

**Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)**

**Audit of Inequalities 2021-2025**

**and**

**Action Plan**

**Consultation Document**

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# **Section 1: INTRODUCTION**

* 1. This consultation is to enable us to review our Audit of Inequalities 2021-2025 and the related Action Plan. Our current Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan were originally published in 2011 and expired on 31 December 2016. However, virtually all of the measures and actions were still relevant after 2016 and we continued to work towards those outcomes up to 2021. The Department, whilst working to the principles of the previous Audit of Inequalities (AoI) and Action Plan, now require a current audit and action plan to be in place.
	2. A review of this AoI and Action Plan has now been completed and a draft AoI and Action Plan for the period 2021-2025 has been developed and is enclosed with this consultation document. The Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan demonstrates how the Department, have undertaken an audit of inequalities by examining our functions and how these relate to the promotion of equality and good relations.

**How to respond to this consultation**

* 1. We would welcome your comments on both, the Audit of Inequalities and the related Action Plan. We will use “**Citizen Space**” which is a digital platform, originally developed as a joint initiative with the UK government, as a vehicle to improve consultation. When responding please indicate whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. **Citizen Space consultation link:** <https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/daera/daera-audit-of-inequalities-2021-2025-and-action-p>
	2. Alternatively, there is also the option to reply to this consultation by using the ‘**Consultation Response Questionnaire**’, which has been provided to assist in this process, or you may respond in any format. If you do not use the Citizen Space option to reply to this consultation then responses should be emailed to: equality@daera-ni.gov.uk

or posted to:

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* 1. A hard copy of the consultation document or a copy in a different format can be provided on request. There are also text relay services available if required as follows:
* Making a call from a textphone:  Dial 18001 + 028 7744 2033
* Making a call from a telephone:  Dial 18002 + 028 7744 2033
	1. Text Relay Assist can also set up the call for you: Dial 0870 240 5152 from a telephone. The [Next Generation Text Relay](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/accessibility/text-relay-guide) service is also available.
	2. This consultation document reports the proposed new DAERA Audit of Inequalities 2021-2025 and Action Plan.
	3. The consultation will close on 08 March 2022 (at 23.59). Responses received after this date will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and with prior agreement from the Department.
	4. The consultation papers consistent of the following documents:
* Draft DAERA Audit of Inequalities 2021-2025.
* Draft Action Plan.
* Consultation Document (This document).
* Consultation Response Questionnaire.
* Easy Read Version.
* Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

# **Section 2: BACKGROUND**

**Audit of Inequalities 2021-2025 and Action Plan**

* 1. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public bodies when carrying out their work to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine categories of persons:
* Between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
* Between men and women generally;
* Between persons with a disability and persons without; and
* Between persons with dependants and persons without.
	1. Public authorities must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.
	2. In April 2010 the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland published new statutory guidance, ‘Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: A guide for Public Authorities‘. The guidance recommends that public authorities should undertake an audit of inequalities by examining their functions and how these relate to the promotion of equality and good relations. Specific actions to address the inequalities identified should then be set out in an action plan, and these actions linked to the authority’s corporate planning cycle.
	3. The audit of inequalities is additional and complementary to the development of an equality scheme. It is intended to produce a more strategic picture of inequalities that a public authority may be in a position to influence, rather than examining inequalities on a policy by policy basis. It should be similar to other approaches undertaken by organisations to review and evaluate their performance, to make decisions about the way forward and to prioritise actions over time.
	4. It is a review and evaluation of existing reliable and verifiable data, both qualitative and quantitative, for each of the Section 75 equality and good relations categories.
	5. The action plan is also intended as a basis for monitoring performance on equality measures, and for annual reporting to the Equality Commission.
	6. Whilst working to the principles of the previous Audit of Inequalities and the related Action Plan, DAERA now require a current action plan to be in place.

# **Section 3: 5-YEAR REVIEW OF DAERA AUDIT OF INEQUALITIES 2011-2016 AND ACTION PLAN**

**(Review completion date: September 2021)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

* 1. In accordance with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) guidance, a five-year review of our Audit of inequalities and Action Plan is now due. This review will actually cover the period 2011-2021, making it a 10-year review. It incorporates the transition of the NICS from twelve departments down to nine since 8 May 2016. During this period the department’s name changed from Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).
	2. The Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs encompasses:
* the functions of the former Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), excluding Rivers Agency;
* environmental functions from the former Department of Environment (DOE);
* inland fisheries from the former Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL); and
* policy responsibility for Sustainable Strategy.
	1. The environmental functions that transferred from DOE included regulation, but excluded the Northern Ireland Environment Agency’s built heritage function.
	2. In addition, the Departmental Human Resource (DHR) functions transferred to the central NICS HR team which is part of the Department of Finance (DoF).
	3. Throughout this review the acronym DAERA will be used to cover the full reporting period rather than using a combination of the old acronym of DARD and the new DAERA title.

## **BACKGROUND**

* 1. It had been planned that a new Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan would be prepared to cover the 2017 to 2022 period but due to the issues listed at paragraph 3.2.2 below this did not happen. However, given that virtually all of the measures and actions from the 2011-2016 Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan were still relevant in going forward, the Department continued to adhere to and comply with its statutory functions in relation to these equality duties.
	2. Several events impacted on the work and development of the Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan and these were the Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES), internal and external staff transfers, the restructuring of the Equality Branch to become part of Central Management Branch (CMB) and the collapse of the NI Executive in January 2017. Indeed this dramatic period of change and fluctuation continued up to January 2018 when the equality unit, within CMB, became part of a newly formed branch which became known as the Equality, Diversity and Public Appointments Branch. The formation of this new Branch also saw the relocation of these functions and the team from Dundonald House to Ballykelly House. Since October 2020 the equality unit now sits within the Staff Engagement, Equality and Diversity (SEED) Branch.

## **MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS FROM 2011 TO DATE**

* 1. The Action Plan contained a range of measures as set out below. There were 18 issues with related actions and outcomes, with number 13 being split in two (issue 13a and 13b).
	2. At a high level the issues, actions and outcomes for the 2011-2016 Audit of Inequalities and related Action Plan can be broadly categorised in the following three ways, Achieved, Partially Achieved, or Not Achieved.

**Issues to Address (2011-2016) Review**

1. Integration of Section 75 duties into all planning and decision-making processes. Achieved (and ongoing).
2. Action to tackle persistent inequalities. Partially Achieved (and ongoing).
3. Improve engagement with customers across Section 75 groups. Achieved (and ongoing).

**4.** Improve representation by women on DAERA NDPBs and associated bodies. Not Achieved (but ongoing).

**5.** Improve representation by women on internal decision-making teams / groups. Not Achieved (but ongoing).

**6.** Improve representation (disability, race, age) on NDPB’s and associated bodies. Actions Mainly Achieved (and ongoing).

**7.** Improve equality monitoring, and data co-ordination. Partially Achieved (and ongoing).

**8.** Low take up of Rural Development Programme (RDP) funding. Partially Achieved (and ongoing).

**9.** Development opportunities for young people. Achieved (and ongoing).

**10.** Opportunities for older people. Achieved (and ongoing).

**11.** Anti-poverty measures. Achieved (and ongoing).

**12.** Access to rural transport services. Achieved (and ongoing).

**13a.** Provision of Accessible Communication Channels. Achieved (and ongoing).

**13b.** Provision of Accessible Information Services. Achieved (and ongoing).

**14.** Raise awareness of health and well-being information and rural support services. Achieved (and ongoing).

**15.** Increase take up of women on CAFRE’s people development programmes. Not Achieved (but ongoing).

**16.** Specific training for front line staff. Achieved (and ongoing).

**17.** Disability Equality. Achieved (and ongoing).

**18.** Recreation areas and facilities. Achieved (and ongoing).

* 1. For ease of summary, the eighteen issues can be further categorised in to five broad topics: Section 75/Equality issues; Staff, Customers, Services & Communications issues; Representation on Boards & Teams issues; Development Opportunities issues, and Persistent Inequalities issues.

**Section 75/ Equality issues**

* 1. Issues 1, 7 and 17 can be grouped within this broad category and the review showed that most of the actions and outcomes for these issues have been achieved. Issue 7 has been partially achieved and more work needs to be done in relation to monitoring and data co-ordination.
	2. However, it remains important to continue with issues 1 and 17 in order to help consolidate the good work that has been achieved to date and in taking forward the other Section 75 and equality related actions.

**Staff, Customers, Services & Communication issues**

* 1. Issues 3, 12, 13a, 13b, 14, 16 and 18 can be grouped within this broad category and the review showed that all of the actions and outcomes for these issues have been achieved within the previous reporting period.
	2. However, these issues are still important to the Department and it is necessary to maintain a high level of staff and customer interaction and to provide the communication channels and services that are expected from the Department.

**Representation on Boards & Teams issues**

* 1. Issues 4, 5, 6, 8 and 15 can be grouped within this broad category and the review showed that there is still much work to do in relation to these issues.
	2. It is clear to see that the intended outcomes have not been achieved in relation to these issues, i.e. improved representation on boards and teams with under-represented groups such as women, disabled people, people of various races and ages. A number of actions have been achieved but this has not resulted in the desired results.
	3. There has been some local success with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board having reached, and even surpassed, the intended outcome of a 50:50 split by gender on their Board, with the ratios, at the time of the review and up to 2021, being 70% female and 30 male membership.
	4. Related to the issues of under-represented groups are issues 8 and 15. That is, there is still a low uptake of RDP funding by females (issue 8) and a lack of increase of women on CAFRE’s people development programmes (issue 15).
	5. It is clear that these issues must be taken forward and further work should continue to advance with the aim of overcoming these inequalities.

**Development Opportunities issues**

* 1. Issues 9 and 10 can be grouped within this broad category and the review showed that all of the actions and outcomes for these issues have been achieved within the previous reporting period.
	2. The Department has provided and maintained the availability of opportunities for young and older people. This is another success for DAERA but in going forward it is still necessary to maintain the provision of such opportunities for these groups.

**Persistent Inequalities issues**

* 1. Issues 2 and 11 can be grouped within this broad category and the review showed that most of the actions and outcomes for these issues have been achieved. Issue 2, is an overarching issue, and has been partially achieved given that (although many of the overall issues, actions and outcomes have been achieved) some of them have not been achieved and others are only partially achieved. It is clear that more work needs to be done in relation to working towards the outcome of eliminating the inequalities relevant to DAERA as far as possible.

# **Section 4: Audit of Inequalities 2021-2025 and ACTION PLAN**

* 1. In summary and looking at the results of the review overall, then the Department has achieved many successes over the past 10 years but all that success has to be maintained and continued in going forward and built upon in relation to a number of key areas within the new Audit of Inequalities 2021-2025 and related Action Plan.
	2. A new five-year AoI and Action Plan (2021-2025) has been developed. DAERA has liaised with staff and customers during its development to help shape the AoI and Action Plan’s development. It has been drafted taking into account the DAERA Equality Scheme, the 5-Year Review (10-Years in total, 2011-2021) and with reference to ECNI guidance. The final draft AoI and Action Plan will be consulted upon and any responses received will be analysed and incorporated where necessary.

# **Section 5: CONCLUSION**

* 1. DAERA will continue to build on our achievements to date. We will train and work with staff to ensure that they work effectively to meet the needs of people within the Section 75 categories. We will endeavour to further embed this pro-active outreach engagement work into the culture of the Department and encourage business areas when developing policies to take these inequalities, actions and outcomes in to account in going forward.
	2. We will encourage partnership-working arrangements with others to further facilitate projects, where possible, and continue to work to improve the accessibility, communication and services to our staff and customers.