**DRAFT PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND (PBNI) EQUALITY AND GOOD RELATIONS ACTION PLAN**

**2025-2030 (V1)**

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## INTRODUCTION

## Welcome to the new Equality Action Plan (EAP) for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. This EAP sets out the actions the Probation Board for Northern Ireland intend to take over the next five years to promote equality, equity and diversity among people protected by the nine Section 75 groups, that is:

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1. people of different ages,
2. religious beliefs,
3. racial groups,
4. political opinions,
5. marital status,
6. sexual orientations,
7. men and women generally,
8. people with and without disabilities,
9. people with and without caring responsibilities.

## PBNI’S WORK

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) has a presence across all communities and is a central part of the criminal justice system. It works to address the causes of offending to help prevent people coming back into the system and protect the public.  The services we provide enable individuals to change their behaviour which in turn reduces the likelihood of reoffending. This reduces the numbers of victims, and makes communities safer.

Our aim is to change people’s lives for safer communities.

Our staff work in a range of occupations in PBNI. The majority of our staff deliver front line services dealing directly with our 4000 Service Users. This includes managing people on probation (those serving a community sentence or who have been released from prison subject to licence) and preparing pre-sentence reports for judges and magistrates in the courts to enable them to choose the most appropriate sentence.  Staff also work in prisons preparing people for release into the community and we provide an information service for victims of crime.

PBNI’s Board is tasked is tasked with setting the strategic vision and monitoring the service’s performance against objectives. As a Board they take an active role in the promotion of welcoming, diverse and inclusive organisation.

We have developed this Plan to progress our two disability duties to promote positive attitudes and encourage full participation of disabled people in public life.

**CONSULTATION**

We welcome feedback on the draft EAP we are presenting during a 14 week consultation which will run from Friday, 20 December 2024 to Friday, 21 March 2025.

The actions and priorities in this EAP have so far been informed by research in relation to equality issues we experience and know about, and among other organisations; a review of information provided by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland; and consultation with our staff and our service users; and with bodies representing the section 75 categories.

During the lifetime of this EAP, we will continue to gather information about our service users in relation to the Section 75 groups and update our staff equality information in the lifetime of this plan. We also intend during the lifetime of this plan to carry out an audit inequality to use during reviews our EAP and Disability Action Plan (DAP) in the future.

When the consultation period ends, we will update this EAP so that it can be put into effect as quickly as possible.

Our intention is to have actions that will make a real and meaningful difference to the lives of people who work for us and our service users, by addressing the inequalities they experience or to better promote equality of opportunity.

## WHAT IS IN OUR EAP?

The following tables outline our actions for the next five years. The Plan includes actions aimed at:

* Improving the data we use to support decision making
* Supporting our staff
* Improving our services

## HOW WILL WE MEASURE PROGRESS AND SUCCESS?

This five year EAP is designed to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances and needs and will evolve over its lifespan.

We will report annually on our progress against the EAP via our S75 Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI), which is submitted at the end of August each year and available on our website.

## SECTION 1: IMPROVING THE DATA WE UST TO SUPPORT DECISION MAKING

We know that high quality data plays a role in improving services and decision-making. The following actions are aimed at improving the data we collect to ensure the effective discharge of our S75 equality duties.

| SECTION 1: IMPROVING THE DATA WE USE TO SUPPORT DECISION MAKING | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What we aim to achieve** | **What we will do (*Actions)*** | **By when** | **How we measure success** |
| Improved equality information in the S75 categories so that we can inform decision making | 1. Take steps to make the information gathering from service users standard. | * Ongoing during the lifetime of this plan | High % of up to date equality information.  Information used for decision making. |
| 1. Update our monitoring forms in line with new ECNI guidance | * June 2025 | Revised monitoring information form. |
| 1. We will take active measures to encourage staff to update their equality monitoring information after their employment has started. | * April 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan | * Annual awareness raising campaigns to encourage staff to update their equality data. * Development of annual equality profile. * Increase in percentage of staff completing their equality monitoring data.1 |

## SECTION 2: IMPROVING OUR SERVICES FOR SERVICE USERS

We know that high quality data plays a role in improving services and decision-making. The following actions are aimed at improving the data we collect to ensure the effective discharge of our S75 equality duties.

| SECTION 2: ADDRESSING BARRIER TO ACCESSING OUR SERVICES | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What we aim to achieve** | **Actions** | **By when** | **How we measure success** |
| Provide a welcoming, person-centred and accessible services for our service users, particularly those whose first language is not english. | 1. We will continue to develop our interpreting services for our service users. | * April 2025 | * Increased staff awareness about translation / interpreting services. * Monitoring use of uptake for translation / interpreting services * Production of information in frequently used languages. * Use of technological aids to support translation / interpreting services. |
| 1. Improve our understanding of racial inequalities through training and working with representative groups in the community. | * Throughout the lifetime of the equality plan. | * Staff increased awareness of race equality issues facing service users. * Update of training on race issues for our staff. |
| Improve our services for service users who have Neurodiverse conditions[[1]](#footnote-1), so that we can raise awareness in the workplace and in the provision of our services. | 1. We will develop neurodiversity guidance and other communication materials for our staff along with key stakeholders including experts by experience. | * April 2026 | * Production of an online signposting resource/service directory on neurodiversity services. * Increased awareness and information provision for staff in terms of people who are neurodiverse. * Dissemination and launch of neurodiversity training and guidance. |
| Increase awareness of issues faced by staff and service users in relation to sexual orientation. | 1. We will investigate the potential to implement voluntary training similar to the NHS Rainbow Badge initiative whereby staff will complete online training to gain an HSC Rainbow Badge. | * April 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan | * Development of training LGBT training * Monitor the number of staff taking part in the initiative. |

## SECTION 3: SUPPORTING OUR STAFF

We value our staff and want to make sure that this is demonstrated in what we do. We are committed to celebrating and embracing the diversity of our staff and working to redress where there is any diversity gaps. We want to ensure that our staff, can feel able to bring their authentic selves to work so that they feel valued and can continue to provide safe, effective and compassionate service.

| SECTION 3: SUPPORTING OUR STAFF | | | |
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| **What we aim to achieve** | **Actions** | **By when** | **How we measure success** |
| We recognise that men and people from racial minority backgrounds are not well represented in PBNI and will take steps to promote a welcoming, diverse and inclusive workforce. | 1. We will seek to understand the needs of our ethnically diverse staff and service users. 2. Promote a range of events to celebrate the diversity of our staff and their contribution to PBNI throughout the year. | * Throughout the lifetime of the plan | * Policies reviewed, developed and recommended relating to EDI. * Internal EDI group set up to meet and is engaged. * Staff engagement forum is attended by wide range of staff * Staff engagement survey. * Advertising will be designed to promote minorities. |
|  | 1. We will improve awareness of the flexible working application process, encourage appropriate use of hybrid working and understanding of special leave provisions to enable good work- life balance. 2. Review and update Flexible Working Policy and Procedure. 3. Review the use of flexible working. | * Throughout the lifetime of the plan | * Establish baseline on uptake of flexible working and monitor year on year staff accessing these opportunities. * Increased awareness of flexible working, work-life balance and special leave policies. * Monitoring reports produced twice a year on flexible working. |
| It is important that staff who have or acquire a disability are supported in the workplace by overcoming any potential barriers to achieving their full potential. PBNI is committed to creating a safe and welcoming environment for all staff. | 1. We will develop an individual plan in partnership with disabled staff members to ensure they are supported through the provision of reasonable adjustments where appropriate. | * Throughout the lifetime of the plan | * Use of Disability Passport is taken up by staff. * HR have accurate records of reasonable adjustments. * Improved support for disabled staff to return and remain in work. |
| 1. We will review our policies and procedures and their implementation with a view to promoting a person centred, trauma informed approach in the workplace. | * Throughout the lifetime of the plan | * Policies reflective of up to date advice and best practice from the ECNI, LRA and other legislative developments. |
| We have effective policies and relevant training to support them to provide the most inclusive and compassionate probation se | 1. We will work to improve uptake of equality training, both mandatory and developmental. | * Throughout the lifetime of the plan | * Uptake of mandatory equality training monitored. * Increased compliance levels with mandatory equality training. |
|  | 1. We will work to ensure that staff who experience domestic and sexual violence are supported in the workplace. | * April 2026 | * Domestic and sexual violence workplace policy in place and support networks established. * Positive feedback from ongoing engagement from affected staff. |
|  | 1. We will engage with external experts and representative organisations to provide specialist training for employees. | * Throughout the lifetime of the plan | * Training sessions developed delivered and evaluated. * Marketing and promotional strategy to increase uptake of training across PBNI. |
| Personal stories can really resonate and be most impactful in terms of effectively communicating key messages. We recognise that collaborating with people with lived experience enhances the training we provide and gives staff a differentperspective, improving the services we provide. | 1. We will address specific inequalities for staff, for example provide menopause information sessions and celebrate men’s health week to promote inclusion and visibility of gender specific issues in the workforce. | * Throughout the lifetime of the plan | * Raised awareness of gender specific health inequalities for staff. * Increased inclusion and visibility of gender specific issues.   Better support for staff with gender specific issues. |
| Take steps to meet any legislative and good practice duties in relation to gender pay monitoring and reporting. | 1. We will work collaboratively on the forthcoming gender pay gap legislation and determine appropriate methods of monitoring and reporting. | * Dependant on enactment of legislation. | * Pay structure established that ensures fairness and equity in pay and reward arrangements. |
| We recognise from qualitative data that many of our staff are carers of children and older people. Being a carer also affects our service users. | 1. We ensure that there is promotion of Carers Rights Day to highlight care and caring and help informal / family carers understand their rights and find out about support that may be available. | * November 2025 and annually thereafter | * Consistent approach to Carers Rights Day. * Flexible Working records on applications for Flexible Working. |

CONTACT DETAILS

For more details of our achievements in meeting our dual disability duties, please refer to our Annual Progress Report which is available online or by contacting:

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1. Neurodiversity is a broad term, used to describe the many and varying ways in which human brains are wired. It encompasses the wide variety of ways humans think, learn, feel and process information.

   Neurodiversity can include Autism, ADHD, ADD, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia and Acquired Brain Injury. (HSE 2024) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)