

EQUALITY IMPACT

Consideration of Available Data and Research

Quantitative Data

1. The Team found it difficult to access reliable information on the extent of expenditure on public procurement in the Northern Ireland public sector. Best estimates indicate that £1.2bn is spent on public procurement by Northern Ireland Departments. This amounts to 24.3% of expenditure controlled by these Departments.
2. Information to assess the impact of procurement policy and an analysis of contracts was not readily available. The Team considered commissioning research on this but this was not considered practicable within given time constraints.
3. The Team has recommended that Departments, Agencies and related bodies develop better management information about the amount they spend on procurement, on what, and with which supplier (see Chapter 4, paragraph 4.20).

Qualitative Data and Research

4. In preparing its recommendations, the Team took account of recommendations on public procurement prepared by:
 - the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and its predecessor bodies;
 - the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights (SACHR);
 - the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of the House of Commons;
 - the Better Regulation Task Force.
5. Academic research conducted in the United Kingdom, Europe and North America was also considered. Copies of related documentation are available on request from the Finance and Information Systems Division, Department of Finance and Personnel, Room G2.13, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, BT19 7NA.
6. The Team met with the Equality Commission and attended a workshop on procurement as part of an equality conference organised by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Following the conference, the Team received and considered submissions from West Belfast

Economic Forum, Training for Women Network and the Committee on the Administration of Justice.

7. Two meetings took place with the Assembly's Finance and Personnel Committee. In addition, officials in HM Treasury's Office of Government Commerce, procurement practitioners, Ministerial Advisers and senior officials in Northern Ireland were also consulted.
8. Arising from its research and consultations, the Team:
 - noted that the Equality Commission, its predecessor bodies, SACHR, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of the House of Commons and a number of voluntary/community bodies favoured the inclusion of equality considerations in public procurement; and
 - considered concerns expressed by procurement practitioners about practical and legal difficulties in the inclusion of considerations other than commercial in public procurement.

Assessments of Impact

9. Given the lack of quantitative data, it was difficult to assess if the policy recommendations would have adverse impact on any of the groups included within section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
10. The Team has considered its recommendations in the context of existing Northern Ireland anti-discrimination legislation and European Union Directives on procurement and is satisfied that these proposals should not be directly or indirectly discriminatory against any of the groups covered within section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
11. The Team is of the view that its recommendations should have a positive impact on equality of opportunity with regard to religious belief, political opinion, gender, race and disability. In addition the proposals are in line with the Executive's policy on targeting disadvantage and social need.

Consideration of Mitigating Measures or Alternative Policies

12. Since we believe that there should not be any adverse impact, we have not considered mitigation measures. Having considered a wide range of the legal and practical issues, including possible alternative policies, the Team is of the view that at this time, these proposals are the most effective way of promoting equality of opportunity in this policy area.

Consultation

13. For the purposes of a fuller assessment of the equality impact of our proposals, we would envisage the following information being sought:
- is there any other data or information which might be drawn upon to assess the equality impact of the proposals in this report?
 - do those likely to be affected by these proposals consider:
 - that the proposals have any positive or negative equality impacts on any of the groups included within section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and if so how?
 - that, taking account of existing legislation, there are alternative approaches to the promotion of equality of opportunity in this policy area, and, if so, what are they?

Decision and Publication

14. The Team anticipates that public consultation on this report will allow completion of the equality impact assessment prior to final decisions by the Executive.
15. We also anticipate that a report of the equality impact assessment will be made available as an Annex to the published report following final approval by the Executive.