

Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland

Equality Action Plan 2016-17 Draft for Consultation



Independent, Fair and Effective

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PPS Vision and Aim

Our Vision

To be recognised as providing a first class prosecution service for the people of Northern Ireland.

Our Aim

The aim of the Public Prosecution Service is to provide the people of Northern Ireland with an independent, fair and effective prosecution service.

- **Independence**

The Service will be wholly independent of both police and Government; its decisions will be impartial, based on an independent and impartial assessment of the available evidence and the public interest.

- **Fairness**

All actions will be undertaken with complete impartiality, to the highest ethical and professional standards. All persons, including those accused of offences, will be treated fairly. All victims and witnesses will be treated with respect and sensitivity.

- **Effectiveness**

All prosecution decisions will be taken and every prosecution conducted in an effective and efficient manner. We will provide value for money, while delivering a timely and quality service.

Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act. The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) is fully committed to the promotion of equality and good relations, as set out in the Act.¹

The Service works with its criminal justice partners as part of the Criminal Justice System Northern Ireland (CJSNI) to tackle inequalities across the categories specified under Section 75 and to build good relations between persons of differing beliefs, political opinion or racial group. This is achieved through a range of operational mechanisms and policies, and through working in partnership with key stakeholders in the statutory and voluntary and community sectors.

The Public Prosecution Service

The PPS is the principal prosecuting authority in Northern Ireland. In addition to taking decisions as to prosecution in cases investigated by the police in Northern Ireland, it also considers cases investigated by other statutory authorities, such as HM Revenue and Customs.

The primary role of the PPS is to reach decisions to prosecute or not to prosecute and to have responsibility for the conduct of criminal proceedings. A range of additional services are available which have been designed to enhance the effectiveness of the Service, including the provision of prosecutorial and pre-charge advice and an enhanced service to victims and witnesses.

A range of options are also available for dealing with offenders other than through prosecution. These options include informed warnings, restorative cautions and youth conferencing.

¹ It should be noted that matters relating to the prosecution of offences are excluded from Section 75 by Section 38 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002.

Prosecutors may also refer offenders to Driver Improvement Schemes or to a Community Based Restorative Justice Scheme.

PPS Equality Structures

As part of the commitment to our Section 75 obligations, the Management Board has appointed the Senior Assistant Director for Resources and Change as Equality Champion for the Service, whose role is to oversee all aspects of the process. The Equality Champion is accountable to the Management Board and the Director.

The Equality Champion also chairs the Equality and Diversity Steering Group (EDSG), which is made up of representatives from across the Service's business areas, including volunteer staff members with an interest in equality issues. The group meets on a quarterly basis and monitors progress towards meeting the PPS's equality and diversity agenda, in particular ensuring that Section 75 obligations are fulfilled. EDSG reports regularly to the PPS Management Board and maintains responsibility for ensuring that Equality Action Plan objectives are implemented.

The Equality and Governance Officer, working within the PPS Central Management Unit, has day to day responsibility for co-ordinating Section 75 statutory obligations across the PPS. The Equality and Governance Officer also takes a lead role in the promotion and embedding of an equality culture within the PPS, raising awareness of Section 75 through induction or other appropriate training provision, ensuring that the Service's working arrangements and policies engender equality best practice. Both the Equality and Governance Officer and the Head of Central Management Unit sit on the EDSG.

All senior managers across the PPS are responsible for ensuring that Section 75 obligations are fully complied with in developing, reviewing and implementing policy decisions within their remit.

PPS is represented on the Criminal Justice Equality Network which brings together equality practitioners from across the criminal justice sector in Northern Ireland and which aims to drive forward the equality agenda across the sector.

The Service also participates in a range of inter-agency groups, to explore cross-sector equality issues.

About this Action Plan

This Action Plan has been produced in accordance with the commitments set out in the PPS's Equality Scheme, and has been subject to public consultation. It is based on an assessment by the Service of those areas where outcomes could be improved in terms of our Section 75 responsibilities.

It should be noted that the PPS Equality Action Plan will normally be aligned with the Service's business planning cycle; that is, it will usually cover a three year period, mirroring the Service's Corporate Plan.

However this position has now changed, in that the Service has agreed to produce a one-year business plan for 2016-17. This is to reflect the one-year budget set by the Northern Ireland Executive.

In light of this decision the Service has developed a one-year Equality Action Plan to the end of March 2017, with a new 3-year plan to take effect from 1 April 2017.

Next Steps

The PPS will monitor progress on the delivery of its action measures and update the plan as necessary to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to its functions and duties.

While the Service will work to meet the specific deliverables set out in this plan, efforts to promote equality across the Section 75 categories will continue in all aspects of the Service's business.

The PPS will also report formally to the Equality Commission as part of its Annual Progress Report.

**PPS Action Plan
2016-17**

PPS Strategic Priority 2

Building the trust of victims, witnesses and the community we serve

Outcome	Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Section 75 Group impacted upon	Responsibility for taking actions forward
1. Raised public awareness of the role of the PPS and the standard of services expected	1.1 Through community outreach events and meetings, senior PPS staff will take every opportunity to address the perceptions of people in affected S75 groups about Hate Crime and the prosecution of offenders and to explain the PPS role in the overall criminal justice process. ²	Increased awareness of the PPS, its role and services (NI Omnibus Survey)	All Section 75 groups	SAD Serious Crime and Regions
	1.2 Consider findings of the annual PPS Omnibus Survey, in particular public awareness of the PPS and its role, and take action accordingly.	Report on findings of the PPS Omnibus Survey produced for review by the Management Board, and issues addressed as appropriate.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Central Management Unit)
	1.3 Publication of Annual Hate Crime / 'Aggravated by Hostility statistics.	Hate Crime / 'Aggravated by Hostility statistics published by July 2016.	Race Disability Religion Sexual Orientation	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Central Management Unit)

² Events in which the PPS will participate during 2016/17 will include the Belfast Pride and Mela festivals (August 2016)

Outcome	Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Section 75 Group impacted upon	Responsibility for taking actions forward
2. Increased satisfaction and confidence among members of the public	2.1 Consider findings of the annual PPS Omnibus Survey with regards the public perception of the PPS and in particular our fairness, effectiveness and impartiality, and take action accordingly.	Report on findings of the PPS Omnibus Survey produced for review by the Management Board, and issues addressed as appropriate.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Central Management Unit)
	2.2 Consider the NI Victim and Witness (NIVAWS) findings relevant to PPS and address issues as appropriate.	Findings report produced for review by the Management Board, and issues addressed as appropriate.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Central Management Unit)
	2.3 Monitor and assess complaints from service users, including S75 data.	Data captured through the complaints follow-up questionnaires will be assessed on a regular basis to ensure that complaints are addressed and handling arrangements are effective.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Central Management Unit)

Outcome	Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Section 75 Group impacted upon	Responsibility for taking actions forward
3. Improved services, communication and support provided to victims and witnesses, across all Section 75 groups in Northern Ireland	3.1 Provide ongoing support for the Registered Intermediaries Scheme.	The scheme will be monitored internally and issues raised as appropriate - to inform DOJ's evaluation / key decisions in relation to the future direction of the scheme.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Serious Crime and Regions (Assistant Director, Legal Guidance and Advice)
	3.2 Carry out needs assessments for all victims and witnesses and ensure that applications for special measures are made as required.	Percentage compliance as measured via internal monitoring.	All Section 75 groups but in particular: Age, Disability, Dependants	SAD Resources and Change (Head of VWCU)
	3.3 Publish revised PPS Victims and Witnesses Policy (post consultation).	Victims and Witnesses Policy published.	All Section 75 groups but in particular : Age, Disability and Dependants	SAD Serious Crime and Regions (Assistant Director, Legal Guidance and Advice)
	3.4 Consider the findings from the CJINI Hate Crime Review and address issues as appropriate.	Findings from the CJINI Hate Crime Review to be reviewed by the Management Board, and issues addressed as appropriate.	Race Disability Sexual Orientation Religion	SAD Serious Crime and Regions (Assistant Director, Legal Guidance and Advice)

Outcome	Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Section 75 Group impacted upon	Responsibility for taking actions forward
3. Improved services, communication and support provided to victims and witnesses, across all Section 75 groups in Northern Ireland (Continued)	3.5 Implementation of Phase 2 enhancements of the Victim and Witness Information Portal.	Improved access to information and increased satisfaction with / confidence in the services and support provided to victims and witnesses during the prosecution process.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of ICT)
	3.6 Completion of VWCU review (Phase 3).	Development of improved victim and witness services in light of evaluation findings.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Central Management Unit)
	3.7 Review PPS compliance with the Victim Charter.	Findings report produced for review by the Senior Management Team and issues addressed as appropriate.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Serious Crime and Regions (Assistant Director, Legal Guidance and Advice)
	3.8 Implement PPS objectives arising out of the CJSNI Victim and Witness Strategy Action Plan 2015-17.	Objectives achieved.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Serious Crime and Regions

Outcome	Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Section 75 Group impacted upon	Responsibility for taking actions forward
4. Increased confidence in the PPS's handling of cases involving serious sexual offences	4.1 Implement agreed actions arising out of the Review by Sir Keir Starmer.	All recommendations actioned.	All Section 75 groups but primarily women.	SAD Serious Crime and Regions
	4.2 Respond to any recommendations / issues highlighted by Criminal Justice Inspection.	Implementation of CJINI recommendations.	All Section 75 groups but primarily women	SAD Serious Crime and Regions (Assistant Director, Legal Guidance and Advice)

PPS Strategic Priority 3
Strengthening our Capability to Deliver

Outcome	Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Section 75 Group impacted upon	Responsibility for taking actions forward
5. Increased assurance that best practice is followed in respect of procurement	5.1 Revise PPS procurement policy in line with NICS and Government policy guidance.	Revised policy and procedures reviewed and approved by Senior Management.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Finance)
	5.2 Provide training on procurement policies and procedures as appropriate.	Training provided to staff as appropriate.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Finance)
	5.3 Embed procurement responsibilities as part of induction training.	Induction training outlining procurement responsibilities provided to all staff as part of induction training.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Finance)

PPS Strategic Priority 4

To inspire our people and promote a culture of continuous improvement

Outcome	Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Section 75 Group impacted upon	Responsibility for taking actions forward
6. Increased staff awareness in respect of equality, disability and diversity issues and the importance of promoting equality of opportunity	6.1 Provide mandatory e-learning training for all staff in Section 75 matters.	65% of available staff trained in Section 75 matters.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of HR)
	6.2 Provide Section 75 training to all Board members.	PPS will record the number of Board members receiving training.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of HR)
	6.3 Provide 'Diversity Now' training for all new staff.	PPS will record the number of staff receiving training.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of HR)
	6.4 Provide 'Diversity Now' refresher training as appropriate.	PPS will record the number of staff receiving training.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of HR)
	6.5 Participate in unconscious bias training (gender) ³	PPS will record the number of staff receiving training.	Gender	SAD Resources and Change (Head of HR)

³ To be organised by the NICS Diversity Champions Network

Outcome	Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Section 75 Group impacted upon	Responsibility for taking actions forward
6. Increased staff awareness in respect of equality, disability and diversity issues and the importance of promoting equality of opportunity (Continued)	6.6 Provide Disability Awareness e-learning training for all new staff as appropriate. ⁴	PPS will record the number of staff receiving training.	People with a disability	SAD Resources and Change (Head of HR)
	6.7 Design and deliver training for PPS staff to raise awareness of mental health conditions and the impact these have within the criminal justice process.	Training provided to all relevant staff.	All Section 75 groups	Deputy Director (Assistant Director, Legal Guidance and Advice)
	6.8 Delivery of training to all operational staff on child development and communicating with children and young people.	Training provided to all operational staff.	Age – young people	Deputy Director (Assistant Director, Legal Guidance and Advice)

⁴ Disability Awareness for Front-line Staff eLearning was provided to PPS staff during 2015/16

Annex 1 Action Rationale

This section details the underlying evidence identified to support each action described in the main section of this report.

Linked Outcome	Supporting Evidence	Inequality or issue to be addressed
<p>1. Raised public awareness of the role of the PPS and the standard of services expected</p>	<p><u>The NI Omnibus Survey 2015</u></p> <p>In particular analysis of findings to Question 2:</p> <p><i>“Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland “The PPS”?”</i></p>	<p>Increase awareness of the PPS, its role and services, among all S75 groups.</p> <p>Analysis of the findings for Question 2 of the PPS module of the Omnibus Survey showed that more men than women (79% and 72%) had heard of the PPS. Seventy-eight per cent of Protestant respondents had heard of the PPS, compared with 73% of Catholics.</p>
<p>2. Increased satisfaction and confidence among members of the public</p>	<p><u>The NI Omnibus Survey 2015</u></p> <p>In particular analysis of findings to Question 4:</p> <p><i>“How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?”</i></p>	<p>Increase public confidence in the PPS.</p> <p>Confidence levels were higher for Catholic respondents than for Protestants (78% and 73% respectively).</p>

Linked Outcome	Supporting Evidence	Inequality or issue to be addressed
<p>2. Increased satisfaction and confidence among members of the public (Continued)</p>	<p><u>PPS Complaints Database</u></p> <p>The PPS currently monitors all complaints received from stakeholders and the public. Satisfaction levels among complainants are monitored on an ongoing basis, which includes relevant S75 data.</p>	<p>The numbers of complaints dealt with by the PPS on an annual basis remains small (70-80). However individual complainants have raised specific issues, for example in respect of the quality of correspondence (i.e. was it clear and easy to understand).</p>
<p>3. Improved services, communication and support provided to victims and witnesses, across all Section 75 groups in Northern Ireland</p>	<p><u>PPS Victim and Witness Care Unit (VWCU) Stakeholder Analysis (2015)</u></p> <p>The stakeholder analysis involved consultation with key VWCU stakeholders, both within the Criminal Justice System and the Voluntary Sector (e.g. Victim Support NI, Women’s Aid, and The Rainbow Project). The main recommendations arising out of this exercise included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need to publicise the role of the VWCU; - Ensure consistency in the approach taken in the recording of victim and witness needs assessments; - Ensure correspondence is user friendly and issued in a timely manner; and - Consideration of face to face consultations. 	<p>The need to improve the provision of accessible information, communication and support to victims and witnesses in all Section 75 groups.</p>

Linked Outcome	Supporting Evidence	Inequality or issue to be addressed
<p>3. Improved services, communication and support provided to victims and witnesses, across all Section 75 groups in Northern Ireland (Continued)</p>	<p>“Making a difference to victims and witnesses of crime; Improving access to justice, services and support” (DOJ Strategy document - June 2013).</p> <p>In summary the key actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each criminal justice organisation will have measureable standards and each year they will monitor and assess how services are delivered to victims and witnesses and their satisfaction levels. These results will be published. - Ensure victims and witnesses are clear about who they can contact to deal with any problems. - Introduce clearly defined communication procedures, setting out the information that should be given to victims and the associated timescales for each criminal justice organisation. - Continue to develop technical solutions to improve the provision of up-to-date information to victims and witnesses about the progress of the case. 	<p>The need to improve the provision of accessible information, communication and support to victims and witnesses in all Section 75 groups.</p>

Linked Outcome	Supporting Evidence	Inequality or issue to be addressed
<p>3. Improved services, communication and support provided to victims and witnesses, across all Section 75 groups in Northern Ireland (Continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of information in a suitable format for people with disabilities and children. - Establishment of a registered intermediaries scheme to help vulnerable victims, witnesses and defendants with significant communication difficulties to provide evidence. - Develop accessible outreach measures promoting greater public awareness of the services and information available to victims and witnesses and the experiences and views of victims. - Continue to involve appropriate representative organisations and encourage them to be involved with the system. 	<p>As above.</p>

Linked Outcome	Supporting Evidence	Inequality or issue to be addressed
<p>4. Increased confidence in the PPS's handling of cases involving serious sexual offences</p>	<p><u>Review by Sir Keir Starmer (2015)</u></p> <p>The review pointed to failures around strategic planning, case management and in communication / consultation with victims and witnesses. It concluded that these were key areas where significant improvement was needed in the approaches adopted by the PPS.</p>	<p>The need to improve the handling of serious sexual offences, the victims of which are primarily female.</p>

Linked Outcome	Supporting Evidence	Inequality or issue to be addressed
<p>5. Increased assurance that best practice is followed in respect of procurement</p>	<p><u>Procurement and Purchasing Policy and Strategy (March 2014)</u></p> <p>One of the objectives of the PPS in the development of its procurement function is to embed sound ethical, social and environmental standards, and to comply with relevant NICS and Government policies in all aspects of procurement and purchasing.</p>	<p>To follow best practice / wider Government procurement policy, such as 'Guidance on Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement'.</p>

Linked Outcome	Supporting Evidence	Inequality or issue to be addressed
<p>6. Increased staff awareness in respect of equality and diversity issues and the importance of promoting equality of opportunity</p>	<p><u>NICS Well-being at Work Survey 2014</u></p> <p>In particular the following questions:</p> <p><i>“Your Department promotes a positive attitude towards people with disabilities”</i></p> <p>Results for this question found that 80% of PPS respondents felt that the PPS promoted a positive attitude towards people with disabilities - against an overall NICS figure of 89%.</p> <p><i>“The NICS promotes a positive attitude towards people with disabilities”</i></p> <p>Results for this question found that the 85% of PPS respondents felt the PPS promoted a positive attitude towards people with disabilities - against an NICS overall figure of 91%.</p> <p><i>“My Department/Agency puts equal opportunities policies into practice”</i></p> <p>Analysis of findings to this question found that the 53% of PPS respondents agreed that the PPS puts equal opportunities policies into practice – compared with an overall NICS figure of 68%.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities to increase staff awareness / knowledge of equality and diversity and equal opportunities.</p>

Linked Outcome	Supporting Evidence	Inequality or issue to be addressed
<p>6. Increased staff awareness in respect of equality and diversity issues and the importance of promoting equality of opportunity (Continued)</p>	<p><i>"I believe that my Department / Agency provides equality of opportunity for all staff"</i></p> <p>Analysis of findings to this question found that 47% of PPS respondents agreed that the PPS provides equality of opportunity for all staff - against an overall NICS figure of 61%.</p> <p><i>"I am treated with fairness and respect"</i></p> <p>Analysis found that the 68% of PPS respondents agreed that they are treated with fairness and respect - against 73% for the NICS as a whole.</p>	<p>As above.</p>

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