

DoF Screening template

Screening is the first of two methods by which the necessary level of “regard” is demonstrated as being paid to the statutory equality goal, as set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The DoF Equality Scheme commits us to screening our policies. This includes our strategies and plans, policies, legislative developments; and new ways of working such as – the introduction, change or end of an existing service, procedure, policy etc.

This screening template is designed to help business areas consider the likely equality and human rights impacts of their proposed decisions on different groups of customers, service users, staff and visitors.

Detailed information about the Section 75 equality duties and what they mean in practice is available on the Equality Commission’s website:

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf>

A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened, should be ‘signed off’ and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made accessible on the DoF website as soon as possible following completion and made available in alternative formats on request.

All Section 75 consultees should be advised of the screening exercise once the final policy decision has been taken.

The screening template has 4 sections to complete. These are:

Section A - details about the policy / decision that is being screened.

Section B - 4 key questions that require you to outline the likely impacts on equality groups, and all supporting evidence.

Section C - 4 key questions in relation to obligations under the Disability Discrimination Order and the Human Rights Act.

Section D - the formal record of the screening decision.

SECTION A

Information about the policy

This stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening on a step-by-step basis.

Remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for us) as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by us).

Is this a new or revised policy?

Revised. Closure of an existing benefit.

a) Name of the policy

Closure of the NICS childcare voucher salary sacrifice scheme.

b) Brief Description of the policy

To end employer-supported childcare vouchers in NICS following the provider's withdrawal and the UK-wide closure to new entrants since 2018. Staff can move to alternative schemes (Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) and the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme (NICSS)).

c) Aims of the policy/ Rationale behind the changes

The provider, Employers for Childcare, has confirmed the contract is no longer financially viable for them and has requested early contract release. Participation in the scheme has declined since closure to new entrants and further reduced post-pandemic. Alternatives now provide better value for most staff.

To ensure clear communication and a managed wind-down, while signposting staff to TFC and NICSS.

d) Who will the policy affect?

NICS staff currently using childcare vouchers and those considering childcare support. There are 2,645 employee accounts; 685 actively sacrificed in the last 52 weeks; 1,960 not sacrificing; 373 accounts have a balance of £1 or more.

e) Is this a NICS wide policy?

Yes. Applies across NICS departments.

f) Who will implement the policy?

People & Organisational Development Directorate, with operational support from NICSHR and CPD.

g) Will this policy or revision address an existing inequality? Yes/No
If yes, please give details.

Potentially depending on the personal circumstances of those affected. By facilitating access to TFC and NICSS which together may be more beneficial than the childcare voucher scheme, the closure may help affordability for working parents, which may benefits groups with dependants and women. NICSS provides a 15% reduction on eligible costs and combines with TFC's 20% top-up.

h) Will this policy or revision benefit any Section 75 categories? Yes/No
If yes, please give details.

Potentially depending on the personal circumstances of those affected.
Where it does benefit staff, then the groups benefitted are likely to be: People with dependent children; women; lone parents; part-time staff. Alternatives reduce childcare costs for eligible working parents.

i) Will this policy or revision have an adverse differential impact upon any of the Section 75 groupings? Yes/No. If yes, please give details.

Potential minor impacts for staff ineligible for TFC or NICSS (for example household income above £100,000 or Universal Credit claimants), or those with unused voucher balances. Mitigation is set out in Section B.

Section B

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data.

What evidence / information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Set out all evidence below along with details of the different Section 75 groups you have met and / or consulted with to help inform your screening assessment. Please also provide details of priorities and needs identified for each Section 75 group.

Workforce composition at 1 January 2025: 24,513 staff; female staff 50.0%; Catholic staff 50.5%; older age profile staff with 28.5% aged 55+; declared disability 6.4%; minority ethnic 0.7%. These figures inform the assessment of potential differential impact.

Operational evidence: 2,645 voucher accounts; 685 active salary sacrifice users in the last 52 weeks; 1,960 no longer sacrificing; 373 positive balances. NICS does not have a full section 75 breakdown of the group with childcare voucher accounts to enable further analysis. However, of those NICS staff still actively sacrificing salary, the composition is 51.6% female and 48.4% male.

Alternative schemes: Tax-Free Childcare eligibility and NICSS parameters, including 15% subsidy and increased caps.

If you have no evidence held, outline how you will obtain it:

The data supplied is from the equality provided by the NI Statistics & Research Agency (Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service) and based on staff data held on the HR system. Staff have been reminded to update their disability, sexual orientation and dependent status data.

Whilst there was no specific consultation with groups affected, unions are being consulted.

Screening questions

There are 4 essential screening questions:

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the nine Section 75 categories? (minor/major/none)

See detailed assessment below – minor impacts for some s75 groups, partially mitigated by potential for greater support from other schemes.

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories? (yes/no)

No specific opportunities identified in this context. Civil Service will ensure good communications to help s75 groups affected find other schemes to help with childcare costs.

3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact upon good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (minor/major/none)

None. The policy concerns staff benefits and access to nationally administered schemes.

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between these three groups? (Yes/No)

No specific opportunities identified in this context.

Are there likely impacts on Section 75 Categories?

- **Religious belief:** No impact on equality of opportunity / None

None. No link to religious belief and no data to support assessment of differential impact on those with one religious belief or another.

- **Political opinion:** None, as above / None

None. No link to political opinion.

- **Racial group:** None, as above / None

None. Alternatives are available regardless of racial group. Minority ethnic representation is low but unlikely to be differentially affected by closure.

- **Age:** None, as above / None

Minor. Older staff may or may not have lower childcare demand, while younger staff with dependants may be more affected. Mitigated by access to TFC and NICSS.

- **Marital status:** None, as above / None

Minor. Lone parents may be more sensitive to changes in childcare support. May be mitigated through targeted signposting to TFC and NICSS.

- **Sexual orientation:** None, as above / None

None. No direct link identified.

- **Men and women generally:** None, as above / None

Minor. Women may be more likely to have primary childcare responsibilities. Alternatives provide comparable or greater support for most eligible staff.

- **Disability:** None, as above / None

None to minor. Some disabled staff may have specific childcare arrangements. Signposting and individual advice mitigate impacts.

- **Dependants:** None, as above / None

Minor. Closure changes the route to support for help with cost of childcare but alternatives reduce costs for most working parents, depending on the personal circumstances of those using the scheme. Positive impact for many due to combined TFC and NICSS support.

No change/none for those with older dependents.

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

Potential minor impacts for e.g. female lone parents or minority ethnic staff with dependants. Mitigated by proactive communications and access to TFC/NICSS

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

None available.

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Alternatively there may already be policies in place which would mitigate any adverse impact identified.

Mitigation measures proposed:

- Targeted communications from DOF outlining closure, timelines, and how to access TFC and NICSS, including links and eligibility.
- Signposting to Employers for Childcare Family Benefits Advice Service for "better-off" calculations and personalised guidance.
- Clear guidance on any reimbursement process where HMRC criteria apply, with payroll treatment explained.
- Reminders to staff holding positive voucher balances to avoid unintended loss and to plan transitions to alternative support.

Section C

DoF also has legislative obligations to meet under the [Disability Discrimination Order](#) and the [Human Rights Act](#). The following questions relate to these two areas.

Consideration of Disability Duties

Does the proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity for DoF to better **promote positive attitudes** towards disabled people?

Explain your assessment in full

Neutral. Communications should use inclusive language and accessible formats where required.

Does the proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity to actively **increase the participation** by disabled people in public life?

Explain your assessment in full

Neutral. No direct change in participation in public life.

Consideration of Human Rights

The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 brings the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and it applies in N Ireland. Articles 3 and 4 are classified as “absolute” rights ie the State can never withhold or take away these rights. All others are either “qualified” or “limited”. Further information is available via the following link

<http://www.nicshumanrightsguide.com/>

Indicate any potential **adverse impacts** that the policy / decision may have in relation to human rights issues.

	<u>Adverse Impact</u>	
	(delete as appropriate)	
Right to Life	Article 2	No
Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment	Article 3	No
Prohibition of slavery and forced labour	Article 4	No
Right to liberty and security	Article 5	No

Right to a fair and public trial	Article 6	No
Right to no punishment without law	Article 7	No
Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence	Article 8	No
Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	Article 9	No
Right to freedom of expression	Article 10	No
Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association	Article 11	No
Right to marry and to found a family	Article 12	No
The prohibition of discrimination	Article 14	No
Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions	Protocol 1 Article 1	No
Right to education	Protocol 1 Article 2	No
Right to free and secret elections	Protocol 1 Article 3	No

No adverse impacts identified across Articles 2 to 14 or Protocol 1 rights. The policy changes a staff benefit route and maintains access to childcare support through national schemes.

Please indicate any ways which you consider the policy positively promotes human rights.

N/A for positive human rights promotion beyond affordability support.

Please explain any adverse impacts on human rights that you have identified.

None

If you have identified any adverse impacts on human rights through this screening you must complete a Human Rights Impact Assessment:

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/human-rights-impact-assessment-proforma>.

Monitoring Arrangements

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's [Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities \(July 2007\)](http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75MonitoringGuidance2007.pdf):
<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75MonitoringGuidance2007.pdf>

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

Please detail proposed monitoring arrangements below:

- Track staff queries to identify any group-specific issues.
- Review feedback from unions.
- Reassess screening if evidence shows any adverse differential impact.

Section D - Formal Record of Screening Decision

Title of Proposed Policy / Decision being screened: Closure of the NICS childcare voucher salary sacrifice scheme.

I can confirm that the proposed policy / decision has been screened for (i) equality of opportunity, (ii) good relations disabilities duties and (iii) human rights issues

On the basis of the answers to the screening questions, I recommend that this policy / decision is – * **Screened Out** – No EQIA necessary (no major impacts)

Provide a brief note to explain how this decision was reached:

The provider's withdrawal and the UK-wide closure to new entrants make continuation impractical; alternatives (TFC and NICSS) provide equivalent or improved support for most eligible working parents. Minor potential impacts are mitigated through targeted communications.

Screening assessment completed by -

Name **Alison Welsh**
Grade **G7**
Date **07/01/2026**

And approved by –

Name **Olivia Martin**
Grade **G5**
Date **07/01/2026**

Central Support Team Notified

Equality Contacts advised

Screening uploaded to DoF website