



QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST



# QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY EQUALITY SCHEME 2024–2029



SHAPING  
A BETTER  
WORLD  
SINCE 1845

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





## FOREWORD

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (“the Act”) requires 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 Act.

We, the Chair of Senate and the President/Vice-Chancellor of Queen’s University Belfast, are fully committed to effectively fulfilling our Section 75 statutory duties across all our functions through the effective implementation of our Equality Scheme.

This Scheme sets out how we propose to fulfil our Section 75 statutory duties.

We will commit the necessary resources, from those available, in terms of people, time and money, to make sure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that our Equality Scheme is implemented effectively and on time.

Our Equality Action Plan is key to the implementation of our Scheme and has been informed by a comprehensive Audit of Inequalities across a range of categories outlined in the Act. The relevant Sustainable Development Goals are aligned within the Plan and socio-economic inequalities and the impact of cost of living are reflected in our actions.

We will continue to deliver our programme of policy development, outreach, engagement, communication and training to ensure that all staff and Senate members are made fully aware of our Equality Scheme (2024 – 2029) and understand the commitments and obligations within it.

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

We also realise the important role that the statutory, community and voluntary sectors and the general public have to play to ensure the Section 75 statutory duties are effectively implemented.

Our Scheme demonstrates how determined we are to ensure there are opportunities, for people affected by our work, to have a positive influence on how we carry out our functions in line with our Section 75 statutory duties.

It also offers the means for people directly affected, by what they consider to be a failure on our part, to comply with our Equality Scheme and/or to make complaints.

On behalf of the University and our staff and students, we are pleased to support and endorse this Equality Scheme which has been drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Commission guidelines.



Professor Sir Ian Greer  
President and Vice-Chancellor

Dr Stephen Kingon  
Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Senate

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**WE ARE ONE OF THE UK'S LEADING UNIVERSITIES IN TERMS OF GENDER EQUALITY, HOLDING AN ATHENA SWAN SILVER INSTITUTIONAL AWARD.**

## BACKGROUND

Queen's University is one of the oldest universities in the United Kingdom.

Established in Belfast in 1845, as one of the three 'Queen's Colleges in Ireland' we became a fully-fledged university in 1908, adopting our present name – The Queen's University of Belfast.

We are part of the Russell Group, which represents 24 leading research intensive UK universities including the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and University College London.

Ranked 198 globally (Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2023), with a student-centred ethos, we deliver education and training to over 24,000 students including over 4,000 students from 120 different countries.

We are represented across the globe as a centre of teaching excellence and innovative research. 99% of our research environment is world-leading or internationally excellent.

We form the focal point of the Queen's Quarter area of Belfast, one of four cultural districts in the capital city.

We offer over 300 academic degrees at various levels and across a broad subject range.

We are one of the UK's leading Universities in terms of gender equality, being the holder of an Athena SWAN Silver Institutional Award.

We also hold the Silver Diversity Mark award which highlights the University's progress in advancing gender, race and disability equality and its ambitious plans in this space.

### STRATEGY 2030

Strategy 2030 sets out our ambition to Shape a Better World through life-changing education and research, investing in our people, both students and staff, to ensure excellence and impact.

Our Equality Scheme links to Strategy 2030 and specifically our four priorities:

- Education and Skills
- Research and Innovation
- Global Reputation and Partnerships
- Social and Civic Responsibility, and Economic Prosperity

Underpinned by four enablers:

- Our People
- Financial Sustainability
- Infrastructure
- Technology

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are at the heart of Strategy 2030.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Welcome to our new Equality Scheme and Action Plan 2024 -2029 which sets out how Queen’s will continue to sustain an environment that values and celebrates the diversity of our staff and student body. Queen’s promotes an inclusive culture where everyone is supported to do their best work through development opportunities, collegiality and a sense of belonging. It also contributes to our compliance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

1.2 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (“the Act”) requires us to comply with two statutory duties:

1.3 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;
- person 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 groups.

1.4 Schedule 9 4(1) of the Act requires us, as a designated public authority, to set out in an Equality Scheme how we propose to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75 in relation to our relative functions.

1.5 These include the “powers and duties” of a public authority which for us can be found stated in Section 4 of the 1908 Royal Charter which states:

*“The objects of the University shall be the advancement and dissemination of learning and knowledge by teaching and research, and through the practice and inculcation of professional and other skill appropriate to the provision of higher education, and by the example and influence of its corporate life.”*

1.6 This Equality Scheme is both a statement of our arrangements for fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties and our plan for their implementation.

1.7 We are committed to the discharge of our Section 75 obligations in all parts of our organisation and will commit the necessary resources from those available 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.



## 2. ARRANGEMENTS FOR ASSESSING COMPLIANCE WITH THE SECTION 75 DUTIES

2.1 Responsibility for the effective implementation of the Equality Scheme lies with Senate, our Governing Body. The President and Vice-Chancellor is accountable to Senate for the development, implementation, maintenance and review of the Equality Scheme in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Our Senate oversees and reviews the implementation of the Scheme.

2.2 Any question or comments regarding the Equality Scheme should be directed to: The Diversity and Inclusion Unit, Queens University Belfast, Level 4 Administration Building, Belfast BT7 1NN by emailing [eqdiv@qub.ac.uk](mailto:eqdiv@qub.ac.uk)

2.3 All staff Job Descriptions include the requirement to comply with our policies and procedures, including our Equality and Diversity Policy and for all staff to complete diversity training. Line Managers also have specific responsibility for ensuring compliance in their own work areas.

2.4 We prepare an Annual Progress Report summarising how we have discharged our Section 75 statutory duties. This report is sent to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland each year and follows its guidance.

2.5 Progress on the delivery of Section 75 statutory duties is also reported to Senate annually.

2.6 The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has recommended that all Equality Schemes are accompanied by an Action Plan to address Section 75 inequalities and that such plans should be informed by an Audit of Equality Effectiveness (“Our Audit”). Our Audit was carried out in June and July 2023 and involved a review of information including but not limited to:

- Strategy 2030
- Disability Action Plan (2021-2026)
- People and Culture Plan (2023 - 2026)
- Article 55 Review and affirmative Action Plan (2023)
- Latest Section 75 Annual Progress Report (2022 -2023)
- Staff Pulse Survey (January 2022) results
- Application for Athena SWAN Gold 2023
- Research and Benchmarking Data (Sector)
- Organisational policies
- Staff Training (EDI)
- Draft Health and Wellbeing Plan
- Best practice GB &NI

- Best practice by other Russell Group Universities
- Equality Commission for NI Codes of Practice, guidance and advice information
- External Reviews

2.7 Key Findings from Our Audit are available online.

2.8 This Scheme was sent to a wide range of internal and external service users, voluntary groups and organisations, Trade Unions and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to inform the development of our Action Based Plan (“our Action Plan” – see Section 12).

2.9 The final approved Equality Scheme and Action Plan will be hosted on the website.

2.10 Our Action Plan will seek to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. It will be implemented through the framework of our Equality Scheme.

2.11 Some of the measures contained within our Action Plan derive from feedback received from stakeholders. This ensures that equality of opportunity and good relations are incorporated at both a strategic and operational level.

2.12 Our Action Plan contains a range of positive action measures to be delivered. These will be identified according to protected characteristics (e.g. race, religion, sexual orientation etc) to ensure a balanced, fair and even distribution of activity for each of the nine protected characteristics.

2.13 Progress against our Action Plan will be monitored by the Diversity and Inclusion Unit and reported on annually, both internally and externally to the Equality Commission, as part of the normal cycle of business.

2.14 This will help inform the development/refinement of the Action Plan allowing us to address any equality, diversity and/or inclusion issues which may emerge during the reporting cycle. It also ensures the Action Plan is a live, flexible and evolving document.

### 3. ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTING

- 3.1 We recognise the importance of consultation in all aspects of the implementation of our statutory equality duties. Specific training can be provided to those facilitating consultations to ensure that they have the necessary skills to communicate effectively with consultees.
- 3.2 We will consult on matters to which the duty is likely to be relevant, including our Equality Scheme, Action Plan and the likely impact of policies, adopted or proposed to be adopted, on the promotion of equality of opportunity (i.e. screening reports and Equality Impact Assessments) in accordance with the principles contained on the Equality Commission's guidance.
- 3.3 All consultees who are on our **Consultee List** will as a matter of course, be notified by email of the matter/policy being consulted upon to ensure they are aware of all consultations. Where appropriate, we will undertake targeted consultation for those consultees who may have a particular interest in the matter/policy being consulted upon and to whom the matter/policy is of particular relevance.
- 3.4 We will engage with affected individuals and representative groups to identify preferred consultation methods and will consider these. Consultation with stakeholders will begin as early as possible.
- 3.5 We will consider the accessibility and format methods of consultation to remove any barriers to the consultation process and ensure meaningful consultation. We will give particular consideration as to how best to communicate with young people, those with disabilities and minority ethnic communities.
- 3.6 Information will be made available to consultees in appropriate formats to ensure meaningful consultation. Information will be made available in alternative formats upon request.
- 3.7 Consultation periods will normally last 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, the consultation period may be shortened to eight weeks or less before the policy is implemented.
- 3.8 If the policy must be implemented immediately or the consultation period shortened to eight weeks or less, it will be reviewed as part of the monitoring commitment, and comments received will be taken into consideration.
- 3.9 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we will consider any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy, together with feedback received during consultation.
- 3.10 We will seek to provide feedback to consultees in a timely manner by email or by placing it on our website.
- 3.11 Our list of external consultees is available on our **Consultation Exercises Webpage**.
- 3.12 The consultation list is not exhaustive and is reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant to our functions.
- 3.13 We welcome enquiries from any individual and or organisation wishing to be added to or removed from our list of consultees.



### 4. ARRANGEMENTS FOR ASSESSING, MONITORING AND PUBLISHING THE IMPACT OF POLICIES

- 4.1 We use screening and equality impact assessment (EQIA) tools to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. In carrying out these assessments, we look at the intended outcomes of the policy in question and follow the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance.
- 4.2 The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland define a policy as 'denoting any strategy, policy (proposed / amended / existing) or practice and or decision, whether written or unwritten'.
- 4.3 The purpose of screening is to identify those policies which are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations. Screening should be completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process and normally before implementation. More detailed strategies or policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages will be screened at various stages during implementation.
- 4.4 The lead role in the screening of a policy is taken by the policy author / decision maker who has the authority to make changes to that policy. However, screening can involve others such as staff from the Diversity and Inclusion Unit, those who implement the policy and colleagues from across the University.
- 4.5 The following questions are applied to 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?
  - Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?
- 4.6 In order to answer the screening questions, relevant information and data should be gathered. In taking this evidence into account, we must consider the different needs, experiences, and priorities for each of the Section 75 equality categories. Any screening decision will be informed by this evidence.
- 4.7 The screening process leads to one of the following three outcomes:
- The policy is 'screened in' for equality impact assessment; or
  - The policy is 'screened out' with mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted; or
  - The policy is 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.
- 4.8 If 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 may, on occasion, decide to process with an EQIA, depending on the policy. If an EQIA is not to be conducted, we will nonetheless consider measures that might mitigate the policy impact as well as alternative policies that might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity and/or good relations.
- 4.9 Where mitigation is required, the reasons to support this decision, together with the proposed changes, amendments, or alternative policy, will be outlined in the screening template.
- 4.10 If 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 relation categories, this will normally result in an EQIA being carried out.
- 4.11 If screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'none', in respect of all the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, the policy will be screened out.
- 4.12 Templates, guidance and Frequently Asked Questions on the screening process are available at **Equality Screening | People and Culture | Queen's University Belfast (qub.ac.uk)**
- 4.13 If a consultee raises a concern about a screening decision based on supporting evidence, the screening decision will be reviewed.

4.14 If screening has identified the need for a full impact assessment, then an EQIA will be carried out in accordance with Equality Commission guidance, normally before implementation.

4.15 An 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 promote equality of opportunity and good relations more effectively.

4.16 Any EQIA will be subject to consultation at the appropriate stage(s).

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**Arrangements for publishing the results of the assessments of the likely impact of policies (which have been adopted or it is proposed to adopt) on the promotion of equality of opportunity.**

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4.17 Screening reports will be published regularly on our website. They will set out:

- Policies screened by the university in the intervening period;
- 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; and
- A link to the completed screening template(s).

4.18 EQIA reports will be published once any impact assessment has been completed. These include:

- A statement of the aim of the policy assessed;
- Information and data collected;
- Details of the assessment 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; and
- Future monitoring plans.

4.19 All published information will be accessible and may be available in alternative formats on request. Results of assessments (screening reports and completed templates, the results of EQIA's are available at [Policies Currently Screened | People and Culture Queen's University Belfast \(qub.ac.uk\)](https://policies.currentlyscreened.qub.ac.uk)

4.20 We will monitor any adverse impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity of policies which we have adopted through policy screening, EQIA and policy / EQIA review.

4.21 Qualitative and quantitative data is collected, collated and analysed across equality categories. Our equality monitoring system and database is reviewed regularly and where necessary, changes and/or new data may be commissioned. EQIA monitoring information will be regularly reviewed, together with our monitoring information.

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

4.23 Monitoring information, including EQIA monitoring information will be published within our Annual Section 75 Progress Report and on our website.

## 5. STAFF EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION TRAINING

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5.1 We recognise that staff training and raising awareness of equality, diversity & inclusion play a crucial role in the effective implementation of the Section 75 duties.

5.2 We provide a comprehensive menu of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training for our staff. This uses a blended approach of e-learning and face-to-face training sessions which seek to:

- Raise awareness of the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland act 1998;
- Raise awareness of our Equality Scheme commitments and the particular issues likely to affect people across the range of Section 75 categories, to ensure that staff fully understand their role in implementing the scheme;
- Raise awareness of unconscious / hidden bias and how it can affect decision making; educating staff on techniques to identify and challenge any bias displayed in range of different workplace scenarios;
- Provide those staff involved in the assessment of policies (screening and EQIA) with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively;
- Provide those staff involved in any consultation process with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively; and
- Provide those staff involved in the implementation and monitoring of our equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively.

5.3 All staff are required to complete mandatory online Equality Diversity and Unconscious Bias eLearning programmes.

5.4 All new staff joining the University also receive Equality and Diversity Training as part of the induction process.

5.5 Our commitment to the Section 75 statutory duties is made clear in a wide range of publications.

5.6 In addition, the following arrangements are in place to ensure all staff and members of Senate are aware of and understand their equality obligations:

- A summary of this Equality Scheme will be developed and made available to all staff;
- Access to the full Equality Scheme will be provided for all staff;
- Any queries will be addressed by the Diversity and Inclusion Unit;
- Information relating to this Equality Scheme will be incorporated into staff training materials within 3 months of the Scheme's approval;
- Information on the Equality Scheme and the University's Section 75 statutory duties will be included in induction training for new staff;
- Focused training will continue to be provided for key staff who are directly engaged in taking forward the implementation of the Equality Scheme.
- Where appropriate, training will be provided for key staff who are directly engaged in taking forward the implementation of the Equality Scheme;
- Where appropriate, training will be provided to ensure staff are aware of the issues experienced by the range of Section 75 groups;
- Where appropriate and on an ongoing basis, arrangements will be made to ensure staff are kept up to date with Section 75 developments;
- Training on Section 75 and the new Equality Scheme and Action Plan may be provided for Senate members upon request;
- Where requested, training will be provided for students going on work placements;
- Where relevant, specific training and awareness raising programmes may be developed and delivered in association with the appropriate Section 75 groups and staff;
- Where appropriate, participants learning will be assessed to determine the effectiveness of any training provision;
- Delivery of training will be reported on as part of the Section 75 Annual Progress Report, which will be sent to the Equality Commission; and
- We will continue to maintain a database of staff who have completed the Equality and Diversity Training.

## 6. ARRANGEMENTS FOR ENSURING AND ASSESSING PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SERVICES WE PROVIDE

- 6.1 We strive to ensure that our information and services are accessible. We adhere to the relevant provisions of current anti-discrimination legislation. In line with general monitoring arrangements, we monitor across functions in relation to access to information and services, to ensure that equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.
- 6.2 We are aware that some groups will not have the same access to information, and where practicable we will seek to address this. To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, we will seek to provide information in alternative formats upon request e.g. large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not a first language. This is not an exhaustive list.
- 6.3 We will continue to work with the Equality Commission and representative organisations regarding good practice in this area. We will respond to requests for information in alternative formats, usually within one month of the request being received, unless the timescale of the third-party providers dictates otherwise.
- 6.4 We will continue to use our internal communications, website, and social media accounts as the primary means for disseminating Equality, Diversity and Inclusion information for staff and students.
- 6.5 We will endeavour to ensure that all our services are fully accessible to everyone.
- 6.6 We have partnered with AccessAble to develop guides to help staff, students and visitors to get to and around our sites and buildings more easily.
- 6.7 We have, through our academic support directorates, well-established structures to support students from a broad range of backgrounds including international students and students with a disability or long-term condition.



## 7. TIMETABLE FOR MEASURES PROPOSED IN THIS EQUALITY SCHEME

- 7.1 The timetable for all measures proposed within this Equality Scheme is set out below.
- 7.2 The measures outlined below will be incorporate into our business-planning processes.
- 7.3 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.



| Phase   | Activity  | Completion                      |
|---|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. We will conduct an Audit of Inequalities / Equality Scheme Effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is intended to produce a more strategic picture of inequalities that we may be able to influence.</li> <li>It will consider known and emerging inequalities within in the University as they impact staff, students and the wider community.</li> </ul>   | June / July 2023<br>Annually    |
| 2. We will develop a draft Equality Scheme and supporting Action Plan       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This draft Equality Scheme &amp; Action Plan has been developed based on a review of the previous scheme and the findings of the Audit of Inequalities.</li> <li>We will complete an equality screening process and develop a Communications Plan in readiness for formal consultation.</li> <li>Prior to this, the Unit will review and update any formal internal / external consultation list.</li> </ul> | July / August 2023              |
| 3. We will engage with key stakeholders on the draft Equality Scheme        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The draft Equality Scheme will be shared with key stakeholders (internal and external) to obtain feedback.</li> </ul>  | 31 July -<br>23 October 2023    |
| 4. Consultation & Review  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following the formal 12-week consultation we will consider and review all consultation responses.</li> </ul>   | 23 October -<br>6 November 2023 |
| 5. Finalise & Approve   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will present a final Equality Scheme and Action Plan to University Management Board for review and approval in November 2023, seeking Standing Committee approval by December 2023. (TBC)</li> <li>We will then submit our final Equality Scheme to the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland.</li> </ul>   | November /<br>December 2023     |
| 6. Equality Scheme Launch   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will publicise our Equality Scheme and Action Plan as per our Communications Plan.</li> </ul>   | January 2024                    |
| 7. Monitor and Review of Equality Scheme                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As required by Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the University will conduct a review of this Equality Scheme and report annually to ECNI on progress, as per the statutory reporting commitment.</li> </ul>  | Annually                        |

## 8. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- 8.1 We are responsive to the views of members of the public and will endeavour to resolve all complaints made regarding this Scheme.
- 8.2 Schedule 9 paragraph 10 of the Act refers to complaints. A person can make a complaint to a public authority if they believe they may have been directly affected by an alleged failure of the authority to comply with its approved Equality Scheme.
- 8.3 If the complaint has not been resolved within a reasonable timescale, the complaint can be brought to the Equality Commission.
- 8.4 A person wishing to make a complaint that we have failed to comply with our approved Equality Scheme should contact The Diversity and Inclusion Unit, Queen’s University Belfast by emailing [eqdiv@qub.ac.uk](mailto:eqdiv@qub.ac.uk)
- 8.5 Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days of their receipt.
- 8.6 We will carry out an internal investigation of the complaint and will respond substantively to the complainant within one 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 months. In those circumstances, the complainant will be advised of the extended period within one month of making the complaint.
- 8.7 During this process the complainant will be kept fully informed of the progress of the investigation into the complaint and of any outcomes.
- 8.8 In any subsequent investigation by the Equality Commission, we will co-operate fully, providing access in a timely manner to any relevant documentation that the Commission may require.
- 8.9 Similarly, we 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 We will make all efforts to implement promptly and in full, any recommendations arising out of any Commission investigation.





## 9. PUBLICATION OF THE EQUALITY SCHEME

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9.1 Our Equality Scheme may be available in alternative formats from the Diversity and Inclusion Unit. It can be accessed online.

9.2 The following arrangements are in place for the publication of the Equality Scheme:

- We will make every effort to communicate widely the existence and content of our Equality Scheme;
- We will email a link to our approved Equality Scheme to the consultees on our consultation list;
- We will make use of social media to notify Consultees that the scheme is available on request;
- We will respond to requests for the Equality Scheme in alternative formats in a timely manner. Formats may include but are not limited to: large print, audio formats and in minority languages to meet the needs of those not fluent in English.



## 10. REVIEW OF THE EQUALITY SCHEME

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

10.2 Our review will evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme in relation to the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties relevant to our functions.

10.3 In undertaking this review, we will follow any guidance (as may be appropriate) issued by the Equality Commission.



# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 - EXAMPLE GROUPS RELEVANT TO THE SECTION 75 CATEGORIES FOR NORTHERN IRELAND PURPOSES

| Category                         | Example groups  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Religious belief</b>          | <p>Buddhist; Catholic; Hindu; Jewish; Muslims, people of no religious belief; Protestants; Sikh; other faiths.</p> <p>For the purposes of section 75, the term ‘religious belief’ is the same definition as that used in the ‘Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order’. (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 and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.’ Therefore, ‘religious belief’ also includes any perceived religious belief (or perceived lack of belief) and, in employment situations only, it also covers any ‘similar philosophical belief’.</p> |
| <b>Political opinion</b>         | Nationalist generally; Unionists generally; members/supporters of other political parties.  |
| <b>Racial group</b>              | Black people; Chinese; Indian; Pakistani; people of mixed ethnic background; Polish; Roma; Travellers; white people.  |
| <b>Men and women generally</b>   | Men (including boys); Transgender people; Transsexual people; women (including girls); those who identify as neither male nor female.   |
| <b>Marital status</b>            | Civil partners or people in civil partnerships; divorced people; married people; separated people; single people; widowed people.   |
| <b>Age</b>                       | Children and young people; older people.  |
| <b>Persons with a disability</b> | Persons with disabilities as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and subsequent amendments.   |
| <b>Persons with dependants</b>   | 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.  |
| <b>Sexual orientation</b>        | Bisexual people; heterosexual people; gay or lesbian people.  |

## APPENDIX 2 - GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The Equality Commission recommends that a Glossary of Terms used is included in an Equality Scheme.

### 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 one of more of the Section 75 categories, 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 to deliver 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.

### AUDIT OF EQUALITY EFFECTIVENESS

An Audit of Equality Effectiveness is a systematic review and analysis of inequalities which exist for service users and those affected by a public authority’s policies. An audit can be used by a public authority to inform its work in relation to the Section 75 equality and good relations issues. The Audit can enable public authorities to assess progress on the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties, as it provides baseline information on existing inequalities relevant to public authority’ functions.

### CONSULTATION

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

### DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT

Differential impact occurs where a Section 75 group has been affected differently by a policy. This effect could either be positive, neutral or negative. A public authority must make a judgement as to whether a policy has a differential impact and then it must determine whether the impact is adverse, based on a systematic appraisal of the accumulated information.

### DISCRIMINATION

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

- Direct Discrimination
- Indirect Discrimination
- Disability Discrimination
- Victimization
- 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 underrepresented 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, 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".

## 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. Duties is 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 cover 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.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland define a policy as 'denoting any strategy, policy (proposed / amended / existing) or practice and/or decision, whether written or unwritten'.

## POSITIVE ACTION

This phrase is not defined in any statute, but the Equality Commission understands it to mean any lawful action that a public authority might take for the purpose of promoting equality of opportunity for all persons in relation to employment or in accessing goods, facilities or services (e.g., health services, housing, education, justice, policing). It may involve adopting new policies, practices, or procedures; or changing or abandoning old ones. Positive action is not the same as positive discrimination.

Positive discrimination differs from positive action in that positive action involves the taking of lawful actions whereas positive discrimination involves the taking of unlawful actions. Consequently, positive action is by definition lawful, whereas positive discrimination is unlawful.

## 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; or
2. An investigation initiated by the Commission, where it believes that a public authority may have failed to comply with its approved Equality Scheme, 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.

## APPENDIX 3 - SUMMARY OF AUDIT OF INEQUALITIES

The Equality Commission, in its guide, 'Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - A Guide for Public Authorities' defines an Audit of Inequalities as:

*'A systematic review and analysis of inequalities which exist for service users and those affected by a public authority's policies.'*

The Guide for Public Authorities recommends that:

*In order to effectively demonstrate that a public authority has paid due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations through the implementation of its equality scheme, a public authority should develop action measures/action plans to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.'*

The Commission recommends designated public authorities to undertake an Audit of Inequalities on a five yearly basis across all of the nine Section 75 categories that are relevant to our functions. Our Audit of Inequalities carried out in 2023 is intended to produce a more strategic picture of inequalities the University may be able to influence through action measures and timeframes for addressing identified issues.

The Audit of Inequalities does not examine inequalities or potential inequalities on a policy-by-policy basis. These are examined through the University's equality screening and Equality Impact Assessment processes at the time of policy development or review.

A two-stage approach was undertaken to review the Queen's University Equality Scheme and to develop the Audit of Inequalities and Equality Action Plan.

Stage One – we reviewed the University's Equality Scheme to ensure it remains current, compliant with Equality Commission guidance and aligns with Strategy 2030 ambitions. This Equality Scheme 2024-2029 for Queen's University Belfast has been developed and is being publicly consulted upon.

Stage Two - we reviewed progress against the previous Audit of Inequalities and Equality Action Plan and a desktop review of broad research and evidence.

Since the last Audit of Inequalities and Equality Scheme in 2018, the Diversity and Inclusion Unit has been developed to encompass Diversity, Inclusion and Staff Wellbeing. Increased resources will support the University's efforts to fulfil our commitments as a designated public authority in Northern Ireland and form a key role in achieving our ambition to "be among the leading universities for equality, diversity and inclusion" as outlined in our Strategy 2030.

Significant progress has been made across the institution in the last five years. Key areas of focus and actions outlined in the 2018-2023 Equality Action Plan have been achieved and equality, diversity and inclusion were at the heart of all efforts as the University navigated the Covid-19 pandemic and adapted to new ways of working and delivering the academic programme.

This Audit of Inequalities references a range of key inequalities across the Section 75 groups but is not an exhaustive list. In addition to quantitative and qualitative information and data available within the University, external evidence by way of research published by advocacy and lobby groups, academics, charities and third sector bodies, and other sources continues to emerge.

This Audit of Inequalities has enabled the University to identify those inequalities which exist for service users and those affected by the University's policies. The Equality Action Plan outlines the action measures and timeframes to address identified inequalities and how the University intends to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The Audit of Inequalities will be revisited annually, or more frequently when key inequalities are identified, research becomes available or stakeholder engagement highlights areas requiring attention.

The University's Equality Action Plan is a 'live' document and will be reviewed annually to ensure actions are strategically aligned, up to date, relevant and realistic in terms of impact.

The Audit of Inequalities document will be available on the [University's Consultation Exercises Webpage](#).

## APPENDIX 4 - EQUALITY SCHEME ACTION PLAN

### HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The content of this Plan has been developed by an Audit of Inequalities, which was undertaken to identify key inequalities. As part of the Audit of Inequalities, the University examined a wide range of information sources.

In addition, we consulted with a wide range of stakeholders (between 31 July 2023 –23 October 2023) so that a range of views received from stakeholders could be considered for inclusion in the final Equality Scheme and Action Plan.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Whilst the primary purpose of conducting the Audit was to inform this plan, the information from the audit will also be used to develop future policies and inform our equality screening processes.

### ACTION MEASURES

This Plan includes measures which the University has prioritised for implementation.

It includes measures which involve collaboration across directorates, faculties, schools and with key stakeholders such as the Students' Union, Trade Union representatives and external organisations.

Some of the actions relate to measures which are already in place and their continuation is expected to make a positive impact.

The Equality Scheme Action Plan is not the only means by which the University is actively seeking to address inequalities. It should be read in conjunction with:

- Strategy 2030
- People and Culture Plan 2023 - 2026
- Net Zero Plan - Sustainability Development Goals
- Disability Action Plan 2021 -2026
- Athena SWAN Action Plan (Institutional and School ActionPlans)
- Queen's Gender Initiative Objectives
- Article 55 Affirmative Action Plan
- Equal Pay Audit
- Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

Please note that each of these strategies and plans contain specific positive action measures for the University to implement and deliver. In addition, the list above is not exhaustive.

### MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Plan will be monitored and reviewed annually to ensure action measures are being effectively implemented, delivered and reported upon.

Progress will be reported upon internally and form part of our annual review on progress on Section 75 to the Equality Commission.

Our Annual Progress Report will be published on our website.



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