



**Satisfaction of Employers and Service Providers
With Business Support Provided by the Equality Commission**

April 2012



CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction.....	10
1.1 Background to the Study	10
1.2 Study Aim and Objectives	10
2. Methodology	11
2.1 Sampling for the Telephone Survey	11
2.2 Profile of Organisations and Response Rate	12
2.3 Statistical Significance	12
2.4 Focus Groups with Employers / Service Providers (2 Groups)	12
3. Survey Results.....	13
3.1 Awareness of Equality Legislation	Error! Bookmark not defined. 13
3.2 Contact with the Commission	Error! Bookmark not defined. 14
3.2.1 Awareness that the Commission Meets with Employers to Provide Support ..	14
3.2.2 Contact with the Commission in Last 12 Months	14
3.2.3 Frequency of Contact with the Commission	16
3.2.4 Reason for Contacting the Commission	16
3.2.5 Types of Contact	17
3.2.6 Satisfaction with Different Forms of Contact.....	19
3.2.7 Suggested Improvements with Written Contact	19
3.2.8 Suggested Improvements with Meetings	19
3.2.9 Suggested Improvements with Telephone Contact.....	20
3.2.10 Contact and Changing Equality / Employment Practices / Procedures	20
3.2.11 Most Recent Type of Contact with the Commission.....	20
3.2.12 Overall Satisfaction with Contact with the Commission.....	21
3.2.13 Improving Contact with the Commission	22
3.2.14 Reasons for no Contact with Commission.....	22
3.2.15 Preference for Receiving Employment Information and Advice.....	22
3.3 Commission Services.....	Error! Bookmark not defined. 23
3.3.1 Awareness of Commission Provided Equality Training	23
3.3.2 Attendance at Commission Provided Equality Training	23
3.3.3 Satisfaction with Commission Training.....	24
3.3.4 Changes to Equality Practices and Procedures.....	25
3.3.5 Improvements to Commission Training	25
3.3.6 Awareness and Use of Commission Guides / Publications	26
3.3.7 Changed Equality Practices as Result of Booklets	27
3.3.8 Visits to the Commission's Website	28
3.3.9 Website Meeting the Needs of Users.....	30
3.3.10 Satisfaction with the Commission's Website.....	30
3.3.11 Changes to Equality Practices Due to Website Visit	30
3.3.12 Suggested Improvements to the Commission's Website	31
3.3.13 Registration, Monitoring Forms and Article 55 Review	Error! Bookmark not defined. 32
3.3.14 Registration.....	Error! Bookmark not defined. 32
3.3.15 Satisfaction: Commission Assistance with Registration	32
3.3.16 Satisfaction: Commission Assistance with Monitoring	33
3.3.17 Article 55 Reviews.....	Error! Bookmark not defined. 35
3.3.18 Satisfaction: Commission Contact Re: Article 55 Reviews	33
3.3.19 Change Equality Practices Following Article 55 Reviews	34
3.3.20 Statutory Duties for Public Authorities	Error! Bookmark not defined. 36

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

3.3.21	Seeking Advice from the Commission on Section 75.....	35
3.3.25	Changing Policy and / or Procedures as a Result of Compliance Process....	35
3.3.26	Suggested Improvements in Advice Received by the Commission.....	35
3.3.27	Contacting the Commission for Advice on Disability Duties.....	36
3.3.28	Changes to Equality / Employment Practices and Procedure	36
3.4	Overall Views of the Commission.....	37
3.4.1	Overall Satisfaction with the Commission.....	37
3.4.2	The Commission as a Valued Source of Expert Advice on Equality	38
3.4.3	Single Most Important Improvement to Assist Employers	39
3.4.4	Commission Service Areas: Perceptions of Importance versus Performance	39
3.5	Confidence in the Commission.....	41
3.5.1	Confidence in Commission to Promote Equality of Opportunity for All	41
APPENDIX 1 – EMPLOYER’S QUESTIONNAIRE		42
APPENDIX 2 – LETTER TO EMPLOYERS		62
APPENDIX 3 – DISCUSSION SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUPS		64
APPENDIX 4 – FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS.....		74

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from a survey of public and private sector employers regarding their satisfaction with key aspects of business support provided by the Equality Commission. The survey provides the Commission with an opportunity to assess the extent to which Commission services are meeting the needs of public and private sector employers. The survey builds upon a previous survey conducted in 2007. It thus assists with monitoring changes in employer perception of the Commission over time as well as alerting the Commission to further opportunities to help and support employers to meet their commitments under equality legislation. Comparisons with 2007 findings are made where possible. The survey was based on two elements: a telephone survey of 340 employers, and two focus groups with employers. The survey was carried out independently by Social Market Research (www.socialmarketresearch.co.uk) and was conducted between December 2011 and January 2012.

Key Findings

Overall Satisfaction and Perception of the Commission

- 86% of employers surveyed are satisfied with the services provided by the Commission which is identical to the satisfaction level recorded in 2007. The level of satisfaction is consistent between public and private sector organisations as well as between organisations of a different size. The proportion of employers 'very satisfied' with Commission services increased from 28% in 2007 to 51% in 2012;
- 88% of employers agree that the Commission provides a valued source of advice with just 4% disagreeing. This view is consistent across both public and private sector employers;
- 90% of employers have confidence in the ability of the Commission to promote equality of opportunity for all, with just 5% holding the opposite view. Again this view is consistent across both public and private sector organisations.

Awareness of Equality Legislation

- As with previous editions of this survey, prompted awareness of equality legislation among employers was found to be extremely high (e.g. age discrimination legislation, 99%; sex discrimination laws, 99% etc). However, relative to the very high awareness levels of other pieces of legislation, public sector respondents recorded a lower level of awareness for legislation relating to positive duties on disability (79%).

Employer Awareness and Contact with the Commission

- 75% of employers are aware that Commission staff will meet organisations to offer advice and support on equality matters, with public sector organisations (93%) more aware of this compared with their private sector counterparts (72%);

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

- When asked directly if they had contact with the Commission in the last 12 months, 37% of employers indicated that they had. This represents a significant fall in contact level compared with 2007 (61%);
- The most common reason given for not having contacted the Commission in the last 12 months was that employers felt they had no need to;
- When probed across a range of contact types e.g. training, completing monitoring returns, advice on statutory duties, the rate of contact with the Commission increased to 74% of employers surveyed.
- 71% of public sector organisations had contact with the Commission in the previous 12 months compared with 35% of private sector organisations. Smaller private sector organisations (employing 11-50 employees) recorded the lowest level of contact at 27%;
- The fall in the level of contact among smaller private sector organisations (down from 60% in 2007 to 27% in 2012) may help explain the overall fall in the level of contact reported by employers;
- 34% of employers contacting the Commission in the previous 12 months had done so to seek advice on fair employment compliance, with the same number contacting the Commission for advice on employment issues (34%);
- 50% of those contacting the Commission in the last 12 months said that their contact related to fair employment, which is a marked increase from the 31% recorded in 2007;
- 81% of employers had contacted the Commission by telephone in the last 12 months, with 56% reporting written contact and 18% meetings with the Commission;
- 95% of employers were satisfied with their most recent telephone contact, 88% were satisfied with their most recent written contact and 88% were satisfied with their most recent meeting with the Commission;
- In 98% of recent contacts with the Commission, employers said that communication was polite and friendly, with 92% saying that the time taken to provide information was adequate. In 91% of recent contacts, employers reported receiving all of the information and assistance they needed, with almost all (96%) saying they would readily contact the Commission again. These findings, taken collectively, are consistent with the findings from the 2007 survey;
- 95% of employers were satisfied with their most recent contact with the Commission (99% in 2007);
- 39% of employers expressed a preference for receiving information from the Commission by email, with 24% preferring to receive information via the Commission's website.

The Commission Working with Different Groups

- 74% of respondents said they are aware that the Commission works with employers to improve employment opportunities for those groups of people who have difficulties in accessing jobs;
- 46% of those who are aware that the Commission works with employers to support different groups said that their organisation had put in place activities to provide training or employment opportunities for these groups.

Equality Training For Business

- 81% of employers are aware that the Commission provides equality training for employers, which marks a significant increase on the 61% recorded in 2007. Awareness of Commission provided equality training is consistent across public and private sector employers;
- 28% of employers had availed of Commission training in the previous 12 months, with public sector organisations (46%) aware of Commission training more likely to avail of it compared with private sector organisations (27%);
- 36% of employers aware of Commission training had attended courses on Article 55 / Employer Duties, with 24% attending training relating to recruiting fairly;
- 33% of employers who had attended Commission provided equality training said that their organisation had instituted change to equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a *direct* result;
- 93% of employers who had attended Commission training were satisfied with it with none dissatisfied and 7% recording 'don't know'. The comparative satisfaction figure for 2007 was 99%;

Commission Guides and Publications

- 73% of employers were aware (*unprompted*) of at least one Commission publication or guide (78% in 2007), with awareness higher among public sector organisations and lower among smaller private sector (employing between 11-50 employees) organisations (68%);
- 24% of respondents spontaneously recalled the Commission's step by step guide to monitoring, with 23% recalling the Commission's publication on model policies and procedures;
- 58% of employers who were aware of Commission publications or guides had used at least one (63% in 2007);
- 29% of employers using Commission publications or guides reported changing equality / employment policy and / or procedures as a *direct* result;
- 97% of employers who had used Commission publications or guides were satisfied with them (94% in 2007);

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

- 20% of all employers said that advice on dismissal / redundancy would be of most benefit to them, with 19% saying that advice on pregnancy / maternity would be of most benefit;

The Commission's Website

- 65% of employers had visited the Commission's website at some point, with 62% having visited in the last year (45% in 2007);
- All public sector organisations had used the Commission's website compared with 63% of private sector organisations;
- Users of the Commission's website visited 4 times on average in the previous 12 months (up from 3 times on average in 2007);
- 43% of employers visiting the Commission's website in the last 12 months did so to get a faster answer to a query;
- 80% of employers visiting the Commission's website in the last 12 months found it easy to find the information they required on their last visit (79% in 2007), with just 7% finding it difficult;
- 87% of employers said they found the information they needed on their last visit to the Commission's website;
- 17% of employers who had visited the Commission's website in the last 12 months had changed their equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of their visit;
- 88% of employers visiting the Commission's website in the previous 12 months were satisfied with the website, with just 3% dissatisfied (92% satisfaction rating in 2007);

Registration, Monitoring and Article 55 Reviews

- 34% of employers had been involved in registering their organisation with the Commission (26% in 2007);
- 81% were satisfied with Commission provided assistance with the registration process (90% in 2007);
- 50% of employers had contact with the Commission in relation to fair employment monitoring (28% in 2007);
- 95% were satisfied with Commission assistance with monitoring (100% in 2007);
- 22% of employers had contact with the Commission regarding Article 55 Reviews (up from 19% in 2007);
- 94% were satisfied with Commission assistance relating to Article 55 Reviews (93% in 2007);
- 17% of employers contacting the Commission regarding Article 55 reviews had changed equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a

result of the process they had gone through to complete their review (16% in 2007).

Employer Perceived Importance and Performance of Service Provision

- Relative to other areas of service provision, employers rated 'responding to enquiries effectively' as the most important aspect of service;
- Relative to other areas of service provision, the professionalism of Commission staff was ranked highest of all service offerings;

Statutory Duties for Public Authorities

- 54% of public sector organisations had, in the last 12 months, approached the Commission for advice and support on the Section 75 duties;
- 71% of public sector organisations seeking advice on Statutory Duties had sought advice on the implementation of equality schemes, with just over half (56%) seeking advice relating to equality audits;
- 91% of those seeking advice on compliance with Section 75 were satisfied with the advice provided by the Commission;
- 58% of public sector organisations had made changes to equality / employment policies, procedures and practices as a direct result of the Section 75 compliance process;
- 16% of public sector organisations had contacted the Commission (in the last 12 months) seeking advice in relation to the disability duties;
- 90% of those seeking advice on compliance with disability duties were satisfied with the advice provided by the Commission;
- 81% of public sector organisations contacting the Commission for advice on disability duties were satisfied with the length of time it took for the Commission to provide the advice they received;

Commission Contact and Changes to Employment Practices

- 33% of all organisations in the survey had instituted a change to equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a *direct* result of their contact with the Commission (38% in 2007).
- 49% of organisations with a significant level of contact (i.e. 3 or more contacts in the previous 12 months) had introduced change as a result of their contact with the Commission (57% in 2007).

Conclusions

The evidence from this survey shows clearly that the services provided by the Commission to employers and service providers are highly valued, with overall satisfaction remaining consistently high compared with previous editions of the survey. Also, and without exception, large and small public and private sector

organisations have expressed a high degree of confidence in the ability of the Commission to promote equality of opportunity for all.

The survey has further underscored the importance of the Commission's website as a mode of contact for employers and service providers, with this medium increasing significantly compared with 2007. Although the level of contact via more traditional modes such as telephone, written and through face to face meetings has declined, this has been clearly offset by the increase in contact with the Commission through its website. In future editions of the survey it is recommended that this type of contact be examined in more detail as is the case with the more traditional forms of contact.

Finally, the survey has presented employers and service providers with an opportunity to suggest where further refinements to the service can be made.

1. Introduction

In September 2011, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) appointed Social Market Research (www.socialmarketresearch.co.uk) to conduct a survey of employers and service providers regarding their satisfaction with business support provided by the Commission. This report presents the findings from this survey, and where possible, makes comparisons with the findings from a previous survey carried out in 2007. The survey was also complemented with focus groups with employers and service providers.

1.1 Background to the Study

The Equality Commission (the Commission) has responsibility for overseeing, reviewing and enforcing equality legislation with regards to disability, fair employment and treatment, age, race relations, sex discrimination, equal pay and sexual orientation. The legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of any of these areas in relation to employment, and in most cases, the provision of goods and services. In some statutes there are additional duties placed on employers (e.g. the Disability Discrimination Act places duties on businesses to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people). The Commission also has specific duties to ensure that public bodies in Northern Ireland comply with their statutory duties to promote equality and good relations under the Northern Ireland Act. As part of this process the Commission provides a supportive role to employers and service providers by:

- responding to telephone, email and written queries;
- providing information and advice;
- issuing publications;
- hosting seminars and training courses; and,
- raising awareness generally of the individual's rights to equality.

1.2 Study Aim and Objectives

The overall research aim was:

'To provide robust data to evaluate the extent to which Commission services to businesses are meeting the needs of employers and service providers in Northern Ireland, and be capable of monitoring change over time'.

Within this overall study aim the Commission set the following attendant objectives in three main areas as follows:

- Employer and Service Provider awareness of legislation and services provided by the Commission:
 - a) Awareness of anti-discrimination and public sector statutory duty legislation;
 - b) Awareness of distinct responsibilities under separate anti-discrimination statutes and public sector statutory duties;

- c) Awareness of employer and service provider support provided by the Commission.
- Employer and Public Sector Practices:
 - a) to explore the extent to which employers and service providers have revised the ways they employ people or provide services as a result of the legislation and / or the services provided by the Commission;
- The Equality Commission and its work:
 - a) to acquire comparative data on the level of employer confidence [satisfaction] in the Commission and its work;
 - b) to evaluate specific Commission advice and/or assistance to employers and service providers.

2. Methodology

The research was based on two elements:

- a telephone survey of 340 public and private sector employers; and,
- 2 focus groups with employers / service providers.

2.1 Sampling for the Telephone Survey

The key objective of any sample design is to ensure that the achieved sample of respondents is representative of the population from which it is drawn. In relation to this survey the temptation was to stratify the sample on a proportionate basis either by number of employees or by number of organisations. However, the risk of applying this approach is that the sample design may have generated an insufficient number of cases to represent those employees in organisations employing 51 to 100 and 101+ employees. There was also a risk of an insufficient number of public sector service providers to allow meaningful statistical analysis. In light of these factors, SMR applied a disproportionate sampling approach to secure an equal number of cases (n=85) for each of the three private sector categories (11-50; 51-100; and, 101+) and public sector service providers (n=85) [note that all public sector organisations were included in the sample, with private sector organisations randomly selected from each stratum. [Please also note that 28 additional interview were conducted with public sector staff with a responsibility for Section 75].

2.2 Profile of Organisations and Response Rate

A total of 340 interviews were conducted with a range of private and public sector organisations. The survey achieved a response rate of 75%. The achieved sample is presented in Table 2.1.

No. of Employees		No. of Concerns ¹	% Concerns	Achieved Sample	% Sample
Private Sector	11-50	2353	63.3	85	25
	51-100	678	18.2	85	25
	101+	564	15.2	85	25
Public Sector		122	3.3	85	25
Total		3717	100	340	100

The number achieved within each stratum / sector is large enough to facilitate statistical inference to all public and private organisations being serviced by the Commission. However, given the disproportionate basis of the sample, there was a need to apply a corrective weighting procedure to correct for employer size and sector. The profile of the weighted sample is presented in Table 2.2.

No. of Employees		No. of Concerns	% Concerns	Weighted Sample	Sample %
Private Sector	11-50	2353	63.3	214	63
	51-100	678	18.2	61	18
	101+	564	15.2	51	15
Public Sector		122	3.3	14	4
Total		3717	3717	100	100

2.3 Statistical Significance

Throughout the results section of this report, the following symbols have been used to denote statistical significance: * statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval; ** statistically significant at the 99% confidence interval; and, *** statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level. Where asterisks are not used it should be assumed that no statistically significant differences were observed.

2.4 Focus Groups with Employers / Service Providers (2 Groups)

To complement the outcomes from the quantitative survey, SMR conducted qualitative research in the form of focus groups with employers and service providers. Respondents were recruited from the main survey as well as by making direct contact with organisations. The groups were convened in Belfast and Londonderry/Derry. Initially three groups had been planned but the third group with small employers (11-50 employees) was cancelled due to poor attendance. This suggests that alternative methods such as in depth interviews may have been more appropriate. The other two groups lasted approximately 1 hour 30 minutes - there was an under-representation of private sector employers in these two groups so findings have to be interpreted with some caution. The discussion schedule is attached as Appendix 3 and findings as Appendix 4.

¹ Based on Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Monitoring Data (2011)

3. Survey Results

Overall 340 public and private sector organisations were surveyed by telephone during December 2011 and January 2012. The questionnaire included questions on the following areas:

- Awareness of equality legislation;
- Contact with the Commission;
- Equality Training for Employers;
- Information guides and publications;
- The Commission's website;
- Registration, Monitoring and Article 55 Review;
- Overall satisfaction with the Commission;
- Importance of service areas compared with performance;
- Statutory Duties for Public Authorities;
- Background characteristics of organisations.

Note that throughout this report the survey findings are based on data weighted by size and sector unless otherwise stated.

3.1 AWARENESS OF EQUALITY LEGISLATION

This section of the report presents the findings relating to awareness of equality legislation, and shows that awareness levels are generally high.

Table 3.1 shows that the vast majority of employers and service providers, when prompted, are aware of the different laws listed, with almost all (99%) aware of laws relating to age discrimination, fair employment and sex discrimination. Based on unweighted data, awareness of anti-discrimination laws relating to Section 75 was recorded at 98% among public sector organisations, with 79% of public sector employers aware of positive duties on disability.

Table 3.1 also presents the results from the Commission's previous employer survey and shows that the findings from the current survey are consistent with those of 2007.

	% (2012)	% (2007) ²
Age discrimination	99	99
Fair employment (religious / political discrimination)	99	99
Sex discrimination	99	99
Disability discrimination	98	94
Racial discrimination	98	99
Section 75 (statutory duties) ³	98	100
Equal pay	96	98
Sexual orientation discrimination	94	90
Positive duties on disability (applies to public authorities) ⁴	79	79
Other	0.4	-
Base: 2012, n=340; 2007, n=341		

² 2007 figures based on combined prompted and unprompted responses

³ Public sector employees only and based on unweighted data

⁴ Public sector employees only and based on unweighted data

The survey revealed no significant differences in awareness of anti-discrimination laws between private and public sector organisations or between organisations of a different size (i.e. number of employees).

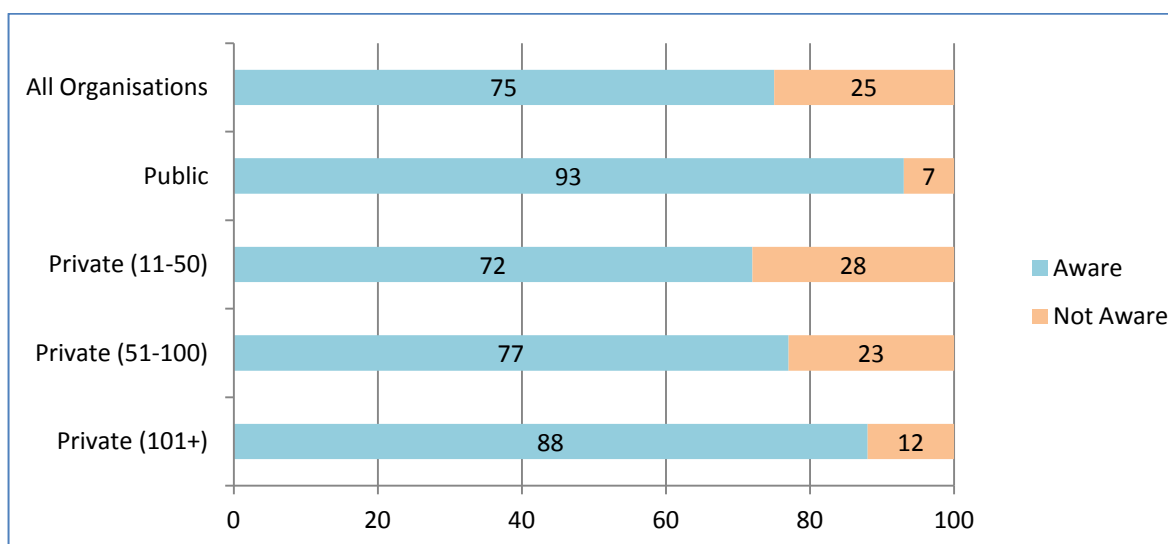
3.2 CONTACT WITH THE COMMISSION

This section of the report presents the findings relating to employer contact with the Commission and shows that although the overall level of contact with employers has fallen since 2007, employer satisfaction with contact remains consistently high regardless of the type of contact (i.e. written, telephone, meetings etc) experienced.

3.2.1 Awareness that the Commission Meets with Employers to Provide Support

Three out of four employers (75%) are aware Commission staff meet with organisations to offer advice and support on a range of equality matters, for example reviewing or developing employment policies, practices and procedures such as recruitment and selection, harassment and equal opportunities policies.

Figure 3.1 Awareness that Commission Meets with Organisations to Offer Advice and Support (n=340)

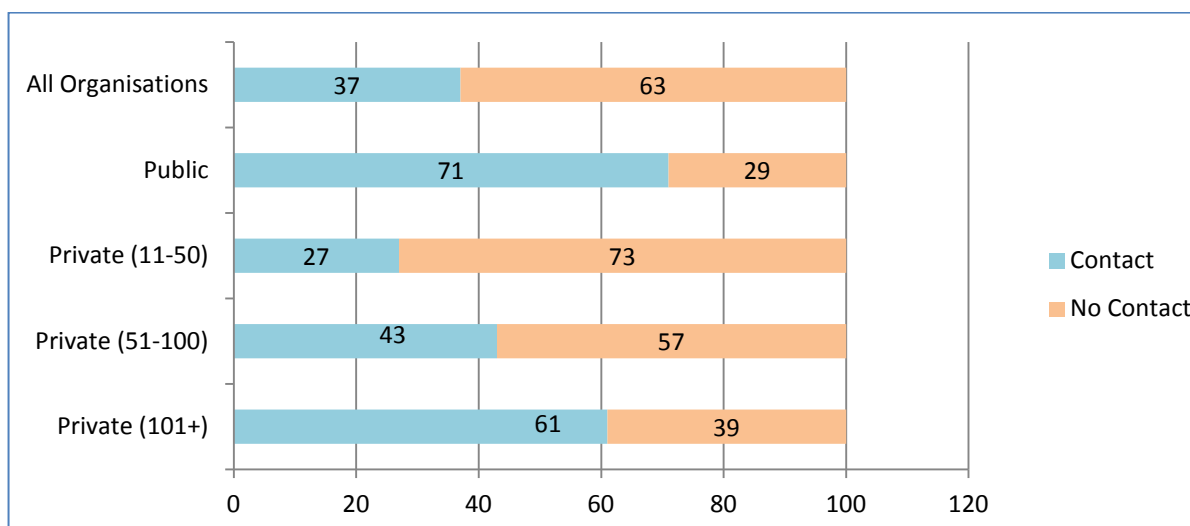


Awareness that the Commission meet with organisations to offer advice and support was highest among public sector organisations (93%) and lowest among private sector organisations with between 11 and 50 employees (72%, $p \leq 0.05$).

3.2.2 Contact with the Commission in Last 12 Months

Among all employers in the current survey, 37% said their business or organisation had contact with the Commission in the previous 12 months. This represents a significant fall (24 percentage points) in the level of contact when compared with the 2007 figure of 61%.

Figure 3.2 Contact with Commission in the last 12 Months (n=340)



The overall fall in the level of contact with the Commission is consistent across all organisation and employer types, with the fall most marked among smaller private sector employers (a fall of 33 percentage points from 60% in 2007 to 27% in 2012). This may be as a result of the Commissions drive to specifically engage with larger employers over the last 3 years.

Also with regard to contact with the Commission by public sector organisations in the last 12 months, the current survey shows a fall of 22 percentage points compared with 2007 (down from 93% to 71%), however the level of contact among public sector employers compared with private sector employers is still significantly higher in both surveys.

	% (2012)	% (2007)
All Organisations	37	61
Private (11-50)***	27	60
Private (51-100)	43	52
Private (101+)	61	71
Public	71	93
Private**	35	63
Public	71	93

Base: (2012, 340; 2007, 341)
 * Significant at the 95% level; ** Significant at the 99% level; *** Significant at the 99.9% level

When probed across a range of contact types e.g. training, completing monitoring returns, advice on statutory duties, the rate of contact with the Commission increased to 74% of employers surveyed ⁵.

⁵ No comparable figure was available from the 2007 survey

3.2.3 Frequency of Contact with the Commission

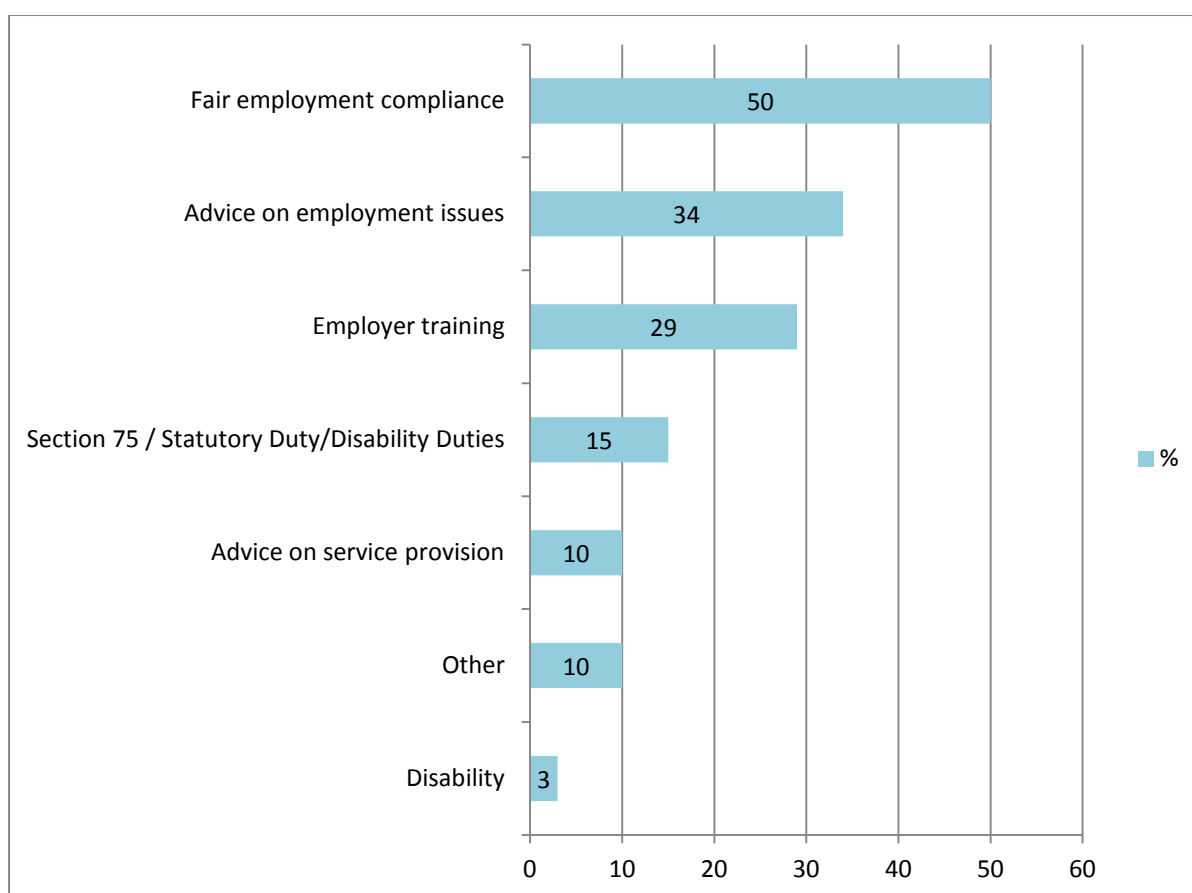
Among those organisations who had contact with the Commission in the last 12 months, 30% had one contact, 26% two contacts and 44% three or more contacts. Among these organisations there was no significant difference in frequency of contact between different types and sizes of organisation. There was also no significant variation in level of contact between public and private sector organisations.

3.2.4 Reason for Contacting the Commission

The most common reason why businesses and organisations contacted the Commission was in relation to fair employment compliance (50%) and to seek advice on employment issues (34%).

The comparative figures for 2007 were: fair employment compliance (50%); Section 75 (46%); advice on employment issues (28%); employer training (18%); and, advice on service provision (6%)⁶.

Figure 3.3: Reason for Contact with the Commission in the Last 12 Months (n=125)



Analysis by sector found that public sector organisations contacting the Commission in the last 12 months were more likely to do so for issues relating to Section 75 (56% vs. 11%, $p \leq 0.001$) and employer training (50%) [private, 11-50, 17%; private, 51-100, 31%; private, 101+, 42%; $p \leq 0.05$].

⁶ Note that only public sector organisations will contact the Commission with Section 75 related queries

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Conversely, smaller private sector employers contacting the Commission in the last 12 months (employing between 11-50 employees, 22%) were less likely to do so for issues relating to fair employment compliance (public, 50%; private, 51-100, 46%; private, 101+, 45%; $p \leq 0.05$).

Among those who had contacted the Commission to get general advice (n=125), 34% said their most recent contact related to fair employment, with 9% citing sex discrimination. Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents said that their most recent contact related to 'other' areas which was mostly (n=14) not sure or don't know comments, followed by employee relations/staff advice (n=7).

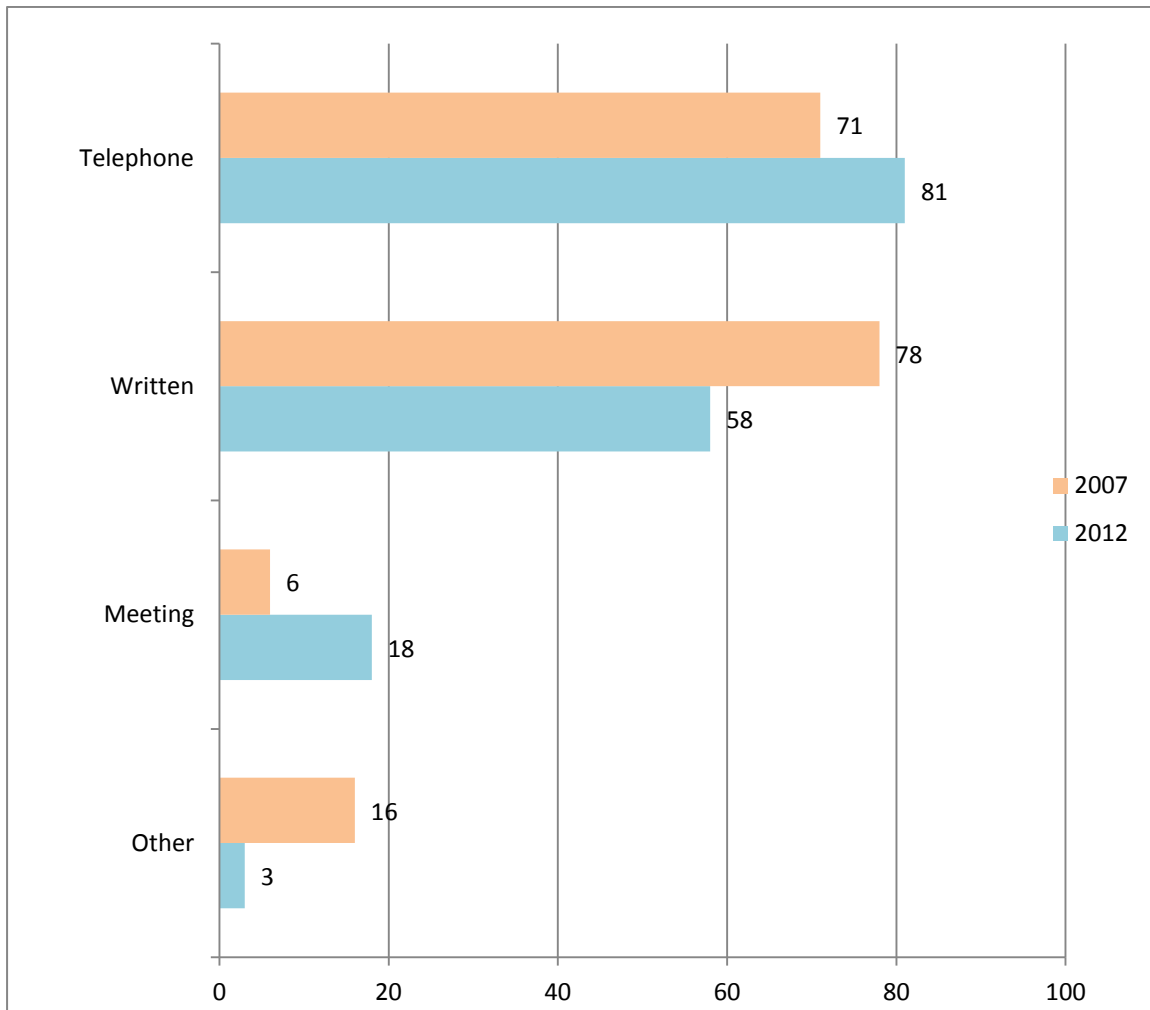
Figure 3.4 Equality Area Recent Contact Related (n=125)

	%
Fair employment	34
Sex discrimination	9
Multi-area .e.g. across recruitment / selection, harassment etc)	7
Disability	3
Race	3
Section 75	3
Equal pay	1
Positive duties on disabilities	1
Other	24
Base: 125	

3.2.5 Types of Contact

Amongst those who had contact with the Commission in the previous 12 months (n=125), 81% had telephone contact, 58% written contact and 18% had meetings with Commission staff. Other contacts included: applications (n=4); and training courses (n=2).

Figure 3.5 Types of Contact in Last 12 Months? Base: (2012, n=125; 2007, n=209)



Compared with 2007, the current survey shows a marked increase in the proportion of employers reporting telephone contact (up from 71% in 2007 to 81% in 2012), with a reduction in the level of written contact (down from 78% in 2007 to 56% in 2012). Among those with contact with the Commission in the last 12 months, the proportion meeting the Commission has increased from 6% to 18%.

Among organisations in contact with the Commission during the previous 12 months, public sector (70%) organisations and large private sector employers (101+ employees, 74%) were more likely to report written contact compared with other organisation types (private, 11-50, 43%; private, 51-100, 54%, $p \leq 0.05$). During the last three years the Commission has specifically focussed on reviews with larger employers.

The survey also found that public sector organisations, compared with private sector organisations, were more likely to have had a meeting with the Commission (40% vs. 16%, $p \leq 0.05$), with smaller private sector employers less likely to report meetings (9%) compared with other private sector organisations (private, 51-100, 23%; private, 101+, 23%, $p \leq 0.05$).

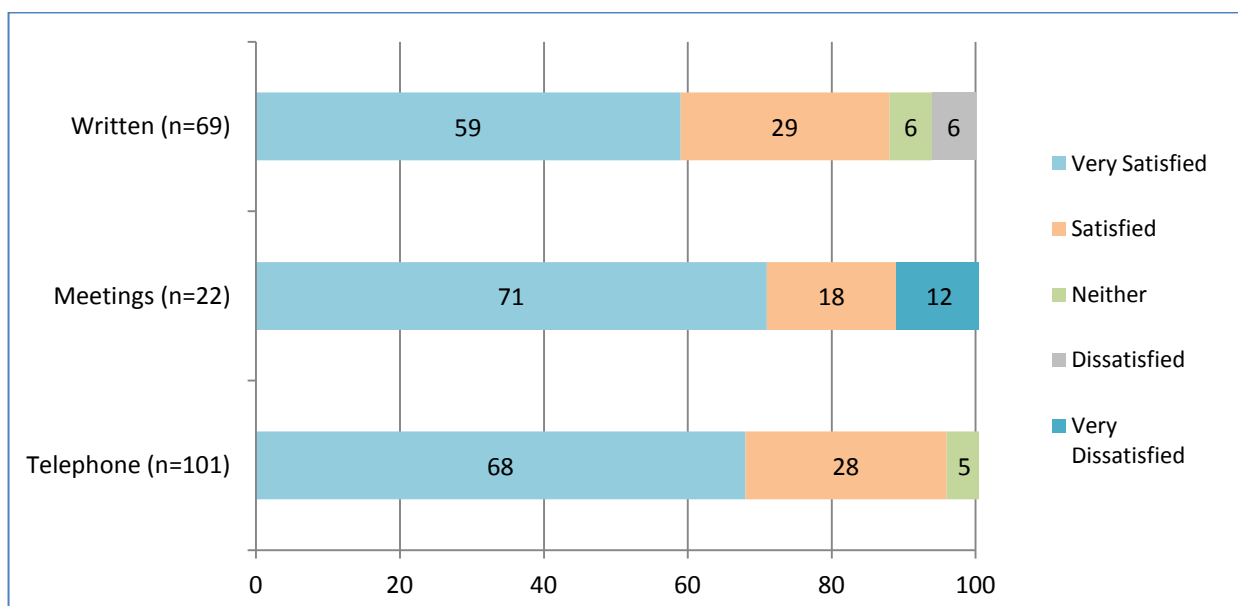
3.2.6 Satisfaction with Different Forms of Contact

Respondents were asked to say how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with their most recent contact.

Figure 3.6 shows that 95% were satisfied with their most recent telephone contact with the Commission (96% in 2007), 88% were satisfied with their most recent written contact (97% in 2007), and 89% were satisfied with their most recent meeting with the Commission (95% in 2007).

Note that respondents were provided with an opportunity to say why they were either satisfied or dissatisfied with their most recent contact and these responses are listed in the appendices. For example, respondents who were satisfied with written contact noted that the query was answered (n=19), they were provided with helpful or useful information (n=20) and a quick response was provided (n=4). Similarly, those satisfied with telephone contact commented that the query had been answered (n=27), and that it was helpful and/or useful (n=51).

Figure 3.6: Satisfaction with Different Forms of Contact with the Commission



3.2.7 Suggested Improvements with Written Contact

Among those (n=69) who had written contact with the Commission in the last 12 months, the vast majority (77%) said that written contact by the Commission could not be improved. Among those who did suggest improvements, 4% (n=3) called for more information on what the Commission does, with 4% (n=3) saying that the Commission should read letters more thoroughly, and 4% (n=3) saying the Commission should offer their services more.

3.2.8 Suggested Improvements with Meetings

With regard to meetings with the Commission, the majority of those experiencing this type of contact in the last 12 months (n=22) felt that meetings could not be improved.

3.2.9 Suggested Improvements with Telephone Contact

Among those with telephone contact in the last 12 months (n=101), more than eight of ten (81%) said that telephone contact could not be further improved.

3.2.10 Contact and Changing Equality / Employment Practices / Procedures

Three out of ten (30%) organisations reported changing equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of their most recent telephone contact, with 32% make changes following their most recent written contact and 19% making changes following their most recent meeting with the Commission.

	%
Written Contact	30
Meetings with Commission	32
Telephone Contact	20
All Types of Contact	33

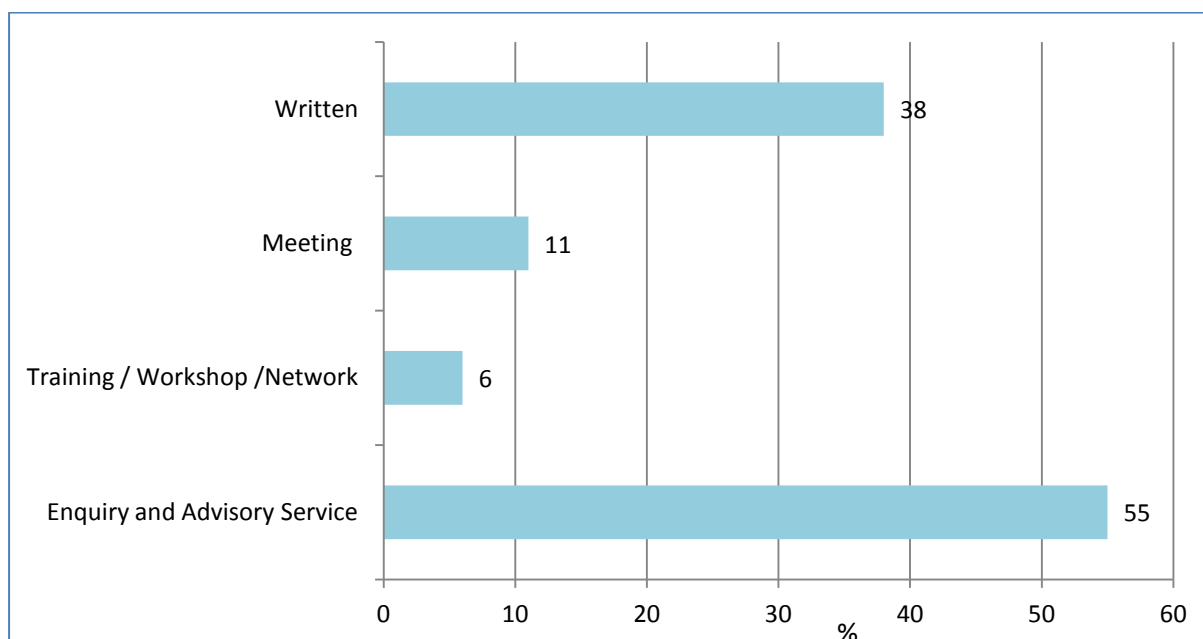
Among all most recent contacts, 33% reported making a change to equality / employment practices and / or procedures (27% in 2007). Note that although a greater proportion of public sector employers (50%), compared with private sector employers (31%), said that they had introduced change as a result of their contact this difference was not statistically significant.

Among organisations contacting the Commission three or more times in the last 12 months, 49% reported making a change to equality / employment practices as a result of their most recent contact by telephone, in writing or via a meeting with the Commission. This level of change is significantly higher when compared with the level of change reported by organisations with a single contact with the Commission in the last 12 months (22%) and those organisations with between 2 and 3 contacts with the Commission (18%, $p <= 0.01$). Note that the most common change to employment / equality practices related to changing or updating policies (38%).

3.2.11 Most Recent Type of Contact with the Commission

Among all respondents with contact with the Commission in the previous 12 months (n=125), 55% said their most recent contact had been via the Commission's enquiry and advisory service, with 38% citing written contact, 11% meetings and 6% training / workshops or network meetings.

Figure 3.7: Most Recent Contact with Commission (n=125)



Those who had contact with the Commission were asked to give their views on different aspects of their most recent contact. Table 3.4 shows that in 2012 98% agreed that communication was polite and friendly, with 96% saying they would readily contact the Commission again. On all of the indicators listed, 91%+ agreed with each statement. The figures for 2012 are largely consistent with the 2007 figures.

		Agree	Neither	Disagree
		%	%	%
Communication polite and friendly	2012	98	-	2
	2007	99	1	-
Time to provide information was adequate	2012	92	2	6
	2007	97	2	1
Received all information / assistance needed	2012	91	3	6
	2007	99	1	-
Readily contact the Commission again	2012	96	2	2
	2007	99	1	-
Base: Respondents with Contact (2012, n=123; 2007, n=209)				

3.2.12 Overall Satisfaction with Contact with the Commission

Almost all (95%) employers were satisfied with their contact with the Commission, with the majority (68%) 'very satisfied' and 27% 'satisfied'. Compared with 2007 (99%), the findings for 2012 show a slight fall in satisfaction level.

Table 3.5 Employer Satisfaction with Commission Contact		
Is this a statistically significant difference i.e. 'similar' or a true fall	2012	2007
	%	%
Very Satisfied	68	52
Satisfied	27	47
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	3	1
Dissatisfied	-	-
Very Dissatisfied	2	-
Don't Know		-
Base (2012): All Respondents With Contact (n=123)		
Base (2007): All Respondents With Contact (n=209)		

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to say why they were either satisfied, dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The majority of employers who were satisfied with contact noted that it was because it was helpful and /or useful (n=46) or because the Commission was able to provide an answer (n=18).

3.2.13 Improving Contact with the Commission

Among all respondents who had contact with the Commission in the previous 12 months (n=123), 76% said that the service could not be improved. Among those who did make suggestions the most common was a call for improved availability/accessibility (n=12) and improved feedback (n=7).

3.2.14 Reasons for no Contact with Commission

The most common reason for not having contacted the Commission in the previous 12 months was that employers had no need to.

3.2.15 Preference for Receiving Employment Information and Advice

Respondents were invited to express their preference for how they would like to receive information and advice from the Commission, with 36% favouring email, 24% via the Commission website and 13% in written format by post. There were no significant differences in preferences for receiving employment information from the Commission by organisation size or sector.

Table 3.6 How would you most prefer to receive employment information and advice from the Commission (n=337)	
	%
Email	36
Commission website	24
Written / Post	13
Telephone	12
Employer training events	9
Face to face	4
Other	1

3.2.16 Aware of the Commission's Work with Different Groups

Respondents in the survey were asked if they or others in their organisation are aware that the Commission works with employers to improve employment

opportunities for those groups of people who have difficulties in accessing jobs (e.g. disabled people, women returning to the workforce, carers, people from the Travelling community, and those longer term unemployed). In response, 74% of respondents said they are aware of this work with no significant variation in response between public and private sector organisations or between organisations of different size.

Among those organisations aware of this work by the Equality Commission, almost half (46%) said that their organisation has put in place activities to provide training or employment opportunities for these groups, with no significant differences between employer types.

3.3 COMMISSION SERVICES

This section of the report presents the findings relating to Commission services including equality training for business, the Commission's website, guides and publications, monitoring / registration / article 55 and statutory duties.

In terms of key findings, the results show that awareness of Commission training has increased significantly since 2007, with training on article 55 / employer duties the most popular type of training attended with satisfaction with Commission training remaining high. Awareness, use and satisfaction with Commission guides and publications remain strong among employers, with the survey also underscoring the importance of the Commission's website as a mode of communication with employers. Employers have also strongly endorsed the Commission as a helpful resource in providing help and support in relation to employers meeting their statutory duties.

EQUALITY TRAINING

3.3.1 Awareness of Commission Provided Equality Training

The majority (81%) of all respondents were aware that the Commission provides equality training for employers. This represents an increase of 20 percentage points on the 2007 figure of 61%. There was no significant difference in awareness level between public (93%) and private sector employers (81%).

3.3.2 Attendance at Commission Provided Equality Training

Just over a quarter (28%) of respondents who were aware of Commission training, said that either they or someone from their organisation had attended Commission provided training within the last 12 months⁷.

Among those aware of Commission provided training, respondents in smaller private sector businesses (11-50 employees) were least likely (18%) to say that either they or others from their organisation had attended equality training within the last 12 months [public sector, 46%; private 51-100, 35%; private, 101+, 50%; $p < 0.001$].

⁷ Note that the 2007 survey asked respondents about attending training in the previous three years (45%), which makes comparison between the survey years problematic.

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

		%
All Organisations		28
Sector and Size***	Private (11-50)	18
	Private (51-100)	35
	Private (101+)	50
	Public	46
Sector**	Private	27
	Public	46
p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01; *** p<=0.001: Base: All Respondents Aware of Commission Provided Training (n=274)		

Training on Article 55 / employer duties was found to be the most popular attended Commission training course (36%), with recruiting fairly attended by 24% of those who had availed of Commission training in the last 12 months.

There were no significant differences in the types of training course attended by organisations in different sectors or between organisations of different size

	2012 (%)	2007 (%)
Article 55 / Employer Duties	36	15
Recruiting Fairly	24	29
General Introductions to Equality (various topics)	19	36
Harassment & Bullying	16	22
Disability Discrimination Act / 2004 Access	15	16
Age	12	21
Migrant Workers	9	5
Sex Equality – including equal pay	8	7
Reasonable Steps Defence	8	-
Other	31	10
Base: All Respondents Who Had Attended Commission Training (2012, n=76) (2007, N=92)		

Those who were aware of Commission training were provided with an opportunity to say if there were other areas that the Commission should be providing training on. In response, the most common suggestions related to Section 75 and age discrimination.

3.3.3 Satisfaction with Commission Training

Satisfaction with Commission provided training was recorded at 93% (99% in 2007), with 65% 'very satisfied' and 28% 'satisfied'. No employer was dissatisfied with training, with 7% recording 'don't know'. Respondents were asked to explain their satisfaction rating for Commission training, with respondents generally finding the training helpful and useful.

There were no significant differences in satisfaction with Commission training by organisations in different sectors or between organisations of different size.

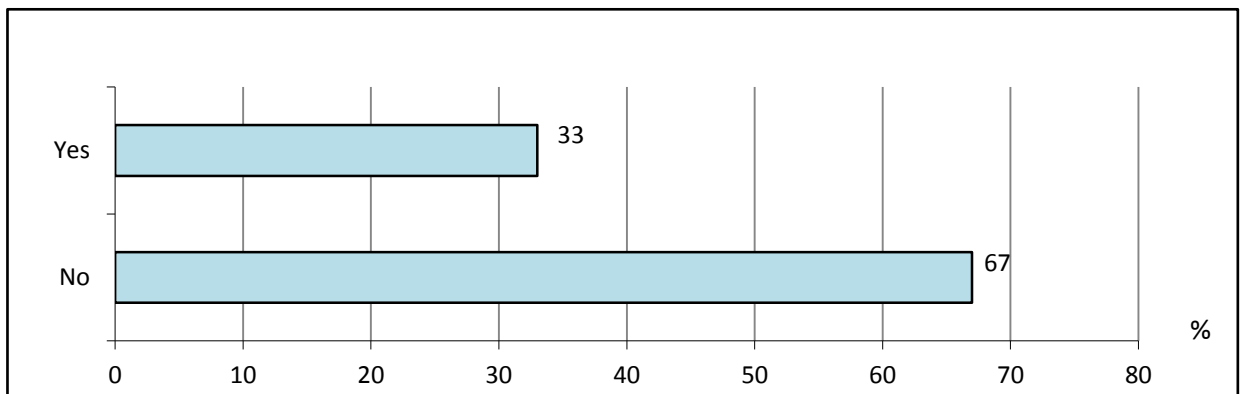
	2012	2007
	%	%
Very Satisfied	65	62
Satisfied	28	37
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	-	-
Dissatisfied	-	1
Very Dissatisfied	-	-
Don't Know	7	-

Base: All Organisations Attending Commission Training (2012, n=76: 2007, n=87)

3.3.4 Changes to Equality Practices and Procedures

Thirty three percent (33%) of organisations that had availed of Commission training in the previous 12 months had changed equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a *direct* result of training received. There were no significant differences in the likelihood of having changed equality / employment practices and / or procedures between organisations in the different sectors.

Fig 3.8: Have you changed any equality / employment practices or procedures as a result of Commission Provided Training? (n=76)



The most common changes to equality /employment practices and / or procedures related to amending policies (n=3), preparedness for going into business (n=3) and putting in place a step by step guide to recruitment (n=3).

3.3.5 Improvements to Commission Training

The vast majority (78%) of employers aware of Commission provided employer training believed that the training provided could not be improved upon. Approximately one in five (22%) employers aware of Commission training made suggestions on how it could be improved, with the most suggestions including: cutting down on the administration (n=3); keep costs down by using email (n=3) and more help returning the annual monitoring return and article 55 reviews (n=3).

COMMISSION GUIDES AND PUBLICATIONS

3.3.6 Awareness and Use of Commission Guides / Publications

The Equality Commission supports employers by providing a range of guides and publications. In the current survey, almost three out of four (73%) employers were aware (unprompted) of at least one Commission guide or publication (78% in 2007), with awareness significantly higher among public sector respondents (93%, $p \leq 0.05$) compared with other organisations (private, 11-50, 68%; private, 51-100, 77%; private, 101+, 86%, $p \leq 0.05$).

When unprompted awareness of specific publications is considered, the Commission's step by step guide to monitoring was the most likely to be recalled by respondents, followed by the Commission's publication on model policies (23%).

Among employers who were aware of Commission publications, most (58%) had used at least one which is on a par with the figure of 63% recorded in 2007. Although there was no significant difference in the likelihood of using Commission guides and publications among different organisation types, across all employers in the survey the majority (71%) of public sector respondents reporting having used a Commission publication compared with less than half of private sector employers (42%, $p \leq 0.05$).

	Aware of		Used	
	%	n	%	n
Step by Step Guide to Monitoring	24	83	73	61
Model policies and procedures (equal opportunity / harassment / equal pay)	23	77	62	48
Codes of Practice: Fair Employment	23	78	54	42
Guidance Publication: Age	21	70	47	33
Codes of Practice: Race	21	70	40	28
Codes of Practice: Sex	21	71	41	29
Guidance Publication: Sexual Orientation	18	60	35	21
Guidance Publication: Maternity	18	60	48	29
Guidance Publication: Section 75 Duties	16	53	45	24
Guidance Publication: Equal Pay	15	51	37	19
Guidance Publication: Flexible Working	14	49	31	15
Good Practice briefings and information leaflets	14	46	15	7
Guidance Publication: Unified / Integrated Guidance	13	43	23	10
Ezines	8	26	8	2
Other	34	117	5	6

3.3.7 Satisfaction with Commission Booklets / Guides

Among respondents who were aware of Commission booklets and guides and who had used at least one, 97% were satisfied (65% 'very satisfied' and 32% 'satisfied'). The comparative satisfaction rating in 2007 was 94%.

	2012	2007
	%	%
Very Satisfied	65	42
Satisfied	32	52
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	2	5
Dissatisfied	-	1
Very Dissatisfied	-	-
Don't Know	2	-

Base (2007): All Respondents Who Had Used A Booklet or Guide (2012, n=144; 2007, n=215)

Respondents who had used Commission guides and publications were provided with an opportunity to explain their rating and these responses have been listed on a verbatim basis in the appendices. Among those satisfied with guides and publications twenty respondents were satisfied because of the condensed nature of the guides and publications with a further 16 respondents commenting on the high quality of the guides and publications.

3.3.8 Changed Equality Practices as Result of Booklets

More than one quarter (29%) of employers who had used a Commission publication said that they had changed equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of the information contained within the publication(s). This figure is similar to that recorded in 2007 (28%).

Among those who had used Commission guides and publications there was no difference in the likelihood of changing practices or procedures between public or private sector organisations or between organisations of a different size.

Suggested improvements to Commission publications included: getting an outsider's view / speaking to ordinary people (n=3); difficult to get them – send out a list (n=3); and, that they should be less detailed (n=3).

3.3.9 Access to Advice: Areas of Most Benefit

In seeking to continually meet the needs of employers, respondents were provided with a list of areas and asked which would they most want access to advice on. In response, 20% said that access to advice on dismissal / redundancy would be of most benefit to them, with 19% citing pregnancy / maternity and 16% citing recruitment / selection.

	%
Dismissal/redundancy	20
Pregnancy/maternity	19
Recruitment/selection	16
Terms/conditions	11
Work-life balance	7
Reasonable adjustments	6
Detriment re: service [e.g. not being able to access a building]	1
None of the above	21

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Analysis by employer type and size shows that public sector organisations were less likely to suggest access to advice on dismissal / redundancy (8%) compared with private sector organisations, with public sector organisations (31%) more likely to say that access to advice on recruitment and selection would be of most benefit to them ($p \leq 0.05$).

	Public	Private (11-50)	Private (51-100)	Private (101+)
	%	%	%	%
Pregnancy/maternity	15	20	20	12
Reasonable adjustments	23	4	7	14
Recruitment/selection	31	12	16	29
Detriment re: service	-	1	-	-
Dismissal/redundancy	8	23	15	15
Terms/conditions	8	12	10	8
Work-life balance	8	6	12	4
None of the above	8	23	21	19

COMMISSION WEBSITE

3.3.10 Visits to the Commission's Website

Overall, 65% of respondents in the survey had visited the Commission's website. When compared to those stating they have had contact with the Commission (37%) this figure is higher and may imply that employers do not regard visiting the Commission's website as contact.

All public sector respondents have visited the website compared with 63% of private sector employers ($p \leq 0.01$).

Further analysis shows that smaller public sector employers (11-50 employees, 57%) were least likely to have visited the Commission's website (public, 100%; private, 51-100, 67%; private, 101+, 86%, $p \leq 0.001$).

A comparison between the current survey and 2007 found an increase of 17 percentage points (up from 45% to 62%) in the proportion of respondents who had visited the Commission's website in the previous 12 months.

		%
All Organisations		65
Sector and Size***	Private (11-50)	57
	Private (51-100)	67
	Private (101+)	86
	Public	100
Sector**	Private	63
	Public	100
p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01; *** p<=0.001 Base: All Respondents (n=340)		

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

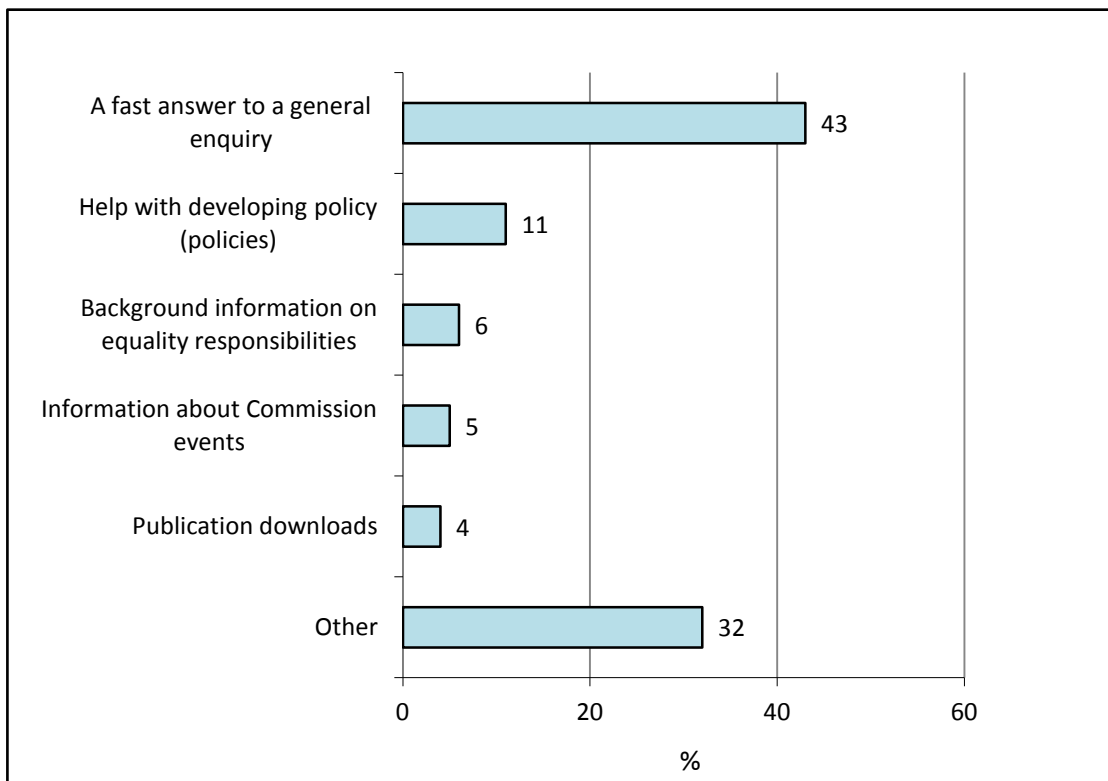
Among those who had visited the Commission's website, the average number of visits in the last 12 months was found to be 4 (3 in 2007), with respondents working in public sector organisations visiting the website 8 times on average, compared with an average of 4 visits among respondents working in private sector organisations ($p \leq 0.01$).

		Average Number of Visits
All Organisations		4
Sector and Size***	Private (11-50)	2
	Private (51-100)	5
	Private (101+)	5
	Public	8
Sector***	Private	4
	Public	8

p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01; *** p<=0.001
Base: All Visitors to Commission Website (n=220)

On the last occasion that respondents had visited the Commission's website, 43% had done so to make a general enquiry, 11% to get help with developing policy and 6% to get background information on equality responsibilities. The comparative figures for 2007 were: general enquiry (43%); information on legislation (35%); publication (12%); and, other (7%).

Figure 3.9: Main Reason for Visiting Commission's Website (Last Visit) (n=220)



There were no significant differences in main reason for visiting the Commission's website between organisations in different sectors or between organisations of different size.

3.3.11 Website Meeting the Needs of Users

Visitors to the Commission's website were also asked to say how easy or difficult it was to find the information they required. Overall, 80% of visitors found it either 'very easy' or 'easy' to find the information they required, with 7% finding it either 'difficult' or 'very difficult'. This is similar to 2007 findings.

	2012	2007
	%	%
Very Easy	42	30
Easy	38	49
Neither Easy Nor Difficult	5	11
Difficult	5	3
Very Difficult	2	1
Don't Know	10	7

Base: All Visitors To Commission's Website (2012, n=220; 2007, n=152)

In the vast majority of cases (87%) respondents said that they were able to find the information they needed on the Commission's website.

3.3.12 Satisfaction with the Commission's Website

Overall satisfaction among visitors to the Commission's website was recorded at 88%, with 61% 'very satisfied' and 27% 'satisfied'. Just 3% of visitors were dissatisfied. The comparative satisfaction figure for 2007 was 92%.

	2012	2007
	%	%
Very Satisfied	61	32
Satisfied	27	60
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	6	5
Dissatisfied	3	1
Very Dissatisfied	-	-
Don't Know	3	2

Base: All Visitors to Commission's Website (2012, n=220; 2007, n=152)

Respondents were given an opportunity to say why they were either satisfied or dissatisfied with the Commission's website, with respondents most frequently saying that the website is easy to use, easy to access and it was easy to find what they wanted.

3.3.13 Changes to Equality Practices Due to Website Visit

Approximately one in six (17%) visitors to the Commission's website had changed their equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of their visit. This compares favourably with the 11% figure recorded in 2007. The most commonly reported changes were amending policies and procedures (n=15), which included redundancy, complaints, equal opportunities and

maternity/paternity. This was followed by making changes to recruitment and selection (n=11).

3.3.14 Suggested Improvements to the Commission's Website

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to suggest improvements to the Commission's website, with the most frequently mentioned improving the layout to make it easier/clearer to find things (n=19). Additionally, some other improvements included live chatrooms (n=3), and to have a frequently asked questions (FAQ) section (n=3).

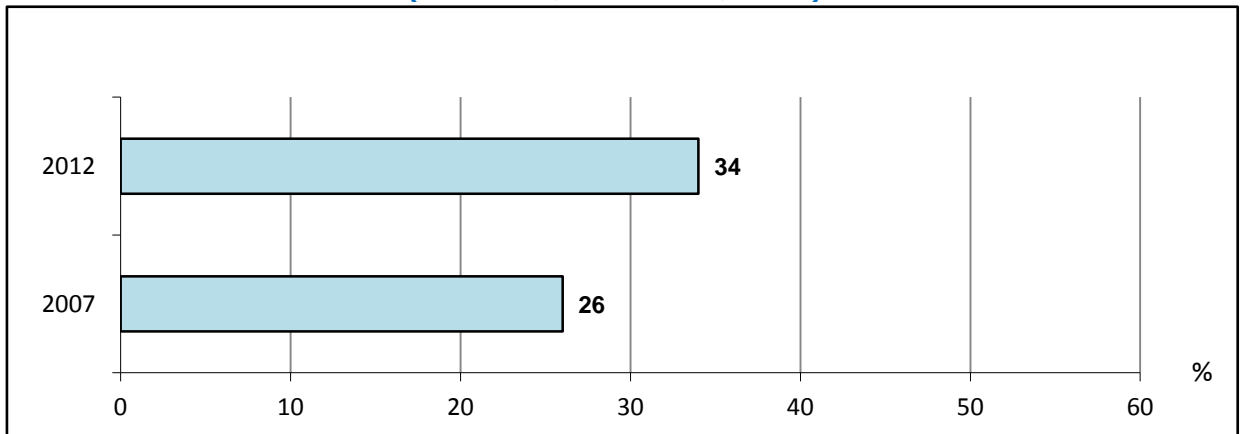
REGISTRATION, MONITORING FORMS AND ARTICLE 55 REVIEW

Under Fair Employment legislation the Commission has a role in assisting employers in Northern Ireland with the completion and submission of annual monitoring returns and the completion of Article 55 Review reports every 3 years. The survey was an opportunity to elicit the views of organisations on the work of the Commission in supporting them with their statutory duties in relation to both these issues.

3.3.15 Registration

Approximately one in three (34%) respondents had been involved in registering their business or organisation with the Commission. The figure for 2007 was 26%. As was the case in 2007, a higher proportion (41%) of respondents working in smaller private sector organisations (11-50 employees) had been involved in registering their business compared with other sectors (private 51-100, 28%; private 101+, 18%; public, 8%, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 3.10: Involved in Registering Your Business / Organisation with the Commission
(Base: 2012, n=340; 2007, n=341)



When asked how they knew that their organisation needed to be registered with the Commission, 39% of these organisations (n=46) said that they had been informed by the Commission, with 25% (n=29) saying it was common knowledge. Seven percent (n=6) of respondents said that they had become aware of the need to register from advertising. Other sources accounted for 27% of responses to this question (n=23).

3.3.16 Satisfaction: Commission Assistance with Registration

In the 2012 survey, 81% of respondents who had received assistance from the Commission with regard to registration, were satisfied with the support they received, with 57% 'very satisfied' and 24% 'satisfied'. Just 2% of these respondents expressed dissatisfaction with Commission assistance. The overall level of satisfaction in 2012 has fallen by 9 percentage points from the level recorded in 2007 (90%).

	2012	2007
	%	%
Very Satisfied	57	42
Satisfied	24	48
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	8	7
Dissatisfied	2	-
Very Dissatisfied	-	-
Don't Know	10	3

Base: Respondents Registering Organisation (2012, n=116; 2007, n=89)

Respondents who made comments on how the Commission could have better supported them through the registration process made the following points: not having to register at all; more help with paper work; too many categories in forms; and, provide option of registering online.

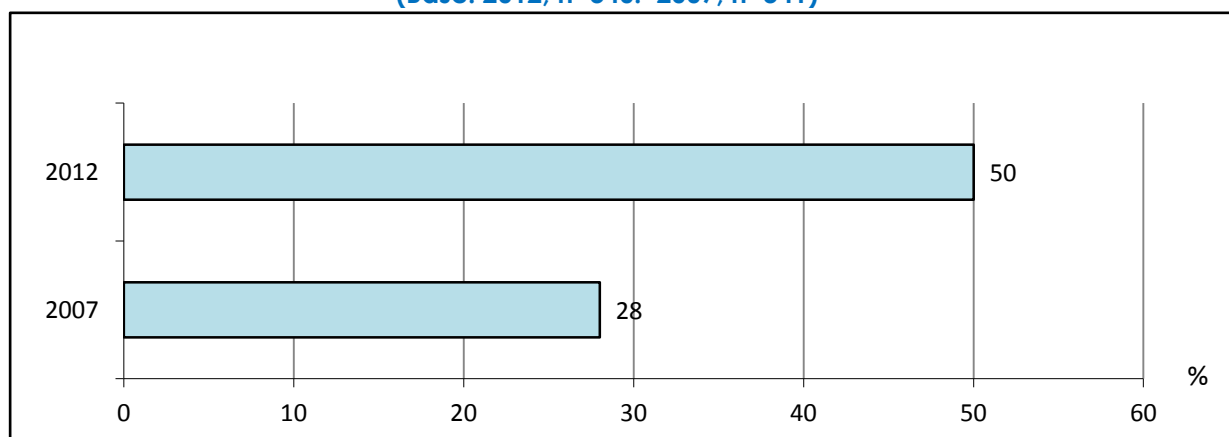
It should be noted that the Commission does not have the authority to amend FETO employer duties and as a result some of the suggestions above are out of the control of the Commission.

3.3.17 Monitoring

In the last 12 months half (50%) of all organisations surveyed said that they had contact with the Commission when completing their annual monitoring form. This represents an increase of 22 percentage points on the 2007 figure of 28%.

Respondents in smaller private sector organisations (11-50 employees, 43%) were less likely to say that their organisation had contact with the Commission in the last 12 months when completing their monitoring return (public, 62%; private, 51-100, 60%; private, 101+, 67%, $p \leq 0.05$).

Figure 3.11: Contact with Commission when Completing Annual Monitoring Form?
(Base: 2012, n=340; 2007, n=341)



3.3.18 Satisfaction: Commission Assistance with Monitoring

Respondents were asked to comment on how satisfied they were overall with contact they had with the Commission when completing their annual monitoring form. Overall 95% of respondents expressed satisfaction with contact, with 71% 'very satisfied' and 24% 'satisfied'. The comparative figure for 2007 was 100%.

	2012	2007
	%	%
Very Satisfied	71	65
Satisfied	24	35
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	3	-
Dissatisfied	2	-
Very Dissatisfied	-	-
Don't Know	1	-

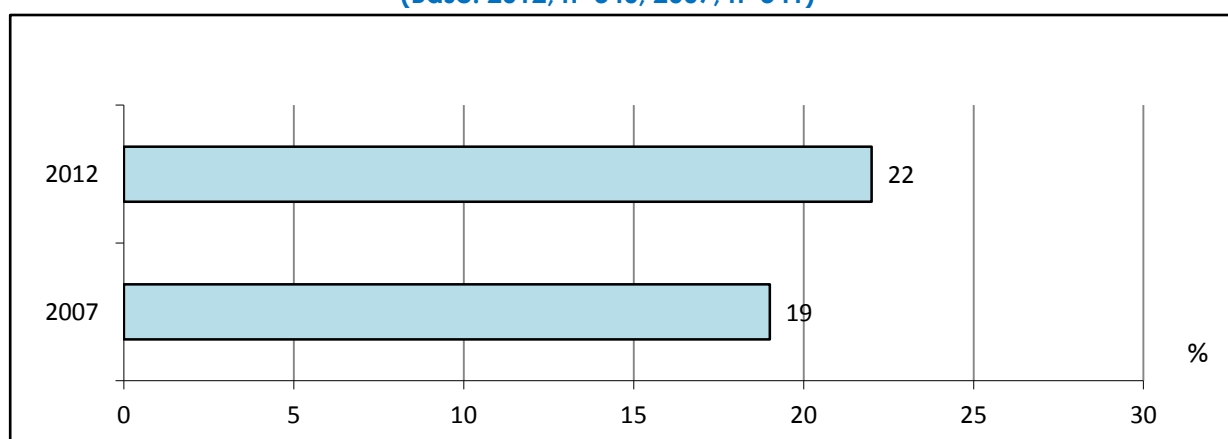
Base: Respondents Assisted by Commission Re: Monitoring (2012, n=169; 2007, n=96)

Respondents made a number of suggestions as to how the Commission could better support them with monitoring with the most frequently mentioned including making the monitoring process more straightforward / easier (n=9).

3.3.19 Article 55 Reviews

Approximately one in five (22%) respondents had contact with the Commission when completing their Article 55 Review, which compares with 19% in 2007.

Figure 3.12: Contact with Commission when Completing Article 55 Reviews
(Base: 2012, n=340; 2007, n=341)



Respondents in smaller private sector organisations (11-50 employees, 13%) were less likely to say that their organisation had contacted the Commission in the last 12 months regarding Article 55 Reviews (public, 46%; private, 51-100, 28%; private, 101+, 47%, $p \leq 0.001$).

3.3.20 Satisfaction: Commission Contact Re: Article 55 Reviews

Overall 94% of respondents who had contact with the Commission in relation to the completion of Article 55 Reviews were satisfied with Commission assistance, with the majority (60%) 'very satisfied' and 34% 'satisfied'. Just 1% of respondents were dissatisfied.

Compared with 2007, the level of satisfaction with this aspect of service has increased by 1 percentage point from 93% to 94% in the current survey.

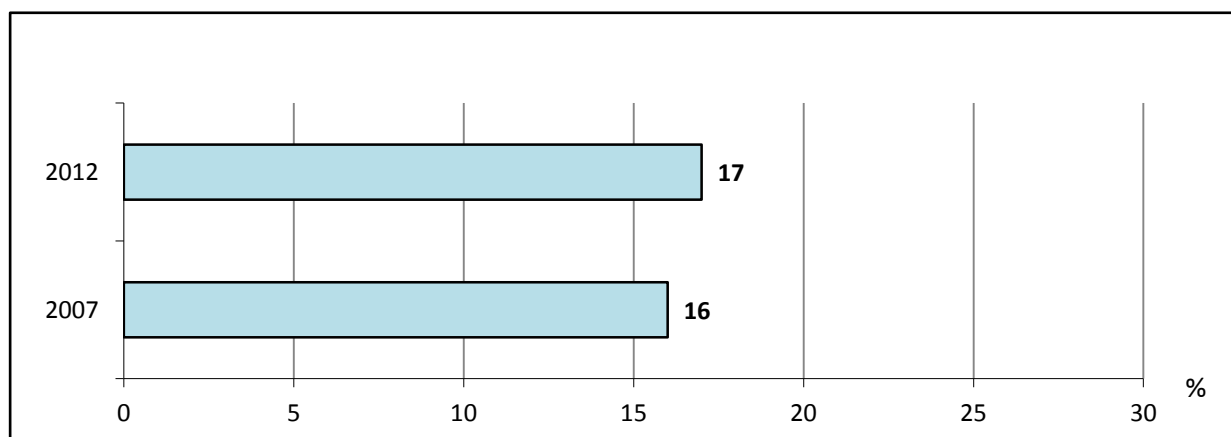
	2012	2007
	%	%
Very Satisfied	60	59
Satisfied	34	34
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	3	3
Dissatisfied	-	1
Very Dissatisfied	1	-
Don't Know	2	3

Base: Respondents Assisted by Commission Re: Article 55 Reviews (2012, n=74; 2007, n=65)

3.3.21 Change Equality Practices Following Article 55 Reviews

Overall 17% of respondents said that their business or organisation had changed equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of completing their Article 55 Reviews. This is similar to the 2007 figure of 16%.

Figure 3.13: Changed Equality / Employment Practices and / or Procedures as a Result of the Process to Complete Article 55 Review? (Base: 2012, n=73; 2007, n=64)



Analysis by organisational sector found no significant difference in the response to this question between different types and size of organisation.

The main changes to equality or employment practices reported by employers were advertising and recruitment (n=6).

With regards improvements respondents would like to see when contacting the Commission regarding Article 55, the majority (n=13) noted that there were none/could not improve.

STATUTORY DUTIES FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

The survey also sought the views of public sector respondents on the support received from the Commission in relation to statutory duties. Of the 85 public sector organisations surveyed, 63 completed this section of the survey which was required to be completed by the person in the organisation with responsibility for

Section 75. Note that the analysis in this section of the report is based on unweighted data.

3.3.22 Seeking Advice from the Commission on Section 75

The majority (54%, n=34) of the public sector organisations who answered questions (n=63) relating to Section 75 said that in the last 12 months their organisation had sought advice from the Commission in relation to Section 75 duties.

Among those organisations seeking advice, 71% (n=24) had sought advice on the implementation of an equality scheme, with 56% (n=19) seeking advice about undertaking an audit of inequalities.

Table 3.21: In the last 12 months in which area(s) did you or your organisation seek advice from the Commission in relation to complying with your duties under Section 75? (n=34)	
	%
Implementation of an Equality Scheme	71
Undertaking an Audit of Inequalities	56
Assistance with Section 75 Complaints	12
Other ⁸	24

Among those who had sought advice from the Commission, 91% were satisfied with the advice provided on complying with their Section 75 duties, with 3% dissatisfied.

Table 3.22 Overall in the last 12 months, how satisfied were you with the advice provided by the Commission on complying with your Section 75 duties? (n=34)	
	%
Very Satisfied	55
Satisfied	36
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	6
Dissatisfied	3
Very Dissatisfied	-
Don't Know	-

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to explain the main reason for their satisfaction rating, with the most frequently mentioned responses relating to receiving good advice and that the information was useful.

3.3.23 Changing Policy and / or Procedures as a Result of Compliance Process

In almost six out of ten cases (58%, n=19) public sector respondents had changed policies, procedures practices or services as a result of the process they had gone through to comply with duties under Section 75. The most common changes related to reviewing and changing policies (e.g. screening, equality schemes etc).

3.3.24 Suggested Improvements in Advice Received by the Commission

Respondents made a number of suggestions on what improvements they would like to see in the advice provided by the Commission, including practical examples (n=6), although the majority (n=17) stated that there were none/could not improve.

⁸ Includes: developing an equality scheme (n=1); new guidance (n=1); revision of an equality scheme (n=1); and, screening (n=2).

3.3.25 Contacting the Commission for Advice on Disability Duties

In the previous 12 months fifteen (16%) of public sector respondents had contacted the Commission seeking advice in relation to either one or both of the disability duties. Among those who had contacted the Commission (n=10), 8 did so regarding producing / implementing a disability plan.

Table 3.23: In the last 12 months in which area(s) did you, or your organisation, seek advice from the Commission in relation to the Disability Duties? (n=10)	
	n
Producing/Implementing a Disability Action Plan	8
Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people	2
Encouraging Participation in Public Life	2
Clarification on the Commission's Guide to the Duties	2
Clarification on the difference between the Disability Positive Duties and disability discrimination	1

Among organisations contacting the Commission regarding disability duties n=10, 90% were satisfied (n=9) with the advice provided with 10% dissatisfied (n=1).

Among the 10 organisations approaching the Commission for advice on disability duties, nearly half (n=4) reported changing policies, procedures practices or services as a result of the contact they had with the Commission.

Overall, 81% of respondents contacting the Commission for advice on disability duties were satisfied with the length of time it took for the Commission to provide the advice they received, with 3% dissatisfied, 8% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 8% recording 'don't know'.

Among those making suggestions (n=10) on how advice provided by the Commission on disability duties can be further improved, individual respondents made the following comments: better communication; better examples of reports; more information; sometimes reluctant to give advice for fear of a conflict of interest; training to counsellors or awareness raising; and, try and enable organisations to try and put policy into practice.

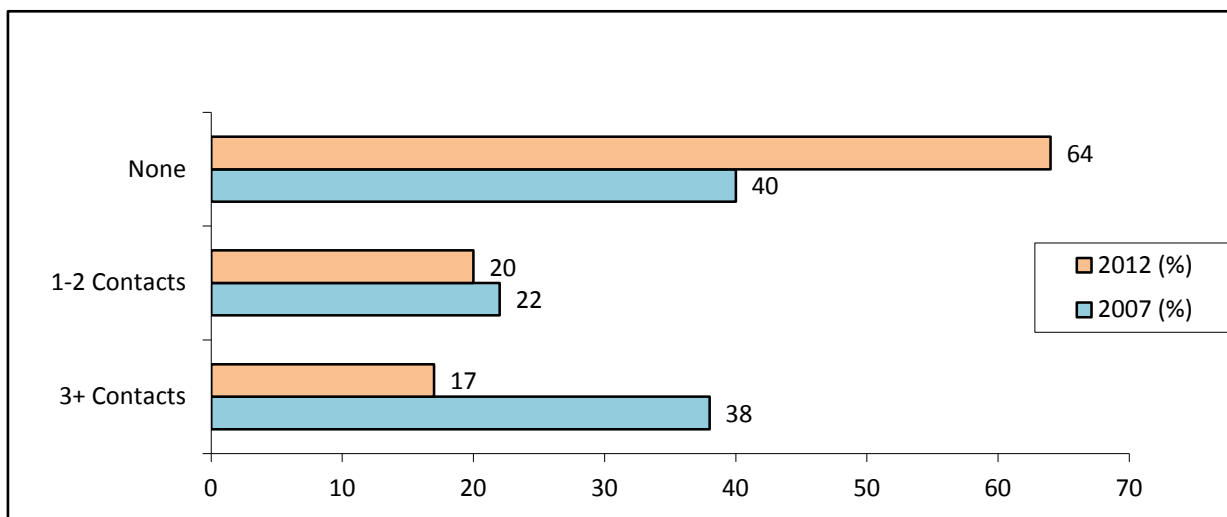
EQUALITY/EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND PROCEDURE

3.3.26 Changes to Equality / Employment Practices and Procedure

Of interest to the Commission is the impact that contact with the Commission has had on changing the equality / employment practices and / or procedures within businesses and organisations.

To better understand this, a new composite variable was created based on the number of contacts each organisation had with the Commission. Figure 3.14 shows that 64% of the organisations had no contact with the Commission in the previous 12 months, 22% had between 1 and 2 contacts with the Commission, and 17% had three or more contacts (i.e. a significant level of contact with the Commission).

Figure 3.14: Number of Contacts with Commission in Previous 12 Months
(Base: 2012, n=340; 2007, n=341)



In addition to creating a measure of contact, a new variable was also created to measure changes in equality / employment practices and / or procedures. This variable was based on positive responses to employers introducing changes to equality / employment practices as a result of their contact (i.e. changes as a result of direct contact via telephone, in writing, meetings or attendance at training / workshops etc; using Commission published guides and publications; visiting the Commission's website etc).

Using this approach found that 33% (38% in 2007) of all organisations in the survey had instituted a change to equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a *direct* result of their contact with the Commission.

Analysis by level of contact found that the majority (61%) of organisations with a significant level of contact (i.e. 3 or more contacts in the previous 12 months) had introduced change as a result of having availed of one or more Commission services. This compares favourably with the figure of 57% recorded in 2007.

Organisations with lower levels of contact were less likely to have introduced change to equality / employment practices and / or procedures within their organisations (no contact, 24%; between 1 contacts, 43%; 2 contacts, 61%; $p \leq 0.05$).

3.4 OVERALL VIEWS OF THE COMMISSION

Overall employer satisfaction with the Commission is an important performance indicator which the Commission has measured since 2004. On a positive note the 2102 survey shows that overall satisfaction remains relatively high with the majority of employers 'very satisfied' with the service provided by the Commission.

3.4.1 Overall Satisfaction with the Commission

Overall, 86% of respondents in the survey were satisfied that the services provided by the Commission meet the needs of employers, with 51% 'very satisfied' and 35% 'satisfied'. Three percent of respondents were dissatisfied ('dissatisfied', 2%; 'very dissatisfied', 1%), with 7% saying they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'. The

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

comparative figure for 2007 was also 86%. Note that the proportion of respondents 'very satisfied' with the Commission increased from 28% in 2007 to 51% in 2012.

	2012	2007
	%	%
Very Satisfied	51	28
Satisfied	35	58
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	7	14
Dissatisfied	2	1
Very Dissatisfied	1	-
Don't Know	5	-
Base: All Respondents (2012, n=336; 2007, n=341)		

The analysis found no significant difference in level of overall satisfaction between respondents working in different organisational sectors.

	2012 (%)	2007 (%)
All Organisations	86	86
Sector and Size		
Private (11-50)	81	85
Private (51-100)	95	86
Private (101+)	92	86
Public	100	93
Sector		
Private	85	85
Public	100	93
p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01; *** p<=0.001 Base: All Respondents (n=340); (2007, n=341)		

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to explain their overall satisfaction rating, with the most frequent comments relating to the helpfulness of the Commission, never having any problems and the Commission providing good information.

3.4.2 The Commission as a Valued Source of Expert Advice on Equality

Overall 88% of all respondents surveyed agreed ('strongly agree', 44%; 'agree', 44%) that the Commission provides a valued source of expertise on equality, with 4% disagreeing ('disagreeing', 2%; 'strongly disagreeing', 2%) with this statement and 8% recording 'don't know'.

Analysis by organisational sector found no significant difference in agreement level between respondents working in different organisations and sectors.

		Agree (%)
All Organisations		88
Sector and Size	Private (11-50)	85
	Private (51-100)	90
	Private (101+)	94
	Public	100
Sector	Private	88
	Public	100
p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01; *** p<=0.001: Base: All Respondents (n=340)		

3.4.3 Single Most Important Improvement to Assist Employers

Recognising that the Commission operates within a specific legal remit focused on equality, respondents were asked to say, in their view, what is the single most important improvement the Commission could make to assist them in fulfilling their requirements under equality law.

In response, the majority of respondents (58%) who answered this question said that the Commission could not improve in this area. Among those who did make suggestions (n=142), 26% called for prompt email updates on changes to the legislation, with 14% calling for continued promotion of the service to employers.

3.4.4 Commission Service Areas: Perceptions of Importance versus Performance

The survey also provided an opportunity for respondents to identify what they perceive to be the service areas of greatest importance to them as employers. In the first instance respondents were presented with seven discrete service areas provided by the Commission and asked to score each on scale from 1 to 10 in terms of importance (1 = not at all important, 10 = extremely important). The same approach was used in relation to their perception of Commission performance on each of the seven areas.

Table 3.27 shows that responding to enquiries effectively (8.95) is deemed to be the most important aspect of service, followed by providing up to date guidance information (8.80).

In terms of performance, and as expected, employers rated each of these aspects lower. The professionalism of staff scored highest (8.70) with provision of equality training scoring relatively lower (7.84) on performance.

The largest variation between importance and performance was found to be in relation to supporting employers with fair employment duties (-0.57), with the lowest variation relating to the professionalism of Commission staff (-0.02), with perceived performance in this service area almost perfectly matching employer perception of importance.

It is worth noting, that both the mean importance and performance scores for each item overall, were relatively high indicating that employers deemed all of the areas to be important with the Commission also deemed to be performing well in all areas.

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

	Mean Score (Importance)	Mean Score (Performance)	Difference
Responding to enquiries effectively	8.95	8.53	-0.42
Providing up to date guidance information	8.80	8.28	-0.52
Supporting employers with fair employment duties	8.79	8.22	-0.57
Professionalism of Staff	8.72	8.70	-0.02
Promoting awareness of equality legislation	8.64	8.24	-0.4
Supporting employers with development of equality policies.	8.29	7.99	-0.3
Providing Equality Training	8.07	7.84	-0.23

Further analysis by sector found no significant differences in perceived importance of each service area between public and private sector organisations, with the same pattern emerging for perceived performance.

3.5 CONFIDENCE IN THE COMMISSION

The survey was also an opportunity for the Commission to measure employer confidence in the work of the Commission, with the findings supporting the view that confidence is high regardless of organisation sector or size.

3.5.1 Confidence in Commission to Promote Equality of Opportunity for All

Overall 90% of all respondents surveyed said that they have 'a lot of confidence' (62%) or 'some confidence' (28%) in the ability of the Commission to promote equality of opportunity for all, with 5% saying they have either 'not a lot of confidence' or 'no confidence' in the Commission. Five percent of respondents recorded 'don't know'.

Analysis by organisational sector found no significant difference in agreement level between respondents working in different organisations and sectors.

		Confident (%)
All Organisations		90
Sector and Size	Private (11-50)	88
	Private (51-100)	90
	Private (101+)	96
	Public	100
Sector	Private	89
	Public	100
p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01; *** p<=0.001: Base: All Respondents (n=340)		

APPENDIX 1 – EMPLOYER'S QUESTIONNAIRE



QUESTIONNAIRE

Employer Survey

NOVEMBER 2011



PREAMBLE

Good morning / afternoon / evening. My name isand I am calling on behalf of the Equality Commission. We are conducting research on the services the Commission provides for businesses and public sector organisations in Northern Ireland. Hopefully by now you will have received a letter regarding this research.

Would it be possible to speak to **the person who has responsibility for equal opportunities** within your business / organization?

ONLY READ OUT THE FOLLOWING IF RESPONDENT REQUIRES MORE INFORMATION – IF RESPONDENT IS HAPPY TO PROCEED WITH SURVEY MOVE TO Q1.

We are talking to more than 300 businesses and public sector organisations throughout Northern Ireland and I wondered if you could spare some time to talk through some issues – it should not take longer than 10 minutes. The aim of the survey is to evaluate the impact of equality legislation and/or the Commission's advice and guidance on employers' practices in terms of employment and service delivery. We are also trying to evaluate whether employers perceive improvement in some aspects of the services which the Commission provides. All responses will be treated in confidence and any comments made will not be attributed to any organisation or person.

I would like to re-emphasize that it is the Commission that is being evaluated and not employers.

***N.B. Public Sector Companies**

There are around 140 public sector companies within the sample. **Ensure that the person that answers the questionnaire has overall responsibility for workplace equality policies in the organization.** This may not be the person who deals with Section 75 policy work.

Section 1 Equality Legislation

Q1. Can you please say if you are aware of the following anti-discrimination laws? PROMPT
RESPONDENT

	Mentioned
Age discrimination	1
Disability discrimination	1
Equal pay	1
Fair employment (religious / political discrimination)	1
Positive duties on disability (applies to public authorities)	1
Racial discrimination	1
Section 75 (statutory duties)	1
Sex discrimination	1
Sexual orientation discrimination	1
Other (please specify)	1

Section 2: Contact with the Equality Commission

Q1. Commission staff often meet with organisations to offer advice and support on a range of equality matters, for example reviewing or developing employment policies, practices and procedures such as recruitment and selection, harassment and equal opportunities policies. Are you aware that the Commission offers this service?

Yes	1
No	2

Q2. In the last 12 months has your business or organisation had any contact with the Equality Commission?

Yes	1	-> go to Q3
No	2	-> go to Q19

Q3. And in the last 12 months on how many occasions has your business or organisation had contact with the Commission? (RECORD APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF TIMES). INSERT LOWER FIGURE IN CASES WHERE RESPONDENT GIVES A RANGE OF FIGURES (E.G. IF SAYS 3 OR 4 – INSERT 3)

--

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Q4. Have you had contact with the Commission in relation to any of the following in the last 12 months? **READ OUT CODE ALL THAT APPLY**

Advice on employment issues	1	-> go to Q5
Advice on service provision	1	-> go to Q5
Employer training	1	-> go to Q5
Fair employment compliance	1	->go to Q6
Section 75 / Statutory Duty/Disability Duties	1	
Other (please specify)	1	

Q5. Thinking about the last time you had contact with the Commission to get general advice, which equality area did this contact relate to? (DO NOT PROMPT)

	YES	NO
Age	1	2
Disability	1	2
Equal pay	1	2
Fair employment	1	2
Multi-area .e.g. across recruitment / selection, harassment etc)	1	2
Positive duties on disabilities	1	2
Race	1	2
Section 75	1	2
Sex discrimination	1	2
Sexual orientation	1	2
Other (please specify)	1	2

Q6. In the last 12 months have you had any of the following forms of contact with the Commission?

	YES	NO
1 Written contact i.e. letter, fax, email or website (includes sending in monitoring forms)	1	2
2 A Meeting with the Commission	1	2
3 Telephone contact	1	2
4 Other (please specify)	1	2

NOTE THAT Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10 AND Q11 ARE REPEATED FOR ITEMS 1 TO 3 ABOVE

Q7. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with your most recent **written contact** with the Commission?

Very Satisfied	1
Fairly Satisfied	2
Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	3
Fairly Dissatisfied	4
Very Dissatisfied	5

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Q8. What was the main reason for this rating of your most recent **written contact** [substitute from Q6] with the Commission?

--

Q9. Have you changed any equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of this **written** contact?

Yes	1	➤ Go to Q10
No	2	➤ Go to Q11

Q10. What have you changed as a result of your most recent **written contact**?

--

Q11. How could the Commission improve its **written contact** to better meet your business needs?
INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT IMPROVE

--

Q12. Thinking about the last time you had contact with the Commission, what form of contact was it?

Written contact i.e. letter, fax, email or website, monitoring return form	1
A Meeting with the Commission	1
Training / workshops / network meetings	1
Enquiry and Advisory Services (telephone)	
Other (please specify)	1

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Q13. Still thinking about the last time you had contact with the Commission. I am now going to read you out a number of statements, and for each please tell me if you agree or disagree. IF RESPONDENT AGREES ASK IS THIS STRONGLY AGREE OR AGREE: SAME WITH DISAGREE - IS THIS DISAGREE OR STRONGLY DISAGREE

READ OUT

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	N/A
The communication was polite and friendly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	8
The time taken to provide the information was adequate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	8
I received all the information and assistance I needed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	8
I would readily contact the Commission again if I had a query.	1	2	3	4	5	6	8

Q14. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the contact you had with the Commission in the last 12 months? **CODE ONE ONLY**

Very Satisfied	1
Fairly Satisfied	2
Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	3
Fairly Dissatisfied	4
Very Dissatisfied	5
Don't Know	6

Q15. What was the main reason for this rating of your **overall contact** with the Commission?

--

Q16. In addition to any changes you may have mentioned, have you changed any other equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of the contact you have had with the Commission in the last 12 months?

Yes	1	➤ Go to Q17
No	2	➤ Go to Q18

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Q17. What other equality / employment practices and / or procedures have you changed?

--

Q18. What is the main way, if any, in which your contact with the Commission could have been improved?

INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT IMPROVE

->GO TO Q20

Q19. What is the **main reason** why you have had no contact with the Commission in the last 12 months?

--

Q20. How would you most prefer to receive employment information and advice from the Commission?

Face to face	1
Telephone	2
Employer training events	3
Commission website	4
Other (please specify)	5

The Equality Commission works with employers to improve employment opportunities for those groups of people who have difficulties in accessing jobs (E.G. disabled people, women returning to the workforce, carers, people from the Travelling community and those longer term unemployed).

Q21. Are you or others in your organisation aware of this work?

Yes	1	➤ Go to Q22
No	2	➤ Go to Section 3

Q22. Have you or others in your organisation put in place activities to provide training or employment opportunities for these groups?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

Section 3 Equality Training for Employers

I now want to ask you about any employer equality training which your business or organisation may have received from the Commission. Please note that equality training may also be recognised as 'workshops' or 'employer networks'.

Q1. Are you aware that the Commission provides equality training for employers?

Yes	1	Go to Q2
No	2	Go to Section 4
Don't know	3	

Q2. Have you or someone in your organisation attended any equality training provided by the Equality Commission over the last 12 months?

Yes	1	Go to Q3
No	2	Go to Q9
Don't Know	3	Go to Q9

Q3. Which training courses have you (or someone in your organisation) attended in the last 12 months? **DO NOT PROMPT CODE ALL THAT APPLY**

	Yes	No	Don't know
Age	1	2	3
Article 55 / Employer Duties	1	2	3
Disability Discrimination Act / 2004 Access	1	2	3
General Introductions to Equality (various topics)	1	2	3
Harassment & Bullying	1	2	3
Migrant Workers	1	2	3
Recruiting Fairly	1	2	3
Sex Equality – including equal pay	1	2	3
Reasonable Steps Defence	1	2	3
Other (please specify)	1	2	3

Q4. What further areas of equality training do you feel the Commission should offer to employers? **INCLUDE FIXED CATEGORIES – NONE AND DONT KNOW**

Q5. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the training you (or someone in your organisation) received from the Commission? **CODE ONE ONLY**

Very satisfied	1
Quite satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Q6. What was the main reason for this rating of the training provided by the Commission?

Q7. Have you changed any equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of training provided by the Commission?

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Yes	1	➤ Go to Q8
No	2	➤ Go to Q9

Q8. What practices and procedures have you changed as a result of the training you (or someone in your organisation) received from the Commission?

Q9. What is the main way in which the Commission's training services could be improved? INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT IMPROVE

Section 4 Equality Commission Information Guides and Publications

Q1. The Equality Commission has a wide variety of information guides and booklets for business. Can you tell me those you are aware of and if you have used them? **DO NOT PROMPT**

	Q1 Aware		Q2 Used	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Model policies and procedures (equal opportunity / harassment / equal pay)	1	2	1	2
Step by Step Guide to Monitoring	1	2	1	2
Guidance Publication: Age	1	2	1	2
Guidance Publication: Sexual Orientation	1	2	1	2
Guidance Publication: Equal Pay	1	2	1	2
Guidance Publication: Section 75 Duties	1	2	1	2
Guidance Publication: Unified / Integrated Guidance	1	2	1	2
Guidance Publication: Flexible Working	1	2	1	2
Guidance Publication: Maternity	1	2	1	2
Codes of Practice: Fair Employment	1	2	1	2
Codes of Practice: Race	1	2	1	2
Codes of Practice: Sex	1	2	1	2
Good Practice briefings and information leaflets	1	2	1	2
Ezines	1	2	1	2
Other (please specify)	1	2	1	2

Q2. And have you used this booklet / guide?

If aware of at least one publication at Q1 and used it, go to Q3 else go to Q8

Q3. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the booklets and / or guides you received from the Commission? **CODE ONE ONLY**

Very satisfied	1
Quite satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Q4. What was the main reason for your choice of rating of the Commission's booklets and / or guides?

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

--

Q5. Have you changed any equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of using the Commission's booklets and / or guides?

Yes	1	➤ Go to Q6
No	2	➤ Go to Q7

Q6. What practices and / or procedures have you changed as a result of the information from the Commission's booklets and guides?

--

Q7. What ways, if any, could the Commission's booklets or guides be improved?
INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT IMPROVE

--

Q8. In which of the following areas would it be of **most** benefit to you to have access to advice? CODE ONE ONLY

Pregnancy/maternity	1
Reasonable adjustments	2
Recruitment/selection	3
Detriment re: service [e.g. not being able to access a building]	4
Dismissal/redundancy	5
Terms/conditions	6
Work-life balance	7
None of the above	8

Section 5 Equality Commission Website

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE. WE ARE NOW MORE THAN HALF WAY THROUGH THE SURVEY.

Q1 Have you ever visited the Equality Commission web site?

Yes	1	Go to Q2
No	2	Go to Section 6
Don't know	3	

Q2 In the last 12 months, approximately how many times have you visited the Commission's website?

--

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Q3 On the last occasion that you visited the Commission website, what was your **main** reason for doing so? (DO NOT PROMPT)

A fast answer to a general enquiry	1
Background information on equality responsibilities	3
Help with developing policy (policies)	2
Information about Commission events	4
Publication downloads	5
Other reason (specify)	6

Q5 In your opinion how easy or difficult is it to find information you require on the Commission's web site? **CODE ONE ONLY**

Very easy	1
Easy	2
Neither easy nor difficult	3
Difficult	4
Very difficult	5
Don't know / Can't remember	6

Q4. Did you find the information you needed?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't Know	3

Q6 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the Commission's website?
CODE ONE ONLY

Very satisfied	1
Quite satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Q7. What was the main reason for your choice of rating of the Commission's website?

--

Q8. Have you changed any equality / employment practices and / or procedures as a result of visiting the Commission's website?

Yes	1	➤ Go to Q9
No	2	➤ Go to Q10

Q9. What practices and procedures have you changed as a result of the information that you obtained from the Commission's website?

--

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

- Q10. What improvements or additions would you like to see in the Commission's website?
INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT IMPROVE

--

Section 6 Registration, Monitoring Forms and Article 55 Review

- Q1. Were you involved in **registering** your business / organisation with the Equality Commission?

Yes	1	Go to Q2
No	2	Go to Q5
Don't know	3	

- Q2. How did you know your business should be **registered**?

--

- Q3. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the assistance you had from the Commission in relation to **registration**? **CODE ONE ONLY**

Very satisfied	1
Quite satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

- Q4. On reflection what ways, if any, could the Commission have better supported you with the **registration process**? INCLUDE FIXED CATEGORIES – NONE AND DONT KNOW

--

The **second area** I would like to ask about is completing the annual Fair Employment monitoring forms.

- Q5. In the last 12 months, did you or your organisation have contact with the Commission when completing the annual **Monitoring Form**?

Yes	1	Go to Q6
No	2	Go to Q8
Don't know	3	

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

6. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the contact you have had with the Commission when completing your **Monitoring Form?** **CODE ONE ONLY**

Very Satisfied	1
Quite Satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite Dissatisfied	4
Very Dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Q7. In what ways, if any, could the Commission better support you with **monitoring?**
INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT PROVIDE BETTER SUPPORT

Q8. In the past 12 months did you or your organisation have contact with the Commission when completing your **Article 55 Review?**

Yes	1	Go to Q9
No	2	
Don't know	3	Go to Section 7

Q9. How satisfied are you with the contact you have had with the Commission when completing your **Article 55 Review?** **CODE ONE ONLY**

Very satisfied	1
Quite Satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Q10. Have you changed any equality/ employment practices and /or procedures as a result of the process you go through to complete the **Article 55 Review?**

Yes	1	Go to Q11
No	2	
Don't know	3	Go to Section 7
N/A – Have not carried out Article 55 review yet	4	

Q11. What practices and procedures have you changed, as a result of the process you go through to complete the **Article 55 Review?**

Q12. What improvements, if any, would you like to see in the contact you have with the Commission when completing your **Article 55 Review?** INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT IMPROVE

Section 7 Overall Satisfaction With The Equality Commission

Q1 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the services provided by the Equality Commission to meet the needs of employers? **CODE ONE ONLY**

Very satisfied	1
Quite satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Q2 What is the main reason for your choice of rating?

Q3. How much would you agree or disagree that the Equality Commission provides a valued source of expert advice on equality? **CODE ONE ONLY**

Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Disagree	3
Strongly disagree	4
Don't know	5

Q4. How much confidence do you have in the ability of the Equality Commission to promote equality of opportunity for all? **CODE ONE ONLY**

A lot of confidence	1
Some confidence	2
Not a lot of confidence	3
No confidence at all	4
Don't know	5

Q5. **Recognising that the Commission operates within a specific legal remit focused on equality, in your view, what is the single most important improvement the Commission could make to assist you in fulfilling your requirements under equality law? (UNPROMPTED) INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT IMPROVE**

Section 8 Importance / Performance

Q1 On a scale of 1 to 10 how important are each of the following aspects of service provided by the Commission (1=not at all important and 10 = very important)?

	Not Important ←-----→ Very Important										N/A
Professionalism of Staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Providing Equality Training	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Providing up to date guidance information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Responding to enquiries effectively	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Promoting awareness of equality legislation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Supporting employers with fair employment duties	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Supporting employers with development of equality policies.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88

Q2. On a scale of 1 to 10 how well do you think the Commission has performed on each of the following aspects of service (1=performed poorly and 10 = performed well)?

	Performed Poorly ←-----→ Performed Well										N/A
Professionalism of Staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Providing Equality Training	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Providing up to date guidance information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Responding to enquiries effectively	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Promoting awareness of equality legislation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Supporting employers with fair employment duties	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88
Supporting employers with development of equality policies.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	88

Section 9 Statutory Duties for Public Authorities

NOTE: THIS SECTION IS ASKED ONLY OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYERS (and specifically of those dealing with statutory duties) – MARK ONLY PUBLIC SECTOR SAMPLE ANSWER THIS SECTION OTHERS ROUTED TO S10

The Section 75 duties contain two elements. Public authorities are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine groups and to have regard to the need to promote good relations between three groups.

X1. It is important that this next section of the survey is answered by the person in your organisation with responsibility for Section 75. Are you able to answer questions relating to Section 75 or is there someone else in your organisation who may be better placed to answer these questions?

Yes, I am able to answer	1	→ Go to Q1
No, Someone else is better able to answer	2	→ Go to X2

X2. Would you mind telling me who this person is to allow us to contact them for this section of the questionnaire?

Yes	1	→ Go to X3
No	2	→ Go to Section 10

X3. RECORD CONTACT DETAILS

NAME	
CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER	
NAME OF ORGANISATION	
GO TO SECTION 10	

Q1. In the last 12 months did you or your organisation seek advice from the Commission in relation to either or both of the **Section 75 duties**?

Yes	1	Go to Q2
No	2	Go to Q8
Don't know	3	

Q2. **In the last 12 months in which area(s)** did you or your organisation seek advice from the Commission in relation to complying with your duties under **Section 75**?

	YES	NO
Implementation of an Equality Scheme	1	2
Assistance with Section 75 Complaints	1	2
Undertaking an Audit of Inequalities	1	2
Other (please specify)	1	2

Q3. Overall in the last 12 months, how satisfied were you with the advice provided by the Commission on complying with your **Section 75 duties**?

Very satisfied	1
Quite Satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Q4. What was the main reason for this rating of the advice provided?

--

Q5. Have you changed any policies, procedures practices or services as a result of the process you go through to comply with your duties under **Section 75**?

Yes	1	➤ Go to Q6
No	2	➤ Go to Q7

Q6. What policies, procedures practices or services have you changed as a result of the process you go through to comply with your duties under **Section 75**?

--

Q7. What improvements, if any, would you like to see in the advice provided to you by the Commission in relation to complying with your duties under **Section 75**?
INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT IMPROVE

--

Disability Duties

The two positive Disability Duties to promote positive attitude towards people with a disability and to encourage their participation in public life were introduced in January 2007.

Q8. In the last 12 months did you or your organisation seek advice from the Commission in relation to either or both of the **Disability duties**?

Yes	1	Go to Q9
No	2	If Yes to Q1 go to Q15; Else go to Section 10
Don't know	3	

Q9. **In the last 12 months in which area(s)** did you or your organisation seek advice from the Commission in relation to the **Disability Duties**?

	YES	NO
Producing/Implementing a Disability Action Plan	1	2
Encouraging Participation in Public Life	1	2
Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people	1	2
Clarification on the Commission's Guide to the Duties	1	2
Clarification on the difference between the Disability Positive Duties and disability discrimination	1	2

Q10. Overall in the last 12 months, how satisfied were you with the advice provided by the Commission on complying with the **Disability duties**?

Very satisfied	1
Quite Satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Q11. What was the main reason for this rating of the advice provided?

--

Q12. Have you changed any policies, procedures practices or services as a result of the contact you had with the Commission in relation to the **Disability Duties**?

Yes	1	➤ Go to Q13
No	2	➤ Go to Q14

Q13. What policies, procedures practices or services have you changed as a result of the contact you had with the Commission in relation to the **Disability Duties**?

--

Q14. What improvements, if any, would you like to see in the advice provided to you by the Commission in complying with the **Disability Duties**? INCLUDE A FIXED CATEGORY – NONE / COULD NOT IMPROVE

--

Q15. Thinking of your contact with the Commission in relation to Section 75 / the Disability Duties. Overall, how satisfied were you or your organisation with the **length of time** it took for the Commission to provide the advice you received?

Very satisfied	1
Quite Satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

Section 10 Background

THESE FINAL QUESTIONS ASK YOU ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION.

Q1. First, which industry sector are you in?

	Code		Code
Clothing and textile	1	Agriculture/ food processing	8
Manufacturing	2	Training and consultancy	9
Construction	3	Finance	10
Tourism/ Hotel and catering	4	ICT	11
Retail	5	Community/ voluntary	12
Media/ marketing	6	Public Sector	13
Transport and distribution	7	Other – please specify	14

Q2. How long has your organisation been in business?

Up to 2 years	1
Between 2 – 5 years	2
6 – 10 years	3
More than 10 years	4
Don't Know	5

Equality Commission (Satisfaction Of Employers / Service Providers With Business Support: 2012)

Q3. Has an applicant, employee, customer, or member of the general public ever made a complaint about your business / organisation to the Equality Commission?

Yes	1	Go to Q5
No	2	
Don't know	3	Go to Q6

Q4. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the way this complaint was handled by the Commission? **DO NOT PROMPT CODE ONE ONLY**

Very satisfied	1
Quite satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Quite dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6
Complaint still ongoing	7

Q5. As a follow-up to this survey, we will be conducting a number of focus groups across Northern Ireland, the purpose of which will be to explore in more detail some of the issues raised in this survey. It is hoped that the feedback from these groups will allow the Commission to improve upon the service provided to businesses in Northern Ireland.

The groups will be conducted in your local area and will last between 1 and 1 and half hours. Would you (or someone from your business / organisation) be willing to participate in one of these focus groups?

Yes	1	➔ GO TO Q7
No	2	➔ CLOSE INTERVIEW

Q6. RECORD CONTACT DETAILS

NAME	
CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER	
NAME OF ORGANISATION	
CLOSE INTERVIEW	

APPENDIX 2 – LETTER TO EMPLOYERS

Date: 14 November 2011

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS USING EQUALITY COMMISSION SERVICES

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland aims to provide a high quality service to employers and service provider organisations throughout Northern Ireland.

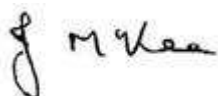
To this end the Commission has appointed an independent company, Social Market Research, to carry out a satisfaction survey amongst employers and service providers.

Your organisation is one of approximately 700 selected by Social Market Research at random from our records and their researcher's may contact you during the next few weeks. The survey will take the form of a short telephone interview and will ask for your views on the support services the Commission currently provides to employers. This feedback will help us to find out how effective we have been in supporting organisations, as well as identifying where we need to make improvements in the service we provide.

I hope that you will agree to participate in this important research. Any information which you provide will be used only by the research company for the purposes of this exercise and will therefore be treated confidentially. Furthermore, the information given will not be attributed to any particular employer, business, service provider or individual. Should you wish to discuss any aspect of the survey please contact my colleague Leanne Brown in the Research Team of the Commission (028 90500607) or Donal McDade at Social Market Research (028 90923362). Alternatively you can contact either by email: lbrown@equalityni.org or dmcade@socialmarketresearch.co.uk

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in anticipation for your co-operation. Your views will help to shape and improve the services offered by the Equality Commission.

Yours faithfully



Jacqui McKee
Head of Employment Development

APPENDIX 3 – DISCUSSION SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

**Satisfaction of Employers
With Business Support Provided by
the Equality Commission**

Final
7th December 2011



PROFILE INFORMATION

Propose to capture profile information using the Electronic Audience Response System

Characteristics		Location of Focus Group			
		Belfast	Derry / L'derry	Craigavon / Portadown	TOTAL
Gender	Male				
	Female				
Age Band	Under 30				
	30-49				
	50+				
Type of organisation	Private Sector				
	Public Sector				
Employees	10 or less				
	11 to 50				
	51-100				
	More than 100				
Business sector	Clothing and textile				
	Manufacturing				
	Construction				
	Tourism/ Hotel and catering				
	Retail				
	Media/ marketing				
	Transport and distribution				
	Agriculture/ food processing				
	Training and consultancy				
	Finance				
	ICT				
	Community/ voluntary				
	Public Sector				
	Other (please specify)				
Job Title	HR Manager				
	HR Officer				
	Equality Manager				
	Equality Officer				
	Compliance Manager				
	Policy Development Manager				
	Other				

FOCUS GROUP AGENDA

Standard Pre-amble



(10 mins)

- Introductions;
- Background to and purpose for the focus group;
- Explain how people have been selected and why (outline of process and criteria and used)
- Explain what we will cover during the focus group and the structure of the session overall;
- Standard focus group guidelines;
- Explain that it is their own personal views we are looking for – not what they think organisations in general think / do
- Confidentiality and anonymity – report feedback on non-attributable basis;
- Permission to voice record the session.
- Explain what will happen to their comments. (For discussion - Will the EC put the report on the internet? if so how and when?)

PART 1 - ABOUT YOU AND YOUR ORGANISATION



(10 mins)

Approach



See questions posed in voting slide show

PART 2 - PERCEPTIONS



(15 mins)

2.1 Perceptions

What is your overall perception of the Equality Commission? Sum it up for me in one word or a short phrase.

(Use flip chart to categorise the responses into 'Strongly positive attitudes, weakly positive attitudes, neutral, mildly negative, strongly negative')

Do you have different perceptions of different parts of the EC? If so, what are these?

(Note the different parts and the nature of the perception)

Please tell me how come you perceive the EC in this way?

(Use flip chart to categorise the responses into actions, individuals, events / experiences etc that were significant – as a means of understanding what motivates positive and negative perceptions).

What would you like to see the EC do to address any negative perceptions you have described?

(Note the corrective measures put forward by participants).

PART 3 - KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF SERVICES



(10 mins)

3.1 Explore what participants know

What sorts of services does the EC provide to businesses?

(Use flip chart to categorise the responses. Assess where there is most understanding least understanding)

Compare later with full list of what EC provides and note and report on any significant gaps)

.....

PART 4 - WHEN THEY WOULD CONTACT EC AND NOT



(20 mins)

4.1 When would they contact EC?

- In what sorts of employment situations would you contact the Equality Commission?
- And, what sort of help would you be looking for?
- Why would you contact the EC for this and not any other organisation?

(Use flip chart to categorise the responses. Assess the types of situations and the type of assistance being sought and why EC would be the preferred provider of this support)

4.2 When would they NOT contact EC?

- Can you think of an employment where potentially the Equality Commission could help but you feel reluctant to contact them?
 - What sort of situation would that be? (Features etc)
 - And, what sort of help would you be looking for?
 - Would you feel a little reluctant or very reluctant to contact EC? And why?
 - Who would you contact instead and, again, why?

(Use flip chart to categorise the responses. Assess the types of situations and the type of assistance being sought and the reasons for reluctance in contacting the EC)

- In situations like the ones you have described, what more could the EC do to reassure you that it is both safe and worthwhile approaching them first.

(Use flip chart to note all further suggestions from participants on what should be done).

PART 5 - SCENARIO 1 - GENDER (PREGNANCY)



(15 mins)

Imagine this happened in your organisation...

Mrs Jones has been employed in a senior role in your organisation since April 2005.

In August 2011, she was told by a Director that they had lots of exciting opportunities coming up and so she should not become pregnant in the near future.

She further alleges that she received very positive reviews of her work and was told that she would be promoted in the next year.

Mrs Jones claims that in September 2011 a more Senior executive assured her that there were going to be no redundancies as the organisation had enough work / funds for the next year.

Prior to in early December 2011, Mrs Jones suffers a miscarriage. Mrs Jones advised her employer of this and was absent from work for two weeks. Whilst she was off, she was aware that a business planning meeting had taken place and she was anxious to input into those discussions upon her return. However, she claimed that she was told by Senior Executive that he was too busy to discuss same with her.

Mrs Jones returns from her Christmas holiday leave on the 5th January 2009 and was told that she was to be made redundant. Her employer refused to tell her whether anyone else would be made redundant. However, she discovers that she was the only person dismissed by reason of redundancy at that time.

Mrs Jones believes that she was selected for redundancy because her employers had become aware, due to her miscarriage, of her intention to start a family.

She makes it clear that she plans to take legal action against your organisation.

1.5 Employers' response?

As an employer:

- What would you do in a situation like this?
- If you did not have monies for legal support, what would you do?
- Who would you contact for support? And who would you contact first, next, last etc and why? *(Use the table of different organisations -Appendix A- and ask participants to use stickers to note their first, second and third choice)*
- If the Equality Commission was not your first port of call, what would the EC need to change to reassure you that it is 'safe' / 'best' to contact them first?

PART 6 - SCENARIO 2 - DISABILITY



(15 mins)

Imagine this happened in your organisation...

Mr Smith has been employed in a Quality Assurance role with by your organisation since 2001.

In July 2003, Mr Smith was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis.

In October 2006, following a review assessment by a doctor, Mr Smith's working environment was altered and he was allowed to work a day shift pattern.

Mr Smith continued in this position until November 2010 when he was involved in an incident outside of work and was on sick leave until February 2011.

In June 2011, Mr Smith was removed from his position in Quality Assurance and placed in a different role which required him to paint and clean.

Mr Smith alleges that he was given no information to why he was no longer in the Quality Assurance Role and why he was being moved to this new role of painting and cleaning.

Mr Smith alleges that this role was not suitable for him because of his disability and shortly afterwards he suffered a flare up of his rheumatoid arthritis, as a result of same he was off on sick leave.

Following his return from sick leave, he was allocated another role which he felt was unsafe and made him feel worthless.

On the 30th October 2011, Mr Smith was informed that he was facing redundancy.

Mr Smith believes that his employers had placed him in roles which were vulnerable for selection for redundancy and that he had been deliberately marked within the lower end of the scale in respect of the redundancy selection criteria.

He makes it clear that he plans to take legal action against your organisation.

1.6 Employers' response?

As an employer:

- What would you do in a situation like this?
- If you did not have monies for legal support, what would you do?
- Who would you contact for support? And who would you contact first, next, last etc and why? *((Use the table of different organisations -Appendix A- and ask participants to use stickers to note their first, second and third choice))*
- If the Equality Commission was not your first port of call, what would the EC need to change to reassure you that it is 'safe' / 'best' to contact them first?

PART 7 - CLOSE



(5 mins)

- Summarise the key points raised and the suggestions made.
- Remind participants of how their feedback will be used, when report will be completed and what will happen next.
- Thank participants and close.

Appendix A

Examples of other service providers

Citizens Advice Bureau	1
Commission for Racial Equality	1
Community Group	1
Disability Action	1
EOCNI	1
Equality Commission	1
FEC	1
Human Rights Commission	1
Industrial Tribunal or Court	1
Labour Relations Agency	1
Local Councillor or Politician	1
Newspaper	1
Ombudsman	1
PSNI	1
Radio or Television	1
Solicitor	1
Special interest groups (e.g. LGB / racial-ethnic / disability / women)	1
Supervisor/Manager	1
The Law Centre	1
Trade Union	1
Other	1

Appendix 4 – FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

4. Findings from the Focus Groups

4.1 Focus Group Organisation and Profile

The evaluation also included two focus groups⁹. These took place on 8th and 12th December 2011 respectively. The profile of those who attended is set out below. Whilst the numbers attending were small, the insights obtained were constructive and wide ranging and would, in our opinion, merit consideration by a wider group.

Table 4.1

Characteristics		TOTAL
Gender	Male	3
	Female	5
		8
Age Band	Under 30	1
	30-49	3
	50+	4
		8
Type of organisation	Private Sector	1
	Public Sector	7
		8
Employees	11 - 50	3
	51-100	
	More than 100	5
		8
Role	HR Manager	
	Head of HR	
	HR Officer	2
	Equality Manager	1
	Equality Officer	1
	Compliance Officer	
	Policy Development Officer	
	<i>Something else?</i> ¹⁰	4
		8
Business sector	Public Sector	2
	Non Public Sector	6
		8

4.2 Themes Covered

The focus groups discussions centred on the following themes:

- General perceptions of the Commission;
- Knowledge and awareness of Commission's services;
- When participants would and would not contact the Equality Commission; and,
- Employers' response to two scenarios each of which raised equality issues.

⁹ Three focus groups were organised, however, whilst 8 people had confirmed they would attend focus group three, one the day none attended.

¹⁰ These participants had at least one other role within their organisations (e.g. inspector, auditor, general administration, bursar) in addition to being responsible for their organisation's equality duties.

A full copy of the discussion schedule for the focus groups is contained in Appendices.

4.3 General Perceptions of the Commission

What is your overall perception of the Equality Commission?

Overall, the Commission was perceived in a positive light.

Staff were described as:

- *"Knowledgeable and helpful";*
- *"[Staff] are nothing other than courteous"; and,*
- *"They [the Commission] are using in helping us [employers] to check are we compliant"*
- *"They [The Commission] have a common sense approach to helping us [employers] fulfil... [our equality obligations]"*.

The resources and services available were also praised by some participants:

- *"If you go on the [Commission's] web site it's helpful"; and,*
- *"The training was brilliant!"*

There was open acknowledgement of the challenge that the Commission has in striving to perform two seemingly diametrically distinct roles i.e. guiding employers on how to comply with the legislation and, separately, its enforcement function. Whilst SMR recognises that the Commission has no authority to change its roles, participants perceived these apparent tensions differently:

Some considered the enforcement role to be a vital asset:

- *"The Commission is compliance-focused.... [however] this is necessary in our society"*
- *The perception as "policeman... needs to stay... needs to stay independent... absolutely crucial"*

Whilst there appeared to be a high degree of confidence about information from the support side not being passed inappropriately to the enforcement side, some participants, nonetheless, perceived the dual role of advisor and enforcement was not without its challenges:

- *"I'm conscious I have to be very careful what I disclose [e.g. to the support side of the Commission]... they [too] are very careful about what they say"; and,*
- *"Some [organisations] have gone to them [the Commission] for help and have been criticised severely... [the Commission was perceived more like] ... the 'policeman'"*.

A few considered that the scale and detail of reporting required is demanding. One participant summed up the views of a few others when they said,

- *"Not another report!... The number of reports we have to prepare!"*

A few participants were of the view that the current reporting requirements were disproportionate, and in their view, burdensome, for organisations, particularly those with smaller numbers of employees:

- *"It's a complete waste of time... it's a level of bureaucracy that businesses don't need... you [as an employer] are forever answering questions about the annual return... feel you are under suspicion";*
- *"The current template [Annual Return] is too onerous" especially for staff with multi-roles within small organisations, "It needs a sharper focus"*

Do you have different perceptions of different parts of the EC?

The answer to this was 'No'. There were two reasons for this:

Dual role but single organisation

Whilst there was a clear understanding of the two main roles of the Commission (i.e. compliance and support), all of the participants perceived it as a single entity. Moreover, there was no sense that the staff and / or services in any particular section were perceived as somehow better or worse than any other:

- *"I view it as 'one' [organisation]; and,*
- *"I don't 'slice it up'".*

Single point of contact 'becomes' the Commission

Most of the participants appeared to have had direct contact with different parts of the Commission in recent years. However, at least one of the participants 'experienced' the Commission via a designated contact who liaised with appropriate parties within the Commission on their behalf to get queries answered. This meant that the participant did need to contact other staff within the Commission. Consequently, their view of the Commission was determined by their perception of the quality of support they received from their designated contact. To them, the designated contact 'was' the Commission. In their words, *"I don't 'see beyond' that"*.

What would you like to see the EC do to address any negative perceptions you have described?

When this question was put to the participants, the feedback was a mixture of specific suggestions to address any negative perceptions they had raised, plus some general suggestions for improving interactions with customers. There were requests for:

- **Simpler reporting** (in general) that takes less time to complete. This appeared to be especially important for at least one participant who indicated that amount of time they consumed in making the returns was so significant for that *"it puts me off everything else... I don't bother [reading] the [Commission's information] emails"*. (Since SMR understands that the emails from the Commission are designed to relay important information and advice to employers, we considered this to be a salient point).

- The Commission to provide employers with a **computer programme or online** system that would ensure that employer returns were complete and accurate at the point of entry (thereby cutting down on the time currently spent in 'follow-up' queries). As one participant put it, and others agreed, provide an electronic system whereby "*you [the employer] can't get it wrong*" and one where the entry requirements are proportionate to the number of employees.
- Simplification of **Article 55** returns in particular;
- Fewer but **more succinct emails** where the employer can **immediately see** whether or not it is of **relevance or interest** to them. Whilst participants were aware that the emails from the Commission could contain useful information and updates, two factors appear to put them off doing so:
 - The sheer number of them ("*They [the Commission] send a lot of emails*"); and,
 - According to the participants, there is nothing in either the subject or the body of the email to help employers decide which links to explore or ignore ("*It's just a page of links... if you were just running through the email, you wouldn't bother going to the links*").

It was also suggested that emails should be 'themed' and clearly labelled (e.g. 'equality and age', 'equality and recruitment' etc) again to help employers decide whether or not they needed to read the contents.

For some, updates on employment law would be of interest (larger employers); case law for all employers.

There was also interest in being notified about related training courses on the topics raised.

Finally, in relation to email, it was suggested that the Commission introduce an email 'preference' service whereby, employers could choose which topics they wished to receive emails on and then, subsequently, they would only receive emails on those topics. Employers could change their preferences at any time but would be invited to update them at least once a year. It was thought that this would help employers filter out emails from the Commission which they considered were not of interest to them.

- The Commission to be **pro-active in** drawing employers' attention to what it is "**doing to help employers**". There were two aspects to this, namely, subjects of interest and style of approach:
 - **Subjects of interest** - It was suggested that the Commission should produce and disseminate articles about equality that would be helpful to employers in the current economic climate, how equality adds 'value' e.g. 'Using equality to enhance productivity' or 'How equality can enhance employee engagement'.
 - **Style of approach** - The Commission was compared with the Labour Relations Agency (LRA). To many of the participants, the LRA was perceived as highly proactive, very customer focused and dynamic in supporting employers on employment and equality issue - they were described as

“fantastic”. In contrast, the Commission was perceived as much more passive and much less dynamic in its approach to customers.

- The Commission to **‘get closer to customers’** by:
 - **Providing feedback** on what has been submitted already by employers. The lack of feedback appeared to be an important issue for a number of participants particularly given the time and effort they had invested in the various submissions:
 - *“We've submitted reports over the years but never heard anything back”;*
 - *“Our disability plan... lots of work... took six months to complete... we got an email back [from the Commission] saying ‘We've got it’”.*
 - *“Our Annual Progress report, again, a lot of work... couple of months... write and re-write... [and after it was submitted to the Commission received and email]... ‘Thank you, we received it on...’”*

It seemed that participants wanted some response from the Commission that in some way reflected the **‘value’** of their work and could show that the document had been read and that the Commission were actually using the material submitted to **improve practice across employers**. For example, this ‘value’ could be expressed in terms of prompt feedback from the Commission on:

- What the Commission does with the submissions it receives from employers; and with suggestions on, for example:
- Good ideas they had spotted in their organisation's document that could be shared with others;
- Aspects of others' documents that their organisation could learn from etc.

Whilst a number of participants indicated that they had received some feedback on their Article 55 submission, others wondered whether the Commission's staff actually read the documents and / or if they opted not submit the documents, *“Would anyone notice?”*

- **Communicate more extensively, actively and directly** with its customers - **be visible and build relationships**. There was a sense amongst some that they only time they contacted the Commission was when they (the employer) needed guidance of some kind. To them, this created one-sided sort of relationship where the Commission is the ‘helper’ and the employer is the ‘helped’; the employer always ‘asks’ and the Commission always ‘guides’. What these participants appeared to be seeking was a more partnership-style of working relationship whereby *the Commission* would pro-actively and directly contact (speak to and indeed personally visit) the employer at times with relevant information. Participants appeared to want to build a relationship with the Commission. The relationship-building methods used by the LRA appeared to be well liked and participants would like to see the

Commission replicate these e.g. linking in directly with employers' conferences, hosting locally-based tailored training, being proactive with customers offering to meet employers at their organisation and "give a hand... not looking to find fault". Finally, on this point, whilst a local office is not the only way to build relationships with customers, the participants in the Derry / Londonderry focus group interpreted the lack of a local EC office as a further marker of the 'remoteness' of the Commission towards employers in 'The West'.

4.4 Knowledge and Awareness of the Commission's Services

What sorts of services does the EC provide to businesses?

All of the participants were aware of the two main types of services offered by the Commission:

- Advice / Support; and,
- Dealing with tribunals.

In addition, all were aware of the following specific services / resources:

- Training;
- Publications;
- Web site.

The Belfast-based focus group were more aware¹¹ of a greater range of services than the Derry / Londonderry focus group in that the Belfast participants also cited:

- Conferences;
- Templates;
- Employer networks;
- Newsletters.

¹¹ It is not clear whether or not this is related to any or all of the following factors:

- the actual numbers of participants in the group (Belfast had 5, Derry / Londonderry had 3); and,
- the actual experience that individual participants in the Belfast focus group had of the Commission.

4.5 When Would Employers Contact The Commission and When Not?

4.5.1 Contact the Commission

In what sorts of employment situations would you contact the Equality Commission?

And, what sort of help would you be looking for?

Why would you contact the EC for this and not any other organisation?

The feedback from participants is summarised in the table below.

Situation & Help Required	Why the Commission?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Criteria - Would seek verbal advice on suitable criteria for a job role. 	<p><i>"They're up to date with the legislation"</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advertise - <i>"I would ask them to review a draft advert to be sure we hadn't 'missed' anything"</i> 	<p><i>"It's just who you'd go to... their [the Commission's] information is up-to-date... [After seeking their feedback would] take it we had 'the word' [the definitive comment]... and would feel a bit more 'covered' [protected from possible future challenge]"</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forms / Returns templates - Would seek help / clarification on how to interpret and complete their templates. 	<p>As the authors of the templates, they are regarded as the authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Reasonable adjustments' - Would seek clarification on what was deemed 'reasonable'. 	<p>Because the Commission referred to the importance of 'reasonable adjustment' in its training sessions. It was therefore assumed that the Commission could and would provide guidance on this.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Case Law - Would seek assurance that they were interpreting the case law correctly and thereby applying the equality legislation correctly. 	<p>The Commission has general advisors with this expertise.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Centrally driven policies - Would seek advice on how suitable and feasible policies developed by lead company in mainland UK are for NI 	<p>Because the Commission is considered to have this type of expertise.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy development- Would seek a view on what approach to take before policy is developed. 	<p>Want the Commission's "steer" especially if the policy was perceived as contentious issue a judicial review was not inconceivable.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affirmative Action - Would seek advice on what is lawful in this context and what is not. 	<p><i>"The Commission are more familiar with the legislation...[they] will discuss it with you... they will say if it [what an employer is considering] is not lawful".</i></p>

4.5.2 Not Contacting the Commission

- **Can you think of an employment situation where potentially the Equality Commission could help but you feel reluctant to contact them?**
 - **What sort of situation would that be?**
 - **And, what sort of help would you be looking for?**
 - **Would you feel a little reluctant or very reluctant to contact EC? And why?**
 - **Who would you contact instead and, again, why?**

- **In situations like the ones you have described, what more could the EC do to reassure you that it is both safe and worthwhile approaching them first.**

The feedback from participants is summarised in the table below.

Situation & Help Required	Why not the Commission?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment law - Would want help with a "situation" and need clarity on the application of the law. 	<p>In case it would be prejudicial.</p>
<p>Would go to: Solicitor. Need to go to a legal adviser anyway to get to the "nitty-gritty" (the specifics of a case)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Past recruitment processes - Would want assurance that what we (as employers) had done during past recruitment processes was correct. 	<p>Would be "<i>afraid ... worry about something [coming out] that was not correct... and how much trouble we [might be] ... in... afraid it [even a review of the process] could 'bite' us</i>".</p>
<p>Would go to: No-one. Would not risk exposing the organisation to possible criticism and potential liabilities.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training- Would want locally-based, tailored training. 	<p>Considered training is too general and Belfast-focused.</p>
<p>Would go to: Labour Relations Agency training. Delivered locally and perceived as highly tailored for local employers.</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Anything - Would want help with equality and employment issues. 	<p>Negative perception of Commission as 'policeman' rather than as a source of guidance. <i>"They're a regulatory body... they don't come across [to me] as an advisory body"</i>. Perceived as punitive rather than helpful.</p> <p>Unclear what at what point and according to what criteria the Commission decides to support a case against an employer. It was suggested that without an awareness and understanding of the above that employers can feel completely exposed and unsure about the circumstances in which the Commission would / would not support a case against them.</p> <p>There was a perception (false) that the Commission had to support a certain number of cases against employers each year to "justify their existence".</p>
<p>Would go to: Solicitor and Labour Relations Agency training. Perceived as more customer-orientated</p>	

Participants considered that there was nothing the Commission could do regarding the 'employment law' or 'past recruitment' issues above. However, there was a desire for more locally-based training and for such training to be tailored specifically for local employers. There was also a desire for more direct relationship building activity with customers to demonstrate that the Commission existed as much for employers as employees.

EMPLOYERS RESPONSE

Two different scenarios were presented (See Focus Group Discussion Schedule in the Appendices) and participants were invited to consider:

As an employer:

- **What would you do in a situation like this?**
- **If you did not have monies for legal support, what would you do? Who would you contact for support? And who would you contact first, next, last etc and why? (SMR allocated 3 points for a 1st choice, 2 points for a second choice and 1 point for a 3rd choice).**
- **If the Equality Commission was not your first port of call, what would the EC need to change to reassure you that it is 'safe' / 'best' to contact them first?**

4.5.3 Scenario 1 - Gender (Pregnancy) Issue

What employers would do

In this scenario, participants indicated that they would do the following:

- Carry out an investigation to establish the facts;
- Look back into the circumstances re availability of work and future funds etc;
- Find out what were the redundancy criteria; and,
- Check what processes were followed, the staff member involved should have received a notification that her post was at risk.

Who employers contact

There were mixed views on which agency to contact for support in this scenario.

In the Belfast focus group:

The Commission (with 12 points - 2 x 1st choices and 3 x 2nd choices) was the preferred source of support of the participants. The main reasons given were:

- A presumption that the Commission was highly likely to have experience of this, or something similar, before and could offer advice; and,
- That whether the employer's processes were incorrect or the application of the processes was incorrect being pro-active and seeking advice from the Commission in a situation like this demonstrated a willingness to change and, it was perceived, would lessen an employer's penalty.

The Labour Relations Agency (with 10 points - 2 x 1st choices and 2 x 2nd choices) was a close second. There was clearly considerable respect for the LRA because they were perceived to:

- Have "a good grasp of a situation" like this;
- Be "more [aware] of the practicalities"; and,
- Have "good experience of arbitration".

Finally, in the Belfast focus group, approaching a Solicitor ranked third (3 points, 1 x 1st choice) because participants considered that a solicitor could "check our position... do we have any defence" and could also "advise on a level of settlement". Participants perceived that the Commission would not be in a position to provide this level of detail.

However, in the Derry / Londonderry group:

The LRA was the preferred source of support (with 7 points - 1 x 1st choices and 2 x 2nd choices).

Approaching a solicitor was ranked second overall (with 5 points - 1 x 1st choice and 1 x 2nd choice).

However, the Commission did not feature as a source of support.

Whilst the numbers of participants in the Derry / Londonderry group were small, and the findings therefore needed to be treated with caution, nonetheless, the perception within the group was that they could not approach the Commission for support on an issue such as this because they perceived / feared that:

- *"You [the employer] can't go there... the Commission could take you [the employer] to court!"*;
- *"They [the LRA] don't get involved in ITs [industrial tribunals]... the official documentation is not coming from them"*.
- *"Is there a real 'firewall' [between the support side and the compliance side]?"*
- Whilst the Commission does offer impartial advice there is a perception that some of the cases (details not given) that the Commission have supported have seemed unfair on employers; which has led to a perception that; and,
- *"The Commission is always there for the worker but not the employer"*.

Whilst the Belfast focus group selected the Commission as its first choice of support, similar concerns were raised:

- *"You would worry that they [The Commission] would look... pry further"*;
(However, it was pointed out that this fear, *"may not be based on anything"*.)

What more can the Commission do?

Participants in the Derry focus group said, that if it were feasible, they would like "less tagging" i.e. they would like a facility to ring up the Commission, anonymously, and seek advice on a particular situation - basically an anonymous help line. The current procedure involves them stating their name and organisation and then an adviser calls them back. What they would like is a facility to obtain advice without identifying themselves or their organisation.

Those in the Belfast group suggested that the Commission do more to reassure employers of the confidentiality between the two functions - support and compliance.

4.5.4 Scenario 2 - Disability

What employers would do

In this scenario, participants indicated that they would do the following:

- Go back and gather information from sickness records;
- Disability is a protected status - find out what reasonable adjustments were made;
- Find out when decisions were made, was the post holder included in this process;
- Establish whether anyone else was 'mange-moved';
- Look at sick pay criteria;
- Assess disability awareness levels in the organisation;
- Find out what were the selection criteria for redundancy and was disability considered;

- Establish whether or not the post holder was made aware that his post was at risk; and,
- Determine if a staff engagement policy exists.

Who employers contact

Again, there were mixed views on which agency employers would opt to contact for support in this scenario.

In the Belfast focus group:

Approaching a Solicitor was the preferred choice (11 points, 3 x 1st choices and 1 x 2nd choice):

- *“Professional guidance”*;
- *“Pros and cons of your options” (Did not think this would be available from the Commission)*;
- Solicitor is *“impartial”*;
- *“Solicitor represents the employer... the Equality Commission does not”*;
- The solicitor will be pragmatic.

The Commission (with 9 points - 1 x 1st choice and 3 x 2nd choices) was the second of the participants. The main reason given was that the Commission might possibly be able to *“sign post me [the employer] to [further] help”*. However, some of the participants considered that if an employer had already sought advice from a solicitor that approaching the Commission was not going to add to the advice in any material way but that the only value in approaching the Commission was in *“being seen”* to do so.

Disability Action (with 3 points - 3 x 3rd choices) was ranked third and was perceived as the organisation with expertise on disability issues.

In the Derry / Londonderry focus group, (as with Scenario 1) the Equality Commission did not feature in the top three sources of support.

Approaching the LRA was the preferred choice (8 points, 2 x 1st choices and 1 x 2nd choice). As well as providing free advice, LRA was perceived as being very knowledgeable and as being an advisory body whose advisers had practical employment experience.

Approaching a solicitor (with 5 points - 1 x 1st choice and 1 x 2nd choices) was the second choice of the participants, again because of the pragmatism of the advice.

Contacting Disability Action (with 2 points - 2 x 3rd choices) or a subscription-based employment advisory service (with 2 points 1 x 2nd choice) was ranked joint third. Again, Disability Action was perceived as the organisation with expertise on disability issues. The Advisory Service was considered an option because a particular participant's employer already subscribed to such a service, and hence there would be no additional cost.

The Commission did not feature in the top three choices for the following reasons:

- One participant perceived the Commission's advisers as 'theoretical' rather than practically-focused. They were seeking more pragmatism and they considered that LRA offered this;
- One participant perceived the Commission as 'remote' from its customers and impersonal, *"I don't [ever] speak to the same person [no sense of continuity / opportunity to build working relationships]... I need a 'connect' [someone through whom I can experience a sense of connection with the Commission]"*.
- One participant 'thought of' the Commission as being somehow only concerned with recruitment and selection. They therefore did not think of seeking the Commission's advice on any other part of the 'employment journey'.

What more can the Commission do?

Participants in the Belfast focus group considered that there was little to nothing more the Commission could do. In their view, the Commission *"needs to be apart from employers"*, *"employees need confidence [in the Commission and the separation helps with this]"*, and there is, inescapably, *"a tension [when] acting as advocates and advisers"*.

The participants in the Derry / Londonderry focus group suggested that the Commission build closer relationships with its customers through pro-active communication and a set up of a local office in Derry / Londonderry.

NOTE: Finally, a number of participants made a specific request that the Commission publish this report or send an email with a link to the report (online) to all employers letting also them know, in relation to the recommendations:

- What has been done; and,
- What will be done.

