

Annual Equality
Progress Report

to the Equality
Commission for NI
2007 / 2008



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Foreword

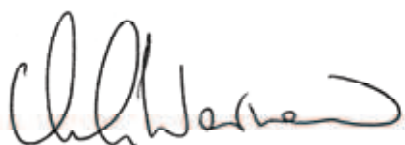
We are pleased to present DARD's Annual Equality Progress Report for 2007 / 08 along with our first report on progress on the actions and targets outlined in our Disability Action Plan. Equality is a key priority for DARD and there will be a continued strong emphasis on this area of work in the coming years.

We have continued to make steady progress on a range of equality issues, and this Report reflects contributions from all of our business areas. Of particular note has been the work taken forward towards the launch of the NI Rural Development Programme (2007-2013), the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of DARD Direct and the inclusion of additional minority languages on the DARD website.

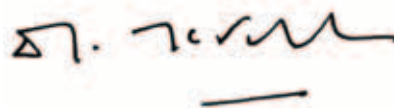
As well as the progress outlined in these Reports, during the last year we have also hosted a one-day equality event for all of our senior staff and introduced a new evidence-based equality screening process. These measures are helping to ensure that all aspects of our business are rigorously scrutinised for possible equality implications, and that we actively seek out ways to further promote equality and good relations.

Our business areas are working under tight budgetary constraints and we simply cannot afford to make decisions without first working through the possible impacts of our decisions on our customers, our staff and service users. We are committed to providing the leadership necessary to ensure that equality remains firmly at the core of our business.

We wish to thank all those organisations and individuals that have worked closely with us over this last year, and have helped us to continue to make good progress on a number of equality fronts.



Michelle Gildernew, MP MLA
Minister of Agriculture and
Rural Development



















Dr Malcolm McKibbin
Permanent Secretary
Department of Agriculture and
Rural Development

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Executive Summary

What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations and what outcomes were achieved?

Commitment to Statutory Duties

- The Department remains committed to its statutory equality duties and this report shows the steady progress DARD is continuing to make in implementing the equality and good relations duties. It also reflects the extent to which we have worked to ensure that equality issues are considered in all aspects of policy development and service delivery.
- Good progress has been made in developing the Department's first Evidence and Innovation Strategy. The Strategy will help DARD to build a more comprehensive and robust evidence base to underpin policy development, delivery and evaluation and thereby, ensure that it better meets the needs of rural people. Public consultation on the Strategy concluded on 12 September 2008, and we hope to publish the final version by the end of the calendar year.
- DARD has continued to build on the good relationships that already exist with a number of organisations representing equality groups, and during this reporting year has actively sought their expertise and assistance on a number of key issues e.g. during the development of a new equality screening process; hosting an equality event for all senior managers; and at various stages during the Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) of DARD Direct and the Rural Development Programme (2007- 2013).

Equality Steering Group (ESG)

- The Department's Equality Steering Group continues to meet every quarter and is chaired by the Permanent Secretary. Business areas across DARD are represented at each ESG meeting, and regular updates and progress towards equality targets are presented to DARD senior management.
- Guest speakers at ESG meetings during this reporting period have included Monica Wilson, CEO of Disability Action, Patrick Yu, Director of NICEM, and Felicity Houston, Commissioner for Public Appointments in NI.
- Each speaker has provided a valuable insight into the work of their organisation, outlined the key issues which affect under-represented groups and provided valuable suggestions to help us make our

services, policies and Boards more inclusive and accessible for all. Detailed minutes from each ESG meeting are circulated across DARD business areas for information and placed on our intranet site and Equality Branch's pages on the DARD intranet.

- Just outside this reporting year, Shannon Sickels and Roberta McLarnon of The Children's Participation Network (NI) also accepted invitations to address our June 2008 ESG meeting. They outlined the role of the Network and how best to consult and engage with children and young people to ensure that their needs and views are heard and, as appropriate factored into our decision making processes.

DARD Public Appointments

Speaking at our ESG meeting in March 2008, Felicity Houston, Commissioner for Public Appointments outlined that barriers to participation continue to exist for under-represented groups and that more needs to be done to make the public appointment process more appealing, flexible and accessible. She added that she was pleased to hear that DARD was currently reviewing its advertising arrangements and looked forward to hearing the outcome of this work.

- Eileen Mullan, course organiser of Belfast Metropolitan Collage's (BMC) 'Get on Board' course; (a 6-week programme specifically for individuals wishing to apply for public appointments) also spoke at the same ESG meeting and outlined some measures for DARD that may help encourage participation from under-represented groups. Following this meeting, DARD officials agreed to speak about our NDPB's to potential course participants on future sessions of the 'Get on Board' Course.
- DARD's Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and their Sponsor Branches are encouraged to regularly review and develop their procedures in line with current best practice from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (OCPANI) and Central Appointments Unit (CAU) and to target publicity material to reach under represented groups. Advertisements for DARD public appointment vacancies often include a welcoming statement to encourage under represented groups to apply.
- Central Management Branch hosted an equality information session in October 2007 for NDPB Sponsor Branch staff and guest speakers from the Equality Commission, Disability Action and Central Appointment's Unit gave valuable presentations outlining further

actions that could be considered. Equality Branch has also provided guidance on possible ways to help improve under-representation levels eg reviewing the accessibility of the appointments process; including Plain English wording of forms and selection criteria, consideration of the use of mailshots, translations and liaising with key organisations for their assistance.

DARD Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) Actions

- The Agriculture Wages Board (AWB) provides agricultural workers a rate of pay equivalent to and higher than those receiving the national minimum wage. The AWB also provides agricultural workers with more paid holidays than those receiving the national minimum wage. The AWB provides protection for all workers in agriculture including Section 75 groups. This has a positive impact on the rural community.
- A commitment has been given by **Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Association** (NIFHA) to increase female representation on the NIFHA Board to 2 by 2011, and to 3 by 2014. In addition, we aim to increase applications from females for positions on the Board to 30% by March 2011 and 40% over the next 3 years. Just outside this reporting period, a representative from Fisheries Division gave a presentation to the BMC's 'Get on Board' course participants to help encourage interest in DARD NDPB public appointments.
- The **Loughs Agency**, a public authority in its own right, works to promote inclusiveness across all equality categories under Section 75. The Agency also produces its Annual Report in both English and Irish.
- **Agric – Food and Bio-Sciences Institute (AFBI)** has a target in place, to increase the female membership of the AFBI Board. For future recruitment campaigns AFBI Sponsor Branch (ASB) and AFBI are committed to doing everything possible to seek to improve the levels of under-representation. For example, careful consideration will be given to the newspapers used for the placing of advertisements; to the format / content of adverts and for any language translations. ASB and AFBI will also engage closely with key organisations, such as Belfast Metropolitan College and key equality bodies for assistance.
- Food Policy Branch has revised the style and wording of newspaper advertisements for the **Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC)** vacancies to try and encourage more interest from under-represented groups.

- **Programme for Government, Priorities and Budget**
DARD introduced procedures in advance of 2007/08, whereby each spending proposal was required to be reviewed by the business area from an equality perspective. High Level Impact Assessments (HLIAs) were completed in respect of all spending proposals over £500K. For proposals under £500K business areas were required to provide an assurance that they had fully considered the equality impact of these budget changes and to retain appropriate records at branch level.
- As a consequence, each spending proposal submitted as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 (including all Efficiency Delivery Plans) and Public Expenditure In-Year Monitoring Rounds was subject to an equality review.
- This process has continued in 2008 /2009 with the added scrutiny in that the Departmental Board and Minister are formally advised of the summary of the identified equality impacts of spending proposals in the Public Expenditure In-Year Monitoring Rounds.

‘Equality is the Business’ Event January 2008

- This one-day event, hosted by the Minister provided an opportunity for all senior staff across DARD to talk directly to key Section 75 representatives about equality outcomes which are at the core of the Programme for Government, Investment Strategy (ISNI) and Budget proposals and what this means in practice for all those who use DARD’s services and facilities.
- This event also saw the formal launch of DARD’s new equality screening process. This process is now more robust, and requires business areas to examine equality issues much more closely than before and to back up decisions reached with supporting evidence.
- Speaking at the event the Minister underlined her commitment to equality, saying: “DARD has already a good track record in promoting equality of opportunity and in tackling the issues of disadvantage and social exclusion. Today is an opportunity for us to consider how we build on this success and plan for the future to ensure that equality remains at the fore in everything we do.”
- Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland said: “The Commission was pleased to be involved in today’s event and welcomes the proactive approach by the Department to their Section 75 duties”.

- Bronagh Hinds, Senior Research Fellow with the School of Governance, QUB who facilitated the event said: “A senior staff team that is committed to achieving results is crucial, and the initiative signals departmental efforts to ensure that equality is integrated more successfully in the future across all its business commitments.”
- Monica Wilson, Chief Executive of Disability Action said: “This event gives a strong indication of DARD's commitment to equality and human rights and we believe sends a message to other government departments.”

Disability Action

- In January 2008, following discussions with the Department, Disability Action have formally agreed to work with DARD over the next year or so, to help raise awareness of disability equality including the new duties.

NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP)

- The NIRDP (2007-2013) offers opportunities for the entire rural community - male and female, young and old, farmers and rural dwellers alike. The Programme consists of a wide range of funding measures under three main strategic headings or ‘Axes’.
- Axis 1 is aimed at improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors. Examples of support available under this axis are mentoring and training for farmers and their families; grants to help farmers keep up-to-date with the latest technologies and helping businesses improve their processes and marketing capabilities.
- Axis 2 is concerned with improving the environment and the countryside. Under this axis, grants are available to landowners who, for example, want to establish woodland forests or adapt their farming practices to improve biodiversity.
- Axis 3 helps to improve the quality of life in rural areas and could include projects offering training for rural women, helping farmers diversify into other businesses or encouraging tourism in the local area. The NIRDP has been designed to take account of the fact that the rural community is made up of more than just farmers, and this is reflected in the variety of support available.
- DARD is committed to ensuring that all rural dwellers can access support under the NIRDP as easily as possible. There are a number of new practices across the NIRDP designed to improve accessibility. For example, under Axis 2, the NI Countryside Management Scheme

features a paperless application process for the first time. Measures under Axis 1 will be grouped together and delivered by an external organisation, providing a 'one stop shop' for farmers and rural dwellers.

- The various documents produced across the Programme are checked to ensure that they are clear and readable and copies of all documents are provided in other languages and formats on request. An advertising campaign will be launched later this year, and will further raise the profile of the Programme to ensure that all rural dwellers know when and how to apply.

Local Action Groups (LAGs)

- Locally based delivery and community participation is key to the NIRD. By involving local people in developing funding strategies that address particular issues in their own areas, we will ensure that funds are used to best effect and to the maximum benefit for all rural dwellers. For example Axis 3 will be delivered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) working in partnership with local councils. These LAGs will be drawn from all sectors of the rural community, farmers and rural dwellers; elected representatives, rural businesses, community groups and young people. LAGs will play a crucial role in deciding what the priorities are for their local area and how funding is distributed. Involving local people in this way will give them a bigger say in how money is spent than ever before.

Interreg IIIA

- Rural Development Division also delivers the Interreg IIIA programme which is in a unique position to impact on the problems of peripherality of rural dwellers particularly in border areas; and on a cross-border basis. The programme will provide support for the development and implementation of Projects for cross border areas. One of the specific objectives of Interreg IIIA is that activities encourage participation by socially excluded, disadvantaged and minority communities.

Lifetime Opportunities – Anti-Poverty Strategy

- As part of the Lifetime Opportunities: Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for NI, DARD has allocated up to £10.4m for actions to help address rural poverty and social exclusion across the budget years 08/09-10/11.
- In order to develop an effective programme to target the key issues facing rural communities; the Department commissioned two pieces of work from rural stakeholders; and consulted with the Agriculture

and Rural Development (ARD) Committee and other government departments to help develop a framework of actions and activities to address rural poverty and social exclusion.

- The overall objective of this framework will be to provide mechanisms and support to those living in rural communities to identify and tackle anti-poverty and social exclusion in their areas; and the means to access the necessary tools and support to address these concerns in a sustainable manner. The outcome from this framework will be to contribute to the elimination of poverty in rural areas and ensure that all actions taken in rural areas are fully inclusive of the population.
- **Rivers Agency** – the continuation of sustainable rural watercourse maintenance by DARD Rivers Agency, following the Flood Management Policy review, represents a positive outcome for the rural community. Rivers Agency aims to ensure uniformity of treatment of drainage and is mindful that flooding is indiscriminate in its effects.

Policy Developments during 2007-2008

NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013

- The Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) 2007-2013 was approved by the European Commission in July 2007. The NIRDP Monitoring Committee is an integral element of the management of the programme and is responsible for overseeing its effective implementation. The NIRDP Monitoring Committee includes representation from economic and social partners, local authorities and other bodies representing civil society such as environmental organisations and Disability Action. It is chaired by DARD in its role as Managing Authority for the Programme.
- In November 2007, the NIRDP Monitoring Committee agreed to the establishment of an Equality and Good Relations sub-group to take a more detailed look at equality and good relations within the NIRDP. Terms of Reference for the sub-group were drafted in early 2008, and the sub-group held its first meeting in April 2008.
- The consultation period for the EQIA of the NIRDP (2007-2013) closed on Friday 2 November 2007. The consultation phase of the EQIA explored the impact that the NIRDP may have on Section 75 groups in compliance with the NI Act 1998. In all, 18 groups took part in pre-consultation discussions, and 14 written responses to the formal EQIA consultation document were also received. All comments received are available on the Department's website – www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations
- Rural Development Division has considered the responses received and is in the process of drafting its final report. This report will be published on DARD's website in late 2008. Ways to deal with possible inequalities in the NIRDP are also being addressed through the Equality and Good Relations Sub Group of the NIRDP Monitoring Committee.

Equality within Local Action Groups (LAGs)

- Axis 3 of the NIRDP will be delivered by new LAGs working in partnership with council clusters. LAGs will be responsible for developing a rural development strategy for their area in conjunction with their council cluster, issuing calls for applications for funding and assessing the eligibility of the applications received.

- There are 7 LAGs covering the geographical area of N Ireland. Membership of these LAGs has been ratified by DARD and signed off by the relevant lead council's Equality Officer as being the key contact of Section 75 groups in that area. The rural development strategy, developed by the council cluster and LAG in partnership, must also be signed off by the lead council's Equality Officer to ensure that no Section 75 groupings are unfairly disadvantaged. LAGs and council clusters are required to record their approach to these issues in a written and publicly available document.

Rural Policy

- The roles of rural champion were developed in order to promote the equality of rural areas with urban areas. A pre-consultation event was held in July 2008 with S75 groups and rural stakeholders to provide detail on rural champion proposals and seek early views. All S75 groups have received details of the consultation and were made aware of the proposed consultation roadshow during September-October 2008. Guidance on the location and timings of these roadshows was sought from the Rural Community Network (RCN) and the Ulster Farmer's Union (UFU).

Forest Service

- Forest Service has continued to roll out its signage strategy, with improved user-friendly signage now in place at 10 of its most popular forest sites. Way-marked trails have been installed at two forests (Drumcairne and Rostrevor) and two forest parks (Tollymore and Glenariff). Further way-marked trails, with appropriate signage, will be installed by 2010. Trails are categorised according to their accessibility, and visual and tactile signs provide information to enable visitors to make an informed decision about which trail to follow. In addition, Forest Service helps to underpin up to 1000 rural jobs, through the management of forests and the supply of timber to local sawmills.
- The proposed Forestry Bill has been equality screened. Forest Service is also developing a Recreation and Social Use Strategy and intends to conduct an EQIA. A Consultative Forum of main stakeholders (including Disability Action) has been set up to take views and will also take views from children and young people.

Evidence and Innovation Strategy

- Public consultation on the first DARD Evidence and Innovation Strategy concluded on 12 September and we hope to publish the final version by the end of the calendar year. The detail of DARD's research requirements will be set out in a series of underlying research programmes and sub-programmes to be developed in the early years of the Strategy, starting with the areas of renewable energy, sustainable environment and rural development.
- The need for a more robust and comprehensive evidence base for promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion in rural areas is identified in both Aim 2 of the DARD Strategy (strengthens the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas) and under the cross-cutting theme of socio-economic research. Suitable programmes and sub-programmes will be drawn up in due course.

Review of Less Favoured Areas (LFAs)

- DARD is currently reviewing the support arrangements for LFA areas. The Department provides £22m per annum of area-based payments to support LFAs, which cover approximately 70% of the agricultural area here.
- During the year DARD officials conducted a series of bilateral evidence gathering meetings to seek views from key stakeholders, including, among others the Ulster Farmers Union, the NI Rural Women's Network, the National Trust, the NI Agricultural Producers Association, RCN, the Rural Development Council and a range of environmental groups.
- A meeting of all interested parties was held in December 2007 to discuss the issues arising from the evidence gathering phase and to discuss proposals for options on the way forward. Following this meeting, stakeholders submitted additional comments to the Department. The findings of the review and options for the Department's future support arrangements for LFAs will issue for public consultation in 2008 /2009. This will contain an assessment of the equality considerations of each option.

Service Developments during 2007-2008

DARD Direct

- DARD Direct is the Department's new service delivery model, which aims to offer customers more choice of how, when and where they access DARD's services, whilst ensuring that the majority of their enquiries are satisfactorily resolved at the first point of contact. A screening exercise on the DARD Direct proposal in line with DARD's Equality and Human Rights obligations indicated that a full EQIA was necessary.
- Following advice from Equality Branch, a pre-consultation exercise was carried out with a range of stakeholders to examine the likely impacts and issues related to rolling out DARD Direct. This exercise, included meeting with 7 organisations representing both Section 75 groups and customers and 3 customer focus groups. A total of 50 staff attended one of 8 staff focus groups and a further 123 staff responded to a staff survey.
- The feedback from the pre-consultation exercise was used to help shape the content of the EQIA consultation document. Following approval by the Minister and the NI Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, the public consultation on the DARD Direct proposals started on 7 July for a 9 week period. DARD pro-actively sought feedback from its stakeholders, and the consultation was advertised in the 3 main N Ireland daily newspapers and also the 3 main farming papers. Members of the NI Assembly were advised about the consultation exercise and 110 stakeholder organisations contacted and invited to provide feedback. Meetings were undertaken with 12 of the key stakeholder organisations and DARD staff were informed of the consultation and invited to provide comments and feedback.

Written Communications

- DARD recently launched a Written Communications project which aims to improve the way we write to our customers; provide consistent and effective information in Plain English. Staff have received a copy of the new guidance and standards, and 600 staff have been trained in the use of Plain English. New staff and staff changing posts will also receive training in the future. A pilot was carried out with Veterinary Service to find a best practice process for external written communications. The best practice process is now being rolled out across DARD.

Telephony project

- This project aims to increase the accessibility of DARD services to our customers by allowing farmers to register the births and deaths of their animals over the telephone, rather than completing paperwork and hand delivering or posting the documentation. During the pilot phase which ran in County Fermanagh, 20% of cattle registrations were made over the telephone, and feedback so far has been largely positive. Customers have said its “quicker and easier”. All surveyed said that they would use the service again. The results of the evaluation are under consideration, and the progression to Economic Appraisal will help us make decisions on how best to provide service to our customers.

CAFRE - DARD College

- During the reporting year the Department’s College CAFRE has held 2 training courses for farmers and farm managers covering the various requirements for the employment of migrant workers. These courses were held in the spring and autumn of 2007 in North Down and Armagh and were attended by 15 farmers either employing or planning to employ migrant workers. The North Down course was organised for dairy farmers, while the course in Armagh was for mushroom growers and apple producers.
- Further training has also been organised for the 2008 /09 year, for Polish workers employed on pig farms across N Ireland. This course will focus on sow production including gilt management, service and insemination as well as farrowing house routines. Management of the newly weaned and growing pig up to slaughter will also be discussed. The course will be delivered by a Polish national with experience in Pig management.
- For such courses or in situations where individual migrant workers apply for a particular course, CAFRE will organise an interpreter, if required, to ensure any language barriers are overcome.

Veterinary Service

- Veterinary Service has been working closely as a partner in the DARD Direct development to ensure that the overall customer service improvement programme is successful. Veterinary Service is also working to develop a range of language translations of the information available at our ports and airports to ensure that new arrivals are made aware of what they can and cannot import.

DARD Disability Forum

- DARD's Disability Forum was launched in 2002, and aims to provide an opportunity for staff with disabilities to have a voice, to develop their confidence and to express their views directly to decision makers across the Department. Forum members are encouraged to play an active role in awareness raising activities that are important issues for staff.
- In December 2007 a new disability site was launched within the main DARD intranet site. This site will help to highlight and raise awareness of disability issues that can impact on our staff, and provide a useful source of information for all staff and managers to access.
- A review of the Forum's work to date was completed during this reporting year. The outcomes from this exercise resulted in several recommendations. These were to :-
 - Develop a dedicated disability website to help raise awareness and provide a means for Forum members to engage with others.
 - Re-launch the Forum to encourage additional participation by disabled staff and new office bearers
 - Revise TOR to take account of many new developments and to review regularly
- The Disability Forum was relaunched at an event in May 2008 in Disability Action's headquarters in Belfast. DARD Minister Michelle Gildernew made the opening address, and Monica Wilson, CEO of Disability Action gave the keynote presentation to DARD senior managers present at the event. DARD's HR Director launched the Department's new Diversity Strategy for staff at this event.

Publications

- The Department has an in-house magazine, 'Groundwork' which issues quarterly to every member of staff. The magazine has 4 pages reserved for equality / disability issues and awareness-raising articles are included in each issue e.g. in relation to sexual orientation, race and cultural celebrations.
- The March 2008 edition of Groundwork included an article on the DARD 'Equality is our Business' event held in January for all senior staff. This article also helped to raise awareness about the launch of a new equality screening process with our own staff.
- All Departmental publications can be made available in large type, audio cassette or a language other than English, if requested.

- During this last reporting year CAFRE has produced a leaflet in an Easy Read format to help promote and publicise its student support services.
- Rural Development staff are using **podcasts** to publicise the impact of a cross-border rural villages project delivered in the East Border Region area. A member of the RDD Interreg IIIA team has recorded a contribution to a podcast that is now available to download from a number of websites. The project involves 8 council areas, which includes Louth and Monaghan Councils.
- The £1m 'Promoting Pride in Our Rural Villages' project has been funded through the EU Interreg IIIA Programme implemented by RDD officers along with colleagues from Border Action. The project focuses on the regeneration of rural villages making them more attractive for locals and visitors alike.

Training

- As part of the training needs analysis for the DARD Direct project, Customer Service training, including Disability Discrimination Act awareness was highlighted as essential for all staff. The aim of this training was to increase knowledge and provide frontline service providers with an introduction to disability awareness. This was completed by defining disability and giving participants the opportunity to identify, explore and address the issues for people with disabilities in accessing goods, facilities and services. Almost 100 DARD staff from Fermanagh / Tyrone areas have attended this training to date, and it is planned that all other DARD Direct staff will also attend this training in the future.
- A series of customer service training under the NI Tourist Board's Welcome Host and Welcome Host Plus training has also been provided to staff in DARD Direct offices. In addition, Plain English training has also been delivered to staff across the Department.
- During this last year CAFRE has hosted a Deaf Awareness training event for its Education Staff. This was attended by six key education staff who were involved in delivery to a hearing impaired student. This training is tailored to the specific needs of the students concerned and is organised when hearing impaired students enrol at CAFRE. Further training will be therefore be organised as further students with hearing impairments are enrolled on CAFRE programmes.

- Training is also planned for 08/09 for CAFRE Supply instructors in working with trainees / students with dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia.

Website services

- The DARD website now has several linked pages under the 'Alternative Formats' heading in other languages, and during the year we increased this provision to a total of eleven languages. Web visitors can request information from the Department in a range of languages or different formats. The Department will continue to review the language provision it provides for customers and, as necessary, will consider adding additional language translations onto its website.
- Over this last year, the Department's Information Management Branch (IMB) has run several workshops for web staff with a focus on improving accessibility issues. Between June 2007 and June 2008 there were 6 website contributor workshops held and attended by 60 staff from DARD business areas. Trained Content Authors and Approvers were also invited to attend the website contributor workshops to increase their knowledge in web communication and content, contributor support and developing accessibility content competitiveness. These dedicated web courses promote easy access to the websites for all groups and also help raise awareness of issues faced by our disabled customers.
- The DARD web presence is produced according to the W3C Accessibility Standards in conjunction with the DARD Web Publication Policy. The overall content accessibility of the DARD website is reviewed each month. During the period July 2007 to June 2008 the average accessibility rating of the DARD website was 94.6%.
- Business areas across DARD pro-actively publish key information in other languages; for instance Forest Service has produced information about recreation activities for web visitors in four languages, and the Agricultural Wages Board's web-page on the DARD website provides key information in Polish, Russian and Portuguese.
- 'Our Customer Service Standards' booklet sets out the core standards of services that customers can expect from us, how we will treat them, and what we expect from them as customers. It also tells customers what to do if things go wrong, and how to seek assistance. This booklet is currently available for downloading from our website in large print and in 11 other languages – Polish, Portuguese, Cantonese, Czech, Latvian, Lithuanian, Mandarin, Russian, Slovak, Irish and Ulster-Scots.

- The booklet is also available on DARDs intranet site for staff to quickly access and to print off if a customer calls into one of our public offices and requests a copy. 'Our Complaints Procedure' leaflet tells customers what to do if they are unhappy with the quality of our service. This leaflet is also available for downloading from the website, and available in the same 11 languages.

Rural Development Programme - Funded Projects

- Over this reporting period the last RDP (2000-2006) funded a wide range of projects in rural areas which have had a significant impact on the lives and well being of many groups of people as outlined below:-
- Disability Tourism Training Programme (Faughan Valley Area-Based Programme). This project has provided training for 10 Tourism Practitioners on best consultation and design practice in developing projects that are accessible for people who have disabilities or are elderly. The project has also provided funding for 9 members of the Professional Angling Councils Instructors Network in identifying suitable access and other infrastructure for people with disabilities wishing to use the facilities for angling, walking, cycling or other recreational activities.
- 'Laying the Foundations' project delivered by Clones Erne East Partnership, funded under the Interreg IIIA Programme. The project aims to develop the image and identity of the area for both residents and visitors to enhance cross border interactions and inclusion both economically and socially; and to develop economic stability and opportunity. One of the key actions of the Partnership was to establish a Shadow Youth partnership to help improve citizenship and to give the young people of Clones Erne East area a voice in local government.

NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)

- The Rural Development Programme 2000 - 2006 provided funding for a Rural Women's Network; and as a result the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) was established in August 2006. Since then, NIRWN has been working to complement the work of existing rural women's networks, and to develop the women's sector, especially those areas of low capacity, such as Counties Antrim and Down. It will also act as an advocate for rural women's issues to ensure that their voice is heard in local and central government.
- NIRWN has also undertaken policy work which will enhance the position of rural women, taken on an advocacy and lobbying role; and supported the development of new women's groups in gap areas and worked to increase the number of women on boards and other decision-making bodies in rural areas.

- NIRWN has also provided information and networking opportunities for rural women; engaged with a wide spectrum of women right across rural areas and played an active role during the pre-consultation informal meeting stages of the LFA Review process. Those involved welcomed the opportunity to hear what the Department was planning to do, first hand.

Race and Ethnic Minorities

- Rural areas are becoming increasingly diverse, populated more frequently by communities who are no longer simply concentrated in urban areas. There are now significant numbers of migrant workers within farming and fishing industries and those employed in food production plants, many of whom also have families living in rural areas.
- Training Branch, in conjunction with Veterinary Service is working towards the delivery of a short series of Religious Diversity workshops to the Portal Inspection teams. These staff are stationed at all local airports and ports and their role is to ensure that effective import controls in relation to food stuff, plants, etc are maintained and they have the authority to stop, search and question passengers arriving here.
- Portal staff are now faced with dealing with passengers arriving from over 80 different countries, representing a wide variety of cultural and economic backgrounds. It is important and appropriate that these staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to handle situations where they may need to enforce EU Regulations on people with different levels of speaking and understanding English; and of different religions and faiths. A DARD representative attends the Migrant Workers Thematic sub-group meetings to keep abreast of the issues affecting migrant workers.
- The proposed training for Vet Service staff will be delivered in late 2008 and will cover a range of issues including - the changing demographics, belief systems and faiths in UK; ways to build good relations with people of different faiths and religious beliefs in the workplace and the practical considerations too eg food, holidays, dress, prayer.
- During the reporting year the Department's College, CAFRE has held 2 training courses for farmers and farm managers covering the various requirements for the employment of migrant workers. These courses were held in the spring and autumn of 2007 in North Down and Armagh and were attended by 15 farmers either employing or

planning to employ migrant workers. The North Down course was organised for dairy farmers, while the course in Armagh was for mushroom growers and apple producers. Further training has also been organised for the 2008 /09 year, for Polish workers employed on pig farms across N Ireland. This course will focus on sow production including gilt management, service and insemination as well as farrowing house routines. Management of the newly weaned and growing pig up to slaughter will also be discussed. The course will be delivered by a Polish national with experience in Pig management. For such courses or in situations where individual migrant workers apply for a particular course, CAFRE will organise an interpreter, if required to ensure any language barriers are overcome.

- In a recent magazine article for staff, Vet Service has highlighted some of the key issues that need to be considered in relation to migrant workers working in meat plants eg health and safety issues. The article helped explain to staff about the language barriers that exist, ways to help overcome these issues and it also provided an outline of the work being taken forward by the Veterinary Public Health Unit to improve good relations within meat plants.

Balmoral Show 2008

- DARD is keen to encourage more ethnic minority members of the public, potential customers and migrant workers to visit the Balmoral Show and other key DARD related events. For this year's Show, (which was held just outside of this reporting period in May 08) we made arrangements to translate the advert, flyer and programme of events into Polish, Portuguese, Cantonese, Lithuanian, Latvian, Russian as well as Irish and Ulster-Scots. We made the information and flyers available to all key language bodies and key ethnic minority and equality contacts for onward circulation to those employers and organisations most likely to have foreign nationals and migrant workers within their workforce. We also encouraged disabled organisations / individuals to consider attending Balmoral Show 2008. We contacted several key organisations and provided assistance to encourage their members to consider attending; feedback was very positive.

What are the main initiatives planned in the coming year to ensure the authority improves outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75?

Leadership – Equality Steering Group

- The Equality Steering Group, which the Permanent Secretary chairs, will continue to meet quarterly. We plan to continue inviting key equality representatives to attend these meetings and to address ESG members. Feedback has indicated that these presentations are very valuable for our senior managers who are able to hear first hand the main issues and concerns of specific groups.

Strategic Planning / Corporate Plans

- The Department's 5 year Strategic Plan, which clearly demonstrates the organisation's commitment to equality, is cascaded throughout the various Divisions maintaining the same themes down to individual personal performance agreements.

DARD Disability Action Plan 2007-2010

- DARD published its Disability Action Plan in August 2007 setting out the key actions we propose to take over the next 3 years to meet our obligations under the new Disability Duties. We plan to review our progress of the actions and targets set out in the Plan and to publish an updated version.

Equality E-Zine

- Equality Branch plans to launch an electronic newssheet over the coming months and to use this as a way of keeping policy makers up-to-date about a wide range of equality development and latest news. This e-zine will also be placed on the intranet site.

Accessibility Review of Website

- IMB Web Unit recently produced two procedural manuals, the Web Contributors Manual and the Web Administrator's manual. Both manuals are designed to act as an aid memoire for users to ensure accessibility standards continue to be met. They are living documents and will be updated as and when necessary. This should ensure that a culture of best practice is adhered to for producing web pages to W3C and NICS standards.
- The DARD website will be tested for accessibility by a group of disabled volunteers. This exercise is being organised in conjunction with Disability Action and will take place as soon as a date can be agreed. Feedback will provide insight into any problems disabled

customers may encounter when accessing the information on our website.

NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) 2007 - 2013

- Preparation for the delivery of the NIRDP 2007-2013 is well advanced with some measures already open for application with the remainder opening in the near future. Local Action Groups (LAGs) who will deliver the Axis 3 measures, have submitted their rural development strategies to the Department for assessment. Once these are approved, LAGs will issue calls for funding and determine the eligibility of applications. LAG members will receive training on equality and good relations issues; delivered by the Rural Network for Northern Ireland.

NI RDP Monitoring Committee

- The NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) Monitoring Committee will meet on a regular basis, generally two or three times a year to review the progress made towards achieving programme targets. It will consider the draft annual reports before they are submitted to the European Commission in June of each year. It will also consider any proposals to amend the content of the programme, before they are submitted to the European Commission.
- As noted earlier in the report, the NIRDP Monitoring Committee has established an Equality and Good Relations Sub-Group to look in more detail at equality issues across the programme. DARD as the programme's Managing Authority, is a member of the sub-group. DARD officials also attend the meetings on a regular basis to advise sub-group members on specific work areas. In the 2008 /2009 year, the sub-group will finalise the terms of reference, membership and agree an action plan for the short to medium term.

Rural Champion and Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion

- DARD will undertake Equality Screening of the Rural Champion policy prior to public consultation. There will also be equality screening of the Anti-Poverty and Social exclusion Framework, of which Rural Childcare forms an element.

DARD Direct

- The public consultation phase of the EQIA on the roll-out of DARD Direct ran for 9 weeks, ie from 7 July until 5 September 2008. All responses received have been published on the DARD internet and have been taken into full consideration in the final decisions on the location of DARD Direct offices. Publication of the final EQIA will take place after all responses have been considered, and decisions made by the DARD Minister and the NI Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development Committee.
- We propose to publish the final EQIA in late December 2008, and once decisions have been made to roll out the DARD Direct model. It is expected that there will be benefits for farmers and rural dwellers with improved accessibility to DARD services; better informed staff and more efficient and joined up services.

DARD Disability Forum

- A new committee for the Disability Forum was established in May 2008, and the new committee has redefined the terms of reference for the Forum. A programme of awareness raising and support for staff with disabilities is planned for the year ahead.

Disability Exhibition June 2008

- Disability Action hosted a major Disability Exhibition in June, and DARD purchased a stand at this 2-day event. This provided a useful opportunity to engage with disabled people and disability service providers. DARD staff and Forum members manned the stand for 2 full days. Useful contacts made / networking opportunity over 100 organisations represented.

Forestry Act and Recreation Strategy

- Forest Service is developing a Forestry Bill to replace the Forestry Act (NI) 1953. The intention is to have a modern Act that will enable Forest Service to meet its responsibilities and commitments to a wide range of forest users and customers. At the same time we will be preparing a new Recreation Strategy which will provide a framework within which recreation and social use of forests can be taken forward.
- Forest Service is about to commence an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of the proposed sections of the new Forestry Bill and Recreation Strategy. This will cover the three principal strands of its work; economic, environmental and social / recreation. It is expected that the equality assessment work will be completed by March 2009, allowing the Bill to be introduced to the Assembly and a new Recreation Strategy to be published.

CAFRE and Rural Services

Over the coming year, CAFRE has planned further disability access improvements at its campus at Loughry in Cookstown. This includes DDA compliant facilities within the student residential accommodation. This will improve access to facilities for students and / or visitors to Loughry Campus.

LFA Review and EQIA

- The findings of the review and options for the Department's future support arrangements for LFAs will issue for public consultation in late 2008. This will contain an assessment of the equality considerations of each option. Following the public consultation, a decision on future support for LFAs will be taken in 2009.

Veterinary Service

- Veterinary Service is planning to progress with translations of key information (leaflets, posters, signs etc) at ports and airports. This will include best practice advice from the GB Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and will also incorporate Plain English and key languages translations as appropriate.
- Veterinary Service is taking forward a range of initiatives in the coming year to help improve equality of service provision and accessibility issues for all our customers to enjoy. These are :-
 - Improving our service at ports and airports, translating important information for new arrivals into a wide range of languages
 - More use of Plain English in all our communications
 - Carrying out a review of our forms and publications to make them more user-friendly
 - Review of Veterinary Service intranet site to ensure that it is accessible and user-friendly
 - Promotion of equality, race, ethnic diversity among staff by publishing articles in our vetlink magazine and the DARD magazine 'Groundwork'.

Public Appointments

- **Loughs Agency** advertisements are placed in a variety of cross border community newspapers. The Agency actively pursues the guidelines contained within. Loughs Agency has a textphone service and provides translations upon request in a variety of languages. The Agency has a welcoming statement at the bottom of all their recruitment advertisements.
- **AFBI** has a target in place to increase the female membership of the AFBI Board. During future recruitment campaigns Sponsor Branch and AFBI will seek to increase female membership on the AFBI Board. The recommendations from the recent DARD Review will also be implemented. For example, careful consideration is to be given to the media used for advertising opportunities and the format / content of adverts. Engagement will be sought with organisations like Belfast Metropolitan College and equality bodies during the recruitment exercise.
- The **Agricultural Wages Board** intends to run a recruitment competition in January 2009 for vacancies on its Board. It is hoped to fill these posts in April 2009.
- **The Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC)** also has a target in place to increase female membership of the Board. To improve levels of representation, all posts are advertised widely with a welcoming statement for under-represented groups. Careful consideration is given to the content of the advertisement so as to make it attractive. It is placed on both the Department's and Central Appointment Unit's websites. In addition we write to all relevant industry bodies and other organisations including the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network to invite applications and encourage the putting forward of candidates, particularly women.

Please give examples of changes to policies or practices which have resulted in outcomes. If the change was a result of an EQIA please tick the appropriate box in column 3:

	Outline change in policy or practice which have resulted in outcomes	Tick if result of EQIA
Persons of different religious belief	•	
Persons of different political opinion	•	
Persons of different racial groups	•	
Persons of different age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The continued roll-out of a signage strategy by Forest Service is considered to have resulted in a positive outcome for children and young people and also for those who are older. • Extension of the EU School Milk Scheme to secondary school children for the 2008/09 school year means equality of treatment for all school children irrespective of age of type of school attended. 	
Persons with different marital status	•	
Persons of different sexual orientation	•	
Men and women generally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the Student Support Fund was updated to improve the accessibility of CAFRE programmes to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the 07/08 year this provided support to a student from a looked-after background and a further student in severe financial hardship. 	
Persons with and without a disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The continued roll-out of a signage strategy by Forest Service is considered to have resulted in a positive accessibility outcome for people who have a mobility difficulty or a disability. • Action has been taken to ensure that learners across all CAFRE 	

	campuses are made aware of the support available to those with learning needs or medical conditions or disabilities	
Persons with and without dependants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•	

Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

Outline evidence of progress made in developing and meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2007-08.

- The Department's commitment to the statutory equality duties was made clear in its new Strategic Plan for 2006-2011. This Plan outlines the Department's vision, aim and role over a 5 year time frame; focuses on 5 key goals and sets out a series of strategic objectives and key actions which should lead to change and measurable success.
- Corporate Policy Division's Business Plan includes confirmation that the Department is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations. Objectives and targets specifically relating to equality issues and the statutory duties have been incorporated into the Personal Performance Plans of those officials in Equality Branch directly responsible for overseeing Departmental compliance with the duties.

NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP)

- DARD is committed to building on this in the next phase, and in a more strategic manner. This will include a communication programme to ensure that the NIRDP is promoted and made accessible to all equality groups; a programme of training for key players involved with delivery; equality screening of local strategies and more robust monitoring and evaluation.
- An advertising campaign for the NIRDP is being produced and will commence in late 2008. The advertising will generate awareness of the Programme, explain its benefits and encourage applications. The campaign will comprise of television, radio and print advertising. The campaign will be publicised as widely as possible to encourage applications from previously under-represented groups. Documents produced for the Programme will be as accessible and user-friendly as possible; and a range of formats and language translations will be available on request.

Section 2: Screening

Please provide an update of new/proposed/revised policies screened during the year.

Title of policy subject to screening	Was the <u>F</u> ull Screening Report or the <u>R</u> esult of initial screening issued for consultation? <i>Please enter <u>F</u> or <u>R</u></i>	Was initial screening decision changed following consultation? <u>Yes/No</u>	Is policy being subject to EQIA? <u>Yes/No</u> ? If yes indicate year for assessment.
Agricultural and Forestry Marketing Development Grant Regs (NI) 2007	*		No
Agricultural and Forestry Processing and Marketing Grant Regulations (NI) 2007	*		
DARD Direct	R	No	Yes 2008
Milk and Milk Product (Pupils in Educational Establishments) (Amendment) Regs (NI) 2007	*		No
The Less Favoured Areas Compensatory Allowances Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008	*		No
The Common Agricultural Policy Single Farm Payment and Support Schemes (Amendment) Regulations 2008	*		No
Commission proposal to increase milk quotas by 2% from 1 April 2008	*		No
Dairy Produce Quotas (Amendment) Regs (NI) 2008	*		No
Implementation of Council Directive 2006/88/EC on animal health requirements for aquaculture animals and products thereof and the prevention and control of certain diseases in aquatic animals in NI.	*		No
The Plant Health (Amendment) Order (NI) 2007	R	No	No
Plant Protection Products (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007	R	No	

The Plant Health (<i>Phytophthora ramorum</i>) (Amendment No 2) Order (NI) 2007	R	No	No
The Plant Health (Import Inspection Fees) (Amendment) Regs (NI) 2008	*		No
The Potatoes Originating in Egypt (Amendment) Regs (NI) 2008	*		No
The Bee Diseases and Pests Control Order (Northern Ireland) 2007	R	No	No
Prohibition of Sea Fishing in Non-Disturbance Zones in Strangford Lough	R	No decision taken yet following consultation	No – do not anticipate need to go to full EQIA
Olive Oil (Amendment) Regs (NI) 2008	*		
The Agriculture (Student fees) (Amendment) Regulations (northern Ireland) 2007	R	No	No
Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Crops, Food and Feeding Stuffs) (Amendment Regulations (NI) 2006	R	No	No
Transport of Animals (C & D)	R	No	No
OFFC Regulations (NI) 2007	R	No	No
Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) Regulations (NI) 2007	R	No	No
The Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Fishing) (Amendment) Regulations	R	No	No
The Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007	R	No	No
The Mussels (Prohibition of Fishing) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2007	*		No
Olive Oil (Marketing Standards) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008	*		No
The Seed Potatoes (Crop Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008	*		No

Proposed statutory notification arrangements for imported seed potatoes	*		No
Proposed implementation of European Commission Directive 2007/33/EC on control measures for potato cyst nematode.	*		No
The Plant Health (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008	*		No
The Plant Health (Import Inspection Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008	*		No
Seeds (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (NI) 2008	*		No
Plant Protection Products (Amendment) (Regulations) (NI) 2008	*		No

*** Consultation on these screening outcomes underway**

Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

Please provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2007/08, stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities and an indicative EQIA timetable for 2008-09.

EQIA Timetable – April 2007- Mar 08

Title of Policy EQIA	EQIA Stage at end March 08 (Steps 1-6)	Outline adjustments to policy intended to benefit individuals, and the relevant Section 75 categories due to be affected.
NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (NIRDP)	Step 6	
DARD Direct	Step 1 completed	Step 2 partially undertaken through pre-consultation exercise

Where the EQIA timetable for 2007/08 (as detailed in the previous annual S75 progress report to the Commission) has not been met, please provide details of the factors responsible for delay and details of the timetable for re-scheduling the EQIA/s in question. (Enter text below)

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2007- March 2008

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased

2008-09 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2008 – March 2009	Existing or New policy?	Please indicate expected timescale of Decision Making stage i.e. Stage 6
Forestry Recreation Strategy	new	March 2009
Legislation to transpose EU Floods Directive	new	
Review of Support Arrangements for Less Favoured Areas in Northern Ireland	Existing	2009/10

Section 4: Training

Please outline training provision during the year associated with the Section 75 Duties/Equality Scheme requirements including types of training provision, and conclusions from any training evaluations.

- A total of 15 staff attended Equality Agenda training courses delivered by the Centre of Applied Learning (CAL) over this last year. This included EQIA (3 staff), Consultation process (5 staff) and screening policies (7 staff). Branches within Service Delivery Group have also organised Plain English and Deaf Awareness training for their staff.
- We are currently reviewing our provision of Section 75 training for staff, and are considering ways to develop more of a business specific approach for DARD staff. With a number of EQIAs being progressed and others to follow over the next financial year, we are proposing to deliver business specific training using in-house and external expertise to facilitate a series of workshops and / or screening clinics to improve staff awareness and to enable them to work through issues and problem-solve in groups.
- During the reporting year, diversity training has been provided for 219 staff, and a further 50 staff attended training on understanding Good Relations and Bullying at Work. In early 2008 we also trained 15 Harassment Contact Officers to deal with initial contacts by members of staff experiencing difficulties in their workplace. Training includes a focus on conflict resolution and mediation skills. Future diversity training for DARD staff will, in future be provided by the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL). CAL will also provide induction Diversity Awareness training for all new NICS staff, and will undertake a rolling programme of refresher training courses for all staff. Fisheries and Rural Policy staff involved in communication with customers have received Plain English training.
- Veterinary Service took part in the Plain English training as part of DARD's Customer Service Improvement Programme during the year. Initial feedback is that the training was very well received as clear evidence of DARD's commitment to improving staff skills in this area and a practical step towards changing our behaviours and culture. Veterinary Service is now working closely with Technical Promotions Branch to review priority documents and forms for customers.

Section 5: Communication

Please outline how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the Section 75 Duties during the year and evidence of the impact / success of such activities.

- Externally the Department continues to promote equality of opportunity and good relations through its Corporate Business Plans, publication of progress reports, in hard copy and on the internet; and email circulation of equality consultation documents to its Section 75 consultees.
- DARD also provides advance notification to Section 75 groups every 6 months about forthcoming consultations and asks them to advise of any documents they would like to receive. Consultation documents are placed on the Department's website, and EQIAs are advertised in the main daily newspapers.
- Internally we communicate progress via the email system, by placing updates on intranet sites, into the content of training courses, the business planning process and through personal performance agreements with members of staff. In addition, the Department's in-house magazine which issues every 3 months, is used to keep staff updated on various equality developments.
- During the last year a wide range of equality related material has been made available to Divisions such as – Equality Commission publications, various equality research reports and guidance on producing alternative formats and language translations.
- The Department's Equality Steering Group, which is chaired by the Permanent Secretary and includes senior managers from each business area, met on 4 occasions during 2007 / 08. Updates on progress are provided at each of these meetings, and the Minister and Departmental Board are regularly kept informed of progress and issues arising after each meeting. Minutes of these meetings are placed on Equality Branch's pages on the DARD Intranet.

Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis

Please outline any systems that were established during the year to supplement available statistical and qualitative research, or any research undertaken / commissioned to obtain information on the needs and experiences of individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75.

Please outline any use of the Commission's Section 75 Monitoring Guide.

CAFRE

- On an on-going basis, CAFRE undertakes equality monitoring of participants on its Further and Higher education programmes, industry training programmes and technology transfer events. This monitoring is completed on a voluntary basis and the information used to enable equality reports to be compiled on programme uptake / participation by the various Section 75 groups. Data on the participation by Section 75 Groups on different programmes, for example, agri-environment training programmes has been provided to other DARD Divisions to inform programme developments.

RDP 2000-2006

- Rural Development Division has systems in place to monitor the Section 75 impacts of projects under this Programme. Equality monitoring forms are sent out to project promoters for distribution to end beneficiaries. Although completion of these forms is voluntary, project promoters have a duty to encourage recipients to complete them. NISRA then collates the returns and provides a report to DARD at least twice a year. The report details the response rates across the various programmes (BSP, Interreg, Leader etc) and an analysis of the Section 75 groups covered by the programme.

NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013

- Similar monitoring arrangements are being put in place for the NIRDP. Full guidance on the importance of this type of monitoring will be given to all delivery agents.
- During May 2007, we held a number of pre-consultation meetings with key representatives of equality organisations about the EQIA for the NIRDP. This resulted in significant evidence on the realities of living in rural areas against each Section 75 group. This quantitative assessment was fully reflected in the EQIA and made an excellent contribution to the formal consultation debate.

- As part of the pre-consultation exercise, DARD met with 3 key Section 75 representative organisations in late 2007 to establish key issues that might need to be addressed in the implementation of DARD Direct. The public consultation phase of the exercise has entailed substantial engagement with equality organisations / representatives. DARD has also sought meetings with 20 key groups during this phase, 10 of which represent the specific interests of the equality sector.
- Education and Finance Branch will be introducing an equality monitoring system during the 2008 / 2009 academic year. This will provide Section 75 information on DARD funding awarded to students undertaking further, higher and post graduate levels of education.

Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

Please provide details of any initiatives/steps taken during the year, including take up, to improve access to services including provision of information in accessible formats.

- **Veterinary Service** participated in the DARD-wide programme of Plain English training. The training was for all staff between Staff Officer and Grade 7 grades, and was well received as a practical contribution to help simplify and improve our communications. We have been working with Technical Promotions Branch to improve targeted publications / forms and this will be on-going.
- Portal Section continue to work with Equality Branch in relation to providing key information in a range of key languages at ports and airports. Information on best practice was sought from DEFRA and this will also be used to inform our work. During the year, there was an increased emphasis on maintaining N Ireland's epizootic 'disease free' status, and for the first time, Veterinary Service introduced an electronic information screen at Stena's Belfast premises. This has provided a valuable and accessible way to communicate directly to Stena passengers.
- During the last year Veterinary Service took steps to deal with a rise in Brucellosis in local hot spot areas. For the first time, groups from local areas have been brought together to provide comments on how information in leaflets will be communicated to others, and to be involved in the decision making process. The farmers liaison groups were progressed through the regional brucellosis meetings; although comprised of volunteers, they are open to all members of the community. The groups have provided feedback on some communication initiatives and have highlighted possible barriers to communication. Some suggestions made by the groups on disease control initiatives are being explored, however, the groups themselves are at a formative stage.
- CAFRE has produced a leaflet annually to inform students about the support and assistance available to them, for example, support funds, disabled students allowance, care call, while studying at CAFRE. Information on student support services has also been made available on the CAFRE student intranet and through briefings that have taken place as part of student induction. Specialist software, Text help has been made available at each CAFRE campus to improve IT accessibility.

- 'Our Customer Service Standards' booklet is currently available for downloading from the DARD website in 11 other languages – Polish, Portuguese, Cantonese, Czech, Latvian, Lithuanian, Mandarin, Russian, Slovak, Irish and Ulster-Scots. It is also available in these formats on our intranet site so if a customer calls into one of our public offices, a member of staff can quickly print it off for them there and then. 'Our Complaints procedure' leaflet is also available for downloading from our website and intranet and is available in the same 11 languages listed above.
- All documents produced for the Rural Development Programme are checked for Plain English and are available, on request; in alternative formats and languages.

Section 8: Complaints

Identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:

- **received and resolved by the authority (including how this achieved);**
 - **which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;**
 - **which were referred to the Equality Commission.**
-
- **The Department has received no Section 75 complaints during the year and referred no Section 75 complaints to the Commission.**

Section 9: Consultation and Engagement

Q Provide details of the measures taken to enhance the level of engagement with individuals and representative groups during the year.

- DARD has continued to build on the good relationships that already exist with a number of organisations representing equality and under-represented groups; and during this reporting year has actively sought their advice and guidance on a number of key issues e.g. enhancing the accessibility, minority language provision and usability of DARD's website; development of our Disability Action Plan, and during key consultation exercises.
- During this reporting year DARD has carried out informal pre-consultation with a wide range of equality groups across all Section 75 categories. This has made a huge difference in helping equality groups understand the business of the Department, what DARD services are available to them, and what funding opportunities are available. In addition to the valuable information we gathered, this engagement process has also helped to reach groups with whom we previously had limited contact, including representatives for older people, ethnic minorities and people of different sexual orientation.
- In addition, this process has helped us establish better and wider working relationships with some groups we had previously worked with, such as groups representing those with disabilities, and those working with children and young people. We will also now take forward new ideas about how to engage children and young people directly, thanks to the Children NI Project, and the Children in NI Participation Network.
- In January, the Minister hosted a major equality event for all of our senior staff, and also launched a new evidence-based equality screening process. At this event, both the DARD Minister and Permanent Secretary stressed their commitment to equality as being a core part of the Department's business.
- Bronagh Hinds, Senior Fellow, Institute of Governance, QUB was both guest speaker and facilitator at this event. Other speakers included representatives from Equality Commission, Committee on Administrative Justice (CAJ), and Disability Action.
- In January 2008, Disability Action agreed to work with DARD to help promote disability issues and to provide on-going support and advice over the coming year.

- The Department continues to provide advance notice of forthcoming consultation exercises to those on the Department's Section 75 contact list. We also provide a reply slip and return envelope on which respondents can indicate their preference for receiving the documents in a range of alternative formats including large print, Braille, disc, audiocassette and a language other than English.
- Veterinary Service is represented on the Department's Equality Steering group and our officers have attended all quarterly meetings. The information from these meetings is regularly passed on to colleagues right across veterinary service, and events and speakers have also prompted articles in our ezine *vetlink*.
- An Equality and Good Relations sub-group of the NIRDP Monitoring Committee has been established to specifically consider equality and good relations issues arising during the lifetime of the NIRDP 2007-2013. The group comprises of representatives of statutory and voluntary bodies; is co-chaired by Monica Wilson, CEO Disability Action and Michael Hughes, Director of the Rural Community Network.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

Please provide details of additional steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

Please outline any use of the Commission's Good Relation's Guide.

- Race equality issues are now regular agenda items for the quarterly meetings of the Equality Steering Group, which comprises the Grade 5 Heads of all DARD Divisions and is chaired by the Permanent Secretary.

Launch of Additional Language Provision on Website

- Patrick Yu Director of NI Council on Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) attended the ESG meeting on 10 December 2007 to mark International Human Rights Day and gave a valuable presentation on the issues affecting those of a different race and from migrant communities living and working in rural areas. Patrick launched the enhanced minority language provision on DARD's website under the Alternative Formats heading.
- These additional pages will enable our business areas to publish information in a range of languages (Chinese Simplified, Chinese full version, Czech, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slovak, Irish and Ulster-Scots) and for our web visitors to be able to access key information quickly and easily from the main DARD homepage. We were delighted that representatives from the Polish and Portuguese communities were able to attend a pre-launch of the website and kindly provided some useful advice to web colleagues.

NI Rural Development Programme

- There is potential for the NIRDP to benefit those from ethnic communities living in rural areas. The equality consultation process during 2007 helped raise awareness of the NIRDP with ethnic minority groups and for representatives to have a better understanding of what the Programme is about, how it can benefit ethnic communities and to encourage under-represented groups to put projects forward.
- Groundwork, the DARD staff magazine which issues quarterly, continues to include articles on a range of equality issues including racism and diversity.
- Rural Policy Division – NICEM will be represented on the Rural Stakeholders Group that will contribute to the development of the Rural White Paper.

- During the year Veterinary Service produced landmark articles in the DARD staff magazine Groundwork to celebrate culture, ethnic and race differences. Two articles featured the life experiences of two of our staff, one who has joined us from Italy as a Veterinary Officer and the other as a Animal Health and Welfare Inspector from Africa. The article highlighted the difficulties these two new members of staff faced through their own first hand experience of coming to live and work here. Language and cultural barriers were highlighted, along with how quickly we talk here and the different accents.
- Veterinary Service also publishes its own ezine 'Vetlink' 2 or 3 times each year. This is circulated to all staff, and during this last year a very diverse range of articles were published. These have included –
 - **Being Inclusive!** – an article focused on the 'do's' and 'don'ts' of including / excluding people, as well as highlighting ethnic and migrant worker issues through the use of a quiz
 - **Walking in the Rain** – an article which focused on raising money for the Special Olympics
 - **Eu lucrez intro- fabrica de pui** An article to highlight the language barriers faced by migrant workers in meat plants. Also contained useful phrases translated into Polish, Slovak and Romanian.
 - **Foot in Mouth at Portal** –an article aimed at raising awareness and understanding of the increased numbers and diversity of people that arrive here through Belfast's International airport.

Section 11: Additional Comments

Please provide any additional information/comments

- In July 2007, CAFRE (Greenmount Campus) hosted a cultural event for 40 delegates from across the world who had earlier attended an International Farm Management Conference in Cork. Delegates were visiting NI for a week to sample the agricultural activities and to see the local tourist sights. Greenmount campus hosted a barbeque in the Walled Garden where the delegates were entertained with traditional Irish and Ulster-Scots music. This event was enjoyed by attending delegates, many of whom were from America and appreciated this traditional experience.
- Veterinary Service has been able to demonstrate the practical advantage of having a diverse workforce from all parts of the world. During the bluetongue disease outbreak we were informed that Italy had banned calves arriving from France. Our Veterinary Officers were unable to find out any information about this development until one of our Italian Veterinary officers located the information on the Italian Government's website and promptly translated it for Veterinary Service.
- In recognition of the social and economic importance of women in the local fishing industry, DARD, through the Fishing Taskforce Group, provided 'seeding' support to create Northern Ireland Women in Fisheries Group, which initially covered the region's primary fishing ports of Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie. The group which hopes in time to attract 100 members, meets monthly and undertakes at least 2 initiatives per annum that promote and sustain our Fishing infrastructure.
- The group also participates in the European and UK Women in Fisheries networks and during 2007, the Department provided additional support to the local group to enable it to host the annual 'European Women-in Fisheries Conference', which attracted the largest attendance of delegates ever. The 2007 Conference was held on 28-30 April in Annalong and was officially launched by the DARD Minister.

A Rural champion paper has issued for consultation with the EQIA screening paper. The screening paper invites comment from Section 75 groups to provide further evidence of equality issues in rural areas.



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**Fairms an
Kintra Fordèrin**



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