

Equality Impact Assessment

on

Flexible Working Policies

by



*Northern Ireland Council for
Postgraduate Medical and
Dental Education*



*Northern Ireland
Blood Transfusion Service*



Health
Promotion
Agency



*Northern Ireland
Guardian Ad Litem Agency*



MEDICAL PHYSICS

*Northern Ireland
Regional Medical Physics Agency*

**Final Report - Summary
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document reports the outcome of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) by Northern Ireland Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education (NICPMDE), Health Promotion Agency (HPA), Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency (NIGALA), Northern Ireland Regional Medical Physics Agency (NIRMPA), Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service (BTS), and the Central Services Agency (CSA) on flexible working policies.

The EQIA was carried out with reference to the Equality Commission's 'Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment' (2001).

This document will be made available on request in formats such as Braille, audiocassette, large print, and disc and in minority languages to meet the needs of those not fluent in English.

The full report is available both in electronic format (on the organisations' websites) and as a paper copy on request from any of the six organisations (for contact details please refer to pp.2-3).

The Organisations

The **Central Services Agency (CSA)** provides a range of services primarily to other service providers within the Northern Ireland Health and Social Services.

The **Northern Ireland Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education (NICPMDE)** is responsible for funding, managing and supporting postgraduate medical and dental education within the Northern Ireland Deanery.

The **Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency (NIGALA)** provides Guardians (experienced social workers) to the Courts in specified family proceedings and adoption proceedings. Their role is to undertake independent enquiries in order to represent the child's wishes and feelings and safeguard their interests in Court proceedings.

The **Health Promotion Agency (HPA)** is working to maintain, improve and promote the good health of all the people in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland **Blood Transfusion Service (BTS)** is responsible for the collection and allocation of blood and related products to the health service.

The **Northern Ireland Regional Medical Physics Agency (RMP)** provides a range of physics and engineering services to the Health and Social Service (HSS) Trusts and other HSS bodies.

The Policies

A wide range of policies are subsumed under the term 'flexible working policies' including part-time work, job-sharing, flexi-time, annualised hours, personalised hours, compressed hours, term-time working, career breaks, carers' leave.

Data Collection and Consultation

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for the purpose of the EQIA. This included the collection of monitoring data on gender, age, religion, marital status, dependants, ethnicity, and disability as well as data on uptake of individual schemes. Furthermore, a series of focus groups (nine in total) were conducted with staff from the six organisations. Finally, a separate questionnaire was sent to all senior managers across the organisations, based on a number of open-ended questions.

The draft EQIA report was published for consultation on 29 November 2002. A range of *dissemination methods* were used, including ads placed in Northern Ireland-wide newspapers, reports placed on the websites of the organisations, and summary reports sent via email and post to nearly 300 consultees.

The consultation period lasted for 11 weeks from 29 November 2002 to 14 February 2003. During this period, three main *consultation methods* were employed: a roundtable consultation meeting with voluntary sector organisations, focus groups with staff, and a pro forma for written comments.

All comments received in writing and/or made in the course of the consultation meeting are listed in Appendix 4 together with the response by the organisations.

Key Findings

Key findings emanating from a review of data/information collected in the course of the EQIA showed various impacts both across the organisations and specific to individual organisations.

Impacts Across All Organisations

The assessment suggests the following conclusions regarding differential impact to flexible working policies across the six organisations:

- The quantitative analysis shows that **men are clearly underrepresented amongst part-time workers**. Additional qualitative data suggests that this is not due to adverse impacts of the policies themselves but rather due to self-discrimination by men, resulting from financial considerations (men still receive higher incomes than females) and wider cultural issues such as traditional gender roles. It was argued that these findings would most probably **also apply to other schemes of reduced working hours**, such as term-time.
- In a similar manner, **men are underrepresented amongst those who take carers' leave**. Here, most probably wider cultural factors (traditional gender roles) also lead to misconceptions regarding men's eligibility to apply for carers leave.
- It also emerged that **single people and people without dependants do not partake in part-time working to an equal extent**. The interview data suggests that this is also more likely the outcome of self-discrimination rather than of any adverse impact of the policies themselves.
- There are some indications that **people with dependants other than children may be more reluctant to avail of carers' leave**. While this cannot be ascribed to adverse impacts of the policy itself (as they are eligible to take carers' leave in the same way as others), a lack of

information on eligibility criteria may play an important role. Also, there are indications that some line managers are not fully aware of the eligibility of these persons and the policy might therefore not be applied consistently.

The assessment did not produce evidence of adverse impacts of flexible working policies with regards to the category of age. Moreover, evidence is inconclusive regarding adverse impacts of the policies for different religious affiliations. While the quantitative data provides some indication with regard to a skewed take up in the smaller organisations (in some cases a higher take up of part-time working by Protestants, in others by Catholics; a tendency for higher uptake by Catholics in relation to carers' leave) it must be remembered that only very few individuals are involved and percentage figures are thus easily distorted. Taking into account the strong correlation between religion and political affiliation, the same can reasonably be assumed for the latter category.

With regard to ethnicity and disability all of the six organisations lack diversity in their workforce; staff members are almost exclusively white and able-bodied. No adverse impacts could be recorded, however, in relation to the access to flexible working policies by those staff who belong to a black and minority ethnic group or who have a disability. It should also be borne in mind that the data is based on staff members identifying themselves as having a disability. The data may under-record the actual incidence of disability.

Although not pointing to inequality as such, there were several other points to note from focus group views. Focus groups raised concerns in the following areas:

- the view that inconsistencies are seen to arise from the varying application of the policies by line managers;
- discrepancies were also reported across different departments of organisations; most typically, it was thought that staff in smaller departments had less access to flexible working policies due to greater business constraints; perceived under-staffing in some departments was considered to play an important role as well;

- certain jobs were seen as less amenable to the promotion of flexible working;
- unfairness was also perceived to apply regarding the exclusion of staff beyond grade 5 from accessing flexi-time.

Impacts for Specific Organisations

In specific organisations it was apparent that scope existed to reasonably address perceptions of disadvantage:

- NICPMDE – the introduction of flexi-time and career break policies and the harmonisation of flexible working opportunities for all staff
- NIGALA – review all staff’s awareness of the range of flexible working policies available and the associated eligibility criteria; consider the option of working from home, on occasion, ensuring that there is consistent application with appropriate criteria and accountability arrangements in place
- CSA – a review of existing flexi-time arrangements, in terms of the start and finish of core hours and flexi hours, and examining the scope for accommodating scrutiny of applications for flexible working policies as part of the organisation’s general grievance procedure.

Action Points (for all organisations)

There are a number of action points emanating from the EQIA, relating to proposals for collective action and suggestions for specific organisations.

Although there is little evidence to suggest adverse impact in relation to flexible working policies, there are several areas that all organisations commit themselves to reflect on – in relation to the promotion of equality of opportunity.

Evidently many staff felt that information about flexible working policies was inadequate, and this may be a factor in the differential uptake by men. It is clear that many organisations do not

effectively measure uptake of flexible working policies in the first place, which is needed to provide a basis for identifying under-representation (eg by single people, dependants). A recurrent theme was the notion of excess hours being worked by staff. Finally, there was an underlying sense that although organisations might have flexible working policies, the practical application of these was inconsistent.

The potential for several straightforward, relatively low-cost initiatives to address some of the perceived inadequacies identified by staff is evident. There are five specific actions that will be undertaken by organisations:

- (1) Initiatives to raise awareness of flexible working policies across organisations, such as an awareness week or leaflets, updates in handbooks, staff magazines etc. Awareness initiatives will also include training for line managers.
- (2) Collaborative work between the organisations to identify and share good practice as well as pitfalls regarding individual policies.
- (3) Development of a flagship project to showcase the benefits of flexible working either jointly or within a specific agency.
- (4) Introduction of a formal monitoring system for measuring applications for and uptake of flexible working policies by different Section 75 categories across agencies. Reporting on this initiative is to be included in public authorities' 'Annual Review of Progress'.
- (5) Review of working arrangements and hours for all grades of staff to identify inconsistencies and bring forward proposals for addressing these (including those of senior managers).

Specific Action Points (for individual bodies)

Linked directly to earlier specific impacts the direct actions are as follows:

- NICPMDE – the organisation to consider introducing a flexi-time and career break policy and to ensure the harmonisation of access to flexible working policies for all staff
- NIGALA – the organisation to review all staff's awareness of the range of flexible working policies

available and associated eligibility criteria; to consider the option of working from home, on occasion, ensuring that there is consistent application with appropriate criteria and accountability arrangements in place. Finally the need for NIGALA to act more assertively with Courts in safeguarding a healthy work life balance for staff.

- CSA – the organisation to review its current flexi-time policy and to raise awareness regarding the option to scrutinise applications for flexible working policies as part of the organisation's general grievance procedure.

Monitoring

The delivery of specific action points in this Equality Impact Assessment will be monitored on an ongoing basis and each organisation's Annual Review of Progress will contain a report on the EQIA implementation.

In addition, a delivery plan outlining the practical implementation of EQIA action points will be produced by the end of the first quarter of the financial year 2003/2004, and this will set out approaches to the monitoring of specific impacts for the equality target groups. The organisations will seek to put in place arrangements for monitoring in relation to the categories of age, gender, religion, ethnicity, marital status, dependants, and disability on an annual basis.

The organisations do not have any quantitative monitoring arrangements in place in relation to the categories of political opinion and sexual orientation. Options for qualitative monitoring with regard to these categories will likewise be explored in the course of the first quarter of the new financial year, pending also the publication of further advice by the Equality Commission.