

Equality Awareness Survey 2008

IN BRIEF

- Awareness of specific equality statutes amongst the general public is generally good. While perceived understanding of some equality legislation appears to have fallen since 2005, specific knowledge of the Section 75 duties placed on public authorities appears to have increased.
- The survey found that social attitudes varied in different scenarios (work, home and relationships) and towards different groups (e.g. mental ill-health compared with physical or learning disabled).
- Almost a quarter of respondents perceived racial or ethnic groups to be the group treated most unfairly in Northern Ireland (Chart 1).
- While the majority of respondents displayed positive attitudes, most negative feelings were expressed towards Travellers (28%), lesbian women, gay men or bisexuals (21%); and Eastern European migrants (20%) [Chart 2].
- 16% felt they had experienced some form of discrimination in the last three years, and one-fifth of those made a complaint. One-third felt they would know their rights if they experienced discrimination or harassment.
- 30% of respondents correctly named the Equality Commission as the body with overall responsibility for promoting equality and dealing with anti-discrimination laws in Northern Ireland. When prompted, over half (55%), had heard of the Equality Commission.
- Around two-thirds had confidence in the ability of the Commission to promote equality of opportunity for all.

Chart 1: Which group do you feel is treated most unfairly in Northern Ireland? (n = 659).

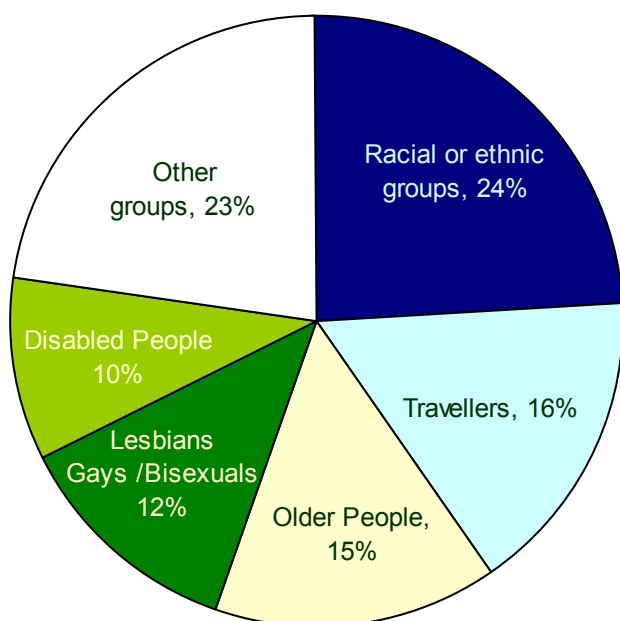
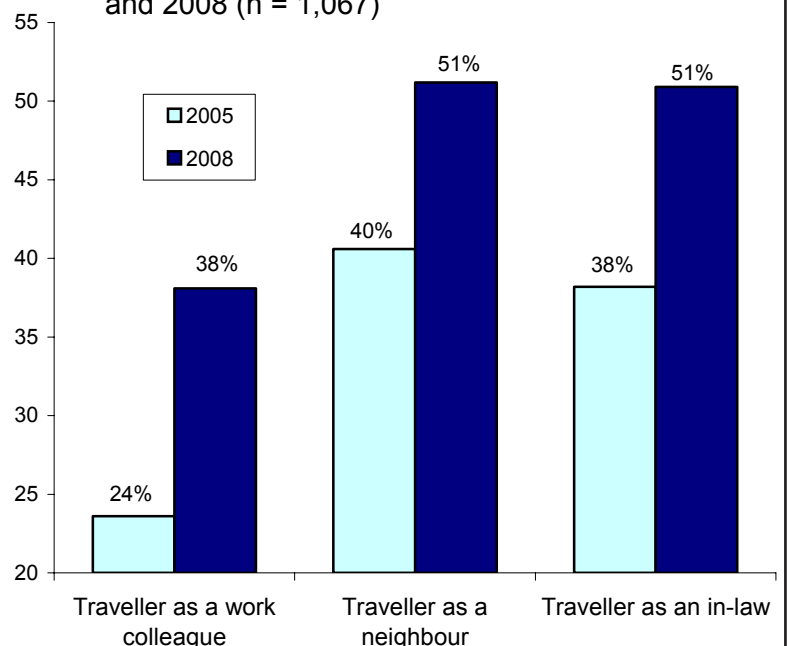


Chart 2: Percentage of respondents who minded having a Traveller as a work colleague, neighbour or in-law, 2005 and 2008 (n = 1,067)



Introduction

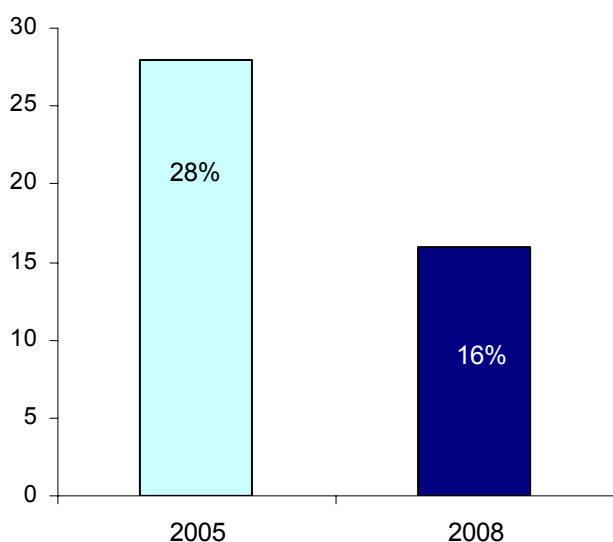
In July 2008, the ECNI commissioned a sample survey of the general public in Northern Ireland. The overall aim of the survey was to establish current awareness of equality-related issues amongst the general public in Northern Ireland and to monitor change since 2005. Specifically, the Commission wished to:

- identify the level of current awareness of anti-discrimination legislation; and awareness of the Commission and its role;
- capture attitudes towards equality issues including attitudes towards key equality groupings;
- probe perceptions and personal experience of discrimination; and
- acquire baseline data on the level of public confidence in the Commission and its work.

The survey was conducted on a face-to-face basis in the respondents' homes with a representative sample of 1,071 adults aged 16 years and over. To ensure the sample was fully representative of the Northern Ireland adult population (16+), the survey was implemented as a stratified random sample, with quotas set for age, sex, and religion. Fieldwork, which covered all of Northern Ireland, was conducted in September 2008.

The survey builds on a previous, similar survey conducted by the Commission in 2005. For comparative purposes, the present survey also selected a number of questions from the Scottish Attitudes and Eurobarometer surveys.

Chart 3: Respondents who had heard of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (n = 1,063).



Awareness of Anti-Discrimination Laws

A series of questions sought to ascertain the level of understanding, awareness and public support for specific pieces of equality legislation in Northern Ireland.

- Awareness of specific **equality statutes** by name is generally good, with longer established legislation more widely known than recent legislation (Table 1). **75%** had heard of the Sex Discrimination Order, followed by fair employment legislation (**73%**) and the Age Regulations (**55%**). The Sexual Orientation regulations, (**46%**) were least likely to be known by respondents (n = 1,071).
- Compared with **2005** however, awareness of the existence of each equality statute by name has declined, with the exception of the **Sexual Orientation** regulations where awareness has increased from 33%.
- Awareness of **Section 75** of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 has fallen over the past three years, from **28%** in 2005 to **16%** in 2008 (Chart 3). However, for those who were aware of Section 75 (n = 168), knowledge of the specific duties placed on public authorities appears to have improved considerably: for example, in 2008, **80%** knew that public authorities were required to develop an

Chart 4: Section 75 places certain duties on public authorities. Are you aware that public authorities are required to?

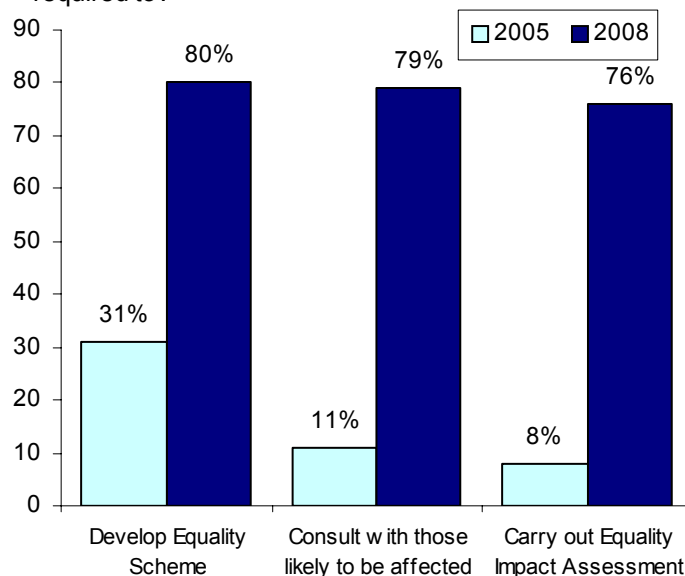
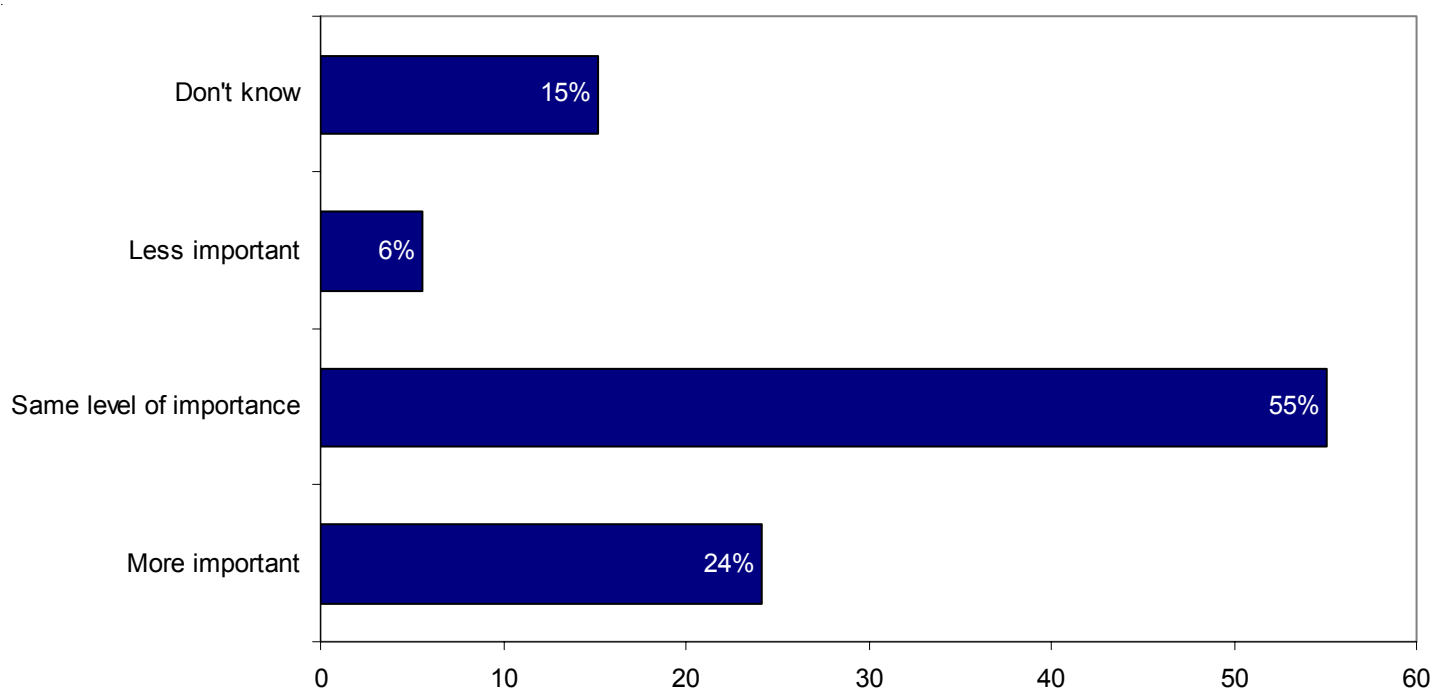


Chart 5: Compared with 3 years ago, have equality issues become more important, less important, or has the level of importance remained unchanged (n = 1,064)



equality scheme, compared with only **31%** in 2005 (Chart 4).

- Over three-quarters of those surveyed indicated that **equality issues** are either just as important (55%) or more important (24%) in 2008 than three years earlier (Chart 5).
- Support for **equality laws** has remained consistent over time, with **92%** agreeing on the need for such laws (also 92% in 2005).
- Substantial backing was also evident for a **Single Equality Act**, with **78%** agreeing that the Government should enact a single law to protect against all types of unfair treatment (80% similarly agreed in 2005).

Social Attitudes and Perceptions

This section of the survey explored a range of social attitudes, including respondents' perceptions of various groups in Northern Ireland, and the representativeness of public bodies.

Prevalence of Discrimination

Respondents were asked to consider the prevalence of discrimination, compared with five years ago (2003).

- 54% perceived that **race discrimination** is either far more or slightly more prevalent compared with five years ago. The dominant perception was that **religious discrimination** is less prevalent than five years earlier.

Perception of Group Treated Most Unfairly in Northern Ireland

Respondents were also asked to identify the group they thought was **treated most unfairly** in Northern Ireland (see Chart 1).

- In considering which group was treated most unfairly, **racial or ethnic groups** (24%), Travellers (16%), older people (15%), lesbians, gays and bisexuals (LGB) (12%) ranked highest. Women (2%) and men (0.3%) ranked lowest. The hierarchy of perceived disadvantage was broadly similar to 2005, except for Travellers who were perceived to be treated more unfairly in 2008.

Table 1: In general, how positive or negative do you feel towards each of the following groups in Northern Ireland? (n = 1,071)

	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)	Positive (%)
Travellers	28	26	46
Lesbian women or gay men	21	22	57
Eastern European migrants	20	23	58
People from the Polish community	16	25	59
People from the Portuguese community	15	26	59
People from the Indian community	12	25	63
People from the Chinese community	12	25	64
People of a different religion to you	7	20	73
People under 30	7	15	79
Women	5	10	85
People over 70	4	13	82
Disabled people	4	14	83
Men	4	13	83

However, when asked to indicate their personal perceptions of particular groups (Table 1), respondents indicated they personally felt most negative towards Travellers (28%), followed by lesbian women or gay men (21%) and Eastern European migrants (20%).

Attitudes towards specific groups

The survey examined attitudes further by considering 'social distance' - the extent to which people would be comfortable with varying degrees of closeness of relationship with members of different groups. Respondents were presented with a list of seven groups, and asked if they would mind having them as a work colleague or a neighbour, or what their attitude would be if one of their close relatives were to marry (or form a civil partnership with) a member of the specified group (see Table 2).

Table 2 shows that, broadly speaking, most adults declared positive attitudes towards all of the groups in each of the three scenarios. However, a significant minority expressed negative attitudes towards various groups: in particular, Travellers, LGB persons, migrant workers and those experiencing mental ill-health.

Travellers

- Just over half (51%) would mind (a little or a lot) having a **Traveller** either as a neighbour or if one of their close relatives were to marry a Traveller (n = 1,066). Negative perceptions of Travellers have increased at each level of proximity since

2005, when 41% minded a Traveller as a neighbour and 38% the marriage scenario.

Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) Persons

- 23% would mind having a lesbian, gay or bisexual person as either a work colleague or neighbour, while 35% would mind if a close relative were in a relationship with such a person. Compared with 2005, the proportion of respondents expressing negative attitudes towards LGB persons has increased at each level of proximity. In 2005, 14% minded having a LGB person as either a work colleague or neighbour, while 29% minded a close relative being in a relationship with such a person.

Migrant Workers

The research sought to specifically establish attitudes towards migrant workers living in Northern Ireland, citing nationalities such as Polish, Portuguese and Latvian by way of example.

- 22% of respondents would mind having a **migrant worker** as a work colleague, while a similar proportion (23%) would mind having a migrant worker as a neighbour. 28% would mind if a migrant worker were to marry one of their close relatives (n = 1,067 and 1,066).
- It should be noted that **race** was used instead of **migrant worker** in 2005, so the results are not directly comparable. The 2005 Survey found that 2% would mind having a person of a different race

as a work colleague, **3%** as a neighbour, and **10%** would mind if one of their close relatives were to marry such a person.

Disability

The 2005 Equality Awareness Survey asked about attitudes towards disabled people generically. The Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 amended the

Table 2: Would you personally mind having a member of the the following group(s) as a work colleague, neighbour, or if one of them were to marry a close relative? (n = 1,071).

	Mind (a little or a lot) %
Traveller	
as a work colleague	38
as a neighbour	51
Were to marry a close relative	51
Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual person	
as a work colleague	23
as a neighbour	23
were to form a civil partnership with a close relative	35
Migrant Worker	
as a work colleague	22
as a neighbour	23
Were to marry a close relative	28
Person with mental ill-health	
as a work colleague	17
as a neighbour	16
Were to marry a close relative	25
Person with a learning disability	
as a work colleague	8
as a neighbour	7
Were to marry a close relative	14
Person with a physical disability	
as a work colleague	8
as a neighbour	6
Were to marry a close relative	10
Person of a different religion	
as a work colleague	5
as a neighbour	6
Were to marry a close relative	8

definition of disability to include those with progressive conditions from point of diagnosis and those with mental ill-health. The current survey sought to evaluate if there were differences in respondent's **perceptions of specific disabled groups** – physical and learning disabled and mental ill-health.

- The proportion of respondents expressing negative attitudes towards each of these three groups in 2008, regardless of social distance, was higher than expressed towards 'disabled people' in 2005.
- Those with **mental ill-health** were viewed most negatively. Respondents in 2008 were almost twice as likely to not favour having contact with these persons at any level of social distance, compared with a person with either a physical or a learning disability. For example, 17% would mind having someone with mental ill-health as a work colleague, compared with 8% for those with a learning or physical disability.

Person of a Different Religion

Of all the groups explored, respondents were least likely to hold negative views towards those of a different religion, though negative views did become stronger with closer social distance:

- 5% of respondents would mind having a person of a different religion as a work colleague (3%, 2005); 6% as a neighbour (3%, 2005); and 8% would mind if one of their close relatives were to marry such a person (7%, 2005) (n = 954 -1,068).

Upholding Rights and Combating Discrimination

When asked about the importance of upholding the rights of particular groups

- Respondents felt it was most important to uphold the rights of **women** (68%), people over 70 (67%), and disabled people (66%). Least support was displayed for upholding the rights of **Travellers** (41%).
- When asked if enough was being done to combat unlawful discrimination, 55% agreed while 28% disagreed; 17% were undecided.

Diversity and Affirmative Action

- Around half to two thirds of respondents agreed with the need for more **diversity** in workplaces, and in the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- Considerable support (70%) was expressed for public bodies being more representative of both the Protestant and Catholic communities.
- Two-thirds (67%) agreed that a representative PSNI will offer a better service.

Personal Experience of Discrimination and Harassment

This section of the survey probed respondents' personal experiences of discrimination or harassment, and those factors relevant in making a complaint.

- **36%** claimed to know their rights if they were the victim of discrimination or harassment.
- **16%** said that they had been subject to some form of **harassment** or **treated unfairly** during the past three years because they belonged to a particular group.
- Table 3 reveals that the most commonly reported experiences of unfair treatment or harassment were 'treated unfairly at work' (8%) and 'being harassed because I belong to a particular group' (7%).
- Of those who believed they had been treated unfairly (n = 162), **20%** said they had made **some form of complaint**, either to the Commission or some other public body.

- The main reasons cited for not making a complaint were "don't want to cause trouble" (25%); "too trivial" (21%); "didn't know who to complain to" (15%) and "too stressful" (9%).
- In **2005**, 17% of people surveyed said they had experienced unfair treatment or harassment in the last 3 years because they belonged to a particular group. Of these people, **31%** made a complaint. The main reasons for people not bringing a complaint were that they felt the matter was "too trivial" (24%) and that they did not want to cause trouble (22%).

Respondents were informed that the Commission offers advice and assistance to people who believe they may have been discriminated against, and asked would they **contact the Commission** if they had a problem.

- **42%** said yes, while an identical proportion said no. 16% did not know (n = 1,064).

Equality Commission: Awareness and Public Confidence

This section of the survey focused on the Equality Commission: in particular, awareness of the public body and its role. In addition, a new subset of questions sought to explore perceptions of the organisation and establish the degree of confidence in the Commission.

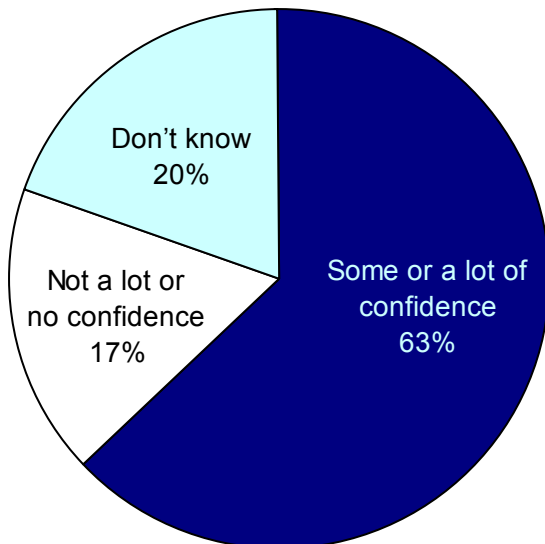
Awareness of the Commission and its Role

- When asked which organisation had overall responsibility for promoting equality and dealing with anti-discrimination in Northern Ireland, **30%** of respondents **correctly identified the Equality Commission**. The next most common response

Table 3: Type of unfair treatment experienced during past 3 years due to membership of a specified group (n = 1,000 – 1,071)

Type of Unfair Treatment	% 2005	% 2008
Treated unfairly at work	5	8
Harassed due to membership of a specified group	7	7
Treated unfairly when you buying / renting a house, premises or land	1	4
Treated unfairly when using shops, bars or restaurants	2	4
Treated unfairly when accessing public services	5	3
Treated unfairly in relation to educational opportunities	2	3
One or more of the above	17	16
Total (n)	1,000	1,071

Chart 6: Confidence in ability of Equality Commission to promote equality of opportunity for all (n = 589)



was the Equal Opportunities Commission (5%), a predecessor organisation. In 2005, **11%** of respondents identified the Commission as the body with overall responsibility for anti-discrimination laws, an increase of 19 percentage points.

- When subsequently advised of the function of the Equality Commission (prompted awareness), **55%** indicated that they had heard of the Commission prior to this survey. This was broadly similar to the finding of the 2005 survey (58%).
- **82%** of those who were aware of the Commission indicated they **knew something about the organisation's role or work**, compared with 65% in 2005.
- When asked to indicate the **main services provided by the Commission**, the most common response was 'advising people' (43%), followed by monitoring the workforce (26%), providing information to employers (20%) and supporting people to take cases to tribunal (20%).

Confidence in the Equality Commission

Those respondents who had heard of the Commission (n = 591) were asked to indicate the **degree of confidence** they have in the ability of the Commission to promote equality of opportunity for all.

- **63%** of this group had either a lot of confidence or some confidence in the Commission; **17%** had not a lot of confidence or no confidence at all; while **20%** didn't know (Chart 6).

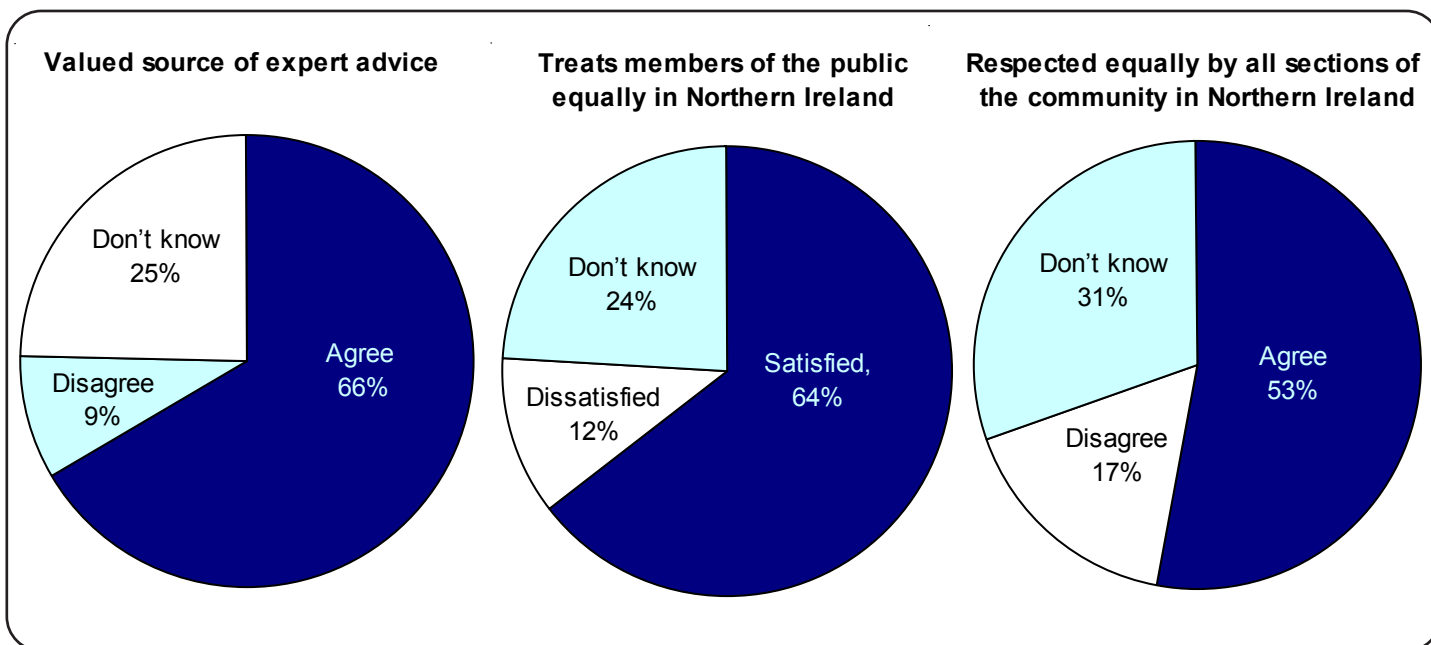
As a follow-up, the above group were then asked to suggest the **single most important improvement** the Commission could make to increase confidence in it.

- Excluding the don't knows, suggestions included engaging in "more promotion and advertising of services" (48%); "promote equality of opportunity for all" (16%); and "increase organisational transparency and accountability" (8%).

Respondents were also asked for their views on the Commission as a source of advice and on the Commission's standing in the community (Chart 7).

- **66%** either agreed or strongly agreed that the Commission provides a **valued source of expert advice** on equality, while **9%** either disagreed or strongly disagreed. One quarter (25%) did not know (n = 590).
- **64%** were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied that the Commission treats members of the public **equally** in Northern Ireland, **irrespective of their background**. **12%** were either very dissatisfied or fairly dissatisfied, while 24% did not know (n = 590).
- **53%** either agreed or strongly agreed that the Commission is **respected equally by all sections** of the community in NI, while **17%** either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Nearly one third (31%) did not know (n = 589).

Chart 7: The Commission as a source of advice and the Commission's standing in the community (n = 589 - 590).



Summary

The survey found that equality issues are important to the general public: there is still solid support for equality legislation and the proposed Single Equality Act. However, compared with 2005 the survey found an overall decline in public understanding of equality legislation and a drop in recognition of specific equality statutes. While awareness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 has fallen, awareness of the duties on public authorities required by this legislation has increased considerably.

In relation to social attitudes, although the majority of the general public still hold positive views towards a range of minority groups, a sizeable proportion of respondents did express negative attitudes towards Travellers, lesbians, gays and bisexuals, migrant workers and those experiencing mental ill-health. The findings indicate the potential vulnerability of these groups to overt acts of discrimination.

Negative views towards minority groups were considerably more evident in 2008 than three years earlier.

In relation to the Equality Commission, compared with 2005, public awareness of the organisation is still relatively high, and there has been an increase in the

proportion of those who know something about the Commission's work.

Finally, the finding that a majority of the public have confidence in the Commission's ability, expertise and impartiality is worthy of note.

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