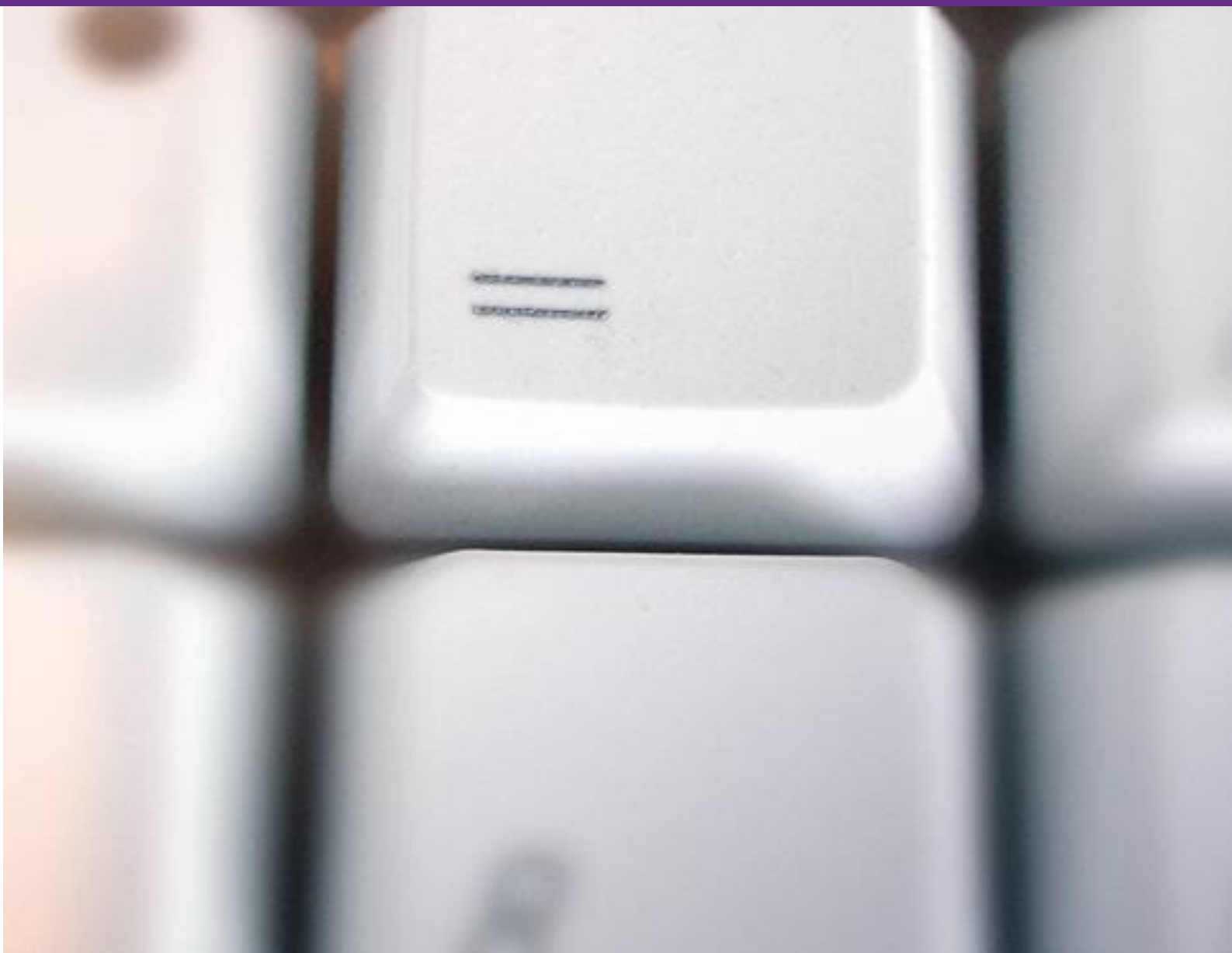


Five Year Review of Equality Scheme – 2011 to 2016



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Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998



This document is available in a range of formats on request.

Please contact Patricia McCarthy, HR and Administration Executive, with your requirements

Publication date: January 2017

Foreword

The **safefood** Equality Scheme was approved by the Northern Ireland Equality Commission in September 2011 and has provided **safefood** with a framework for mainstreaming equality into our policies and work.

This five year report evaluates how the scheme has been implemented at **safefood**. As part of this evaluation, an Audit of Inequalities has been carried out and a new S75 Action Plan developed to take us through the next three years.

safefood considers the promotion of good relations as a cornerstone of its work on the island and strives to promote and integrate equality in all aspects of our services. On behalf of **safefood** and our staff, I would like to present this report as a continuing means of fulfilling our statutory duties.

Ray Dolan
Chief Executive
safefood
10 January 2017

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1 Background

safefood was established in December 1999 as the Food Safety Promotion Board. It is one of six North/South Implementation Bodies established under the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and given legislative effect on the island by the North/South Cooperation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, and the British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999.

Funding is provided by the Oireachtas in the Republic of Ireland and by the Northern Ireland Assembly. Seventy per cent of the funding is provided by the Department of Health (DOH) in the Republic of Ireland, and the balance (thirty per cent) is provided by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland (DOHNI).

The functions of the Body are carried out by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) under the policy direction of the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC). There is a twelve-member Advisory Board and a twelve-member Advisory Committee (SAC) to assist and advise the CEO in the discharge of **safefood**'s functions.

The establishing legislation provides for:-

- the promotion of food safety and healthy eating;
- research into food safety;
- the promotion of scientific cooperation and linkages between laboratories, and,
- surveillance of food-borne diseases.

There is also a requirement to provide nutritional advice and to provide an independent scientific assessment of the food supply.

safefood's arrangements for assessing compliance with its duties as described under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 are set out in the Equality Scheme. These include:

- A commitment to fulfil its Section 75 obligations in all parts of its work. Statutory responsibility for the effective implementation lies with the Chief Executive.
- The Director Corporate Operations will be accountable to the Chief Executive for the development, maintenance and review of the Equality Scheme in accordance with the legislation and any good practice or guidance that may be issued by the Equality Commission.
- The Equality Officer will be the central point of contact with the Equality Commission, for consultation exercises and for complaints under the scheme.
- Objectives and targets relating to S75 duties will be integrated into corporate strategies and operational plans as appropriate and will be reflected at all levels of strategic planning within **safefood**. It is intended that the S75 Action Plan be treated as a 'living document' and whilst it is designed to reflect the three year span of the business plan, it will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
- A commitment to consultation, EQIAs and screening in order to assist in identifying more focused targets leading to greater opportunities to effectively promote equality of opportunity and good relations.
- Training and understanding of Section 75 duties will be carried out during induction and thereafter on an ongoing basis so that staff are aware of their responsibilities.

2 Review

2.1 Commitment

As a North/South body, **safefood** is committed to the ethos of equality throughout its work. At the core of its philosophy is the belief that its main role is to enhance and improve relationships throughout the island throughout a communicative and partnership approach to its work. The revised Equality Scheme 2011-2016 alongside the Audit of Inequalities 2014-2016 and the operation of both the Disability Action Plan 2012-2016 and Section 75 Action Plan 2014-2016 has helped **safefood** to focus on how a programme of change can be facilitated by working in effective partnerships.

Each year, **safefood** prepares an Annual S75 Report for the Equality Commission. This allows for a formal review of its ongoing work and assessments against outcomes and timetables. Equality objectives and commitments are mainstreamed into the strategic and operational business plans. These are reported on in the Annual ss Report. Screening and EQIA processes are followed to ensure that equality is mainstreamed into the organisational thinking.

All these reports are available on the **safefood** website along with its publications and communications about its work.

Senior management responsibility for implementation of the Equality Scheme has been given to the Director Corporate Operations who reports directly to the Chief Executive. Staff are trained regularly in different aspects of equality and all job descriptions include a clear duty and responsibility with regards to S75 duties.

On both a formal and informal level, the staff at **safefood** work with governmental departments and agencies, educational institutes, other bodies and individuals throughout the island of Ireland to promote the message of food safety and healthy eating. This message is not necessarily identifiable with any particular equality grouping but rather seen as something that can touch on all groups. However, **safefood** research has shown that there are vulnerable groups such as low income families and people with disabilities who will straddle all the equality groups and within the groups the elderly, children and men seem to need more tailored messages.

Much of the work over the past five years has been to improve how we communicate with these groups and to help individuals and communities take steps to try to change their lives into healthier ways of living.

safefood continually acts proactively to implement and develop opportunities for equality and good relations. This is demonstrated through its service delivery and on-going awareness raising and training. Geographical location does remain a challenge and one that **safefood** works hard to reduce by focusing on developing partnerships in Northern Ireland.

2.2 Measures taken

During the past five years, **safefood** continued to build on its early work to ensure that equality is mainstreamed into the organisation. Active partnerships with a range of agencies and community groups in Northern Ireland have been successfully developed and fostered. These partnerships have provided **safefood** with the means to highlight and address the areas of food poverty and safe and healthy eating. By working closely in partnership, **safefood** is able to better target specific groupings across the spectrum of the equality groups.

Some specific interventions and measures that have contributed to ensuring equality and good relations stay in the forefront of **safefood**'s work are:

- *Adult obesity awareness campaigns.* Partnerships were formed with organisations and bodies under the 'Fitter Futures for all' framework to promote awareness about how obesity is becoming a norm.
- *All-Island Obesity Forum.* Along with other bodies and agencies, **safefood** is preparing strategies on an all-island basis to fight the continuing growing crisis in Ireland with obesity.
- *Primary School Educational Resources.* **safefood** worked closely with educational bodies and teachers to develop teaching resources that will educate children on healthy behaviours such as the 'Clean Hands' DVD
- *Secondary School Educational Resources.* These resources continue to educate students about healthy eating, labelling, preparing food safely and healthy lifestyles.
- *Men's Health.* Working with organisations such as the Ulster Cancer Foundation, **safefood** focused on appropriate interventions for men.

- *Women's Health.* In partnership with agencies on the island of Ireland, targeted campaigns on folic acid and breastfeeding have been rolled out.
- *Children's health and wellbeing.* Campaigns on nutrition, sleep and portions sizes aim to increase parent's awareness around the links between these and childhood obesity.
- *Scientific expertise forums.* Scientific forums, conferences and advisory groups have been established on an all-island basis. These groups bring together scientists from all backgrounds and groupings to work together to promote food integrity and nutritional awareness.
- *Community Forums.* Local community initiatives are funded by **safefood** to promote awareness about food.
- *Food Poverty.* Research commissioned by **safefood** has highlighted the groups that are at risk of food poverty. **safefood** works with agencies to develop and promote targeted initiatives.
- *Food Safety Awareness Campaigns.* These campaigns merge research findings with a general public interest message to highlight to all how important food safety and hygiene are.
- *People with disabilities.* For the period of this scheme, **safefood** worked closely with the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the National Council for the Blind Ireland to develop materials and web resources that would assist this vulnerable group with food preparation and nutritional awareness.
- *Roadshows, exhibitions and conferences.* Meeting the public and talking to people from all walks of life is a key focal point of **safefood**'s communications. Over the years, **safefood** has attended national events such as Balmoral and the Ploughing Championships, hosted scientific conferences and held roadshows around the island.

Underlying these campaigns is **safefood**'s targeted and commissioned research in food poverty, nutrition and food safety awareness. This research provides **safefood** and other agencies with the facts and knowledge required to identify the groups in society who would most benefit from our education resources and programmes.

2.3 Consultation and Feedback

The annual Progress Reviews provide regular updates to external and internal stakeholders. Much of the work during the period of this Equality Scheme has to been to ensure that a clearer focus has been given to the mainstreaming of equality within the organisation. Consultation is a vital part of all **safefood**'s work. Much of the consultation is done through the development of a policy, service, campaign working closely with the relevant agencies and testing through focus groups and public attitude surveys.

Over the lifetime of the Equality Scheme, 9 policies were screened and determined that an EQIA was not necessary. A new Disability Action Plan was created and automatically sent out for consultation without screening. Only one response from a representative group was received from Northern Ireland.

It has become noticeable to **safefood** that formal equality consultation exercises result in only a very small number of respondents. Whilst acknowledging the role of formal consultations within the delivery of services, **safefood** has found that a more meaningful dialogue is emerging by working with the relevant organisations and focus groups.

A recent action was to update the consultation database to include as many groups and organisations in Northern Ireland. This updated consultation database was used for consulting on the Disability Action Plan. As a result of the lack of responses, **safefood** will review its consultation list by engaging with the consultees to ascertain their interest in being contacted.

2.4 Complaints and investigations

During the lifetime of this Scheme, **safefood** received no complaints under the Equality Scheme complaints procedure. There were no investigations by the Equality Commission.

3 Evaluation

Over the period of the two Equality Schemes, it has become obvious to **safefood** that the main impact of the Equality Scheme has been on its own staff. Staff are aware of how equality impacts on how they deliver services to the public. Equality screening and awareness is a component of policy development. A formal mechanism whereby a screening committee meets to evaluate policies was established by **safefood** at the beginning of the first Equality Scheme. This team was evaluated during this reporting period and refresher training given on the screening process. This formal method works well for **safefood** and will remain in place.

safefood operates on the basis that its responsibilities with regards to the Equality Scheme include the functions or duties it discharges relating to its work in Northern Ireland. **safefood**'s employment policies do not apply in Northern Ireland as **safefood** does not employ any staff there. It is the responsibility of **safefood** to ensure it complies with the employment provisions applicable in the relevant jurisdiction where the staff are based. **safefood** notes that its S75 remit therefore does not extend to employment in Cork or Dublin. It is believed that a better use of the limited resources at **safefood** would be to concentrate on policies that are likely to impact on Northern Ireland.

It is **safefood**'s belief that the promotion of good relations on the island of Ireland is one of the cornerstones of the creation of the North/South bodies. The basic philosophy behind the work of **safefood** is that our actions will inevitably promote better relations between the relevant communities in Northern Ireland and on the island as a whole.

safefood also believes that its work generally will impact on all the equality groups as food poverty and healthy and safe eating impact on all, regardless of their equality status. Therefore, the work over the past years has been to identify vulnerable groups within the equality groups who need access to **safefood**'s messages. This approach has resulted in the creation of strong and lasting partnerships where a multi-agency, all-island direction has been taken to tackle issues of obesity and food poverty. However, **safefood** will continue to review its consultation processes to see how they can be improved and become more useful.

As part of this review, **safefood** carried out a new Audit of Inequalities and assessed its previous S75 Equality Business Plan and Audit of Inequalities. As a result of this, a new S75 Equality Business Plan has been developed for 2017-2019 to tie in with the Corporate Strategy.

The guidance of the Equality Commission has been followed in undertaking this review. The review has been a worthwhile exercise which has allowed us to both look back and look forward.

Based on these evaluations, **safefood** does not feel it needs to develop a new Equality Scheme. The current Scheme will be updated to reflect organisation changes, a new staff training programme and a new five year date.