

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is a non departmental public body established by the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Our powers and duties derive from equality laws which provide protection for everyone in Northern Ireland against discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, race, religious belief and political opinion, sex and sexual orientation.

We also have responsibilities arising from the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in respect of the statutory equality and good relations duties which apply to public authorities.

Our sponsor Department is the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister which carries responsibilities for equality policy and legislation in the Northern Ireland Executive.

Vision

Our vision is of a society in Northern Ireland where there is equality for all and a common understanding of the benefits of a more equal society.

Mission

Our mission is to improve people's lives through the effective implementation of our statutory responsibilities.

Values

In addition to setting out what we want to achieve, it is also important to say how we want to achieve it. In carrying out our work with and for others, we adhere to the following values:

- we are open, honest and trustworthy
- we act with integrity, with courage and with impartiality
- we listen.



Introducing the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is governed by a board of Commissioners consisting of a Chief Commissioner, a Deputy Chief Commissioner and up to 18 (12 at present, Sept 2020) other Commissioners, all appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Geraldine McGahey OBE
Chief Commissioner

Neil Anderson
Deputy Chief Commissioner

June Best MBE

Dr Theresa Donaldson

Duane Farrell

Helen Ferguson

Hazel Francey

Carmel McKinney OBE

Deepa Mann-Kler

Jarlath Kearney

Stephen Matthews OBE

Joseph McVey OBE

Dawn Purvis

Dr Katy Radford MBE



Geraldine McGahey OBE
Chief Commissioner

Commissioners set the overall strategic direction for the organisation, set the policy framework and oversee the delivery of the planned work. With the exception of the Chief Commissioner, all Commissioners are part time and are appointed for a three year term.



Directorate Structure of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland



Policy & Strategic Engagement directorate works with government, elected representatives and stakeholders to improve law and public policy. We support and challenge government to better tackle identified key inequalities and to further advance equality of opportunity and good relations.

Corporate Services directorate delivers finance, corporate governance, human resources, ICT, strategic planning, business efficiency and performance, Commission solicitor, knowledge management and shared services.

Advice and Compliance directorate provides advice, support and guidance to public authorities, employers and service providers on all aspects of their equality obligations and on best practice, both in respect of the anti-discrimination legislation and in respect of the equality and good relations duties.

Legal Services directorate provides information and discrimination advice to individuals with potential complaints under anti-discrimination laws, and legal assistance and representation to assisted applicants.

Communications & Promotion directorate is responsible for stakeholder engagement, media relations, public engagement, campaigns and marketing and provides the Commission's Secretariat.

Research & Investigations directorate gathers evidence to support our work and aims to set the equality agenda through research and evidence. It also conducts formal and Section 75 investigations.



The Equality Commission's senior management team is led by Chief Executive Dr Evelyn Collins CBE

In April 2020, the Commission employs 71 staff (whole time equivalents). Our budget in 2019-2020 was £5.203k

The work of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland





In general terms our statutory remit means that we have a duty to:

- promote equality of opportunity and affirmative action
- work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment
- keep relevant legislation under review
- promote good relations between persons of different racial groups and good disability practice
- oversee the effectiveness of statutory equality duties on public authorities

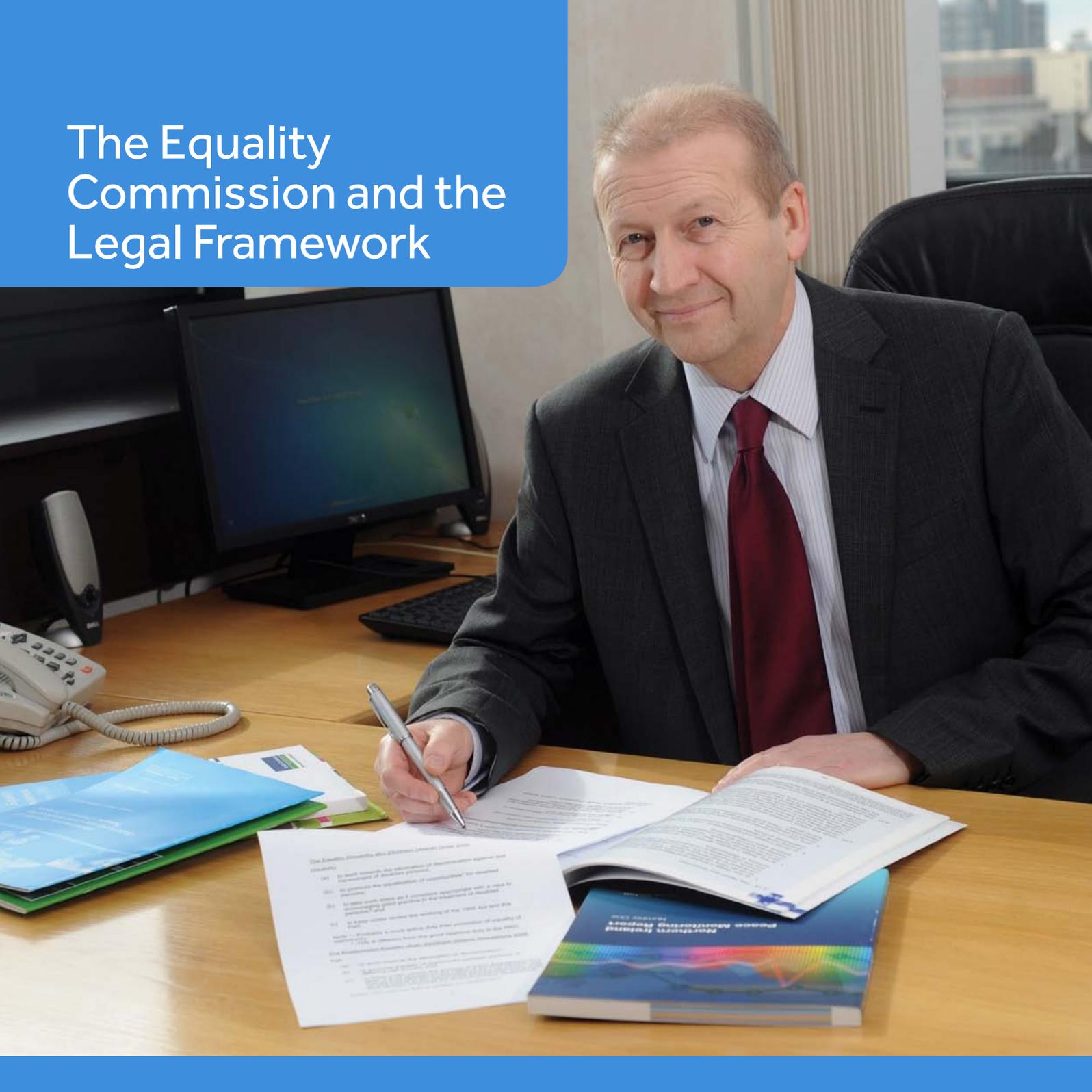
This statutory framework enables us to:

- promote equality through a range of mechanisms (eg by providing direct advice and support to individuals and organisations with responsibilities under equality law)
- produce publications and run conferences and seminars
- undertake research
- influence policy makers
- assist individuals with complaints of discrimination under the law
- undertake investigations

We use a combination of our powers to encourage and to enforce changes to policy, practices and procedures in favour of greater equality.

Underpinning all these activities are communications and awareness raising, engagement with our stakeholders, working in partnership with other organisations and a high standard of corporate governance.

The Equality Commission and the Legal Framework





Northern Ireland's equality laws cover discrimination in employment and the workplace, but some also cover the provision of goods, facilities and services.

Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970

Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 *

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 **

Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 *

Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998 *

Special Educational Needs & Disability (NI) Order 2005 ***

Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003

Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006 *

Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006

* applies to the provision of goods, facilities, services, education and premises

** applies to the provision of goods, facilities, services and premises

*** applies to the provision of education

We also derive powers and duties from the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Equality (Disability, etc.) Order 2000.

Discrimination at work includes:

- direct or indirect discrimination
- failure to comply with a reasonable adjustment duty
- harassment
- victimisation

'Goods, facilities and services' include:

- access to and use of any place which members of the public or a section of the public are permitted to enter, for example, shops.
- accommodation in hotel, boarding house or other
- banking, insurance, grants, loans, credit, finance
- educational facilities
- facilities for entertainment, recreation or refreshment
- facilities for transport or travel
- services of any profession, trade, local government or other public authority

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act





The Northern Ireland Act which brought the Equality Commission into being also introduced new equality duties on public authorities. The main aim of these Section 75 duties is to ensure that equality of opportunity is 'mainstreamed' by public authorities in their policy making, policy implementation and policy review.

Section 75 (1)

A 'public authority' in carrying out its functions in relation to NI shall have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- men and women generally
- persons with disability and without
- persons with dependants and without

The Commission's role in this area includes

- keeping under review the effectiveness of the duties imposed by Section 75

- offering advice to public authorities and others in connection with those duties
- carrying out other functions conferred on it including approval of equality schemes
- preparation of Guidelines
- investigating complaints of failure to comply with an approved scheme.

A public authority must produce an Equality Scheme that sets out its commitment to equality, how it intends to meet its obligations and identifies those policies that need to be assessed in relation to the impact they may have on any of the nine equality groups. It must consult widely on its Equality Scheme and the policies it is assessing.

Public authorities are 'designated bodies' under the law and include: local councils, Government departments and bodies they fund, Education and Library boards, Further Education colleges, health boards and trusts.

More detail on our website at
www.equalityni.org/S75duties

Current priorities: Equality Commission for Northern Ireland





Our Corporate Plan 2016-2019 focuses on four main strategic priorities for the next three years.

These are:

- to champion equality and good relations
- to challenge inequalities
- to put the legislation to work and
- to deliver equality effectively and efficiently.

Planned new and continuing work

- maintain drive for fair participation in the labour market
- increase people's protections against discrimination
- continue to focus on public sector equality and good relations duties
- influence and monitor the Programme for Government's commitments on equality and good relations

Challenges we plan to address

- Gaps in legislative protection – law different in Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK, which is covered by the Equality Act 2010
- Progress, or lack of progress, on Government's delivery of PfG commitments on equality and good relations
- Culture and identity issues – migrants, refugees, Islamophobia
- Difficult issues such as freedom of expression and religion, issues around sexual orientation
- Low representation of women in political and public life
- The impacts of welfare reform
- Uncertain economic climate, reductions in public expenditure
- Northern Ireland is becoming increasingly diverse.

Our services include

- Giving advice and support to individuals with potential complaints under the anti-discrimination legislation.
- Giving guidance to employers and service providers about their obligations under the law and good practice advice.
- Encouraging public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and address inequalities in fulfilling their equality and good relations duties.
- Ensuring that equality considerations are central to decision-making by focusing particular attention in a number of key public policy areas.

**Our Corporate Plan and Annual Report
are available online at www.equalityni.org**



Equality Commission
for Northern Ireland
Equality House
7-9 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DP

Tel: 00 44 (0)28 90 500 600
Email: information@equalityni.org
www.equalityni.org
Follow us on Twitter: @EqualityCommNI
Sign up for our ezine: ezine@equalityni.org

