**DAERA Minutes/Notes of Equality & Diversity Steering Group (EDSG)**

**Date & time: 05 October 2022 @3pm**

**Location: WebEx**

**In attendance:**

Katrina Godfrey Chair, Permanent Secretary, DAERA

Brian Doherty Deputy Secretary, Central Services & Contingency Planning (CSCPG)

Robert Huey Chief Veterinary Officer, Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group (VSAHG)

Norman Fulton Deputy Secretary, Food & Farming Group (FFG)

Martin McKendry Director of CAFRE

Owen Lyttle Director of Marine and Fisheries (Deputising for Tracey Teague)

Lynda Lowe Director of Staff Engagement, Equality & Diversity Division (SEED)

Kathryn Clarke Director of Staff Engagement, Equality & Diversity Division (SEED) (from 10 October 2022)

Colin Campbell Head of Staff Engagement, Equality & Diversity Branch (SEED)

Russell McCurry Staff Engagement, Equality & Diversity Branch (SEED)

**Apologies:**

Tracey Teague EMFG Deputy Secretary

Fiona McCandless Deputy Secretary, Central Services & Contingency Planning (CSCPG)

David Reid Deputy Secretary, Rural Affairs, Forest Service & Estates Management Group (RAFSET)

Paul Donnelly Deputy Secretary, Environment, Marine and Fisheries

Colm Morgan NI Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)

Brian McGeehan NI Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)

**Minutes:**

Russell McCurry Staff Engagement, Equality & Diversity Branch (SEED)

**Summary of Meeting:**

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| **Item** | **Description** | **Action Owner (where appropriate)** |
| **1.0** | **Welcome and apologies** |  |
|  | Katrina Godfrey welcomed all members to the meeting and noted the apologies that were received. |  |
| **2.0** | **Review of previous minutes** |  |
|  | The Chair confirmed with members that they had already agreed the minutes, shortly after the previous meeting, which was held on 03 March 2022. |  |
| **3.0** | **Action Points from EDSG meeting held on 06 October 2021** |  |
|  | All actions points have been completed and no further questions were raised by the members. |  |
| **4.0** | **Equality and Diversity Report/Update** |  |
|  | Colin Campbell’s report formed part of the papers for today’s meeting and had been shared with the group.  He specifically drew attention to the work done by the Equality Unit, and in particular Cindy’s major contribution, in getting the Annual Progress Report completed on time. He referred to the preparation for next year’s report and the possibility of adding pictures, video links, and other features further enhance the key messages. The ECNI screening video was highlighted and there were plans to share that with the staff as soon as possible. He also mentioned the work being taken forward with the Access All Ages video, noting that it was progressing well.  The Chair asked Colin to be mindful of the timeline of the launch, given the uncertainty as to whether the Minister would still be in post after 28 October. Colin agreed to consider further, noting that the availability of the videographer and the editing of the video might be constraining factors. |  |
| **5.0** | **Champions’ Updates** |  |
|  | * **Diversity & Inclusion Champion**   Lynda informed the members that there was a new bundle for an Equality and Diversity Essentials module which had been designed as well as a related module which was currently being developed. The NICS Board had been asked to agree that both of these modules should be made mandatory.  Lynda attended the Diversity Champions Network meeting on 21 September, where a number of issues were discussed, including:  The **Diversity Action Plan 2022-23** had been shared with the NICS Board and was launched at the start of National Inclusion Week from 26 Sept to 2 October. A series of global intranet articles was produced as part of that week.  **Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI)**  A global intranet to promote the Staff Feedback Questionnaire would be launched next week and Champions were asked to encourage completion of the survey within their departments. Champions were also updated on a potential legal challenge relating to NICS membership of Stonewall’s Diversity Champions Programme.  **Gender**  At the Champions meeting, Fiona outlined that the Belfast and Stormont hubs had merged and held a first meeting on 20 September with 50 members attending. Several objectives were currently being taken forward with this work.  The **Race and Ethnicity** Network’s Committee meeting was due to take place on 22 September 2022. The network was working on developing its landing page on the intranet, planning for events and outreach activities.   * **Children’s Champion**   Martin provided an update on the work of the DAERA Children’s Champion Group, the Action Plan and its contribution to the Children and Young People’s Strategy (CYPS) led by DE. The cross-departmental group meets twice per year to discuss and update actions.  The main issues discussed surrounded the impact of the current ‘living crisis’ and its impact on student finance and welfare. He pointed out that support from various agencies was available, however it was identified that support in the west was much more difficult to access than the east. He noted, however, that broadly support had improved over the past few years and the access to the network of professionals was still available.  The group was informed about the restructuring of CAFRE’s student support service and that best practice and expertise from across the UK was being adopted. He also stated that currently a number of staff within the student support service were agency staff as CAFRE awaits the commencement of a recruitment process. | **AP1. Martin to forward the CYPS Action Plan for distribution to EDSG members.** |
| **6.0** | **Equality specialists in each business area/Group** |  |
|  | A short paper was provided for discussion. It was agreed that the relevant action within the Audit of Inequalities (AoI) did not represent the best way forward and that there were better ways of achieving the stated aim while avoiding siloed approaches. These might include more regular information sessions.  Katrina stressed the importance of effective leadership in discharging the Department’s equality obligations and the value of the ECNI checklist. In discussion, it was agreed that it would be useful to invite a senior ECNI representative to a future Departmental Board meeting, to talk about leadership and the effective leadership checklist. | **AP2. Colin Campbell to consider the best approach, informed by the discussion that took place.**  **AP3: Kathryn Clarke to schedule on the Board forward work programme for early 2023.** |
| **7.0** | **AOB** |  |
|  | One item was raised at AOB.   * Social Inclusion Champions   Colin explained that champions were needed for each of the seven social inclusion strategies. After discussion, it was agreed that volunteers should be sought, at G5 level where possible or G6/7 level where more appropriate. | **AP4. Equality Unit to seek volunteers for these roles.** |
| **8.0** | **Date of next meeting** |  |
|  | 08 March 2023 |  |