Engaged with the following stakeholders -
    - Information Commissioners Office
    - Ofcom
    - Foras Na Gaeilge
    - Ulster Scots Agency
    - Conradh na Gaeilge
    - Belfast City Council
    - National Trust
    - Government of Ireland's Department of Rural and Community Development and Gaeltacht

Accessible registration and voting

- Our corporate plan ensures accessible registration and voting is at the forefront of the Commission's external work. This includes increasing voter engagement and removing barriers, ensuring disabled voters can physically access polling stations, and ensuring those who move frequently can access their poll cards.
- Undertook targeted engagement with organisations in Northern Ireland representing disabled voters and those with accessibility needs, including Mencap, RNIB, Guide Dogs NI, Angel Eyes NI, RNID, Diverse Youth NI, Barnardos

and others to better understand barriers to democratic participation and inform future voter information, accessibility planning and partnership activity ahead of the 2027 elections.

- We sustained strong accessibility compliance and commissioned the next WCAG 2.2 AA audit. We are also reviewing the website through an improvement project to sharpen priorities, strengthen governance and support more accessible user journeys.
- Accessibility remains embedded in partner discussions, helping ensure issues and insights continue to inform delivery of projects.
- No significant accessibility issues were identified during the election period in GB or through performance standard reviews, indicating that current support arrangements are operating effectively.
- Neurodiversity training delivered for Public Information Team as well as those who engage with members of the public on the phone. This was in response to feedback we had received from the team about wanting to feel more confident in offering appropriate support.
- Advice given to the Voter Forms Team to ensure all their documents are accessible for those who wish to use them with various accessibility devices or long-term conditions, for example ensuring they are accessible to screen-readers or using best practice to improve readability for dyslexic individuals.

2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2025-26 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

Objective 1 - EDI in the democratic process

Outcomes	**Activities**
To maximise the number of people who can participate in the democratic process by understanding the issues and barriers people encounter throughout the democratic process.	• EDI is positioned as a core delivery principle within the UK Corporate Plan, helping to ensure policy, legal and communications work better reflects the diversity of voters across the UK. • This includes strengthening engagement with under-registered communities, informing our proactive approach to identity and culture legislation in Northern Ireland, and embedding EDI into related projects to remove barriers to democratic participation.
To improve accessibility for voters and raise awareness of support available.	• Research shows that awareness of the support that is available at polling stations has not changed. We have now published (March 2026) an accessibility at polling stations page on our website which includes a bespoke local authority postcode lookup tool to enable those requiring additional support a swift route to identifying the right person to talk to: Accessibility at polling stations | Electoral Commission • We sustained strong accessibility compliance and commissioned the next WCAG 2.2 AA audit. We are also reviewing the website through an improvement project to sharpen priorities, strengthen governance and support more accessible user journeys. • We published updated accessibility guidance in December 2025 following statutory consultation in 2025. Guidance for Returning Officers - Assistance with voting for disabled voters, set standards and monitor the performance of Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) through our performance standards framework. This

	guidance is subject to judicial review and the Electoral Commission is defending the guidance.
To maximise the number of people who know how to register and vote.	• Used targeted channels: digital display, social media, paid search, print and Out of Home, with agency support and data-led channel planning. • Used partner roundtables with organisations including Race Equality Foundation, RNIB and United Response to identify channels used by key audiences.

Objective 2 – Embed EDI in everything we do and make changes, because of engagement with our stakeholders and partners.

To increase trust and confidence amongst under-represented groups of candidates, campaigners and parties in the electoral system	• Collaborated with various political parties and UK Police Forces to discuss candidate intimidation and provide adequate support measures for those most at risk, ie women and ethnically diverse candidates.

To ensure the contractors we use are committed to EDI	• NI team involvement in tender for new creative and media planning agency. This will help us ensure that EDI is a focus throughout our public awareness campaigns.
	• As part of improvements to our procurement process, we now incorporate cultural fit within quality evaluation criteria, assessing:
	  ○ Commitment to EDI
	  ○ Experience of working with diverse and underrepresented communities
	  ○ Inclusive workforce practices and safeguarding
	• We use structured method statement questions to evaluate how suppliers will embed inclusive practices in delivery, ensuring responses are evidence-based and contract-relevant

	• All criteria are designed to remain proportionate, transparent, and linked to contract subject matter, in line with procurement regulations. • We have introduced prompts to initiate equality impact screenings in the procurement and project management processes. This is an example how of the EDI action plan ensures joined up and systematic application across decision-making.

Objective 3 – Equality of Opportunity for all staff

To support equality of opportunity and foster good relations for staff	• The Commission has hosted corporate induction sessions for 80 permanent staff since April 2025 (this data excludes those who have onboarded and left the Commission within the same financial year as we no longer hold their training records). • The induction programme has an EDI section where the team updates new starters about our EDI obligations, including our NI Equality Scheme. • Reviewed menopause support for colleagues, helping to normalise conversations about menopause at work and strengthen peer support. This contributed to a more inclusive wellbeing culture by increasing visibility of menopause-related needs and connecting staff to existing policy support. • Learning at Work Week in April 2025 helped strengthen our inclusive culture by offering accessible virtual and in-person learning opportunities, supported by staff networks. This encouraged connection, belonging and inclusion as part of everyday learning and development. • EDI communication strategy implemented, and data monitored with over 8,500 views on EDI posts, over 1,750 likes and interactions recorded during the period on a range of topics shared by

	staff, demonstrating a culture of trust with significantly more staff coming forward to share their lived experiences, some examples - ○ '*Being a British Jew in 2025'* 315 views and 74 likes ○ *'Facing Alzheimer's: My Story and How You Can Help*' 127 views and 53 likes ○ *'Alzheimer's Awareness Month: My Nan's Story'* 84 views and 37 likes ○ *'Bisexuality, Pride Month, and Me'* 182 views and 35 likes ○ *'Hispanic Heritage Month: Celebrating the Contributions of Spanish and Portuguese speaking communities in the UK'* 132 views and 31 likes • The Commission significantly improved the quality of its workforce EDI data, increasing completion rates from around 50% to close to 90% across most categories following the HR system migration. This strengthened the evidence base for analysing inequalities, informed strategic action on areas such as pay gaps and progression, and supported more robust, transparent EDI reporting and decision-making. • Total staff completion rate is at 93% ○ Age: 100% (mandatory field) ○ Dependents: 83% ○ Disability: 90% ○ Ethnicity: 96% ○ Neurodivergence: 89% ○ Religion: 94% ○ Sex: 100% (mandatory field) ○ Sexual Orientation: 91% • The Executive Team assigned senior ownership for cross-cutting priorities, including staff survey action areas and staff networks. This strengthened governance and accountability for EDI-related improvement work, helping ensure that issues such as bullying and harassment, culture and staff voice

	remained visible and progressed at senior level. • Work began on co-producing an Inclusive Language Guide to improve the consistency, clarity and inclusivity of internal and external communications. By drawing on lived experience and colleague engagement, this initiative aimed to reduce accidental exclusion, support respectful communication and embed inclusive practice more systematically across the Commission, giving specific regard to NI. • A total of 21 training sessions related to EDI have been delivered during this period, this includes 7 sessions specifically delivered in response to staff feedback (197 staff in attendance for these sessions) and other sessions run by our partners (Inclusive employers, life and progress, Benenden) that we advertise and encourage attendance of. • Our two staff-led networks represent the diverse voices of marginalised groups and are thriving within the Commission, raising awareness of issues and barriers faced. • Each network has an Executive Sponsor to support and advocate for them at Executive level. • Took part in National Inclusion Week in September 2025 highlighting the progress made in recent years and in an article 'then and now' showed our plans for addressing issues raised via staff survey and insights from our networks. The post attracted 173 views with 26 likes.

3 Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes

☒ No (go to Q.4)

☐ Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

3a With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

3b What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)*

☐ As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

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

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

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

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

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes, organisation wide

☒ Yes, some departments/jobs

☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment

☐ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Every candidate is asked an EDI question in their interview and to help reduce unconscious bias and ensure all applicants are assessed solely on their skills, knowledge and experience, we use an anonymous recruitment process.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☒ Yes, organisation wide

☐ Yes, some departments/jobs

☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment

☐ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Our performance related pay scheme introduced in this period requires all staff to have an appropriate EDI objective. Objectives were written during this reporting period and will be monitored via our performance monitoring system.

6 In the 2025-26 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

- ☒ Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- ☒ Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- ☐ Yes, in some departments/jobs
- ☐ No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
- ☐ No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2025-26 report
- ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The revised EDI action plan and UK Corporate Plan have been developed with EDI objectives and performance measures in place. Reporting and progress is tracked as part of monitoring the delivery of our operational plans.

Equality action plans/measures

7 Within the 2025-26 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Actions ongoing:

Actions to commence:

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2025-26 reporting period *(points not identified in an appended plan)*:

N/A

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2025-26 reporting period, the following have been identified: *(tick all that apply)*

- ☒ Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
- ☒ Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- ☐ Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- ☐ Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

10 Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)*

☒ All the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

11 Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2025-26 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

Consultation on guidance for electoral administrators in summer 2025: this included early outreach to disability organisations, partners and electoral administrators, which was effective and improved the quality of the process; and the availability of accessible and alternative formats (Easy Read and BSL).

12 In the 2025-26 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently <u>used</u> by consultees**: *(tick all that apply)*

- ☒ 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/out of the consultation

☐ Internet discussions

☐ Telephone consultations

☐ Other *(please specify)*:

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

Responses mostly sent by email.

13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

[Insert link to any web pages where screening templates and/or other reports associated with Equality Scheme commitments are published]

https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/our-plans-priorities-and-spending/our-equality-screening-and-impact-assessments

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

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

3

- IT Service Desk System
- Wales Electoral Reform
- Electoral Administration Project Board

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2025-26:

1 Policy consultations conducted with **screening** assessment presented.

N/A Policy consultations conducted **with an equality impact assessment** (EQIA) presented.

N/A Consultations for an **EQIA** alone.

17 Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

Consultation on updated accessibility guidance for Returning Officers. Under the provisions of the Elections Act 2022, Returning Officers (ROs) are required to provide such equipment as is reasonable to enable or make it easier for disabled people to vote independently and in secret. The Commission is also required to provide guidance to support ROs in delivering these changes, which they must have regard to.

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

☐ Yes	☐ No concerns were raised	☐ No	☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

19 Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

20 From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☐ No, already taken place

☐ No, scheduled to take place at a later date ☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details:

21 In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

22 Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2025-26 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

N/A

23 Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

N/A

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

24 Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2025-26, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

Training to include awareness of the provisions of our Equality Scheme and conducting Equality Screenings. The following has been implemented -

- All relevant information/training about the Scheme and equality screenings have been included on the EDI pages on intranet.
- EDI team held three EDI roadshows across each directorate updating staff on both elements.
- Information on our statutory obligations is provided in staff induction programme with 80 new joiners in the period.

25 Please provide **any examples** of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

Data from EDI roadshows include – 88% of respondents understood what the primary purpose of an equality impact screening was after the session.

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

26 Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2025-26, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

We provide public information support via website, email, telephone and in accessible formats. We run an annual accessibility audit to assess the website against accessibility standards. This method uses both manual auditing with assistive technologies and automated auditing. We monitor accessibility year-round using an accessibility tool.

We provide information in a range of alternative formats on request and work in partnership with a range of organisations to reach more young people, disabled people and ethnically diverse communities.

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

27 How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2025-26?

Insert number here: 0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Section 3: Looking Forward

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

Our NI Equality Scheme was created in August 2022 and supported by the Equality Commission. A five-year review will be conducted in 2027.

29 Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

We will be developing an online training module in respect of equality impact screenings, which will allow us to better track data for this commitment.

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

- ☐ Employment
- ☒ Goods, facilities and services
- ☒ Legislative changes
- ☐ Organisational changes/ new functions
- ☐ Nothing specific, more of the same
- ☐ Other (please state):

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

1. Number of action measures for this **reporting period** that have been:

13	1	0
Fully achieved	Partially achieved	Not achieved

We have updated our Disability Action plan and incorporated activities into the revised EDI Action plan.

2. Please outline below details on all **actions that have been fully achieved** in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs[i]	Outcomes / Impact[ii]
Local[iii]	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Ensuring disability inclusion in our public awareness campaigns and ensuring our campaign materials reflect and represent positive images of disabled people	More disabled people are aware how to register to vote and participate in Elections. Advertising in respect of Voter Authority Certificate across print publications that have high readership numbers across our key audiences (e.g. Able, Enable, Ability Needs)

	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Appropriate advice is provided for voters to be able to cast their vote independently and in secret	To encourage more blind and partially sighted people to vote
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Co-created packs with our civil society partners to ensure tailored resources for key voter-facing resources in a range of accessible formats.	Resources provided included easy read, BSL, audio, braille and large print
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	We provide accessibility guidance to ensure polling stations are accessible for disabled people to vote. Returning Officers are required to take steps to assist disabled voters at the elections, but more needs to be done to raise awareness of what is available.	Consultation exercise complete. Updates to the guidance following statutory consultation in summer 2025, to align guidance for Senedd and Scottish Parliament elections, and publication of supporting resources for Returning Officers.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Committed to Disability Confident scheme – Employer status	The Electoral Commission is proud to be a Level 2 Disability Confident Employer. As part of this commitment, we aim to prioritise interviews for disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria listed in the job description. There may, however, be occasions where it is not practicable or appropriate to interview all disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria. We also welcome requests for reasonable adjustments at any

			stage of the recruitment process or within the workplace.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Updated our welcome statement and 'join us' page on website to promote flexible working arrangements to include our commitment to EDI and the Disability Confident Scheme.	Disabled candidates represented 6% (433) of the total applicant pool of 7,380 applicants. Overall, 139 appointments were made, giving an appointment rate of 2%. Seven disabled candidates were appointed, resulting in an equivalent appointment rate of 2%. This demonstrates that disabled applicants progressed to appointment at a rate consistent with the wider applicant population.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	WCAG compliant and WACG audit to ensure we are compliant Accessibility partner Zoonou	We have completed our annual accessibility audit of the website, and the site is now WCAG 2.2 AA compliant.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Developed an inclusion and accessibility checklist to ensure accessibility at all events, meetings and in offices.	When organising events, accessibility or special requirements are accommodated, where possible. Contact information provided for guests who require specific access arrangements.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	To create opportunities for people with disabilities to campaign and stand for election	We developed animated videos to support candidate understand what they need to do to stand for election and explain to how to

			complete their nomination papers properly.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Update the postal vote application forms to ensure any new requirements are reflected in clear and user-friendly designs.	Forms will be published in accessible PDF format in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	To provide alternative formats for disabled voters on how to register and vote.	Provided BSL video and easy read versions.
	To mainstream the disability duties in Commission activities	To submit our Annual Progress Report and Disability Action plan to the EDI committee and Equality Commission.	Submitted on time with approval from the Executive Team, demonstrating our commitment to fulfilling our Section 75 obligations.
	To encourage disabled people to participate in public life	Ensuring all consultations engage with disabled people and representative groups.	We have successful partnership arrangements with a range of representative groups such as Mencap, RNIB, Guide Dogs NI, Angel Eyes NI, RNID, Diverse Youth NI, Barnardos and others.

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

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact

1	Ensure all staff are aware of Disability Duties and the DAP.	L&D suite of disability and wellbeing related topics rolled out	195 people attended the following courses – • Mindfulness in Action • British Sign Language • Mental Health in the workplace • Dementia Awareness • A conversation on PMDD • Deaf Awareness week with RNID • Having a conversation about mental health • Recognising the stages of burnout
2	Ensure all staff are aware of Disability Duties and the DAP.	Mental Health First Aider Training	Currently there are nine staff trained as MHFA.
3	Ensure all staff are aware of Disability Duties and the DAP.	We maintain information on our disability information hub to update staff on disability legislation, responsibilities as an employer and our commitment to Disability Confident Scheme.	All staff know where to find information using a dedicated page on Disability duties and our statutory obligations, social model of disability, inclusive language, reasonable adjustments and disability inclusive practices.

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

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Identify opportunities to portray positive images of disabled	Our campaigns are planned to be inclusive and accessible. Our	In our campaigns we provide closed captions, subtitles, easy read formats, and test our creative with people who have a range of

	people, in both internal and external communications,	registration campaign features a person with learning disabilities.	disabilities, including neurodiversity and colour blindness. This has increased accessibility for our adverts. The Campaigns team won a bronze Effie for our Voter ID public awareness campaign.
2	Consider how the views of disabled staff are incorporated in the promotion of disability equality in the workplace and in policies, practices, and procedures.	We seek the views of disabled staff when implementing new policies/ processes, via consultation and our updated process for Equality Impact Assessments.	Policy decisions take appropriate account of the needs of disabled people and the barriers they face.
3	Ensure all communications are accessible	Our communications are made accessible and are available in other formats	Disability awareness – resources, guides and information published on ECHO/intranet pages under Disability and updated about our Commitment under DCS.

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

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	To promote positive attitudes towards disabled people	Active promotion of disability inclusion calendar days to raise awareness amongst staff	Total of 23 posts relating to disability were shared internally leading to a greater awareness of disabilities and enhanced understanding the social model of disability.

2	To promote positive attitudes towards disabled people	Time to talk and time to walk events were held across the Commission with staff taking part to raise awareness of mental health.	Raise awareness, remove stigma and demonstrate support for disabled people. Encouraging conversations with colleagues.
3	Committed to supporting staff with disabilities	Supporting colleagues with a disability with support from OH and management.	The Commission is committed to supporting staff who struggle with physical or mental illness or disabilities. We have adapted our office spaces and have created a disability hub on our staff intranet which all staff have access to.

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

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
1	Submit annual review of DAP	Review submitted to ECNI	Outcomes as outlined in this report
2	Committed to supporting staff with disabilities	Provided staff with accessible equipment to support them at home and in the office to enable them to do their job eg sit/stand desks, adaptable chairs.	We have made significant improvements to office spaces such as introducing quiet zones, meeting pods for sound proofed discussions, sit-to-stand desks in each office and large screen monitors with fully adjustable monitor arms. Where an occupational health assessment has been carried out, we then review the

			assessment and provide the required hardware, software and furniture.

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

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1	Remove barriers to the selection process	Ensuring disabled applicants are aware they can request reasonable adjustments and all documentation is available on request in accessible formats	521 requests for reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process with many asking for additional time, use of a lift to access building and questions in advance.	The recruitment HR system is not fully functional yet

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

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1		

PART B

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

Click or tap here to enter text.

(b) Quantitative

After each election we ask members of the public for their views on voting and elections, which helps us understand their experiences. The survey sample is boosted with disabled voters to allow us to better understand their experiences. The accessibility guidance consultation ran until 26 October 2025 – the guidance requires Returning Officers (ROs) to provide equipment as is reasonable to enable, or make it easier, for disabled people to vote independently and in secret.

Also after each election we send an accessibility survey to all partners working with disabled people to gather their views on the election and how we can better support them in our partnership work.

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

Please select

No

If yes please outline below:

PART B

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1			

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation's annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

The Disability Action Plan, along with the EDI action plan which will be regularly updated in line with best practices, research and data. The focus will be to obtain accurate disability data from current staff and to track disabled candidates during the application and appointment process. We will also be reviewing our recruitment process to ensure any new initiatives and associated projects will be evidence-led.

[i] **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

[ii] **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

[iii] **Local :** Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.