**DAERA Review of Audit of Inequalities: Action Plan 2011-2016**

**Drafted by July 2021 and reviewed by DAERA business areas from 2 August 2021 for a six-week period.**

**Track changes accepted and document finalised on 16 September 2021.**

This review covers the DAERA (formerly DARD) Inequalities Action Plan 2011-2016. Various structural and staff changes have come about during and after this reporting period.

For example, the structure of the NI departments changed in May 2016 with DAERA incorporating responsibility for environmental issues, among a number of other changes to the Department’s areas of control. In relation to staffing issues then the Voluntary Exist Scheme (VES) also contributed to changes in staff membership across the NICS. Over the past 10 years there have also been many recruitment competitions resulting in further staff changes and promotions across the Department. These major changes have also had major impacts upon the equality team and its work remit.

At the beginning of this Action Plan’s reporting period (2011-2016) there was an Equality Branch, however, this was later dissolved and became a sub-unit of the Central Management Branch. The head of the old Equality Branch also retired and there have also been other staff changes in personnel within the team. All these changes have resulted in work tasks across the civil service being reviewed and delayed or discontinued if possible. The equality work was no exception but given the statutory nature of the Section 75 duties it was necessary to keep this in place across the Department. However, a few tasks have been delayed and the official review of this Inequalities Action Plan was one of those.

An initial assessment was completed with the decision to continue to implement the actions within the Action Plan beyond the 2016 end date. This did not result in any detriment to the work or the aim of the outcomes in working towards the implementation of this Plan. Most of the actions could be viewed as continuing actions and therefore this important work was still taking place within DAERA. The only visible aspect of the Inequalities Action Plan was that the data and research was slightly out of date, however, staff were instructed to use the latest data within their screening and EQIA documents when assessing equality impacts for their policies.

As a result, this review has looked at the suggested dates for the achievement of the actions and intended outcomes as well as the 5-year review covering the 2011-16 Plan. Indeed, extra information has been included to highlight the work that has taken place beyond 2016 and up to 2021 thereby covering a 10-year period. Rather than add every example and detail to this review then this review should be read in conjunction with the Annual Progress Reports to the ECNI which will provide further information and detail if it should be needed.

**DAERA (Formerly DARD) Key Inequalities – Action Plan 2011-2016**

**Corporate Goals**

* To ensure that the equality and good relations obligations are central to all decision making processes
* To ensure fair representation on our public appointments, management boards, committees, groups etc

| **Issue to Address** | **Intended Outcomes** | **Actions Needed** |
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| **1. Integration of Section 75 duties into all planning and decision-making processes** | * Equality and good relations outcomes included in all future corporate and strategic plans, staffing and financial planning processes. [By when: 2012]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Completion of timely and thorough Equality Screening exercises and EQIA assessments.   Achieved (and ongoing). | * Minister, Departmental Board (DB) and senior managers committed to incorporating equality and good relations targets across all aspects of Departmental business, both externally and internally.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
| **Progress to date**  **Equality Scheme**  Following consultation and approval by the Equality Commission, DAERA published and circulated its new Equality Scheme in October 2011. Subsequent reviews of the Equality Scheme have taken place during 2016 and 2021 with minor changes made where necessary. There was no need to consult on these minor changes. Each year, DAERA prepares an annual report to the Equality Commission on the progress it has made in implementing the arrangements in its Equality Scheme to discharge its Section 75 statutory duties.  **Governance structures**  During the 2017/18 reporting period, DAERA improved its governance structures for the delivery of its equality and good relations duties, and diversity and inclusion priorities in line with its Equality Scheme commitment to having effective internal arrangements in place for ensuring effective compliance with the Section 75 duties. This will ensure that these functions are overseen and supported at a senior level within the Department and that they continue to be mainstreamed and made central to policy development and the delivery of services to our citizens. This approach will contribute to enabling cultural change within DAERA by helping create a working environment where equality and good relations are embraced as core business values and that they are promoted and respected both within the Department and in our engagement with stakeholders and customers.  As part of the improved governance structures the Equality Steering Group (ESG) has been superseded by the Equality and Diversity Steering Group (EDSG). The EDSG meets twice a year, is chaired by the Permanent Secretary and is a sub-group of the DAERA Departmental Board (DB). This demonstrates leadership and ownership of equality, good relations, diversity and inclusion at the most senior levels, which, in turn, will ensure they are better promoted and championed within the Department and wider. The EDSG is also responsible for overseeing and monitoring the Department’s progress against its equality, good relations and human rights obligations and relevant strategies, policies and action plans.  An Equality and Diversity Working Group (EDWG) has also been established and they report and make recommendations to the EDSG. This group is responsible for, amongst other things, promoting the use of equality, good relations and diversity best practice across business areas and maximising collaborative working on equality and diversity initiatives where possible.  **Corporate and strategic plans, staffing and financial planning processes**  The following plans are just a few examples of where the equality and good relations outcomes have been included in the corporate and strategic plans, staffing and financial planning processes. Further information and detail has been set out within the Annual Progress Reports (APR) with the latest reports still available on the DAERA website.  Objectives and targets relating to the statutory duties have been integrated into strategic and operational business plans including the Department’s draft Strategic Plan (2012-2020) which was issued for consultation in 2012. The strategy outlines the Department’s continued commitment to the Section 75 duties and to the targets already set out in the 2011-2016 Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan.  The Department’s 2014-16 Corporate Plan included reference, in the introduction, to the statutory equality obligations to be met under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and referred to the Department’s Equality Scheme and Audit of Inequalities setting out the actions the Department had promised to take to meet its equality obligations.  The Department’s Draft Strategic Plan 2020 states: As a public authority, DAERA has statutory equality obligations to meet under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. We take these responsibilities seriously, and work hard to ensure that equality and good relations considerations are a core part of our business functions and all decision-making processes. Our Equality Scheme and Audit of Inequalities set out the actions the Department has promised to take to meet its equality obligations. We are also committed to meeting the Department’s sustainable development and rural proofing obligations.  The Divisional Business Plan for DAERA’s Central Management functions in 2017-2018 included an objective to ensure the Department met its statutory obligations in respect of its Equality Scheme; Disability Action Plan; Audit of Inequalities and Children and Young People’s Action Plan.  The Corporate Balance Scorecard for the Division responsible for equality issues included an action for DAERA business areas to understand the need to comply with Section 75 requirements and the Equality Scheme commitments.  Although the above are just a few examples, the equality and good relations outcomes continue to be included in the corporate and strategic plans for the Department. Financial planning processes are adhered to and managers are responsible for ensuring that they are aligned with the Section 75 considerations and implemented within their remit. Looking at the evidence set out in each of the APR’s over the past number of years then we can highlight the following staffing agreements.  Job descriptions for staff working in Equality Branch include the following actions:   * Ensure that the Department fully complies with its statutory equality obligations; meets its Equality Scheme commitments and the targets in its Audit of Inequalities. * Ensure implementation of the new equality scheme requirements across the Department.   An extract from a personal performance agreement in 2017-2018 is as follows: “To support the Minister, Equality Officer, Departmental Board and the wider Department in ensuring the Department meets its statutory obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and through the commitments set out in our Equality Scheme and published action plans”.  **Equality screening exercises and EQIA assessments**  DAERA continues to screen policies at the earliest opportunity in the policy development / review process and to carry out subsequent EQIAs as appropriate. All new or revised policies continue to be screened for possible equality implications across the nine equality categories using the Department’s screening analysis form during the reporting periods. The Department has also carried out focused pre-consultation with appropriate Section 75 representatives and this has helped in the formulation of the policies as well as in the identification of potential impacts.  At the beginning of the 2011-2016 Audit of Inequalities, the 2012-2020 Strategic Plan set out the Department’s commitment to undertake 6 EQIAs as follows:   * 1 EQIA by 2014:   + The HQ Relocations Team published the final EQIA Report in August 2014 on the DARD HQ Relocation Programme. * 5 EQIAs by 2015:   + Education Strategy   + Agri-Food Sectoral Strategies   + New CAP   + New Rural Development Programme   + Anti-Poverty and Rural Isolation   **CAP Reform EQIA – Adoption of online as the primary channel for communication**   * The equality screening of the Department’s proposal to make online the primary channel for communicating and transacting with customers of EU area-based CAP schemes identified a number of potential adverse equality impacts on several groups of people. The department subsequently conducted a full EQIA on the proposal and consultation on this took place between November 2015 and February 2016. * Consultation responses questioned/challenged screening findings on a number of Section 75 categories. These responses were considered before final decisions were taken and the EQIA report prepared.   **Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 Equality Impact Assessment**   * The RDP EQIA was finalised as part of the submission of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme and associated documents to the EU Commission on the 14th October 2014. * Work then started on an Equality Action Plan which took the recommended mitigating actions in the EQIA and aligned them against key areas of programme implementation.   **Engagement with Consultees**  DAERA also continues to keep in contact with consultees through the regular issuing of emails with details of screening assessments, updating and circulating information on its website, occasional meetings with local sectoral groups and inviting key consultees / representatives to meet with DAERA staff and to give presentations when appropriate too. These arrangements have helped maintain good relations with key organisations and ensure that they remain fully aware of the DAERA actions to support its Equality Scheme commitments.  **Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework – Consultation**  The Sustainable Rural Communities Branch undertook a consultation exercise on proposals for a successor Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework which closed on 20 January 2016. In advance of the consultation the Branch undertook a screening exercise and concluded that the Framework should be screened out. They proposed in the consultation document that equality screening would be undertaken in respect of each individual programme delivered under the successor Framework and, where appropriate, full EQIA’s would be carried out by the lead public authority.  Since then, the Department has undertaken equality screening exercises on its new and revised Schemes and although these may or may not have led to an EQIA, there have often been minor policy changes implemented and new actions to improve outreach, etc. as a result of working through this process. As a result of a number of recommendations in the Equality Impact Assessment DAERA has been reviewing the method of collection of the Section 75 monitoring information for its TRPSI Schemes. The changes to the monitoring system were designed to improve the quality and extent of the Section 75 information collected which in turn informed TRPSI Scheme development.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021 as listed above and as detailed within the APR’s then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2012) has been achieved. Indeed, the work relating to the integration of Section 75 duties into all planning and decision-making processes within DAERA has continued beyond the target date of 2012 thus highlighting how the Section 75 duties have been embedded within the Department. It is necessary to maintain the consideration and implementation of the Section 75 duties. The completion of equality screenings and EQIA’s are important tools in developing and managing policies and should be adhered to in all business areas. Similar actions to achieve these outcomes should be retained within the new Audit of Inequalities Action Plan. | |
| **2. Action to tackle persistent inequalities** | * Successful achievement of all actions in this Action Plan by the appropriate target dates. [By when: 2016]   Partially Achieved (and ongoing).   * Inequalities and under-representation levels eliminated.   Partially Achieved (and ongoing). | * DB commitment to tackling persistent inequalities and to monitoring progress towards achieving equality outcomes.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * DB provided with progress reports.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  The Department’s Equality and Diversity Steering Group (EDSG) continues to meet regularly. It is chaired by the Permanent Secretary and monitors the Department’s overall progress towards meeting its wider equality agenda and Equality Scheme commitments. EDSG is made up of senior representatives from across DAERA business areas and NIPSA representatives, with administrative support provided by the Equality and Diversity Units. The membership of the former ESG group also had external representatives from key organisations with an interest in DAERA business and rural equality and good relations issues. It may be useful to re-consider the EDSG membership to include some of the key external representatives in going forward.  Speakers suggested how DAERA policymakers and service providers could help improve their engagement and outreach with key groups of customers to ensure that much wider views are heard on issues of specific interest and to help tackle those areas of our work that continue to have low participation and under-representation across specific Section 75 groups.  The Equality and Diversity Units provided progress reports to the EDSG on the fulfilment of the Section 75 obligations. Detailed minutes of the EDSG meetings were circulated across DAERA business areas for information, placed on the DAERA internet for the public and also made available to consultees.  The Departmental Board is committed to tackling persistent inequalities and to monitoring progress towards achieving equality outcomes. They are provided with progress reports on a regular basis.  When looking at all the issues listed within this Review it is clear to see that the majority of the actions and intended outcomes have been achieved and continue to be implemented. A handful of intended outcomes have been partially achieved. Although there has been some success in relation to NDPB’s, and in particular the AFBI Board, the main area of concern is still the inability to successfully achieve the 50:50 representation of women, and other under-representative groups, across all DAERA NDPB’s. The membership of the internal decision-making teams and groups also needs to be considered in going forward.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021 as listed throughout this review and as detailed within the APR’s then it can be agreed that the 2011-2016 Inequalities Action Plan has been mainly successful. This has helped to embed and maintain a culture of equality within the Department but it is also evident that more work needs to be done to eliminate the remaining inequalities and under-representation levels.  Overall, it is clear that virtually all of the issues listed within the Action Plan are still relevant today. In relation to the issues that have not been achieved and those that have only partially been achieved then there may be a need to reconsider the actions needed in order to achieve success in the future. | |
| **3. Improve engagement with customers across Section 75 groups** | * Policymakers have a better understanding of the issues impacting on different groups of people. [By when: 2012]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Customers actively contributing to decision making processes that they have a specific interest in. Improved engagement between policymakers and key groups. [By when: 2016]   Achieved (and ongoing). | * Business areas to actively engage with customers, staff and consultees across S75 categories early in the policy development process.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Specific actions needed to encourage participation by people with disabilities, children and young people, older people and those from a minority ethnic background.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
| **Progress to Date**  Business areas are encouraged to engage with customer and sectoral representatives from an early stage in the policy development process and as part of pre-consultation preparation. This can help ensure that appropriate and timely policy interventions and mitigating actions can be discussed and considered as needed.  In May 2011, representatives from the Participation Network (PN) and NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) facilitated a workshop for DAERA staff to discuss ways to encourage the participation, consultation and engagement of children and young people in the development of those policies and services that are likely to be of most interest to them.  This session was attended by many of our key policy staff who develop policies that impact on children and young people directly, and who are keen to consult / engage with young people and with their representatives. The two speakers outlined the human rights requirements of the Children’s Convention (UNCRC); the Section 75 responsibilities and the requirement to consult; and also, why (and how) DAERA needs to listen to the views of rural young people and make sure that their needs are being met.  **Rural Development Division**  The Children and Young People thematic working group was facilitated by the Rural Network NI on behalf of Rural Development Division. During this early stage of the Action Plan, it comprised of 15 members from across 4 Local Action Group (LAG) areas. Membership included a health visitor, member of the NI Children’s and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership and an Area Manager for Early Years. This group was set up in November 2012 and usually met bi-monthly. Whilst there were no young members of the group at that time, DAERA did invite young people to present to the group and use the linkages which the TWG members had in place to engage with young people, such as Youth Action, YFCU, YMCA and LAGs. The group proposed to implement a project seeking to include rural youth into new LEADER strategies 2014‐2020.  **Farm Policy Branch**  Farm Policy Branch consulted with young farmers’ representatives with a view to including succession opportunity as selection criteria for the third tranche of the Farm Modernisation Programme. The consultation process took place between 16 February and 18 April 2012. In total six responses were received from the UFU, YFCU, Disability Action, Ulster Arable Committee, UUP, and Kevin MacAuley (Farm Week). The proposal to support younger farmers was endorsed by all stakeholders. While some approved the criterion outright, one stakeholder urged DAERA to ensure that there were appropriate safeguards in place so that the likelihood of successful applications from farmers over the age of 40 was not prohibited.  Engagement with young farmers’ representatives continued for the development of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme – Capital, with specific meetings in October 2014 and February 2016 to discuss key elements of the scheme design, along with follow up engagement ahead of scheme roll out (most recently ahead of launch of Tier 1 tranche 3 of FBIS-Capital in October 2020, and ahead of the opening of the Expression of Interest stage for Tier 2 tranche 2 in July 2021.  **CAFRE**  There are active Staff Student Consultative Committees (SSCC’s) across each of the CAFRE campuses. Students participate in staff student consultations on the progress, direction and quality of their learning experience. These meet at least once per semester. Recommendations are reported in course reports and are monitored by validating bodies, for example the Ulster University.  At these SSCC meetings, those students present and representing their year group have the opportunity to discuss their course with the Course director provide feedback on key strengths of their course, highlight any areas of concern and identify areas of improvement. The students take the opportunity to feedback and offer suggestions for improvement in areas such as teaching, learning, assessment and facilities and resources. The issues identified during SSCC meetings are discussed with the course team, and action taken, where possible to address them. Feedback from students is also taken on board, when, for example, planning for student induction, scheduling of coursework. Students have the opportunity to follow up on agreed actions at subsequent meetings. The minutes of these meetings are signed off by the Student Representative Council (SRC) president and posted online on the Student Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).  CAFRE also operates a Students’ Representative Council (SRC) at each Campus. Members are nominated from each course and a Student President for each Campus is elected by SRC members. SRC meetings are generally held every month during the academic year where elected student representatives can also discuss non-academic issues with staff, including accommodation, catering, clubs, societies and health and safety. On an annual basis SRC members, or other class representatives, also meet with members of the CAFRE Senior Management Team, (Education Management Team), College Management Team, and with the College Advisory Group. This provides an opportunity for them to provide feedback on their experience of their course and of CAFRE and discuss, in detail, any concerns they have or improvements required.    Each year all students are encouraged to complete an online “Listening to Learners” survey and their views form part of the annual course review process. This online student survey provides a wide range of questions on all aspects of course delivery including recruitment, course content, course delivery, assessment, careers guidance and overall level of student satisfaction. The information gained from the survey corroborates and builds on feedback from SSCC meetings and provides information for course directors and course teams on areas to be examined. As a result of feedback received from students, more industry visits have been incorporated into Further Education (FE) programmes.  CAFRE staff meet with Higher Education students to discuss DAERA policy development issues in relation to young people. A Loughry student was added as a member of the University of Ulster panel contributing to the revalidation of the College’s higher education food courses in February 2014. This resulted in the Loughry students, on higher education food programmes, contributing to course developments as part of a major review of the College’s foundation and honours degree food programmes.  Five CAFRE students were invited by the then DRD Assembly Committee to give evidence on transportation issues in rural areas at a committee meeting held at Loughry Campus.  On a five yearly cycle, Higher Education courses delivered by CAFRE, and validated by Ulster University, undergo revalidation. This involves a resubmission of a revised curriculum to the University and a meeting with a University Panel to discuss the resubmission, proposed changes to the course and the rationale for these changes. An existing CAFRE student from a separate discipline sits on this Panel and during the Panel meeting a representative group of current students enrolled on the course meet with the Panel. In this way students have the opportunity to contribute towards curriculum design and the delivery and assessment of CAFRE courses. Revalidation and evaluation of new courses have taken place with Ulster University over the last number of years with a new honours degree in Sustainable Agriculture evaluated in November 2020, a top up Honours degree in Horticulture evaluated in February 2021 and a Higher Level Apprenticeship in Food, evaluated in April 2021.  **Policy Development Branch (PDB)**  PDB completed a review of Higher Education (HE) Tuition Fee policy at CAFRE and a review of Further Education (FE) Support and Charging Policy at CAFRE. As part of the consultation process for both reviews, PDB engaged with and sought the views of students who were studying at CAFRE across all disciplines and campuses at that time. As part of the review of HE tuition fees, CAFRE students attended a stakeholder focus group event in June 2018 and during the review of FE support and charging policy, student only focus groups were held across each of the CAFRE campuses during October and November 2019.  **SEIPD**  SEIPD held a science and innovation stakeholders conference in September 2011. Invitations to participate in this event were issued to a wide range of groups. The groups covered all sections of the community, both old and young, ethnic minorities, women’s and disabled groups and members of the rural community. This is now an annual event which allows stakeholders to comment on proposed research gaps identified by DAERA or provide alternative evidence gaps for the Research and Innovation work programme.  **DAERA Direct**   * DAERA Direct is the Department’s customer-focused approach to effective and accessible service delivery. A network of 12 easily accessible DAERA Direct offices, in twelve locations across NI underpins our customer focused service delivery. * These offices are designed to offer customers more choice of how, when and where they access the Department’s services. This can be via the telephone, online, email, post, or in person at a DAERA Direct office. * All DAERA Direct offices also provide internet access to assist the rural community to undertake transactions with the Department online. The provision of online services is likely to be particularly beneficial to customers who may have mobility or transport difficulties which prevent them from visiting an office in person, for example those with specific disabilities, or those with caring responsibilities for dependants. * In November 2013, the DAERA Minister confirmed that a new Government building, to be built in Strabane, would be the location for the remaining DAERA Direct Office. This purpose build office was completed in early part of 2016 and completed the roll out of DAERA Direct.   **Consultations**  The Department is committed to carrying out consultations in accordance with the Equality Commission’s guidelines. Below are a few examples of consultations held by the Department but further information is available in the APR’s.  **Consultation on policy proposals for a Rural Proofing Bill**   * DAERA undertook a public consultation during the period 3 February to 16 March 2015 on the policy proposals for a Rural Proofing Bill. * Prior to launching the consultation, DAERA officials met with key stakeholders on a one-to-one basis and subsequently established a Rural Proofing Bill Stakeholder Forum. * During the consultation period, DAERA hosted a series of nine public meetings across NI to maximise public engagement. At these meetings, DAERA officials outlined the background to rural proofing and the policy proposals for the Rural Proofing Bill. Attendees were then given the opportunity to discuss, ask questions, and express their views on the proposals. * In addition to publicising the consultation on its website and in the press, DAERA wrote to a wide range of consultees, including those on its Section 75 consultee list; those listed in the Executive Office’s (TEO – formerly OFMdFM) “*Guidance on Distribution of Departmental Publications and Consultation Documents*”; and members of the Rural Proofing Bill Stakeholder Forum, to seek their views on the policy proposals. DAERA also wrote to officials in all NI departments that sit on the Inter-Departmental Committee on Rural Policy, advising them of the proposals and offering to meet. DAERA subsequently met with officials from a number of departments to discuss the proposals. * DAERA received 32 written consultation responses to the consultation. The profile of respondents, which included individuals; local councils; public service delivery organisations; rural stakeholder organisations; and other public/community/voluntary sector organisations, indicates that the consultation reached a wide range of stakeholders.   **CAP Policy proposal to make online the primary channel for communication and transacting with DAERA**  The equality screening of the Department’s proposal to make online the primary channel for communicating and transacting with customers of EU area-based CAP schemes identified a number of potential adverse equality impacts on several groups of people. The department subsequently conducted a full EQIA on the proposal and consultation on this took place between November 2015 and February 2016.  In December 2015 the then DAERA Minister Michelle O’Neill officially launched the new DAERA website. With the launch of the new mobile and tablet friendly website DAERA customers have a more convenient way to complete their administration at a time of their choosing and not just when offices are open.  Following the consultations on the CAP EQIA, mitigating policies and/or procedures were introduced to address the adverse impacts:   * Help to get online; * Funding and support helped to improve broadband access for customers across Northern Ireland. In turn this provided access for customers to computers in DAERA offices with staff assistance available if they should need it; * Help to use online services; * Online services were designed to help make them accessible; * The provision of a telephone helpline to give customers help and assistance was provided; * Face-to-face training sessions were also provided across NI; * Furthermore, online videos, information and help guides were made available for customers; * Alternatives to online; and * Paper forms, leaflets, guidance etc. continue to remain in use.   The online Single Application and Map Service Scheme is the main agricultural subsidy scheme in Northern Ireland and has replaced most of the individual Common Agricultural Policy subsidy payments previously made to farmers. Following consultation and engagement with users, a web chat facility was introduced in 2017 which allowed users to communicate in real-time using easily accessible web interfaces.  In addition, DAERA introduced an enhanced service of digital assistance appointments through its DAERA Direct Offices where customers could access specific, tailored help to enable them to make their Single Applications online. In 2017, 3,778 service users attended these appointments and benefitted from this additional service and online uptake of single applications increased from 62% in 2016 to 99.5% in 2017.  **Forest Plans and Engagement**  Forest Service promotes the use of early engagement with stakeholders when reviewing forest plans. Since 2017 Forest Service has been undertaking a review of the eight Forestry Planning Areas, FPA, for Northern Ireland. A consultation is conducted at the scoping stage of the planning review for each FPA. Over 100 stakeholder organisations are invited to participate in each consultation. In addition, posters, press releases and social media are used to promote consultations and to encourage responses. To further increase stakeholder participation an ‘easy read’ version of the consultation document has been published and produced both online and in paper form.  Up until March 2021, six consultations have been conducted that resulted in a total of 265 responses from a range of stakeholders including community groups, environmental organisations, farmers groups, councils, private individuals, forestry industry and government bodies. DAERA welcomes this encouraging response rate which has been a valuable contribution to the development of meaningful draft forestry plans.  **Environmental Issues**  **Environment Strategy**: When the Department launched a 20 week public discussion on the ‘Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland’ in September 2019 a group of 30 young people representing their schools and environmental organisations participated in the launch which included a litter clean up in the Belfast hills. An ‘Our Bright Futures’ event involving a large number of school pupils was held at Parliament Buildings as part of activities to promote the public discussion. At the end of the discussion period 2,500 responses had been received from all age groups – from the under 18s to the over 70s.  **Green Growth Strategy**: The Department intends to launch this strategy for public consultation in late 2021 and is committed to putting citizens at heart of green growth policy development through ongoing engagement with young people and other key group. A youth survey on climate change was shared on DAERA social media channels over the summer and there are further communications planned with the youth sector as this process continues. The Education Authority has been carrying out a programme of youth engagement on DAERA’s behalf with a group of around 20 young people participating selected from a range of organisations, providing feedback on the Green Growth strategy.  **Consultation Methods**  The consultation methods most frequently used by consultees were as follows: face-to-face meetings, focus groups, written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing, information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation, and telephone consultations. Other methods used have been; conferences, advisory groups and key stakeholder groups. All consultations are advertisement on the internet. Various other consultations have taken place beyond the end date of 2016 in relation to the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan.  The DAERA Equality Scheme sets out arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies and this is available on the Department’s website: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/daeras-equality-scheme>    In addition, the completed screening templates are also available on the Departments website: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/daeras-equality-scheme#toc-11>  DAERA continues to keep in contact with consultees through the regular issuing of emails with details of screening assessments, updating and circulating information on its website, occasional meetings with local sectoral groups and inviting key consultees / representatives to meet with DAERA staff and to give presentations when appropriate. These arrangements have helped maintain good relations with key organisations and ensure that they remain fully aware of the DAERA actions to support its Equality Scheme commitments.  The Department’s online Induction package included a section outlining the roles and responsibilities that each member of staff has in meeting Section 75 requirements. All new staff to the Department received this information on their first day into the Department.  As needed, short workshops / advisory sessions on implementation of the Section 75 duties / Scheme commitments have also been scheduled during the year for policy teams e.g. on developing proposals to introduce online services for customers.  **Equality & Diversity Steering Group (EDSG)**  Guest speakers during this reporting period included the CEO of Playboard and the Equality & Good Relations Officer of Belfast City Council. The ECNI have also attended the EDSG meetings to speak about leadership and Section 75 issues. Speakers briefly highlighted the work of their respective organisations and discussed how DAERA’s work and the decisions it makes impacts on the lives and well-being of different groups of rural people, our staff and customers who use our services. Speakers suggested how DAERA policymakers and service providers could help improve their engagement and outreach with key groups of customers to ensure that much wider views are heard on issues of specific interest and to help tackle those areas of our work that continue to have low participation and underrepresentation across specific Section 75 groups.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021 as listed above and as detailed within the APR’s then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2012 and 2016) has been achieved. The various methods used to engage with stakeholders and consultees has helped to contribute to better understanding by business areas and policy makers, thus, leading to policies that have come about with input from the consultees in relation to the decision-making process. The achievement of these actions and outcomes should be maintained within the culture of DAERA in going forward and key actions may be necessary in the new Audit of Inequalities Action Plan to help ensure the business areas continue to engage with the customs who represent the Section 75 groups. | |

**DAERA (Formerly DARD) Key Inequalities – Action Plan 2011-2016**

**Corporate Goals**

* To ensure that the equality and good relations obligations are central to all decision making processes
* To ensure fair representation on our public appointments, management boards, committees, groups etc

| **Issue to Address** | **Intended Outcomes** | **Actions Needed** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **4. Improve representation by women on DAERA NDPBs and associated bodies** | * An increase of 25% in expressions of interest by women in DAERA public appointments by 2013. [By when: 2013]   Not Achieved (but ongoing).   * An increase of 25% in the number of successful applications received from women by 2014 across all NDPB’s and associated bodies. [By when: 2014]   Not Achieved (but ongoing).   * To increase the gender balance to take representation to 50%. [By when: 2016]   Not Achieved (but ongoing). | * In partnership with others, review all aspects of our public appointments processes and groups that DAERA hosts: to remove any potential barriers to participation by women.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Undertake prompt and innovative outreach measures to raise interest levels amongst potential female candidates.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  **Outreach Measures and Partnerships**  At 31 March 2012, there were 5 DAERA-sponsored NDPBs with a total board membership of 47 public appointees. Of this number, 12 appointees were female, representing just under 26% of all appointees.  DAERA held a Gender workshop in April 2011 facilitated by Dr Margaret Ward and Lynn Carville from the Women’s Resource & Development Agency (WRDA). The workshop focused on ways to improve women’s participation and representation levels on our decision-making boards and forums.  In October 2011, representatives from DemocraShe and the WRDA addressed the EDSG (formerly ESG) members. The issue of gender representation was discussed; the need for good corporate governance which requires women’s equal representation and diversity generally on boards, committees and management teams.  In October 2012 DAERA hosted an, ‘Are we there yet?’ Workshop for all senior managers and policy makers. The focus of the event was on gender equality and good relations. Adrian Kerr CEO Local Government Staff Commission outlined how local government had sought to address gender inequalities across councils. Women’ sector representatives attended and provided advice / ideas during table discussions.  The Public Appointments Commissioner led a Public Appointments Working Group to review public appointment processes, and to outline ways to help tackle existing inequalities and underrepresentation levels. A DAERA member of staff also sat on this group.  DAERA has also sought to increase the level of female representation on its Non-Departmental Public Bodies by engaging with various women’s groups including the NI Rural Women’s Network, the Fermanagh Women’s Network and the Women’s Resource and Development Agency. DAERA continue to contact Section 75 consultees groups and in particular Age NI, British Deaf Association (NI), Coalition on Sexual Orientation, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Indian Community Centre, NI Council for Ethnic Minorities, Royal Institute for Blind People and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. Board vacancies continue to be advertised in the daily and agricultural press, in an Irish newspaper and in both the NICVA and Disability Action e-zines.  **LEADER**  Using the Axis 4 LEADER ‘bottom up approach’ methodology each Local Action Group (LAG) is representative of the area which it serves. The original appointments were equality proofed by the individual lead Council Equality Officers prior to approval by DAERA. As at 2013, the representation of women on LAGs ranges from one cluster having less at 19% with more than 45% women on another. The rest range between 21% and 40% women. This equates to an average representation of 33% women on LAGs. The LAGS are required to run open calls for new members, additionally, the Rural Support Networks (RSN’s) and the Northern Ireland Rural Women’s Network (NIRWN) are available to assist this process. All appointment processes are tested by the Council Equality Officer.  **Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme (PMG) Selection Panel**  As at 2013 the Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme (PMG) Selection Panel for the over £50k grant applications was chaired by a woman. A female representative from Invest NI also sat on the PMG Selection Panel for the under £50k grant applications. Out of a total membership of 7 members, 2 members were female.  **Position as at 31 March 2014**  At 31 March 2014 the position for the 5 DAERA-sponsored NDPBs and one ad-hoc Advisory Group (sponsored jointly with DETI) showed that the total board membership was 58 public appointees. The 58 includes 6 ex officio members:   * Two on the Drainage Council (1 DAERA (formerly DARD, 1 DOE) and 4 on the recently established Agri-Food Strategy Board (2 DAERA, 1 DETI and 1 Invest NI). * Out of the 58 appointees, 13 were female, representing just over 22% of all appointees. Female representation on DAERA boards continued to be low.   During 2014, the Department initiated a review of its arrangements for making public appointments with the aim of improving processes and developing initiatives to encourage more women to apply for positions on the boards of its public bodies. The review identified a range of issues for consideration and implementation including, the scope for adjusting selection criteria to widen the pool of potential applicants for forthcoming competitions.  **Position as at 31 March 2015**  Membership of Public Bodies at 31 March 2015, Chairs and Members, was as follows:   * Chair Position: 5 Males and 0 Females. * Member Positions: 27 Males and 10 Females.   **Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board**  During 2015/16, the AFBI Sponsor Branch administered a competition to recruit members to the Board for appointments to be made with effect from 1 April 2016. The competition attracted 39 applications. Of these, 17 (44%) were from female candidates and the remaining 22 (56%) applications were from men. At 1 April 2015, AFBI Board membership consisted of three female and nine male Board members (33% female representation).  During 2016/17, DAERA appointed seven new members to the AFBI Board - 2 males and 5 female. At 1 April 2016, there were seven female and ten male AFBI Board members (41% female representation). No other appointments were required during the period and on 31 March 2017, the departure of Board members who had reached the end of their tenure resulted in achievement of 50% female representation at 1 April 2017 (six female and six male AFBI Board members).  **Northern Ireland Fishers and Harbour Authority (NIFHA)**  NIFHA competitions were held to appoint 2 new board members in 2015. Application packs for NIFHA Board competitions were re-designed to address concerns that the job criteria and application format could discourage female applicants from applying.  In addition to traditional advertising by publication in the press, an information email was issued to various groups from the DAERA Section 75 consultee list. Organisations contacted were invited to make their members aware of the opportunity. Candidate information documents were available in alternative formats upon request. NIFHA Sponsor Branch also visited the three harbours – Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie – and delivered a presentation in order to promote the competition.  The competition attracted 24 applications. Of these, three (12.5%) were from female candidates and the remaining 21 (87.5%) applications were from men. At 1 April 2015, NIFHA Board membership consisted of one female and six male Board members (14% female representation). At 1 December 2015, there were two female and five male NIFHA Board members (28% female representation).  **Agricultural Wages Board (AWB)**  Farm Policy Branch adheres to the principles set out in Commissioner’s Code of Practice when making appointments to the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB). The Department appoints three Independent Members to the  Board, with one of the Independent Members being appointed on 1 April 2015.  Details of the post were included in the ‘All Aboard’ newsletters produced by the Central Appointments Unit (CAU) and on the CAU’s website. Furthermore, the Department’s Section 75 consultee list, which includes a number of women’s groups, was informed of the vacancy. Lastly, prior to the competition launching, the post was included in a welcoming email sent to key women in business by the Head of Central Policy Group.  **Diversity Champion**  During this time the NICS Diversity Champion had worked alongside the other Diversity Champions to support this corporate work and to look at how best to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding of the issue across the Department. In addition, the Champion was also involved through her membership of the Co-ordinating Committee of the NICS Senior Women’s network, which was launched in May 2015.  All departments made a commitment to deliver an awareness raising event before the end of the 2015/16 business year. In order to ensure that this was meaningful to DAERA, the Champion gathered a small advisory group from across the department made up of colleagues at all levels to design the event. The event was held in March 2016 and was attended by approximately 50 staff with the Equality and Good relations Officer of Belfast City Council attending as guest speaker.  **Position as at 31 March 2016 and 31 March 2017**  The number of females on the Department’s public bodies remains low though an increasing percentage of female representation over recent years is now evident. Of the 42 public appointments on its regulated bodies at 31 March 2016, 11 (26%) were held by women. Since then and at 1 April 2017, women held 14 (38%) of the 37 public appointments on these bodies. This is only a slight increase from March 2016 to the end of March 2017.  The Department remained committed to increasing the number of women on its public bodies and to improve diversity generally. Sponsor Branches continue to review their procedures for making appointments with the aim of encouraging more women and other under-represented groups to apply for positions on the boards of their public bodies. This ongoing review includes the scope to adjust selection criteria to widen the pool of potential applicants for appointment competitions.  In addition, the Department has been involved with other NICS Departments in the development of a 5-year Diversity Strategic Action Plan (2016-21) to establish a corporate and coordinated approach to increasing diversity in NI public appointments. This interdepartmental group facilitates the cross-cutting discussions which help to develop the overarching strategy and action plan. The Action Plan will assist Departments meet the diversity targets for public appointments agreed by the NI Executive in February 2016. It is currently proposed that a new strategy and supporting action plan (both under development), will replace the previous draft Diversity Action Plan.  The appointments carried out during 2016/17 helped to increase the female representation on the AFBI Board and meet the 50% target for gender balance.  **Governance**  During the 2017/18 reporting period, a new Equality, Diversity and Public Appointments (EDPA) Branch was established within Corporate Services Division and was located in the new DAERA building in Ballykelly. There is a dedicated public appointments officer in post supported by a deputy and the EDPA Branch oversees a centralised approach to the planning, management and delivery of public appointment competitions and combines these functions with the broader equality functions and diversity responsibilities.  This centralised and dedicated approach to public appointments allows for expertise in the area to be developed and provides a platform for best practice to be shared and disseminated within the department which, in turn, reduces the risk of non-compliance with the CPANI Code and reputational damage for DAERA. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to streamline and develop processes for attracting a diverse range of candidates with the right skills to serve on DAERA bodies and build on the success already achieved by the department in terms of increasing female participation on its boards.  **Position as at 31 March 2018**  The number of females on the Department’s public bodies was still below the 50% target. Of the 37 public appointments on its regulated bodies at 31 March 2018, 16 (43%) were held by women. This was an increase from the previous year (38%) and the Department has been moving closer towards achieving the overall target.  The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board had exceeded the 50% target at an individual level. At 1 April 2017, there were six females and six male AFBI Board members, 50% female representation. Following the end of tenure for the Deputy Chair and the appointment of 2 new members both of whom are female, thus resulting in the AFBI Board, as of 31 March 2018, having 8 females (62%) and 5 males (38%).  **Position as at 31 March 2019**  The number of females on the Department’s public bodies was still below the 50% target set by the Executive. Of the 36 public appointments on its regulated bodies at 31 March 2019, 16 (44%) were held by women. Whilst this is a small increase from the previous year (43%) this was difficult to achieve due to the drop in the number of people appointed, but the Department was continuing to move towards achieving the overall target. Unfortunately, there was little or no opportunity to change these statistics due to there not being a functioning executive, nor Ministers to make appointments to Boards. The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board has exceeded the 50% target for female membership.  **Position as at 31 March 2020**  The number of females on the Department’s public bodies is still below the 50% target set by the Executive. Of the 36 public appointments on its regulated bodies at 31 March 2020, 16 (44%) were held by women. The Department was continuing to move closer towards achieving the overall target. The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board has exceeded the 50% target at an individual level. During the course of this reporting period a new Chair was appointed to the AFBI Board, this changed the gender breakdown to eight females (67%) and four males (33%).  **Position as at 31 March 2021**  The number of females on the Department’s public bodies is still below the 50% target set by the Executive. Of the 28 public appointments on its regulated bodies at 31 March 2021, 13 (46%) were held by women. The Department is continuing to move closer towards achieving the overall target. The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board has exceeded the 50% target at an individual level, the gender breakdown being seven females (70%) and three males (30%).  **DAERA Public Appointments Unit**  In terms of impact on individuals according to Section 75 category, the establishment of a central public appointments unit has helped ensure that the processes for appointments are fairly and openly applied and that the principles underpin an inclusive process. It is important that any individual who wishes to serve on one of DAERA’s bodies and has the skills to contribute is given the opportunity to put themselves forward for appointment. Having resources dedicated to public appointments also means that staff can be proactive in terms of outreach efforts when running a competition including maximising all possible media opportunities to attract a large and diverse applicant pool. Staff time has also been made available to review the effectiveness of each public appointment competition and identify any barriers to participation by underrepresented groups to continually improve the process and widen opportunities to participate for everyone.  During the 2020/21 reporting period the EDPA Branch was dissolved and the public appointments section moved over to the ALB Sponsor Branch to continue this work.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021 as listed above and as detailed within the APR’s then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2013, 2014 and 2016) have not been achieved. In 2017 the AFBI Board did achieve and surpass the target of 50% female representation on its Board but this was after the target date and is only a partial success overall. The actions for this issue have been achieved but the intended outcome has not yet materialised.  This work should continue and it is necessary to keep this issue within the new Audit of Inequalities Action Plan. Consideration around the actions needed to achieve this should be assessed and renewed if necessary. | |
| **5. Improve representation by women on internal decision making teams / groups** | * Fair representation (50:50) by women and men on all key DAERA internal decision-making Boards, teams / groups etc. [By when: 2016]   Not Achieved (but ongoing). | * Revise the gender make-up of internal Boards, review teams, policy, subject-specific groups, forums etc and the criteria for membership.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
| **Progress to Date**  **CAFRE**  As at 2013, CAFRE had 26 management committees with a gender balance of approximately 27% female to 73% male. A group of female staff representing Grades III, II and I was consulted by the DACRE Director on how CAFRE can improve the representation of women on decision-making groups. As a result of this it was agreed that CAFRE Committee Chairs would review the make-up of CAFRE Committees with the view to increasing female representation.  **College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) - College Advisory Group**  During 2012/13, SDG Resource Management Services Branch initiated a recruitment competition for 9 members of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) - College Advisory Group. An information night was held at Greenmount Campus, CAFRE, for prospective candidates. This helped to fulfil the action listed above to review the policy in relation to recruiting members to this group.  As part of the 2012/13 competition, the selection process was reviewed significantly changing the wording of the Candidate Booklet and Application Form to make them less daunting and easier to understand. The eligibility criteria were also amended to reflect the attributes that a potential post-holder would need. Since 2013, three further recruitment competitions have been held for 8 new members and a new Chair of the Group and the recruitment processes continue to be reviewed to reflect up to date practices and guidance. As part of the promotion of these appointments, Section 75 representative organisations/groups are alerted to the advertisement, which was published in the three local daily newspapers; the Belfast Telegraph, the Irish News and the Farming Life section of the Newsletter. Also since 2019 online social media platforms and sector specific publications have been employed as appropriate to increase awareness of the opportunity to participate on this group to a wider audience. DAERA also engaged with appropriate stakeholder groups, including those representing the interests of under-represented cohorts, early in the process, to raise awareness of these vacancies and to encourage applications from underrepresented S.75 groups.  **NI Regional Food Programme**  Up to 2021, NI Regional Food Programme has run with a 50:50 female/male split on the Selection Panel and it is intended to continue with this. The panel is hosted by DAERA and is comprised of an Invest NI representative (male), an external representative (female) and a DAERA representative. As of 2013, the DAERA role for the first 4 years was conducted by a female and in latter years the role has been fulfilled by a male before returning to a female from 2018 onwards.  **Agri-Food Cooperation Scheme**  Agri-Food Cooperation scheme has run with a 66% male representation on the Selection Panel. The panel is hosted by DAERA and is comprised of a Countryside Services representative (male), an external representative (male) and a DAERA representative (female). As of 2018, the DAERA role is conducted by a female.  **Postgraduate scheme**  The current selection panel is comprised of 1 male (Grade 5) and 2 females (Grade 6) along with an external male panel member from Teagasc.  **Gender Champion**  A Grade 3 female has in the past, held the DAERA Gender Champion role and a Grade 5 female currently holds it. In addition, a DAERA G3 female currently holds the NICS Gender Champion role.  **NICS Senior Civil Servant (SCS) grades**  The number of females within the NICS, at the Senior Civil Servant (SCS) grades (Grades 5 and 3) covering the past decade is as follows:   * January 2010 – 31.6% for G5’s and 25.0% for G3+’s. * January 2013 – 32.2% for G5’s and 19.1% for G3+’s. * April 2016 – 39.7% for G5’s and 26.5% for G3+’s. * April 2019 – 38.2% for G5’s and 28.3% for G3+’s.   The figures show that the number of females at both G5 and G3+ grades has increased since January 2010 but they are still well below the 50% level. The NI Labour Force (Census 2011) percentages shows that at G5 level the Census equivalent was 52.6% and for G3+ level it was 51.6%.  With percentages below the 50% mark then it would be difficult to get more females on to internal decision making teams and groups. If these groups do achieve a 50:50 split of membership it may mean that each individual female may be carrying a heavier workload than others due to the multiple membership of these groups.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021 as listed above and as detailed within the APR’s then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcome” (By when: 2016) has not been achieved. The action for this issue may have been achieved but the intended outcome has not materialised yet.  This work should continue and it is necessary to keep this issue within the new Audit of Inequalities Action Plan. It should also be noted that this may all be contingent upon vacancies becoming available at the higher grades and the requirement of the merit principle. | |

**DAERA (Formerly DARD) Key Inequalities – Action Plan 2011-2016**

**Corporate Goals**

* To ensure that the equality and good relations obligations are central to all decision making processes
* To ensure fair representation on our public appointments, management boards, committees, groups etc

| **Issue to Address** | **Intended Outcomes** | **Actions Needed** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **6. Improve representation (disability, race, age) on NDPB’s and associated bodies** | * By 2012 DAERA public appointment process to be reviewed, and to become more accessible and welcoming to under-represented groups. [By when: 2012]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * By 2013 to have introduced a co-ordinated approach to equality monitoring and reporting process across NDPB’s. [By when: 2013]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * In partnership with others to introduce co-ordinated annual programmes of interest raising measures. [By when: 2013]  Achieved (and ongoing). * To increase by 25% the number of applications received from those groups currently under-represented across all NDPB’s and bodies by 2013. [By when: 2013]   Not Achieved (but ongoing). | * In partnership with others, review public appointments processes and identify ways to address potential barriers to participation.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Review existing NDPB equality monitoring to standardise with Section 75 requirements.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Innovative outreach measures to raise interest levels amongst potential under-represented groups.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
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|  | **Progress to Date**  During 2011, AFBI Sponsor Branch (ASB) ran an appointments process to recruit a Deputy Chairperson and 5 new Board Members to the AFBI Board. To encourage more applications from women, people with disabilities and those from different race and ethnic minority groups, AFBI contacted leading representative organisations and gave them advance notice of the intention to advertise these vacancies.  While this approach maintained the number of applications from women, it did not generate any applications from those represented by the other groups contacted. These groups included the Belfast Metropolitan College, Queens University, Belfast School of Governance, Chinese Welfare Association, Disability Action, NI Council for Ethnic Minorities, NI Rural Women’s Network, NI Rural Community Network, RNID (now Action on Hearing Loss), RNIB, Employers Forum on Disability and the Multicultural Resource Centre.  **Agricultural Wages Board (AWB)**  As of November 2013, the Agricultural Wages Board had 3 DAERA appointed members - 1 male and 2 females, of which one of the females was Chair. However, by 31 March 2015, the three DAERA appointed members on the AWB board consisted of, two males and one female. An appointments competition to replace one of the male board members (the Independent Member) was carried out and a female was appointed w/e 1 April 2015.  In order to help address under-representation, and in line with the Commissioner for Public Appointment’s Code of Practice, the assessment criteria for the position was tailored to be as open and inclusive as possible. This included actions such as the following:   * No formal qualifications were required and applicants were not asked to detail current or past employment. * In addition, where a specific criterion was applied, a minimum of 6 months’ experience in the past 10 years was requested. * The press release included a statement of commitment to equality of opportunity and was available in alternative formats upon request. * As well as being published in the printed presses, a mailshot email was issued to the DAERA Section 75 consultee list and a Twitter post was also issued through NI Direct’s Twitter account. * Candidates were also advised that travel expenses, subsistence and dependants & childcare fees were payable for AWB attendance. * All individuals or organisations contacted were invited to forward details of the competition to any individuals or organisations that they felt may have an interest. Of a total of 14 applicants, 5 were from females.   **Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC)**  Food Policy Branch (FPB) carried out an appointment process to appoint a new Member to the Board of the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) in 2013. At the start of the process the Branch made sure that those selected to sit on the selection panel were trained in diversity and equality issues. In addition, they ensured that the application documents were easy to understand and the selection criteria was appropriate to the needs of the LMC.  To encourage more applicants from women, people with disabilities and those from different race and ethnic groups DAERA included a statement to this effect in the advertisement which was placed in the local press. FPB also wrote to section 75 groups on the Department’s consultee list. They also wrote to the Rural Women’s Network and other women’s groups, and to ethnic and disabled groups giving notice of the vacancy. The vacancy was also placed on the Department’s website and the Central Appointment Unit’s website.  **Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board**  During 2016/17, DAERA appointed seven new members to the AFBI Board - 2 males and 5 female.  At 1 April 2016, there were seven female and ten male AFBI Board members (41% female representation).  No other appointments were required during the period and on 31 March 2017, the departure of Board members who had reached the end of their tenure resulted in achievement of 50% female representation at 1 April 2017 (six female and six male AFBI Board members). The appointments carried out during 2016/17 helped to increase the female representation on the AFBI Board and meet the 50% target for gender balance.  The overall picture has not changed substantially from 2013/14, although in a number of areas there have been some changes. Whilst the number of female appointments and applications continues to rise, women, people under 30 years of age, people from a minority ethnic background and people with disabilities continue to be under-represented amongst public appointees. Appointments are made solely on merit and individuals from all parts of society are encouraged to put themselves forward for appointment. A range of outreach and other measures have been developed to ensure greater involvement in public appointments from those parts of society currently underrepresented. In tandem with this approach, work has been taken forward to improve the statistical information available in relation to public appointments, in order to better inform future policy.  The number of females on the Department’s public bodies remains low though an increasing percentage of female representation over recent years is now evident. Of the 42 public appointments on its regulated bodies at 31 March 2016, 11 (26%) were held by women. Since then and at 1 April 2017, women held 14 (38%) of the 37 public appointments on these bodies. This is only a slight increase from March 2016 to the end of March 2017 and more work has to be done if the percentage of women on public bodies is to be raised to a higher level.  The Department remains committed to increasing the number of women on its public bodies and to improve diversity generally. Sponsor Branches continue to review their procedures for making appointments with the aim of encouraging more women and other under-represented groups to apply for positions on the boards of their public bodies. This ongoing review includes the scope to adjust selection criteria to widen the pool of potential applicants for appointment competitions.  In addition, the Department has been involved with other NICS Departments in the development of a 5-year Diversity Strategic Action Plan (2016-21) to establish a corporate and coordinated approach to increasing diversity in NI public appointments. This interdepartmental group facilitates the crosscutting discussions which help to develop the overarching strategy and action plan. The Action Plan will assist Departments meet the diversity targets for public appointments agreed by the NI Executive in February 2016.  **Centralised Public Appointments Unit**  A new Public Appointments Unit was established within Corporate Services Division in 2017 and is located in the new DAERA building in Ballykelly. There is a dedicated public appointments officer in post supported by a deputy and the Unit oversees a centralised approach to the planning, management and delivery of public appointment competitions and combines these functions with the broader equality functions and diversity responsibilities.  This centralised and dedicated approach to public appointments allows for expertise in the area to be developed and provides a platform for best practice to be shared and disseminated within the Department which, in turn, reduces the risk of non-compliance with the CPANI Code and reputational damage for DAERA. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to streamline and develop processes for attracting a diverse range of candidates with the right skills to serve on DAERA bodies and build on the success already achieved by the department in terms of increasing female participation on its boards. That said, the number of females on the Department’s public bodies is still below the 50% target overall. Of the 37 public appointments on its regulated bodies at 31 March 2018, 16 (43%) were held by women. This is an increase from the previous year (38%) and the department is moving closer towards achieving the overall target.  As stated above and moving forward, the AFBI Board has now exceeded the 50% target at an individual level. Following the end of tenure for the Deputy Chair and the appointment of 2 new members both of whom are female, the current AFBI Board, as of 31 March 2018, has 8 females (62%) and 5 males (38%).  Having resources dedicated to public appointments also means that staff can be proactive in terms of outreach efforts when running a competition including maximising all possible media opportunities to attract a large and diverse applicant pool. Staff time will also be made available to review the effectiveness of each public appointment competition and identify any barriers to participation by underrepresented groups to continually improve the process and widen opportunities to participate for everyone.  The DAERA Public Appointments Unit is part of the cross-departmental public appointments group and this also makes use of ad hoc working groups to research and discuss issues of concern and to bring forward remedies where possible.  As at 31 March 2021, the number of females on the Department’s public bodies is still below the 50% target set by the Executive. Of the 28 public appointments on its regulated bodies, 13 (46%) were held by women. The Department is continuing to move closer towards achieving the overall target but only the AFBI Board has exceeded the 50% target at an individual level with the gender breakdown being seven females (70%) and three males (30%). Whilst the number of female appointments and applications continues to rise, women, people under 30 years of age, people from a minority ethnic background and people with disabilities continue to be under-represented amongst public appointees.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2012 and 2013) has been met in relation to doing reviews, monitoring and promotion but the key issue of increasing the number of under-representative groups has not been achieved.  As at 31 March 2021, the number of females on the Department’s public bodies is still below the 50% target set by the Executive. Of the 28 public appointments on its regulated bodies, 13 (46%) were held by women. The Department is continuing to move closer towards achieving the overall target but only the AFBI Board has exceeded the 50% target at an individual level with the gender breakdown being seven females (70%) and three males (30%). Whilst the number of female appointments and applications continues to rise, women, people under 30 years of age, people from a minority ethnic background and people with disabilities continue to be under-represented amongst public appointees.  This work should continue and it is necessary to keep this issue within the new Audit of Inequalities Action Plan. The actions need reviewed and may need to be altered in going forward. | |

**DAERA (Formerly DARD) Key Inequalities – Action Plan 2011-2016**

**Corporate Goals**

* To ensure that the equality and good relations obligations are central to all decision making processes
* To ensure fair representation on our public appointments, management boards, committees, groups etc

| **Issue to Address** | **Intended Outcomes** | **Actions Needed** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **7. Improve equality monitoring, and data co-ordination** | * A centralised equality database and a standardised approach to Section 75 monitoring across all business functions, including NDPBs. [By when: 2011]   Partially Achieved (and ongoing).   * Agreed programme of equality monitoring undertaken by business areas. [By when: 2012]   Partially Achieved (and ongoing).   * Equality monitoring outcomes reviewed and published on an annual basis.   Achieved (and ongoing). | * Establish a methodology for the collection and co-ordination of Section 75 equality monitoring data across all business functions, including NDPB’s.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Develop staff to be able to use the information to inform policy or decision making processes.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Outcomes from equality monitoring to inform future screening and decision-making processes.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  Rural Development Division (RDD) carries out Section 75 monitoring of all its schemes via anonymous questionnaires. Information gathered through these questionnaires is analysed and used to inform further schemes or programmes.  RDD is guided by equality monitoring and applies this information in advertising, the consultation process and scheme documentation. The Axis 3 team completed Introduction to Section 75 and Good Relations training (Article 9). Further to this an equality questionnaire was developed for the purpose of evaluating equality/good relation achievements. This was issued to larger community projects and events where the standard Section 75 proforma was not a suitable method of collecting equality data for reporting.  **2014-2020 Rural Development Programme**  As a result of a number of recommendations in the EQIA, DAERA have reviewed the method of collection of the Section 75 monitoring information for the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme and have introduced electronic monitoring for all schemes. The changes to the monitoring system aim to improve the quality and extent of the Section 75 information collected, which in turn informs rural development policy.  The EQIA on the Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020 made a number of recommendations for improving the equality monitoring and data co-ordination:   * Section 75 should be incorporated into the requirements of IT systems to help improve return rates and data analysis. * A unique identifier or reference number should be included on all forms so that information can be linked back to schemes / measures / tranches. * Monitoring forms should be issued at application stage rather than post-award in order to collect information on those that are unsuccessful as well as successful. * Numbers of monitoring forms issued need to be recorded in order to track response rates. * Where possible, information such as age, gender, disability should be collected on the scheme application forms to ensure a maximum response rate. * Consideration should be given to collecting a reduced amount of information via the monitoring forms and collecting other information such as political opinion using other methods. * For projects with multiple beneficiaries, the project promoter should be required to submit a short equality report on those using the service rather than issuing equality monitoring forms to a large number of beneficiaries.   NISRA (NI Statistics & Research Agency) statisticians have carried out the initial analysis of the Section 75 monitoring data and compared each Section 75 group against the contextual population of Northern Ireland as a whole, rural NI and the farming population. Analysis has shown up a number of issues including that in relation to disability. Both schemes are showing percentage rates of 2.5%; however, statistics show that 20% of the overall population have a disability, whilst in the farming population this rises to 26%.  The analysis was sent to scheme policy leads who determine if any additional mitigating actions need to be put in place to help address any areas where Section 75 groups appear to be under-represented. These recommendations have been considered in the development of guidance for the 2014-2020 programming period. The analysis of the data has shown up some issues for the schemes and policy leads have addressed these in going forward.  Ongoing monitoring of the schemes within the Rural Development Programme demonstrated that for schemes where the Department facilitates completion of the Section 75 monitoring as part of the online application process, these deliver a completion rate of 85% or above. Delays in the roll out of the new administration computer system for one of the schemes (LEADER) meant that Section 75 data collection continued to be collected at that time through postal self-completion following initial contact with the Department. However, the department has noted an improved response rate via this method in that it has doubled to 51% compared to the previous programme due to the department increasing its efforts to maximise response rates.  **Agri-Food Support Branch (AFSB)**  AFSB carries out annual Section 75 monitoring for all applicants for post-graduate awards. Section 75 monitoring is also carried out for recipients of Further Education (FE) awards. No inequalities have been identified to date.  **DAERA Relocation Programme**  In relation to the DAERA Relocation Programme, an EQIA, published in 2014, considered potential equality impacts from the decision to relocate Forest Service Headquarters to Fermanagh, Fisheries Division Headquarters to South Down, the relocation of Rivers Agency to Loughry (now transferred to Department for Infrastructure) and the remainder of Belfast Headquarters to Ballykelly.  In the “Report on the Results of the Equality Impact Assessment of the Relocation of the DAERA Headquarters” dated August 2014 the Department committed to monitor the equality impacts of each of its relocation projects. During 2016/17, monitoring was carried out for the relocation of Fisheries Division and Forest Service. The monitoring data includes information collected by NISRA, who have provided a range of data to inform equality monitoring. NISRA have provided statistical analysis on staff prior to relocation and 12 months after relocation. All staff impacted by relocation, including those who have since left the service, have been issued with a staff questionnaire which examined those areas outlined in the EQIA with potential for impact, for example, the impact on staff with disabilities, those with caring responsibilities, those who work part-time, etc. The aim of the monitoring exercise was to test the impact of relocation on Section 75 groups and to assess the impact of the mitigations outlined in the screening documents, specifically at this stage for the 2 smaller relocations for Fisheries and Forest Service.  The outcome of this equality monitoring on these relocations projects enhanced DAERA’s evidence base and provided a basis for positive action to promote equality of opportunity in future decision making in relation to the accessibility of DAERA facilities.  **Public Appointments**  There is a dedicated public appointments officer in post supported by a deputy and the Branch oversees a centralised approach to the planning, management and delivery of public appointment competitions and combines these functions with the broader equality functions and diversity responsibilities.  In terms of impact on individuals according to Section 75 category, the establishment of a central public appointments unit has helped ensure that the processes for appointments are fairly and openly applied and that the principles underpin an inclusive process. It is important that any individual who wishes to serve on one of DAERA’s bodies and has the skills to contribute is given the opportunity to put themselves forward for appointment. Having resources dedicated to public appointments also means that staff can be proactive in terms of outreach efforts when running a competition including maximising all possible media opportunities to attract a large and diverse applicant pool. Staff time is also made available to review the effectiveness of each public appointment competition and identify any barriers to participation by underrepresented groups to continually improve the process and widen opportunities to participate for everyone.  This approach to public appointments has helped to establish a centralized and standardised system within DAERA, which also includes the use of equality data for Section 75 monitoring of the NDPBs.  **Equality Monitoring Reports**  When equality monitoring reports and outcomes are completed within the Department they are reviewed and published on an annual basis and reported to the ECNI via the Annual Progress Report (APR). The APR is shared with staff and the Departments’ Section 75 consultees. However, there are very few monitoring reports completed in relation to equality screenings that have been, ‘screened out with mitigations’ or for any EQIA’s that have been completed. This is a criticism that is often made by the ECNI for all public authorities.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2011 and 2012) has been partially met in relation to establishing a centralised equality database. However, this could be shown as being fully met and therefore achieved but it depends on the definition of the term ‘centralised’, and this is discussed in the next paragraph.  This is because a centralised database would not serve the purpose of all the various business areas as they have unique sets of customers and clients rather than having a single identifiable pool of individuals. On a local scale and at the Divisional or Branch level then it would be possible to say that this outcome has been achieved given that a centralised database has been established for key business areas and their specific purposes, e.g. Rural Development Programme or the public appointments competitions to mention just a few. In this sense then perhaps the outcome should have been defined more clearly or to be more specific so as to refer to the business areas developing and maintaining a centralised equality database rather than the Department establishing a centralised database, as this outcome seems to suggest.  However, the second part of this outcome (monitoring) has been met given that there is a standardised approach to monitoring in place, albeit that there are very few actual monitoring reports completed. This ties in with the second outcome item (Agreed programme of equality monitoring undertaken by business areas.) and although there is an agreed approach to monitoring, then because of the issue just discussed, it shows that not all business areas undertake nor implement the monitoring process in relation to equality screenings and EQIA’s if they are ever completed.  It would be advisable to retain these outcomes, or something similar, within the new Audit of Inequalities Action Plan. | |

**DAERA (Formerly DARD) Key Inequalities – Action Plan 2011-2016**

**Strategic Goal: To promote the economic, social wellbeing and self-reliance of the rural community**

* to create a strong rural community with more jobs and businesses
* to ensure a higher level of farms that have several different sources of earned income

| **Issue to Address** | **Intended Outcomes** | **Actions Needed** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **8. Low take up of RDP funding** | * Increase in profile of RDP with under-represented groups ie; women, young people, people with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. [By when: 2013]   Partially Achieved (and ongoing).  Increase in number of applications received from under-represented groups ie; women, young people, people with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. [By when: 2013] Partially Achieved (and ongoing).   * Increase in successful projects specifically benefitting under-represented groups ie; women, young people, people with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. [By when: 2013]   Partially Achieved (and ongoing).   * Increase in funding applications that will improve community relations, address sectarianism and conflict issues.   Achieved (and ongoing). | * Pro-active activities to target rural women and women’s groups to encourage RDP funding applications.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Pro-active activities to target young people and other under-represented groups to encourage RDP funding applications.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Encourage suitable project applications that are likely to improve community relations, addressing sectarianism and conflict issues.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
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| **Progress to Date**  **Women’s Groups**  Rural Development Division (RDD) has engaged with women’s groups re Focus Farms to identify opportunities and encourage applications from this grouping. ICT training in agriculture is promoted through existing rural community groups and 32% of trainees are female. Within health and safety, communications have focused on the role of women and farm safety. A female targeted workshop was held with press and media coverage in February 2013. Female attendance at FarmSafe Awareness sessions has fluctuated between 18% and 21% during 2013 and strategies are in place to encourage female participation including existing groups and YFC.  Work with Farm families on the Mentoring programme has paid off with 61% of mentoring sessions having at least 1 female participant. This was achieved by engaging the whole farm family. 7% of applicants are female business id holders.  The Rural Network for NI facilitates a number of thematic working groups including Women in Rural Development comprising representatives from LAGs, Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster (YFCU), NIRWN and Countryside Services Ltd (CSL). The group held 3 events to highlight women in rural development and women in business featuring a mix of speaker presentations and stands which were attended by approximately 200 people. A good practice guide featuring some of the women who have received funding under the RDP and who have been involved in the Women’s Thematic Group activities throughout 2012 was published. This group also worked closely with the QUB research team with their work on gender mainstreaming the NIRDP and has fed into additional research on Gender Mainstreaming. The Women’s group has now closed with the completion of 3 events, a publication and factsheet.  **Children and Young People**  The Children and Young People thematic working group comprised of 15 members from across 4 local action group areas. Membership included a health visitor, member of the NI Children’s and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership and an Area Manager for Early Years. This group was set up in November 2012 and usually met bi-monthly. Whilst, initially, there were no young members of the group, young people were invited to present to the group and use the linkages which the TWG members have to engage with young people, such as Youth Action, YFCU, YMCA and LAGs. These linkages have secured attendance at European events, such as a seminar on the ENRD Youth and Young Farmers Initiative on 11/12 December, where 2 young farmers participated; and also the attendance of approx 25 young people to the youth consultation event on the Rural Development Programme. The group also facilitated a youth co-operation workshop at the UK NRN conference in Cardiff. Also as part of the outcome from the TWG it was proposed to implement a project seeking to include rural youth into new LEADER strategies 2014‐2020.  Meetings and liaison with a range of community & youth providers including Youth Action, Young Farmers Clubs, Inside Out, Statutory Youth Service etc. took place.  Under the Axis 3 measures of the NIRDP 2007-13 the monitoring of project outputs and results commenced. Reports up to the end of 2013 indicated that the target for 5% of Axis 3 spend towards projects benefiting children and young people was on track to be achieved by the end of the programme. By the end of November 2013 of the 1,081 completed projects, 140 were recorded as benefiting children and young people. The total paid to these projects of £5.7 million representing 18.5% of grant paid to all completed projects.  **Rural population**  Under Axis 3 measure 3.5, village renewal, projects submitted for funding were designed to address needs identified by the rural population. One objective was to support integrated village initiatives which promoted cross-community development and regeneration, thereby, helping to contribute to the improvement of community relations, address sectarianism and conflict issues. Over £10 million was committed to 198 community and council projects ranging from village plans, enhancement and streetscape improvement schemes, and community halls to recreation and games areas and allotments.  **2014-2020 Rural Development Programme**  In the example provided above (Issue No. 7. – Improve equality monitoring, and data co-ordination) in relation to improvements made to the Department’s equality monitoring system for the RDP 2014-2020, this facilitated the potential to lead to better outcomes for our service users. An effective monitoring system would enhance the Department’s capacity to perform its Section 75 duties as it would highlight possible inequalities and provide the evidence base for positive action to remove any identified disadvantage or unfairness in the system for individuals.  The RDP 2014-2020 EQIA was finalised as part of the programme approval. The EQIA set out a number of mitigating actions to ensure equality of opportunity for all potential beneficiaries of the Rural Development Programme. The mitigating recommendations were structured around each of the Section 75 groups examined as part of the EQIA.  An Equality Action Plan was developed which aligned the EQIA mitigating recommendations against the key areas of programme implementation. The Action Plan was updated biannually in advance of the Programme Monitoring Committee on the actions taken for each process. This helped to ensure that the mitigating actions recommended in the EQIA were considered during further programme development and implementation.  Looking to the future, the UK will not be part of the next Rural Development Programming period (2021-2027) as the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020. Projects funded under the NI Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 will continue to receive funding for the lifetime of the project. The European Commission has advised that commitments can be made under the 2014-2020 RDP’s up until 2023 and receive EU funding until 31 December 2023 or until EU funds are exhausted (whichever is earlier).  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2013) has been partially achieved. | |
| **9. Development opportunities for young people** | * CAFRE students have opportunities to benefit from work placements. [By when: 2011]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Successfully achieve the targets set out in the DAERA Children and Young people’s Action Plan. [By when: 2013]   Mainly Achieved (and ongoing). | * Provide a range of opportunities to develop young people at the DAERA College (CAFRE).   Achieved (and ongoing). |
| **Progress to Date**  **Example student placements**  A number of CAFRE education programmes require students to undertake a period of work placement in the relevant industry. Most students stay within Northern Ireland and the UK but others travel internationally. Some also participate in student exchange programmes with Michigan State University and Kildalton College. In addition, students have gone on study tours within the UK and Ireland but also in Europe. Students are also given the opportunity to meet with perspective employers through guest speakers/lectures, bursary awards and career days. A number of careers events are held at the CAFRE Campuses. This facilitates students to engage with employers and work placement providers. 20 employers normally attend the equine event in Enniskillen.  A group of FE equine students completed a two week study tour and work placement in Holland during 2013.  Routine meetings are held with the Staff Student Consultative Committees (SSCC) across each of the CAFRE campuses at least once per semester. Students participate in staff student consultations on the progress, direction, and quality of their learning experience.  The Position at 2021 remains that all CAFRE education programmes require students to undertake a period of work placement in the relevant industry. The majority of students complete their work placements in Northern Ireland, but others take the opportunity to travel both Nationally and Internationally. One key international placement programme is the linkage established by CAFRE with New Zealand Dairy Careers. Through this arrangement agriculture students have the opportunity to complete a year-long placement on dairy farms in the mid-Canterbury Region of New Zealand’s South Island. Approximately 4-5 students complete their placement through this programme each year, although 12 students participated in 2019/20. This programme is currently suspended due to the Covid Pandemic. Student exchange programmes also provide opportunities for national and international experience and currently student exchange programmes exist with Michigan State University, the University of Kentucky and Kildalton College in ROI. In addition, students each academic year undertake study tours within the UK and Ireland and also in Europe, for example Honours degree Agriculture students annually visited Belgium which included meetings with MEPs in the European Parliament. Land-based Engineering students have attended the LAMMA show in England as well as visiting major land-based machinery manufacturers in GB. Students are also given the opportunity to meet with perspective employers through guest speakers/lectures, bursary awards and career days. Currently over 60 industry organisations provide bursaries to CAFRE students with careers events involving prospective employers held annually at each campus.  **CAFRE – Student Engagement and Support**  DAERA’s College (CAFRE) continued to engage with GCSE and A level pupils through the provision of syllabus support, open days and taster days in line with DAERA’s commitment to achieving effective communications with its customers and the wider rural community.  Additionally, CAFRE ran a ‘Worth Knowing’ Programme at its Greenmount Campus which allowed for the development of key campaigns such as mental health awareness and no smoking. This engagement took place with young people regardless of the type of school attended, for example controlled/ maintained/ voluntary/ integrated, or their gender identity. In doing so, young people from all backgrounds were provided with opportunities to find out more about the agriculture, food and rural enterprise sectors and make better informed career decisions and choices. Furthermore, CAFRE encourages equality of opportunity and its courses are offered on the basis of academic achievement. In 2017-2018 CAFRE’s enrolments were 1,700, of which 45% were female and 4% declared themselves as having a disability.  As a demonstration of DAERA’s commitment to ensure its services are fully accessible to everyone, CAFRE has a full-time Student Support Officer who provides information and advice to all students at induction and throughout the year at all three campuses. The officer is also available to provide targeted assistance to students who have additional needs. During the 2017/18 reporting period, adaptations were made to student accommodation to support a student with a physical disability. At the end of their education programme, CAFRE provides additional assistance to students with a disability, by signposting them to supported employment services.  In addition, CAFRE provides signposting to a wide range of support organisations at, for example, student health fairs. During their time at CAFRE, a wide cross section of students have the opportunity to represent the student body in College discussion and feedback forums and the student body is represented on College Committees to ensure student views are represented in decision making processes.  Training is provided for staff when it is identified that they will have students with specific difficulties. This is deemed the best approach as training can be tailored to the individual students’ needs. The effectiveness of this training is monitored through interviews with the students to determine the level of satisfaction with the support they receive.  Although work placements are promoted, more work has to be done to ensure people with disabilities are made aware and apply and are recruited for more work placements. Alternative methods of promotion and selection should be identified and implemented if possible.  The position at 2021 remains that DAERA’s College (CAFRE) continues to engage with GCSE and A level pupils through the provision of syllabus support, open days and taster days in line with DAERA’s commitment to achieving effective communications with its customers and the wider rural community. This engagement takes place with young people regardless of the type of school attended, for example controlled/ maintained/ voluntary/ integrated, or their gender identity. In doing so, young people from all backgrounds are provided with opportunities to find out more about the courses available at CAFRE and make better informed career decisions and choices.  CAFRE encourages equality of opportunity and its courses are offered on the basis of academic achievement. In 2020-21 CAFRE’s enrolments were 1,673, of which 45% were female.  As a demonstration of DAERA’s commitment to ensure its services are fully accessible to everyone, CAFRE has a full-time Student Support Officer who provides information and advice to all students at induction and throughout the year at all three campuses. The officer is also available to provide targeted assistance to students who have additional needs. This may include seeking approval from Awarding Organisations for additional time to complete assessments, the provision of assistive technology or the provision of study skills tutors or support tutors. At the end of their education programme, CAFRE provides additional assistance to students with a disability, by signposting them to supported employment services.  In addition, CAFRE provides signposting to a wide range of support organisations at, for example, student health fairs. During their time at CAFRE, a wide cross section of students have the opportunity to represent the student body in College discussion and feedback forums and the student body is represented on College Committees to ensure student views are represented in decision making processes.  Training is provided for staff when it is identified that they will have students with specific difficulties. This is deemed the best approach as training can be tailored to the individual students’ needs. The effectiveness of this training is monitored through interviews with the students to determine the level of satisfaction with the support they receive. In 2019/20 resilience training was provided to staff and students in recognition of the additional pressures on students during periods of remote learning.  **Key results from the DAERA Children and Young People’s Action Plan.**  Set out below are some of the headline results from the first action plan.   * Rural Development Programme (2007-2013) targets 5% Axis 3 spend directly on projects benefitting Children and Young People. Details of some of the individual “good news” projects:   + Day care/pre- & after-school clubs;   + Outdoor play and multi-use recreational areas; and   + Suicide and self-harm awareness training. * Rural Challenge Programmes 2009 and 2012 benefitted 1,890 and 2,720 children and young people respectively in the 0–24 age bands. The Programmes provided support to community-led voluntary organisations across Northern Ireland to deliver a wide range of projects benefitting children and young people up to the age of 24. Many projects involved providing coaches to deliver sporting and recreational activities, tutors to deliver music, arts, crafts and drama classes as well as improving outdoor play facilities at several locations. A number of projects funded through the Programmes also provided support to vulnerable children and young people in relation to suicide prevention and awareness training. * Rural childcare programme – 851 places were created for young children between the ages of 0 and 12 years. The places were created in various locations throughout Northern Ireland. This programme closed in March 2011. * BOOST – 1,355 participants aged between 16 and 24 completed the Boost Programme. The Programme, which is now complete, had as its core aim to reduce economic inactivity among unemployed rural young people by helping them to gain the core skills needed for employment by addressing barriers to unemployment, such as the lack of skills/qualifications, lack of self-confidence and lack of employment support. * Rural Youth Entrepreneurship (RYE) – as at 2014, 714 participants aged between 16 and 30 have completed the RYE Programme. This programme aimed to contribute to rural economic growth by developing business creation potential among vulnerable young people in Northern Ireland. Through upskilling, networking, mentoring and sharing ideas, RYE aimed to create the foundations for the development of future rural businesses. As a result of the RYE initiative at that time, nine new businesses were started by rural young people who had participated in the programme.   **Policy Development Branch (PDB)**  Following the completion of the review of FE Support and Charging policy at CAFRE, PDB made recommendations which were accepted by the Minister in December 2020 to increase the grant awards available to eligible students and to raise the lower household income threshold which means that more of those students most in need will receive the maximum level of support. The changes to FE support policy will come into effect from September 2021, meaning that eligible students entitled to support will now receive a grant award which should better meet the costs associated with studying at CAFRE.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s and other reports, then it can be agreed that the target dates for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2011 and 2013) have been Achieved. | |
| **10. Opportunities for older people** | * Rural older people do not experience reduced services disproportionately. [By when: 2013]   Achieved (and ongoing). | * Work with others to ensure older people are not excluded or marginalised and can access the range of rural support services they require.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  **Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI)**  A pilot Programme to address social isolation for rural elderly dwellers - Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI) - in conjunction with the Public Health Agency was developed in late 2011 in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. The Programme has achieved circa 43,000 interactions supporting 1,300 rural elderly to date and the activity period was extended to 31 March 2014. A Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI) evaluation was completed in May 2013 and a business case was submitted to DAERA by the Western Health and Social Care Trust in December 2013 requesting a further extension to this pilot initiative.  In relation to Axis 3 measures, targets recorded as achieved by JCC Admin Units include businesses supported and jobs created where the beneficiary is over 65 years of age. There are also a number of projects under the Basic Services measure which directly assist older people. ICT training through agriculture in Axis 1 had 66% of trainees over 50 years of age with 40% over 60 years of age.  Axis 1 measures target all Farm Family members. 58% of applicants to the Farm Family Options Mentoring programme were over 50. The Mentoring programme was delivered in the client’s home which helped to remove any potential barriers such as accessibility for older people and those with mobility problems. Within the Farm Family Options Collective Training programme 71% of attendees at the ICT training sessions and 48% of attendees at BVD Awareness sessions were over 50.  Axis 3 measures are open to all rural dwellers. Targets recorded as achieved by JCC Admin Units included businesses supported and jobs created indicate that 19 beneficiaries were over 65 years of age. There were also a number of projects under the Basic Services measure which directly assisted older people, for example community halls projects which now facilitate dining clubs, musical afternoons and dancing, craft classes, exercise sessions and bowling clubs for older members of the community, a befriending service, meals on wheels, etc.  In August 2013, the Equality Unit met with the Director of the Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI) to discuss issues for older people in rural areas and the links to DAERA business. CARDI Director Dr Roger O’Sullivan addressed the ESG in November 2013.  **Forestry Service Estate**  The equality profile of visitors to forests on the Forest Service Estate are based on the last survey carried out by Forest Service in 2019. The survey estimated that visits to DAERA forests have increased from 4.7 million in 2014 to 9 million in 2019. The survey also returned that while in 2014, 90% of visits were made by people who visited more than once a week, this had reduced to 50% in 2019 suggesting that the base of individuals using the forests for recreational purposes had increased in the intervening period. In 2019 9% of visitors indicated that they had a disability, which is a significantly lower proportion than in the population of Northern Ireland as a whole.  The average age of visitor to DAERA forests in 2019 (including children) was 35 ranging between 27 and 48 depending on the forest surveyed. 78% of visitors were adults aged 16 or older with the most popular recreation activities being walking and dog walking.  DAERA Forest Service continue to engage with operating partners including local government to enhance the recreational products provided by the Forest Service estate.  **Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework**  The new Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework was developed by DAERA policy officials following public consultation and events opened to all stakeholders, which utilised community development networks to communicate with stakeholders. TRPSI actions continue to focus on reaching those most isolated or marginalised in rural areas and include actions that benefit the elderly, disabled, young people, unemployed and allows local communities to identify and support those in need. Specific backing for community development continues to support capacity building across all Rural Areas. In particular, with specific support for capacity building through a Marginalised Minority Communities Scheme.    The focus and impact on integration has facilitated the Good Relations element of the equality agenda. This specific project has also focused on increasing the involvement and interaction with isolated and marginalised groups such as the elderly, disabled, young people and the unemployed in rural areas.  **Inland Fisheries (Public Angling Estate)**  **Concessionary angling licences and outreach**  Inland Fisheries issue concessionary licences and permits to over 60s, young people and anglers with a disability at a significant saving on the full cost. In order to further encourage greater participation in angling, complimentary licences and permits are also issued to under-represented groups (including disability groups) taking part in outreach events. For example, in 2017-2018, Inland Fisheries issued 1,415 concessionary licences and 1,566 complimentary permits.  In addition, the online application system for licences and permits is designed to improve access for anglers particularly those with, for example, a disability or caring responsibilities as this online interaction removes the physical barrier of travel and visiting a distributor to obtain a licence or permit. The Department has a guide to Public Angling Estate fisheries with access for disabled anglers and this provides information on the suitability of access for different disabilities.  **Angling events fund**  Inland Fisheries also provide support to under-represented groups through the angling events fund, for example, Youth organisations, Boy’s Brigade/Scout groups, the Simon Community, Action Mental Health and Prisoners’ groups. Grants were also awarded to promote good relations through cross community schemes.  **Angling First**  Inland Fisheries also fund specific cross community initiatives through Angling First. Angling First Ltd is a charity which aims to introduce the sport of angling to young people, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, as a positive activity and an alternative to engaging in anti-social activity. The organisation also works with vulnerable adults with the aim of improving their mental health.  **Inland Fisheries support**  Inland Fisheries support a promotional stand at a Disability sector exhibition in June each year to promote and encourage access to angling as a sport or interest for disabled people in Northern Ireland. A variety of free promotional goods and information is provided to visitors on the day as well as staff being available for advice and assistance. Inland Fisheries has also developed an angling guide specifically for disabled anglers using waters in the Public Angling Estate. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Short-Guide-to-Public-Angling-Estate-Fisheries-Accessible-to-Anglers-with-Disabilities.pdf>  Inland Fisheries also facilitate a significant community engagement and outreach programme to encourage participation in angling amongst under-represented groups. In 2017-2018, Inland Fisheries engaged with over 60 groups including Action Mental Health, Youth Action NI, Simon Community, YMCA and Hydebank Young Offenders Centre.  In summary the above interventions, supported by DAERA, have resulted in positive outcomes in terms of widening the scope of the public angling estate to, in particular, people with a disability and traditionally under-represented groups, who wish to benefit from our active landscape. Older people can and do make use of these opportunities.  **Policy Development Branch (PDB)**  As noted above at Issue 9, the review of FE Support has led to an increase of the grant awards available to eligible students and the raising of the lower household income threshold which means that those students most in need will receive the maximum level of support and all eligible students will receive a grant award which should better meet the costs associated with studying at CAFRE. The review of FE support also resulted in the decision to introduce support for part-time students for the first time. Many of CAFRE part-time students fall into the category of adult learner and older age groups.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcome” (By when: 2013) has been achieved. The services listed above are open to various groups of people but it is clear that older people do avail of these opportunities. In going forward, it is necessary to continue to provide such services to the elderly. | |

**DAERA (Formerly DARD) Inequalities – Action Plan 2011-2016**

**Strategic Goal: To promote the economic, social wellbeing and self-reliance of the rural community**

* to create a strong rural community with more jobs and businesses
* to ensure a higher level of farms that have several different sources of earned income

| **Issue to Address** | **Intended Outcomes** | **Actions Needed** |
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| **11. Anti-poverty measures** | * Ongoing development and delivery of Programmes and Projects to address rural poverty and social exclusion issues. [By when: 2014]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Rural childcare programme to benefit at least 1,500 people. [By when: April 2011]   Achieved (and ongoing).     * At least 6,000 rural households availing of this Project which if entitled will result in householder availing of grants, benefit entitlements and local and regional services. [By when: 2014]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * At least 5% of Axis 3 of the NIRDP will be spent on projects benefitting young people. [By when: 2013]   Achieved (and ongoing). | * Take forward a range of measures to target those most disadvantaged and excluded in rural areas. To work in partnership with others to assist with the provision of rural services.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Complete the roll out of the Rural Childcare Programme.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Continue to work with the Public Health Agency in the roll out of the Maximising Access to and Uptake of Grants, Benefits and Services (MARA) Project.   Achieved (now complete).   * Target RDP funding to be spent on projects that specifically benefit children and young people in rural areas.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  **Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework**  In the Strategic Plan (2012-2020) DAERA had committed to undertaking an EQIA of its Anti-Poverty and Rural Isolation Framework by 2015. The title of DAERA’s anti-poverty initiative was renamed as the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework and was launched in 2012. The Framework was developed by DAERA policy officials following public consultation and events opened to all stakeholders, which utilised community development networks to communicate with stakeholders.  The Framework included a commitment to tackle Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. A range of Projects and Programmes were undertaken to fulfil this commitment and the majority of these involved working with a range of statutory partners including the Public Health Agency, DHSSPS, DSD, DEL and DRD [during 2016 there was a restructuring of all NICS departments].  Following agreement of the 2011/12-2014/15 budget, the Minister confirmed her commitment to tackling rural poverty and social isolation by allocating £16m through the TRPSI Framework of 2016 to build on the successes of earlier work and develop other interventions.  The TRPSI actions focused on reaching those most isolated or marginalised in rural areas and included actions that benefit the elderly, disabled, young people, unemployed and allows local communities to identify and support those in need. Specific backing for community development continues to support capacity building across all Rural Areas. In particular, with specific support for capacity building through a Marginalised Minority Communities Scheme in border areas with a focus and impact on supporting marginalised Communities to integrate.  The focus and impact on integration has facilitated the Good Relations element of the equality agenda. This specific project has also focused on increasing the involvement and interaction with isolated and marginalised groups such as the elderly, disabled, young people and the unemployed in rural areas.  **Rural Challenge Programme 2012**  DAERA invited applications into the ‘Rural Challenge Programme 2012’ during 14 September to 14 December 2012. Rural community & voluntary groups were given the opportunity to apply for grant aid (up to £10,000) for projects that could address issues of local social isolation or poverty. The Programme aimed to support projects across seven specific ‘Beneficiary Groups’ including, for example, Carers, Ethnic Minorities and Disabled. 44 applications were approved for funding and Letters of Offer issued April 2013, Total Committed £382,446.  The eight Community Development Support Service contracts (£1.2m per annum) awarded from April 2012 included a requirement to provide support for individuals and communities, including farmers and farm families, to access the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (NIRDP), particularly support to access funding under the Axis 3 Measures.  By April 2011, the Rural Childcare Programme had over 1,700 beneficiaries, had safeguarded or created almost 1,500 childcare places and had created 200 new part-time or full-time childcare jobs.  The Maximising Access Rural Areas (MARA) project facilitated a cross-departmental co-ordinated service to maximise access to benefits, grants and local and regional services to support rural dwellers living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Over 20,000 contacts were made with rural households over the period of the MARA programme.  By November 2013 the percentage of NIRDP Axis 3 spend on projects benefitting children and young people was 18.5%.  In summary, these activities have promoted and encouraged inclusivity in access to and enjoyment of our green spaces in support of DAERA’s objectives.  The Forest Park Enhancement Scheme is one of a number of Schemes being delivered under the Tackling Rural  Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework. The Scheme fits very well with the Framework Priorities in that it  addresses important issues such as isolation, loneliness, access and health and well-being and delivers outcomes  for rural dwellers by enhancing and creating spaces that will encourage people to adopt a more healthy and active  lifestyle.  Over the past 4 years DAERA has committed £5.7m from the TRPSI Programme to 17 Forest Park Enhancement Schemes. This significant financial commitment has levered a further £3.9m through partnerships formed with Councils and other grant aiding bodies. In summary, these activities have promoted and encouraged inclusivity in access to and enjoyment of our green spaces in support of DAERA’s objectives  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target dates for the “Intended Outcomes” have annually been achieved. In going forward, it is necessary to continue to provide such programmes, projects and funding to tackle the issue of poverty. | |
| **12. Access to rural transport services** | * Through a joint funding arrangement, facilitate the provision of at least 100,000 passenger trips on an annual basis. [By when: 2014]   Achieved (and ongoing). | * In partnership with DRD (now Department for Infrastructure – DfI, since May 2016) to ensure the availability and delivery of accessible rural transport services to benefit rural people including those who are elderly or have a disability.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  The Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) is an initiative which commenced under the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Programme and which DAERA is continuing to fund. The Scheme is delivered in partnership with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and the Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTP’s) across NI. The Scheme delivers passenger trips for rural dwellers entitled to a SmartPass and most in need of rural transport (mainly the elderly and disabled). They can avail of free or half fare travel on rural community transport partnership vehicles.  On average DAERA has invested £500k per annum. Between December 2009 and October 2013, 627,146 passenger trips have been funded.  In recovering from Covid 19, and having made necessary adaptations to their vehicle fleet, the RCTPs have recommenced passenger trips.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcome” has been achieved. In going forward, it is necessary to continue to provide such schemes and funding to ensure access to rural transport services, providing vital access to services for rural dwellers to remain connected. | |

**DAERA (Formerly DARD) Key Inequalities – Action Plan 2011-2016**

**Strategic Goal: To manage our business and deliver services to our customers in a cost effective way**

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| **Key Issue** | **Intended Outcomes** | **Actions Needed** |
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| **13a. Provision of Accessible Communication Channels**  **13b. Provision of Accessible Information Services** | * Customers can communicate with us using a range of accessible communication methods. [By when: 2012] Achieved (and ongoing). * Customers are made aware of the availability of accessible services and how to access them. [By when: 2012] Achieved (and ongoing). * More accessible information services for customers. Easyread and summary to accompany all documents over 30 pages. [By when: From 2011]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Website accessibility and technology enhanced to suit needs of different groups of customers. [By when: 2012]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Will proactively provide translations of documents likely to be of significant interest to ethnic minorities. [By when: On-going]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * On request will provide translations of documents into other languages.   Achieved (and ongoing). | * In partnership with others, improve the accessibility of our communication channels to suit the specific needs of different customer groups.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Our information, both written and web-based will be developed pro-actively in accessible formats to suit the needs of all equality groups.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Address website accessibility issues.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Provide language translations of key documents.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
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|  | **Progress to Date**  Departmental publications include an accessibility statement at the front, which outlines that each can be made available in a range of formats on request. These include options such as: large print, Braille, Easyread and languages other than English.  DAERA has produced a number of Easyread publications to accompany documents more than 30 pages long, which aim to assist customers who are dyslexic, or who may have a reading, learning or comprehension difficulty.  Ruralni and CAFRE websites are speech enabled using Browse aloud which means that any material on the web can be read out to the customer.  The position at 2021 is that CAFRE is committed to making its website accessible, in accordance with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. The website is designed to be used by as many people as possible. Text is clear and simple to understand. Users should be able to: zoom in up to 300%, navigate most of the website using speech recognition software and use most of the website using a screen reader (including the most recent versions of JAWS, NVDA and VoiceOver).  Agri-food Support Branch) staff attend Open Nights at CAFRE to provide face-to-face advice to students on available funding from DAERA.  Countryside Agri-Rural Partnership provide a telephone helpline for queries on the Farm Modernisation Programme in addition to employing face-to-face, written, text phone, web-based, and text communication channels in delivering this service.  Countryside Services Limited and the Department have provided a telephone helpline for queries on Tier 1 and Tier 2 (respectively) of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme – Capital, in addition to face-to-face, written, text phone, web-based and text communication channels in delivering the scheme.  The DAERA internet contains information on the measures available under the NIRDP 2007-13. A communications working group was established, facilitated by the Rural Network whose membership included representatives for the JCC/ LAG partnerships and the DAERA press office. During 2012 the Network published the ‘RDP in Action’ booklet which is a summary of projects and actions supported thus far and included useful information and contacts. Additionally the Network website hosts a directory of successful projects funded under the NIRDP. The Communications working group facilitates the identification of successful and best projects for promotion at shows and rural events and through news items. Each Joint Council Committee area has a dedicated website for disseminating information on the support available including the application and assessment process. All calls for applications are publically advertised and public information sessions are held.  RDD has produced a shortened version of the Scheme brochure for those seeking less than £50k grant. On all Scheme literature RDD applicants are offered alternative formats, e.g. large print or Braille, or in other languages.  **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) area-based schemes – use of online technology**  The CAP policy proposal to make online the primary channel for communication and transacting with DAERA has resulted in more accurate applications and quicker, earlier payments to the farmers. The bulk of payments were made by October 2016 rather than December of that year.  The EQIA on ‘the use of online as the primary channel for communicating and transacting between DAERA and its customers’ identified the potential for negative or differential impacts on the following S75 categories: Religious Belief; Political Opinion; Age; Marital status; Persons with a disability. The data available suggested that these categories may have more difficulty accessing and using services online (as opposed to paper/face-to-face). In line with its commitment to mitigate against the potential for adverse or differential impact, the Department has introduced the following measures:   * Advisory service. DAERA provides an advisory service which customers can contact for help and information on how to apply and use the online services. This service is available by telephone, web-chat, email or post; * DAERA online service support. DAERA provides a support service which customers can contact for help and information on how to access online services, for example the Government Gateway; * Digital Assistance. DAERA provides one-to-one appointments at local DAERA Direct Offices where customers can call in and talk to a member of staff for advice and support on how to access and use specific DAERA online services and how to access government online services in general. This service can also provide the customer with access to and assistance with a computer; * DAERA holds workshops at CAFRE campuses across Northern Ireland which provide the same help and information as ‘Digital Assistance’ in the form of group sessions; * Online videos. The DAERA website contains a number of ‘how to’ videos showing customers how to apply and use our online services; * Alternatives to online. DAERA also retains the option for customers to use paper applications, if they are unable to use the online services. Other documents such as leaflets, guidance, etc. continue to remain available for those customers who are unable to use online services.   These support measures have been popular with customers and in high demand since their introduction in 2017. In 2018, the Department achieved 100% online applications for the first time indicating that the mitigations are effective in helping customers access the Departments services online.  **DAERA Documents and communication guidelines**  All documents produced in-house have adhered to the written communication guidelines and have a disability/equality statement on how to access alternative formats.  The Equality Unit continues to promote the production of easy-read versions of all major DAERA publications. These are provided on the internet and in hard copy on request. DAERA’s commitment to producing Easy-read documents has been positively welcomed by people with disabilities and key organisations.  Information that is easy to understand and access helps people make better informed decisions and choices. It removes barriers so that people with particular needs are not excluded from accessing Departmental information and services and therefore ensures equality of access.  **Training and support**  A mandatory e-learning course about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Awareness was rolled out across the Department. This training improved the knowledge and understanding of staff and made them much more aware of the issues and concerns of students/customers dealing with mental health issues. Staff were better able to assist customers who at times may need additional assistance. The training continues to improve the knowledge and understanding of staff and ensures they are more aware of the issues and concerns of students/customers dealing with these issues. This also resulted in improved educational outcomes for students with autism.  **CAFRE**  During the 2017/18 reporting year CAFRE College had approximately 300 students with disabilities (18%). A permanent student support officer at CAFRE is still in post to offer academic support, tutoring support and financial support and has attended a number of Autism specific training courses as well as Mental health Awareness Sessions. The number of students declaring a disability or learning need in 2020/21 was 13%, which is similar to the 14% declared in 2019/20. CAFRE has increased awareness of its Equality and Diversity Policy and student support services by providing information on the CAFRE website. This includes information about the availability of a Student Support Officer (SSO) at all three campuses. The SSO provides information and advice to students at induction and throughout the year. The uptake of support services, available to students with additional needs has improved. The improved knowledge and understanding of staff ensures they are more aware of the issues and concerns of students/customers dealing with mental health issues. The uptake of support services, during the 2020/21 academic year decreased slightly. This can be attributed to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic whereby students were taught via blended learning and teacher assessed grades brought alternations to student assessment requirements. Each CAFRE campus has designated quiet areas, which all students can avail of and all campuses are well signposted, and students take part in orientation activities at the start of term. Specific training needs are discussed and assessed at the start of each academic year, and a training plan implemented to meet those needs. Review interviews with students, availing of support services, take place twice a year to establish if their needs are being fully met.  **DAERA Relocation Programme**  In the “Report on the Results of the Equality Impact Assessment of the Relocation of the DAERA Headquarters” dated August 2014 the Department committed to monitor the equality impacts of each of its relocation projects. Monitoring was carried out for the relocation of Fisheries Division and Forest Service. The monitoring data included information collected by NISRA, who provided a range of data to inform equality monitoring. The NISRA data was supplemented by information collected from an Equality Monitoring survey which issued to staff affected by the relocations. The aim of the monitoring exercise was to test the impact of relocation on Section 75 groups and to assess the impact of the mitigations outlined in the screening documents, specifically at this stage for the 2 smaller relocations for Fisheries and Forest Service.  The outcome of this equality monitoring on the relocations projects enhanced DAERA’s evidence base and provided a basis for positive action to promote equality of opportunity in future decision making in relation to the accessibility of DAERA facilities.  **DAERA website**  Upon its formation the DAERA website was upgraded. With the launch of the new mobile and tablet friendly website, DAERA customers have a more convenient way to complete their administration at a time of their choosing and not just when offices are open. Regular monitoring and publication of standard of website accessibility is carried out as well as web accessibility testing as appropriate.  **Facilities Management**  The effectiveness of the personal evacuation plans are assessed with individuals during evacuations (practice and real) to ensure they meet all parties’ needs.  **Languages and translations**  The major costs for translations in 2011 was by the Loughs Agency (a cross-border body, exercising a legal remit for conservation, protection and development across the Foyle and Carlingford catchments.) and these were for documents being translated from English into Irish. In 2011, the cost was £4,679, with the costs during 2012 being £2,304. In 2013-14 the cost was £3,400.24, 2014-15 £2,189.40, 2015-16 nil, 2016-17 £1,715.52 and in the past few years there has been no spend on English to Irish translations recorded.  During the 2010-11 reporting period the Business Case was translated from English into Irish and Ulster-Scots at a cost of £559.44 each. Other translations for Irish and Ulster-Scots covered, mainly, letters, forewords and advertisements among other short documents and papers. These mainly ranged in cost from £20 to £40 per item. Spend for Ulster-Scots translation for 2013-14 was £1,445.76, 2014-15 £756.40 and no costs recorded since 2015.  Translations into other languages have been completed over the past number of years but these are generally at a cost of anything from £10 to £60 per item. Some of the languages that have been covered for these translations are: German, Spanish, French, Polish, Chinese, among various other languages.  In general, there are very few documents translated into any language but the service is still available if it should be needed.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target dates for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2011 and 2012) have been achieved. In going forward, it is necessary to continue to provide this accessibility to DAERA’s information services via the various communication channels, which are already in place. | |

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| **Key Issue** | **Proposed Outcomes** | **Actions Needed** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **14. Raise awareness of health and well-being information and rural support services** | * Will raise awareness with rural communities, staff and students through a range of methods over the next year, including: * Regular e-zines circulated to staff; * Information made available on intranet sites; * Induction information for students; * Awareness raising events organised as appropriate; * CAFRE student support services; * Speakers from key organisations; and * Training sessions as needed.   [By when: 2012]  Achieved (and ongoing). | * Through the provision of rural services, including our main offices, CAFRE (DAERA College), websites etc. aim to provide useful information / sign posting about rural support services available, such as: * domestic and sexual violence; * men’s health issues; * students/ education and counselling / support services; * Carers; and * Sexual orientation issues.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Ensure staff are made aware of relevant policies and the support services available.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  **CAFRE – College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)**  The CAFRE student support office and campus wardening teams organise student focused events throughout the year which cover a wide range of topics including health. Information is included on the internet and at induction.  A student support officer provides one-to-one advice and guidance on personal, academic and financial matters and other concerns.  Students have access to a free 24/7 independent confidential service for telephone or face-to-face counselling on or off campus.  CAFRE engaged with GCSE and A level pupils through the provision of syllabus support, work placement opportunities, open days and taster days. Any perceived issues requiring special support amongst the students are addressed at health fairs, which offer a wide range of stalls and enable students to be signposted to specific organisations for support. Additionally, CAFRE ran a ‘Worth Knowing’ Programme at its Greenmount Campus which allowed for the development of key campaigns, such as mental health awareness and no smoking. The key outcome of this work was to raise awareness of CAFRE and also to highlight mental health issues and other support mechanisms among the students at CAFRE and those who may have considered CAFRE as their choice of college.  During the 2017/18 reporting period, CAFRE continued to engage with GCSE and A level pupils and enrolments for that year were 1,700 students, of which 45% were female and 4% declared themselves as having a disability.  The officer is also available to provide targeted assistance to students who have additional needs. During this reporting period, adaptations were made to student accommodation to support a student with a physical disability. At the end of their education programme, CAFRE provides additional assistance to students with a disability, by signposting them to supported employment services.  In addition, CAFRE provides signposting to a wide range of support organisations at, for example, student health fairs. During their time at CAFRE, a wide cross section of students have the opportunity to represent the student body in College discussion and feedback forums and the student body is represented on College Committees to ensure student views are represented in decision making processes.  CAFRE Horticultural Branch employed an Occupational Therapist who assisted 14 students with brain damage to take part in a 10 week course to allow them to gain new knowledge of a range of horticulture skills. This initiative was last delivered in 2019 with students gaining a Level 2 qualification in Practical Horticulture Skills and improved positive impacts on their health and wellbeing including improved self-esteem and self-efficacy.  CAFRE’s Enniskillen campus provides facilities for Riding for the Disabled (RDA) programmes and currently 7 out of 10 riders are registered as autistic. CAFRE’s Enniskillen campus continues to provide facilities for Riding for the Disabled (RDA) programmes and in February 2019 hosted a visit by HRH The Princess Royal, President for RDA. In 2020/21 CAFRE organised a pilot education course for health professionals who are delivering Equine Assisted Therapy and Learning (EAT&L) activities which can be used to enhance the health and well-being of our local community.  The position at 2019 remains that CAFRE provides signposting for staff and students to health and wellbeing support through access to Inspire’s Wellbeing free, independent and confidential counselling service. In June 2020 the Student Council progressed the CAFRE Campus Connect fundraising challenge in aid of AWARE NI, with staff and students taking part by doing 5km individual challenges to raise awareness of mental health issues.  Through the Farm Family Key Skills scheme, CAFRE has provided awareness training on Coping with the Pressures of Farming. 289 Farmers, employees and family members have received health and wellbeing training from the training provider Rural Support NI including signposting to support organisations.  The CAFRE student support officer and campus residential support teams organise student focused events throughout the year which cover a wide range of topics including health. Information is included on the internet and at induction. In February 2021, the Student Support Officer and wider campus teams developed a programme of events to promote positive mental health and wellbeing amongst the student population. This was in lieu of the health fair which would traditionally be held on each campus. The event ran over a week with workshops offered from a variety of external providers including Inspire, Start 360 and AMH. The workshops where held virtually via teams and any student from across the 3 campus sites could attend. Topics covered included:   * Mood & Food * Healthy Eating and Nutrition * ‘Our Generation’ Mental Health Workshop * HITT Cardio Workout * Loving Your Online Life * A Chat with YFCU President * Rory Best – Mental Health Video * Becoming Physically Excellent – Your Guide to Exercise * Drugs & Alcohol Awareness * Yoga & Relaxation * Let’s Talk About Sex – Sexual Health Session * ‘Love Your Bits’- Cancer Awareness, Male and Female Sessions * Safe Driving with PSNI.   As of 2021 the CAFRE Student Support Officer continues to provide one-to-one advice and guidance on personal, academic and financial matters and other concerns.  In 2020-2021 CAFRE’s enrolments were 1,673, of which 45% were female. The number of students declaring a disability or learning need in 2020/21 was 13%, which is similar to the 14% in 2019/20. The promotion of support available for student’s with disability or learning need by the Student Support Officer and teaching staff has been adapted for remote delivery as required and continues throughout the academic year both online and, when possible, face to face with early disclosure encouraged to ensure the receipt of approval for support from awarding organisations prior to formal / alternative assessments taking place.  **Inland Fisheries**  Inland Fisheries issue concessionary licences and permits to over 60s, young people and anglers with a disability. In order to further encourage greater participation in angling, complimentary licences and permits are also issued to under-represented groups (including disability groups) taking part in outreach events.  In addition, the online application system for licences and permits is designed to improve access for anglers particularly those with, for example, a disability or caring responsibilities as this online interaction removes the physical barrier of travel and visiting a distributor to obtain a licence or permit.  Inland Fisheries support a promotional stand at a Disability sector exhibition in June each year to promote and encourage access to angling as a sport or interest for disabled people in Northern Ireland. A variety of free promotional goods and information is provided to visitors on the day as well as staff being available for advice and assistance. Inland Fisheries has also developed an angling guide specifically for disabled anglers using waters in the Public Angling Estate. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Short-Guide-to-Public-Angling-Estate-Fisheries-Accessible-to-Anglers-with-Disabilities.pdf>  Inland Fisheries also facilitate a significant community engagement and outreach programme to encourage participation in angling amongst under-represented groups including youth groups, mental health organisations, and young offenders.  Furthermore, Inland Fisheries continue to make improvements to the public angling estate to enhance access for anglers with a disability.  This all contributes to positive outcomes in terms of improved inclusivity and accessibility at DAERA funded sites for people throughout Northern Ireland, particularly those with a disability.  **Staff Training**  Staff awareness was raised through various training courses and these are listed below. This resulted in staff being better able to assist customers who at times may need additional assistance. This training improved the knowledge and understanding of staff and made them much more aware of the issues and concerns of students, farmers and any other customers of DAERA dealing with mental health issues. The training courses held throughout the various reporting periods is as follows:   * Mental Health Awareness for Line Managers   The aim of this course is to raise awareness of the issue of Mental Health in the workplace, and to assist line managers in supporting and signposting staff who may be going through a mental health issue. During 2017/18 and as an example of uptake, 84 DAERA managers successfully completed this training.   * Autism Spectrum Disorder Awareness (ASD)   This course has been developed by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, providing information about what ASD is and the challenges faced by individuals living with it. Having an awareness of ASD will help staff understand why an individual with ASD may be acting or reacting in a particular way and it will help create and maintain positive working relationships. This course was rolled out for DAERA staff during 2016/17. In 2017/18 a further 123 staff completed the training.   * Disability Awareness for frontline staff   The aim of this training is to increase staff knowledge of disability and to provide frontline staff with an introduction to disability awareness. The course is aimed at staff at all grades who are in, or new to a post that deals with the public.   * Supporting Vulnerable People   This course has been designed to assist staff in supporting vulnerable people who may seek to use the services offered by the department. On completion of the course staff should be able to describe and define what a vulnerable person is, recognise ways to identify vulnerable people and explain ways to support vulnerable people, including methods for dealing with third parties. In 2017/18, 4 staff completed, or registered an interest in this voluntary training.   * Unconscious Bias   This course aims to help staff discover what personal bias they may have, explore its causes and consider some techniques to manage it. On completion of the course staff should be able to define what Unconscious Bias is; explain how Unconscious Bias can impact in the workplace and state ways to tackle Unconscious Bias. During 2017/18 this course was mandatory for completion by all DAERA staff in management grades i.e. EOII and above and 1,629 staff successfully completed the training.   * Child Protection Awareness Training   This training is specific to DAERA and in 2017/18 was procured by the department and delivered by NSPCC to staff working primarily in the 3 CAFRE campuses. The training is mandatory for all CAFRE staff, including all who work directly or indirectly with students, many of whom are under 18 years of age. The awareness training is rolled out to staff every 3 years. In addition, those staff who are nominated Designated and Deputy Designated Officers within CAFRE are required to complete Designated Officer Training. A total of 426 staff from CAFRE and those staff who regularly work on the 3 college campuses completed Child Protection Awareness refresher training in 2017/18 and a further 9 CAFRE Designated Officers completed the enhanced training.  In 2020/21 a total of 450 staff from CAFRE and those staff who regularly work on the 3 college campuses completed Level 2 Safeguarding training and a further 14 staff completed Designated Officer training.  The training continues to improve the knowledge and understanding of staff and ensures they are more aware of the issues and concerns of students/customers dealing with these issues. There are also improved educational outcomes for students with autism.  **Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework**  DAERA has worked in partnership with a number of NICS Departments to deliver a range of initiatives to address rural poverty and social isolation.  The new Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework 2016 was developed by policy colleagues following public consultation and events opened to all stakeholders, which utilised community development network to communicate with stakeholders.  The current TRPSI actions focus on reaching those most isolated or marginalised in rural areas and include actions that benefit the elderly, disabled, young people, unemployed and allows local communities to identify and support those in need.  This Support Service established Social Farming as a beneficial day opportunity for individuals, within the health and social care system, who are living with a learning disability or mental health issue. Specific backing for community development continues to support capacity building across all Rural Areas.  **Forest Service**  In October 2017, Forest Service helped support BBC One’s Countryfile Ramble at Castlewellan Forest Park as part of a youth development project for BBC’s Children in Need. More than 150 people of all ages and abilities took part in the ramble including a group of young people with special needs from Lurgan YMCA’s YES Programme. This programme gives young people with a disability the opportunity to participate in fun games and engage in different workshops and activities with their peers. The Forest Service provided additional logistical support on the day of the ramble so that a young person with more profound challenges could participate fully on the day.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcome” (By when: 2012) has been achieved. In going forward, it is necessary to continue to raise awareness of health and well-being information and rural support services for staff, students and customers. The facilities, services and training put in place help to support this objective. | |

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| **15. Increase take up of women on CAFRE’s people development programmes.** | * To increase the number of women taking part in CAFRE people development programmes from 25% at present date to 33%. [By when: 2013]   Not Achieved (but ongoing). | * Pro-active engagement with rural women and representative groups to find ways to remove barriers to women’s participation on CAFRE people and diversification programmes.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
| **Progress to Date**  As of 2013, the number of women taking part in the CAFRE people development programmes was 26.1%. The figure for full- and part-time college courses was 38.8%, whereas for recorded industry training courses the figure was 12.4%.  CAFRE engaged with 3 women’s groups who completed the Advanced Diploma in Personal and Business Communication, which on completion can be used to progress onto a postgraduate programme. These womens groups represented the Women’s Rural Network from Forkhill and First Steps from Dungannon. The groups completed the course in 2011-12. Two of the participants progressed to postgraduate study at Loughry Campus.  Female engagement with education programmes is increasing. For example, in 2021, 45 per cent of students enrolled on courses were female, compared with 41 per cent in 2017. Selection for entry to CAFRE’s Education courses is based on academic achievement and merit principles.  Training events, delivered under CAFRE's Knowledge Transfer and Innovation schemes, are funded by DAERA and the EU through the Rural Development Programme. Over 3000 farmers participate in the Business Development Groups scheme and over 17,000 farmers, farm family members and employees have attended awareness training under the Farm Family Key Skills scheme. Female participation in these schemes are 5 per cent and 30 per cent respectively.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcome” (By when: 2013) has not been achieved. In going forward, it is necessary to continue to increase the uptake of women on the CAFRE people development programmes. | |
| **16. Specific training for front line staff** | * DAERA will work with the NICSHR Learning and Development (NICSHR-L&D, formerly known as the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL)) to develop and pilot a suite of Section 75 training modules for DAERA staff. [By when: 2011]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Frontline staff better able to assist our customers who may need additional assistance at times. [By when: 2013]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * College staff skilled to provide immediate and appropriate support for students, visitors and staff with disabilities. [By when: 2013]   Achieved (and ongoing). | * Ensure that staff receive the training needed to effectively carry out equality screening, consultations and EQIAs effectively.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Provision of disability awareness training as needed for front-line staff.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  **NICSHR L&D**  In 2010/11, Equality Branch and the Training & Development Unit (TDU) worked in partnership with the NICSHR L&D (formerly, Centre for Applied Learning (CAL)) to redesign and develop specific training courses for DAERA staff. This contextualisation of the Equality Agenda Training Suite was completed in 2011/12. During 2011/12 a total of 86 staff were trained in: Introduction to Section 75; Section 75 – The Revised Arrangements; Equality Impact Assessments; and Public Consultation & Engagement in the Northern Ireland context. This work ensured that the first action and first outcome listed above have both been achieved. This training continued in the subsequent years as highlighted by the examples set out below. Over the years the training has been reviewed and improved where necessary.  The Department’s Online Induction package continues to include a section outlining the roles and responsibilities that each member of staff has in meeting Section 75 requirements. All new staff to the Department receives this information and awareness on their first day in the Department.  The NICSHR L&D delivers focused training to departmental staff who are directly engaged in taking forward the implementation of the equality scheme commitments. During the early years of this Action Plan the L&D’s delivery of training to departmental staff included courses such as:   * Diversity Now; * Disability Awareness Training for frontline staff; * EQIA Workshops; * Public Consultation and Engagement in the NI Context; * Disability Awareness for frontline staff; * An Introduction to Section 75; * Introduction to Human Rights; and * Policy Making and Human Rights.   Other courses were added in the following years and some of these are listed below:   * Mental Health Awareness for Line Managers; * Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Awareness; * Disability Awareness for front line staff; * Supporting Vulnerable People; * Unconscious Bias; and * Child Protection Awareness Training.   The suite of training provided by L&D is kept under regular review and revised when required. Feedback was sought on the e-learning packages provided by L&D and this was positive, with participants having a preference for this type of learning and development. There is also evidence to show that staff who completed these packages obtained the necessary skills and knowledge about the subject matter.  **NI Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS)**  NISRA representatives provided several short NINIS workshops for 44 of our policymakers in March 2014. The primary aim of the workshop was to provide information on the background to and purpose of Neighbourhood Statistics and to give a demonstration of the NINIS website.  For policymakers, NINIS provides useful statistical evidence across our population demographics that can be used to help inform our service and policy decisions, development of future work programmes and support equality screening exercises and EQIAs.  **Equality Unit**  All staff have been made aware of the Equality Scheme and the commitments within it. DAERA also ensures its staff are informed of the Section 75 duties and Scheme commitments through the staff intranet and DAERA website, through team briefings and presentations and through the regular meetings of the EDSG. A summary of the Equality Scheme has been made available to all staff and the full Scheme is available to all staff via the DAERA intranet.  In addition, key policymakers continue to be briefed as and when needed on the key aspects in relation to equality screening and EQIAs, consultation and in considering mitigating actions. As needed, short workshops / advisory sessions on implementation of the Section 75 duties / Scheme commitments, have also been scheduled during the year for policy teams too.  Induction training for new staff includes an awareness of Section 75 and the statutory duties. This is in tandem with an increase in new entrants to DAERA following the construction of Ballykelly House in the North-West, DAERA has developed a bespoke equality outreach/awareness programme for staff.  Staff in the Equality Unit continue to keep their specialist knowledge and skills up to date through a wide range of local equality focused training and development events, policy & legislative seminars and conferences, etc.  As necessary we will also consider supplementing the equality training provided by L&D to ensure it fully meets the needs of DAERA staff and our business areas.  Senior managers have been regularly updated on disability / equality issues through the EDSG. This is carried out on an ongoing basis. The outcome of this is that business areas and policy makers are better informed about the DDO impacts on their business area resulting in increased engagement and improved outcomes on disability and equality issues.  **NIRDP**  The vast majority of Local Action Group (LAG) members of the NIRDP have participated in the mandatory training sessions of Corporate Governance and Assessment Panel with sessions organised to facilitate newly elected members. During the reporting period, 2 sessions of each of the mandatory training took place.  Due to regular changes in LAG membership, training is ongoing and facilitated when there are enough participants to run the course. LAG members who have not received the training do not sit on Assessment Panels.    At the end of 2013, the Rural Network NI had facilitated and/or delivered a total of 59 training sessions to 743 participants. Equality considerations are deemed essential and covered within each session.  In 2012 L&D included stakeholders in the NIRDP Equality and Good Relations sub-group along with new DAERA staff involved in RDP delivery in a Section 75 training module.  **CAFRE**  The CAFRE Student Support Officer provides awareness training for new members of CAFRE staff, to enhance their knowledge of available support provision to students with disabilities. In addition, 43 CAFRE new entrants were given face-to-face Diversity training and existing staff completed the online refresher during this reporting period.  Training was provided for CAFRE staff in each of the 3 campuses in October/November 2014 with relation to LGBT issues. The Rainbow Project facilitated this training. Approximately 50 CAFRE staff attended this training. Additionally, in October 2014, 6 CAFRE staff attended Internet Safety Training which focused on the use of the internet in relation to vulnerable adults. 355 staff from CAFRE and those staff who regularly work on the 3 college campuses (Countryside Management, Veterinary Service, etc.) have received Child Protection Awareness refresher training.  In August 2020, 19 front line staff received training in supporting students with autism and 34 staff received training in promoting online safety with teenagers. Safeguarding awareness training was completed during the 2020/21 academic year with 450 CAFRE staff completing Level 2 Safeguarding Training and a further 14 staff completing Designated Officer training. It has also been implemented that new staff joining College staff in the intervening years will complete e-Safeguarding Training available on LInKS.  Training is provided for staff when it is identified that they will have students with specific difficulties. This is deemed the best approach as training can be tailored to the individual students’ needs. The effectiveness of this training is monitoring through interviews with the students to determine the level of satisfaction with the support they receive. CAFRE assesses the number of students availing of student support services and supported employment opportunities.  **Diversity Champion**  All NICS departments made a commitment to deliver diversity awareness raising events. In order to ensure that this was meaningful to DAERA, the Diversity Champion created a small advisory group of staff drawn from across the Department, with the aim of identifying diversity issues and promoting these at a local Branch level.  The Champion also introduced an initiative to examine the culture, and associated behaviours, that exist within the DAERA, with a focus on attitudes, working practices and respect to diversity and equality. A series of engagement events with staff were planned and carried out in the following months and years. As a result, the staff in DAERA and the wider NICS have been made more aware of diversity and equality issues.  **Supporting young farmers**  During the 2016/17 reporting period, DAERA provided funding to the Young Farmers’ Clubs of Ulster (YFCU) to deliver a targeted programme of work. One of its strategic themes was ‘Inclusion’ (Community Relations, Equality and Diversity, or CRED) Awareness and Section 75 Awareness. The YFCU delivered its required outcomes with a number of key personnel already trained in equality awareness.  **DAERA Research**  DAERA has different research funding grant programmes whose clients are large Research Performing Organisations and or Institutions e.g. Agri-Food Biosciences Institute, Queens University and the University of Ulster and some Small and Medium Enterprises.  The programmes are:   * Evidence and Innovation (E&I) Research Call; * Research Challenge Fund (RCF); and * Collaborative Research with DAFM (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) and the USA i.e. US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership Programme.   It is necessary for the Department to continue to ensure equality issues are to the fore and that our research partners are fully committed to the equality principles. To help this, the Terms & Conditions in the RCF Letter of Offer stipulate the following as regards equality:   * The Consortium shall comply with the relevant statutory provisions from time to time in force in Northern Ireland imposing obligations on the Consortium in relation to discrimination on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion (including in relation to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998), racial group, marital status, age, sexual orientation, gender, disability and having dependants.   In addition, the Call specification in the US-Ireland R&D Partnership Programme call outlines the following:   * The research should be conducted in full respect of gender equality, the gender dimension in research and ethics considerations. * The research and innovation activities undertaken should where possible explore, analyse and address sex and gender differences and take into account biological characteristics as well as the evolving social and cultural features of women and men and other relevant factors of diversity in a given context.   The outcome of this is that Research partners are made aware of equality issues and are fully committed to the equality principles.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target dates for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2011 and 2013) have been achieved. Frontline staff are now better able to assist our customers who may need additional assistance at times and College staff are skilled in providing immediate and appropriate support for students, visitors and staff with disabilities. In going forward, it is necessary to continue with this training to ensure these outcomes can be maintained. | |

**Strategic Goal: To manage our business and deliver services to our customers in a cost effective way**

* To ensure that our services are efficient, promptly delivered and fully accessible
* To develop our staff with the right skills and knowledge

| **Key Issue** | **Intended Outcomes** | **Actions Needed** |
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| **17. Disability Equality** | * Disability Forum to successfully complete its work plan. [By when: 2013]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * To encourage at least 5 new members to join the Forum. [By when: 2012]   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Successfully complete all actions set out in the Disability Action Plan. [By when: 2012]   Achieved (and ongoing). | * DAERA Disability Forum to develop and take forward a 2-year work programme.   Achieved (and ongoing).   * Monitor progress by business areas towards completion of the Disability Action Plan.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  The DAERA DisAbility Forum was launched in September 2002 and was established to create a support network for DAERA staff with disabilities within the Department. From 2002, the Forum worked to raise awareness of the inequalities that people with disabilities continue to face in their workplace.  The Forum was represented at the quarterly EDSG (formerly ESG), and provided regular updates on its work and its project teams on issues that were of concern for staff and customers with disabilities in accessing key DAERA services.  Forum members were continually encouraged to participate and to play an active role by writing articles for DARD Bizz, and the disability Forum intranet site.  Forum members have attended training programmes, including amendments to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and understanding the implications of the United Nations Convention for Rights with People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).  The Forum also met with representatives from a wide range of disability focused organisations, which included attending a Disability Champions Forum on the 1st December 2011 established by the Equality Commission and The Irish Congress of Trade Unions to support the role of Disability Champions in the workplace and linked to NIC-ICTU Disability Committee.  The chair of the Disability Forum also met with other employers to provide advice on setting up Disability Forums, including the Belfast Health Trust.  The Forum developed a 2-year work-plan covering the period April 2010-March 2012, which complemented the Department’s wider equality agenda.  **Online Induction Package**  During that time, the DHR Equal Opportunities team revised DAERA’s online Induction package to include additional information for new employees with a disability. The information included advice about the reasonable adjustment process, the work of the DisAbility Forum and information available from the Department’s Equality Branch on issues such as DAERA’s Disability Action Plan and the NI Civil Service Autism Strategy.  During 2013 DAERA’s Equal Opportunities Section produced three factsheets covering autism, diabetes and mental health. The factsheets were designed to inform staff about these conditions and offer advice and support. They were placed on the Department’s intranet site so that staff and managers could access them at any time.  **Staff Disability Survey**  During the 2014-15 reporting period, Equal Opportunities Section together with some staff from the Department’s DisAbility Forum developed a staff disability survey. The survey issued on November 2014 to all non-industrial staff and hard copies were also provided to our industrial staff who do not have access to a computer. The response rate was 28% from non-industrial staff and 15% from industrial.  The survey encouraged anyone with a disability who has not already declared that they have a disability on their HR record to consider doing so. The survey also sought views on what more DAERA could do to assist those with a disability in their workplace. The survey also sought feedback on individual’s experiences of our reasonable adjustment process to help us consider if there was more that could be done and lessons to be learned. Most staff who had availed of the reasonable adjustment process were satisfied with the outcome although a small number highlighted that they had been unable to secure all the adjustments sought.  The survey also invited members of staff with a disability to consider joining the DisAbility Forum and it was encouraging that 51 people had expressed an interest in doing so.  **DAERA DisAbility Forum End Date**  The Disability Forum ceased to exist from 2015 due to a number of factors such as the NICS-wide Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES), the rationalisation of the NI Departments, and staff transfers. However, the Forum completed all aspects of their action plan before all these changes came about. The Disability Forum has not been reformed however during the 2019-20 reporting period an NICS Disability Forum was set up and DAERA is represented on this group.  **Display positive messages and images about people with disabilities**  When appropriate the Department have included equality focused wording in key press releases, and have portrayed images and wording about disabled people in a positive manner. This is a continuing action and further work needs to be taken in this area and has been carried over to the revised draft Disability Action Plan 2016-20 and more lately to the 2019-24 Action Plan.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target dates for the “Intended Outcomes” (By when: 2012 and 2013) have been achieved. In going forward the current DAERA Disability Action Plan 2019-24 includes an action about reforming the DAERA Disability Forum, however, it is to be decided how this would fit in with the NICS Disability Forum and whether another forum would be useful. | |
| **18. Recreation areas and facilities** | * Recreational facilities developed in forests suitable and attractive to different age bands, particularly children and young people. [By when: 2015]   Achieved (and ongoing). | * Pro-actively seek partnership working with others to provide age appropriate, safe recreation and play areas for children and young people.   Achieved (and ongoing). |
|  | **Progress to Date**  **Children’s Champion**  A new Children’s Champion for DAERA was appointed in 2013 (a new Champion now holds this post). Discussions have been held to determine how DAERA can provide services to suit their needs; how we encourage their participation, representation and engagement, provide opportunities for play and recreation; and through child protection measures. Meetings were held between the DAERA Champion, Equality Unit and C&YP organisations on how the Department could progress in this area.  **CAFRE Trail**  In 2011 delivery of the CAFRE Trail at Greenmount campus included educational tours to 2,776 nursery / primary school children and 216 secondary school children. An additional 1,218 children participated in a similar programme at Enniskillen campus. In 2012 CAFRE Trail numbers were 2,995 children. CAFRE offers primary school children the opportunity to investigate farming, farmland habitats, wildlife and environmental issues and encourage a greater understanding of our natural environment. The nature trails at Greenmount and Enniskillen Campuses attract ~ 2,500 visitors per year. Due to COVID-19 the use of the CAFRE Nature Trail in 2020-21 was adversely disrupted  CAFRE Horticultural Branch employed an Occupational Therapist who assisted 14 students with brain injuries to take part in a 10 week course to allow them to gain new knowledge of a range of horticulture skills. This initiative was last delivered in 2019 with students gaining a Level 2 qualification in Practical Horticulture Skills and improved positive impacts on their health and wellbeing including improved self-esteem and self-efficacy.  CAFRE’s Enniskillen campus provides facilities for Riding for the Disabled (RDA) programmes and during the 2017/18 reporting period 7 out of 10 riders were registered as autistic. CAFRE’s Enniskillen campus continues to provide facilities for Riding for the Disabled (RDA) programmes and in February 2019 hosted a visit by HRH The Princess Royal, President for RDA. In 2020/21 CAFRE organised a pilot education course for health professionals who are delivering Equine Assisted Therapy and Learning (EAT&L) activities which can be used to enhance the health and well-being of our local community.  **Forest Service**  DAERA Forest Service have Memorandum of Understanding with 9 of the 11 local councils and have licence / lease agreements with local councils for recreation facilities in all six counties. These facilities encompass a wide range activities including walking, cycling, childrens play structures, and built facilities such as the Dark Sky Project in Davagh Forest.  The equality profile of visitors to forests on the Forest Service Estate are based on the last survey carried out by Forest Service in 2019. The survey estimated that visits to DAERA forests have increased from 4.7 million in 2014 to 9 million in 2019. The survey also returned that while in 2014, 90% of visits were made by people who visited more than once a week, this had reduced to 50% in 2019 suggesting that the base of individuals using the forests for recreational purposes had increased in the intervening period. In 2019, 9% of visitors indicated that they had a disability, which is a significantly lower proportion than in the population of Northern Ireland as a whole.  The average age of visitor to DAERA forests in 2019 (including children) was 35 ranging between 27 and 48 depending on the forest surveyed. 78% of visitors were adults aged 16 or older with the most popular recreation activities being walking and dog walking.  DAERA Forest Service continue to engage with operating partners including local government to enhance the recreational products provided by the Forest Service estate.  **Northern Ireland Environment Agency**  The Northern Ireland Environment Agency have continually sought to improve and widen access to its services, particularly for those with a disability. Some recent examples include:   * Upgrades to disabled toilet facilities at 5 sites (Peatlands, Quoile, Ness, Roe Valley and Scrabo) * New boardwalks at Peatlands Park to improve access; * Installation of rest points in country parks; * Accessible play structures; * Development of 2 play parks at Peatlands Park and Ness Country Park to include play and sensory elements for less able bodied children; * Installation of DDA compliant access ramp to the jetty at Quoile Pondage Nature Reserve; and extension of DDA compliant pathways and installation of 2 DDA compliant parking spaces * Improved accessibility to looped walk around the meadow to rear of the visitor centre area in Ness Country Park. * Surfacing upgrades to a number of paths in Crawfordsburn for those with reduced/limited mobility * Works currently being progressed for replacement of the “beach toilets” facility at Crawfordsburn to provide enhanced disabled facilities including a “changing places” facility.   These additional facilities and services enhance access for all and can lead to improved mental and physical health and wellbeing.  In summary, the above interventions have resulted in positive outcomes in terms of improved inclusivity and accessibility at DAERA funded sites for people throughout Northern Ireland in line with DAERA’s commitment to ensuring accessible services for everyone.  In terms of headline visitor figures across the properties managed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (7 Country Parks and in the region of 60 Nature Reserves), they have attracted an estimated 2.78 million visitors during 2020. Representing year on year increases in visitors to these sites.  **Inland Fisheries Public Angling Estate**  DAERA continues to make improvements to its public angling estate to improve access for those with a disability. This as well as all the activities outlined in section 14 mean that angling recreational activities are being promoted and encouraged to a wide audience and accessible facilities are available for the public to enjoy.  **Forest Service**  The importance of green space to people’s health and wellbeing is acknowledged in the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 and there is research evidence to show how various interventions in green spaces, which include forests and woodland, can help address public health issues related to obesity, cardiovascular effects, mental health, wellbeing and equality. Forest Service, in collaboration and partnership with other organisations, implemented a number of interventions in woodland to maximise social, health and equality benefits. These are in line with DAERA’s commitments in terms of consultation, effective communication and improving access.  These included:   * Early engagement with stakeholders to encourage their involvement in the development of forestry plans to ensure they reflect the diverse needs of people, wildlife and industry. Six consultations have been held between 2017 and March 2021 that resulted in 265 responses from a range of stakeholders including community groups, environmental organisations, farmers groups, councils, private individuals, forestry industry and government. DAERA welcomes this significant engagement from stakeholders which will be a valuable contribution to the development of meaningful draft forestry plans. * Promoting mutual understanding through education by encouraging joint working between the Royal Forestry Society (which aims to give children an opportunity to learn about trees) and the Speedwell Trust (an environmental awareness programme) based at Forest Service’s Parkanaur Forest Park. * Facilitating partnership working between eight of the local councils to develop facilities within forests to encourage the use of green space for exercise, enjoyment and relaxation.   The Forest Service acknowledges the role of sharing green spaces as a facilitator in building good relations. In October 2017, Forest Service helped support BBC One’s Countryfile Ramble at Castlewellan Forest Park as part of a youth development project for BBC’s Children in Need. More than 150 people of all ages and abilities took part in the ramble including a group of young people with special needs from Lurgan YMCA’s YES Programme. This programme gives young people with a disability the opportunity to participate in fun games and engage in different workshops and activities with their peers. The Forest Service provided additional logistical support on the day of the ramble so that a young person with more profound challenges could participate fully in the event.  In summary, the above activities have promoted and encouraged inclusivity in access to and enjoyment of our green spaces for people of different age groups, which also includes children and young people.  **Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework**  DAERA has worked in partnership with a number of NICS Departments to deliver a range of initiatives to address rural poverty and social isolation. The new Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework was developed by policy colleagues following public consultation and events opened to all stakeholders, which utilised community development network to communicate with stakeholders. The current TRPSI actions focus on reaching those most isolated or marginalised in rural areas and include actions that benefit the elderly, disabled, young people, unemployed and allows local communities to identify and support those in need.  This Support Service has established Social Farming as a beneficial day opportunity for individuals, within the health and social care system, who are living with a learning disability or mental health issue. Specific backing for community development continues to support capacity building across all Rural Areas.  **Conclusion**  In conclusion and looking at the overall evidence and progress from 2011 up to 2021, the information listed above and as further detailed within the APR’s, then it can be agreed that the target date for the “Intended Outcome” (By when: 2015) has been achieved. In going forward it is necessary to continue with this work and to ensure all recreational areas and facilities are available for all age groups, including children and young people. | |