

Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland

Equality Action Plan 2017-18



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 Policy and Information 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 Policy and Information 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 Diversity Champions Network (DCN), which brings together senior representatives from across the NI Civil Service and which aims to drive forward the equality and diversity agenda across the system.

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 2017-18. This is to reflect the current budgetary position for the year ahead.

In light of this decision the Service has developed a one-year Equality Action Plan to the end of March 2018, with a new 3-year plan to take effect from 1 April 2018.

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
2017-18**

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 among S75 groups and the wider public	1.1 Through outreach events and meetings, senior 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 / SAD Resources and Change (All Assistant Directors)
	1.2 Consider findings of the annual PPS Omnibus Survey, in particular public awareness of the PPS and its role among S75 groups, 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 Policy and Information Unit)
	1.3 Publication of Annual Hate Crime / 'Aggravated by Hostility' statistics.	Publication of Hate Crime / 'Aggravated by Hostility' Annual Bulletin.	Race Disability Religion Sexual Orientation	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Policy and Information Unit)

² Events in which the PPS will participate during 2017/18 will include the Belfast Pride and Mela festivals.

Outcome	Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Section 75 Group impacted upon	Responsibility for taking actions forward
2. Increased satisfaction and confidence among S75 groups and members of the wider public	2.1 Consider findings of the annual PPS Omnibus Survey with regards the public perception of the PPS in S75 groups, 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 Policy and Information Unit)
	2.2 Consider the NI Victim and Witness Survey (NIVAWS) findings relevant to affected S75 groups, 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 Victim and Witness Care Unit / Head of Policy and Information 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 Policy and Information 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, as it extends to Magistrates' Courts.	The scheme will be monitored internally and issues escalated 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 / SAD Resources and Change (Head of Policy and Information Unit)
	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 Serious Crime and Regions / SAD Resources and Change (Head of VWCU)
	3.3 Consider the findings from the Internal Audit Review of the Victim and Witness Care Unit (VWCU).	Findings from the audit to be reviewed by senior management, and issues addressed as appropriate.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Policy and Information 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 (Continued)	3.4 Monitor implementation of the PPS 'Track My Crime' facility (Victim and Witness Information Portal), including uptake and feedback from S75 groups.	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)
	3.5 Monitor expenses paid to those witnesses described as vulnerable witnesses in the PPS Victim and Witness Expenses Policy.	Monitoring of additional payments made to vulnerable witnesses, for example in respect of designated accompanying adults, when requested.	Age Disability	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Finance)
	3.6 Review PPS compliance with the Witness Charter, highlighting any issues affecting S75 groups.	Findings report produced for review by the senior management and issues addressed as appropriate.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of VWCU)

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 Criminal Justice Inspection NI's (CJI) recommendations arising from their review of the implementation of the Starmer Report (2015).	Implementation of CJI recommendations.	All Section 75 groups but primarily women	SAD Serious Crime and Regions (All Assistant Directors)

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 Provide training on procurement policies and procedures as appropriate.	Ongoing refresher training provided to staff as appropriate.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Finance)
	5.2 Embed procurement responsibilities as part of induction training.	Induction training outlining procurement responsibilities provided to all staff where a need is identified.	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.	Percentage of available staff trained in Section 75 matters.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Resource Management)
	6.2 Provide 'Diversity Now' training for all new staff.	Percentage of new staff members trained in Section 75 matters.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Resource Management)
	6.3 Provide 'Diversity Now' refresher training as appropriate.	Number of staff receiving training.	All Section 75 groups	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Resource Management)
	6.4 Participate in unconscious bias training (gender) ³ . Mandatory at SCS level.	Number of staff receiving training.	Gender	SAD Resources and Change (Head of Resource Management)

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
<p>6. Increased staff awareness in respect of equality, disability and diversity issues and the importance of promoting equality of opportunity (Continued)</p>	<p>6.5 Design and deliver training for PPS staff to raise awareness of the statutory aims of the youth justice system, and the best interests principle as it applies to children.</p>	<p>Training provided to all relevant staff.</p>	<p>Age – young people</p>	<p>SAD Serious Crime and Regions (Regional Assistant Directors / Head of Policy and Information Unit)</p>

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 among S75 groups and the wider public</p>	<p><u>The NI Omnibus Survey 2017</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 2015 PPS module of the Omnibus Survey showed that more men than women (84% and 75%) had heard of the PPS. 82% of Protestant respondents had heard of the PPS, compared with 76% of Catholics.</p>
<p>2. Increased satisfaction and confidence among S75 groups and members of the wider public</p>	<p><u>The NI Omnibus Survey 2017</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>In 2015 confidence levels were slightly lower for Catholic respondents than for Protestants (71% and 73% respectively).</p> <p>Confidence levels were higher for male respondents than for female (75% and 68% respectively).</p>

Linked Outcome	Supporting Evidence	Inequality or issue to be addressed
<p>2. Increased satisfaction and confidence among S75 groups and members of the wider public.</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 (approximately 70 - 75). However individual complainants have raised specific issues, for example in respect of the quality of correspondence (e.g. is 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>NI Victim and Witness Survey (NIVAWS) 2017</u></p> <p>The 2017 survey will include a range of questions in relation to the standards of information provision and services provided by the VWCU and the PPS as a whole. For example, questions will address satisfaction levels with the information provided regarding particular needs and uptake in terms of referrals to the NSPCC's Young Witness Service.</p>	<p>The need to improve the provision of accessible information, communication and support to victims and witnesses in all Section 75 groups.</p> <p>Note: The 2017 survey content differs from previous surveys and therefore comparative data are not available.</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, a five-year strategy” (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. - 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. - Provision of information in a suitable format for people with disabilities and children. 	<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"> - 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. - Commence video-recorded cross-examination and re-examination of victims and witnesses as set out in Article 16 of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. - Development of a statutory witness charter. 	<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>CJINI review of how PPS has addressed recommendations arising from the Review by Sir Keir Starmer (2015)</u></p> <p>The Review by Sir Keir Starmer pointed to weaknesses around strategic planning, case management and in communication / consultation with victims and witnesses. CJI has reviewed the PPS's response to the 2015 report and highlighted key areas where further improvement is needed in the approaches adopted.</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 2014/15</u></p> <p>This survey provided a range of information in respect of staff perceptions of departmental / NICS promotion of positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and equal opportunities.</p> <p>For example:</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>“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 issues.</p>

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