



2020-21 BUSINESS PLAN

Better Workplaces

VISION: To be widely recognised as Northern Ireland’s leading authority in promoting productive working relationships for the benefit of individuals and organisations and to support the creation of a thriving and inclusive economy.

PURPOSE: To improve employment relations, promote best employment practice and resolve workplace disputes through the delivery of quality, impartial and independent services.

VALUES: To achieve our vision and purpose, our values are to be:

Progressive – forward thinking, outward looking, and creative in seeking better ways to support the economy;

Ethical – always acting with integrity, impartiality and utmost professionalism, and demonstrating openness and accountability;

Exemplary – challenging ourselves to be the best we can be and a role model in how we conduct employment relations; and,

Responsive – listening to our customers and staff, adapting to ensure our services meet customers’ needs.

These values underpin all that we do.

FOREWORD

This Business Plan represents the final year of the Agency's 2017-21 Corporate Plan, and reaffirms our absolute commitment to continue to meet the needs of our customers and stakeholders in what are exceptional circumstances. The rapid emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has changed dramatically the way we live and work. The Agency's Board held its annual strategic planning workshop in February 2020 when the operational context was very different; no one could have forecast what would transpire at the very end of 2019-20 financial year. The Board had already determined that the Agency's current vision, core purpose, values and strategic themes continue to offer an appropriate framework for all of our operational activities and targets in the coming year. In response to Covid-19, the Board subsequently agreed the following underpinning objectives that will guide all of our business operations; protecting our staff and service users; sustaining as many of our services as possible; and preparation for a substantive recovery of all services.

The Agency has responded quickly to the unprecedented challenge of having to close our offices at very short notice; all staff have the necessary technology to be able to work autonomously from home with the support from their line managers. The Agency has also developed a bespoke **'Together' People Programme** to ensure that our staff are supported through this challenging time for them and their loved ones. The programme has a very strong focus on physical and mental wellbeing.

The physical displacement of staff came at a time when the demand for a number of our services increased. Covid-19 has and will continue to have a fundamental impact on the labour market and the global economy. The demand for our telephone-based Workplace Information Service increased exponentially because of concerns about safety within workplaces and job security.

The Agency has also had to respond to the challenge of delivering Early Conciliation from 27 January 2020. This new service represents a fundamentally different approach to dispute resolution. Previously, an employee could submit a claim directly to the Office of the Industrial and Fair Employment Tribunal (OITFET). Now potential tribunal claimants are required to notify the Agency in the first instance to explore the possibility of resolving the dispute without the need for formal litigation.

The reality is that remote working may be the norm for a significant part of the current business plan period; the Agency is already delivering its Workplace Information Service and individual conciliation remotely and the challenge for this year is to be able to deliver all of our services remotely. This will require our delivery partners and key stakeholders to be flexible in working with us to ensure that our services remain accessible and responsive.

We appreciate the important role that all of our stakeholders play in promoting the work of the Agency and the economic and social return from good employment and industrial relations. The Agency will continue to facilitate the advisory work of the NI Engagement Forum, established by the Executive in March 2020 and which reports directly to the Minister for the Economy.

A positive outside of the trauma associated with Covid-19 has been the restoration of devolved Government; it brings the required certainty in terms of decision-making and provides a direction of travel about key priorities. The Minister’s prompt action in launching the new Early Conciliation service was a very positive first step. The Agency’s Board looks forward to working with Minister Dodds and her officials over the remainder of this mandate.

In summary, we will continue to focus on the wellbeing of our staff and customers while taking every opportunity to restore all of our services.



Marie Mallon
Chairperson



Tom Evans
Chief Executive

THE PLANNING CONTEXT

The restoration of devolved Government in January 2020 should have signalled a period of stability; but no one could not have envisaged that our greatest challenge in 2020-21 would be a global pandemic. In early 2020, the Minister for the Economy announced the introduction of Early Conciliation from 27 January 2020. The Agency is pleased that the Minister acted so quickly in bringing much needed certainty about the timing of the launch of this new service, which changes in a very fundamental way how employment disputes are managed. There was an expectation that the publication of NI Executive's New Decade New Approach document¹ and the prospect of a new Programme for Government (PfG) would provide a more informed planning context for every public body in Northern Ireland. However, Covid-19 has put much of what constitutes normal business on hold; creating unique challenges, which require equally unique solutions.

The Agency closed its offices in March 2020 with all staff working from home. The challenge for this business year will be to deliver as many of our services on a remote basis. We have made a very positive start with our telephone-based Workplace Information service and individual conciliation all delivered remotely. We are actively exploring new digital platforms that will allow our staff to deliver more of our services remotely.

The Agency's Corporate Plan is closely aligned to the draft PfG and our Board has determined that our current strategic themes, focusing on service delivery, partnership and good governance, are still relevant. The recent publication of the Department of the Economy's Covid-19 Response Business Plan validates our Board's decision to establish the following Covid-19 objectives, which have an exclusive focus on mitigating the very obvious risks associated with the pandemic:

- Ensuring that our staff, service users and the general public are safe;
- Sustaining the delivery of key frontline services urgently required because of changes in the labour market; and
- Planning for recovery.

The Agency will continue to focus on the health and wellbeing of our staff; sustained periods of home working can have an adverse impact and the NI Engagement Forum has asked the Agency to develop specific guidance for employers on how to manage prolonged periods of home working. The Agency will also seek to realise the full potential of remote working through the appropriate use of technology to support service delivery.

¹ Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deal-to-see-restored-government-in-northern-ireland-tomorrow>.

The Department of the Economy (DfE) has launched a consultation process on Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay, which is such an appropriate course of action in the context of Covid-19. It is worth noting that in the consultation document the Minister also seeks input to a vision for employment rights here in NI.

The Agency understands that Government's primary focus has had to be on managing the risk to life and seeking to restart the NI economy. Economic recovery plans will also have to take account of the UK's exit from the EU and the associated NI Protocol.² All of this will have a significant influence on the NI labour market and is likely to increase the demand for the Agency's advisory and dispute resolution services.

In launching the consultation on Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay, the Minister has initiated a policy development agenda that had been on hold for some considerable time. The consultation highlights that there have been a number of reforms in Great Britain, which do not apply to NI, where employment law is a devolved matter.

The Agency will seek to work with DfE in order to contribute to the development of future employment relations policy and legislation, taking into account developments elsewhere, in a way that supports the delivery of PfG outcomes. The Agency has already commissioned Warwick University to conduct research on the development of an employment relations model for NI, and it is hoped this will help inform the evidence base available to the Department in developing future policies. This research will be published in 2020-21.

The Agency's baseline budget for 2020-21 is higher than the previous year. Additional budget has been provided to cover the costs of increased employment pension contributions, and there has been an uplift to reflect the 2019-20 pay award and price inflation. Funding has also been provided for five post posts to help the Agency respond to an anticipated increase in demand for services as a result of the UK's exit from the EU. While this increased budget is welcome, the Agency will have to manage financial pressures arising from the outcome of the Rent Review of our Head Office accommodation and the 2020-21 pay award.

² Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-protocol-on-irelandnorthern-ireland-and-political-declaration>.

Demand for our services is influenced by what is happening in the labour market, which will continue to be extremely volatile during 2020-21 because of the economic impacts of Covid-19. Concerns around job security and multiple questions about the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) or 'furlough' have resulted in a very significant rise in the volume of calls to our Workplace Information Service. The introduction of EC, ongoing pressures created by multiple cases in their tens of thousands relating to holiday pay, and the potential for significant redundancies will create substantial operational challenges.

Call volumes to our Workplace Information System (WIS) increased by 22% to just under 21,000 in the past year. In part we saw a spike in enquiries towards the end of the reporting year that can be directly attributable to employment queries related to the Covid 19 pandemic such as those related to CJRS.

In addition there continues to be a high demand for all of our dispute resolution services; in terms of individual rights, more than 15,000 cases registered on our case management system during the reporting period giving rise to almost 30,000 different jurisdiction claims.

Approximately 85% of the cases registered involved large bulk cases (similar cases with the same respondent) mostly derived from case law decisions on the calculation of holiday pay and unlawful deduction from wages; there were 2,368 individual cases registered.

The number of cases cleared in 2019-20 was 3,539. Of these, 1,591 (45%) were cases in which tribunal proceedings had been lodged and 1,948 (55%) were cases that had the potential to proceed to the tribunal. A settlement was reached in 2,159 (61%) of the cases cleared, 709 (20%) of cases were withdrawn and 256 (7%) were determined by a tribunal.

The remaining 12% related to Early Conciliation or pre-claim cases where a party did not engage in conciliation and/or the case was not resolved within the timeframe for lodging tribunal proceedings.

On 27 January 2020, the Agency introduced a new dispute resolution service, Early Conciliation, following the commencement of the Early Conciliation provisions of the Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 2016. As a result, anyone who wishes to lodge a tribunal claim must first notify the Agency and consider the Agency offer of our Early Conciliation service as an alternative to formal litigation.

For the period 27 January-31 March 2020, the Agency received 532 EC notifications; 376 EC cases cleared with 19 settlements and 357 EC Certificates issued. It is too early to offer any commentary on the impact of the service, as no data is available yet on the numbers who subsequently lodged a tribunal claim.

Demand for our mediation, arbitration/independent appeals, and collective conciliation services also remains high.

Covid-19 also affects how we deliver all of our advisory and facilitation services. The Agency will continue to respond to our customers through the development of webinars on high demand topics, by constantly reviewing the content of our website and in using digital technology to help signpost service users to the range of information and support that is available online. We will continue to explore new ways of delivering our workshops and seminars through better use of technology that increase the reach of our services and allows customers greater autonomy in how they access those services.

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The Agency is a publicly funded body established by the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, and continued by the Industrial Relations Order (Northern Ireland) 1992. We are independent of, but accountable to, the Department for the Economy.

Our independent Board, comprising members drawn from business, trade union, employment law and academic backgrounds, establishes the Agency's strategic direction. Board members are public appointments, appointed by the Minister for the Economy.

We currently employ the equivalent of just over 60 full-time staff who operate from two locations – our Head Office in Belfast and a Regional Office in Derry/Londonderry. Our budget allocation for staffing and running costs in 2020-21 is £4,035k. Our capital budget is £145k.

Services

The Agency provides a range of **advisory services** to promote good employment practice and advise employers and employees on their rights and responsibilities. These services include:

- **Workplace Information Service** – this is a confidential information and advice line for employers and individuals, and their representatives.
- **Briefings, seminars, and workshops** – these are aimed at disseminating information and good practice on a range of employment issues and enhancing the employment relations skills of line managers.

- **Document reviews** – these provide commentary on an individual employer’s employment documentation, including contracts of employment, to ensure legislative compliance and promote good practice.

The Agency also provides a range of confidential **dispute resolution** services designed to deal with problems that arise in the workplace. These include:

- **Conciliation** – this service seeks to find a mutually agreeable solution to a problem or disagreement where an individual could make a claim to a tribunal. There are three aspects to this:
 - **Early Conciliation** – from 27 January 2020, except for a number of exemptions, a potential claimant has had to notify the Agency of a dispute and consider conciliation before submitting a tribunal claim;
 - **Post-claim conciliation** – once a tribunal claim has been submitted, the Agency continues to be available to the parties to settle their dispute through conciliation; and,
 - **Employer-led conciliation** – the Agency provides a service to employers who wish to avoid the risk of a tribunal claim by using conciliation to resolve an employment matter.
- **Arbitration** – where a solution to a problem or disagreement to an individual dispute cannot be found, and the parties wish to avoid a tribunal, our arbitration service provides a quick, confidential, non-legalistic process to resolve the matter. Arbitration decisions, and remedies that flow from these, are legally enforceable in the same way as tribunal decisions.
- **Mediation** – this is an effective tool for restoring positive working relationships using a mediator to work with those in conflict or dispute to find a mutually agreed resolution to overcome their differences.
- **Collective Conciliation** – this service aims to help employers and trade unions resolve disputes.

Influencing employment relations policy

As well as being a service provider, the Agency has a key role in working with representative bodies of employers and employees to facilitate discussion and seek to influence strategic employment relations issues. These bodies include the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Chambers of Commerce, Institute of Directors (IoD), and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU). We also work with all the main sectors, including the public, private, education and research, and voluntary and community sectors.

For a number of years the Agency has facilitated the work of the NI Employment Relations Roundtable, which is representative of a number of employer and trade union bodies. In March 2020, the Executive established the NI Engagement Forum, to provide advice on Covid-19 matters as they apply to the labour market. The Agency chairs and facilitates the work of the Forum, which has a much wider representation from employer and trade union bodies with dedicated support from key statutory agencies (Health and Safety Executive NI and the Public Health Agency, as well as the Agency) directly involved in managing the workplace challenges created by Covid-19. The Forum reports to the Executive through the Minister for the Economy; the Agency will work with all Forum members, DfE and the Executive Office to determine whether the Forum has a more permanent role as a vehicle for social dialogue and what impact that may have on the sustainability of the Roundtable.

OUR APPROACH TO THE BUSINESS PLAN

The plan mirrors the structure and format of our 2017-21 Corporate Plan and reflects the need to respond positively to Covid-19 in our operational commitments. We have taken account of the approach adopted by DfE in its 2020-21 Business Plan in closely aligning our performance reporting with the outcomes based accountability (OBA) approach set out in the Executive's draft PfG. Our Corporate Plan provides the strategic framework for all of our business plan activities, and this operational plan also includes very specific actions in response to Covid-19. These strategic themes are:

- 1. Improving organisational performance and responding to the needs of individuals through expert employment relations advice and support** – this theme focuses on the delivery by our expert and knowledgeable staff of advisory and dispute resolution services to improve the performance of organisations and help create better workplaces for individuals.
- 2. Working with stakeholders and delivery partners to evidence and promote the economic and social return from good employment relations and shape public policy** – this theme focuses on working with others to undertake research and generate data on the value of positive and harmonious employment relations and to influence Government policy.
- 3. Optimising the contribution of staff and resources to deliver our statutory functions through effective leadership and governance practices** – through effective leadership and excellent governance arrangements we will make the best use of the resources available to the Agency to deliver our statutory role.

Performance Reporting

The Agency has already invested significant energy in aligning our performance reporting with the outcomes-based approach promulgated in the draft Programme for Government (PfG) and relevant NIAO guidance. This has resulted in the development of three 'scorecards' for all of our core services; the first and second scorecards focus on quantitative and qualitative analysis with the third measuring the impact of those services. These are presented at **Appendix 1**.

The Agency piloted this new approach to performance reporting in 2019-20; this has identified a need for external support to develop more effective systems for gathering qualitative and impact data that build on our existing measurement systems. We will work with our sponsor team and the statisticians in DfE to complete this work.

LINKS TO THE PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

As a public body, the Agency is committed to making a positive contribution to the delivery of the Programme for Government in its totality; however, for business planning purposes, our work is referenced against the following PfG outcomes:

- ***We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy (PfG Outcome 1)*** – our advisory services promote greater employee engagement and job satisfaction resulting in higher productivity; our dispute resolution services provide the stability to grow a strong economy. A more cohesive labour market is more likely to attract organisations to invest in Northern Ireland, which is and is seen to be a good place to do business.
- ***We have a more equal society (PfG Outcome 3)*** – our advisory and dispute resolution services are delivered on a fair and equitable basis, promote greater co-operation, and develop harmonious, productive workplaces. Where disputes arise we help the parties to reach an agreed settlement to resolve these.
- ***We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their full potential (PfG Outcome 5)*** – our collaborative work with delivery partners contributes to the wellbeing of organisations and individual employees. The Agency continues to explore more innovative ways of reaching out to new and existing customers; our work with the public sector contributes to the delivery of more effective and efficient public services; and our work with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) enhances productivity and employee engagement.

- ***We have more people working in better jobs (PfG Outcome 6)*** – our work in developing the employment relations skills of line managers is critical. There is a strong link between effective line management and the health and wellbeing of employees and improved organisational performance. This results in greater levels of staff retention and a reduction in turnover within the labour market. Our work with DfE and the NI Employment Relations Roundtable to explore how the UK Government’s ‘Good Work Plan’ could apply to Northern Ireland is particularly relevant.
- ***We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest (PfG Outcome 10)*** – our work contributes to higher levels of productivity and harmonious industrial relations that encourage greater levels of investment in our economy, both in terms of indigenous companies and potential foreign direct investment (FDI).

OBJECTIVES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR 2020-21

Strategic Theme 1: Improving organisational performance and responding to the needs of individuals through expert employment relations advice and support.

Our objectives for 2020-21 envisage services being delivered remotely for the duration of the Covid-19 restrictions. We plan a gradual restoration of face-to-face service delivery when public health conditions permit, with appropriate safety measures and practices in place.

Under this theme, the key priorities are ensuring remote delivery of all services and evaluating the effectiveness of this. This will inform a longer term blended delivery framework with services being delivered on both a remote and face-to-face basis, where it meet customer needs and is safe to do so.

Strategic objectives

1.1 To provide effective guidance on employment relations issues to individuals and organisations.

Objectives for 2020-21

- a) Respond effectively to callers to the Workplace Information Service via remote working during Covid 19 pandemic with performance measures below adjusted accordingly based on demand for service.

Performance measures:

- Number of enquires received/handled.
 - Average waiting time (*target: less than one minute*).
 - Lost call rate (*target: less than 10%*).
 - Number and % of contacts reporting increased knowledge and understanding of good practice or the law regarding employment relations issues.
- b) Deliver a range of good practice seminars and briefings via recorded webinars during Covid 19 pandemic to give employers, employees, and their representatives greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters.

Performance measures:

- Number of webinars developed.
- Number of events delivered remotely/recorded webinars viewed.
- Number of participating organisations in live remotely delivered webinars.
- % planned events delivered taking account of Covid 19 restrictions
- Customer satisfaction with the quality of the events where this can be determined remotely.
- Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters as a result of attendance at events where this can be determined remotely (*target: at least 75%*).

- c) Review, **by March 2021**, the Agency's approach to, and content of, good practice seminars and briefings to ensure they contribute effectively to increasing employment relations knowledge and skills.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.

- d) Deliver the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice, remotely via interactive webinars to take account of the Covid 19 pandemic, and to encourage employers to adopt good practice in managing employment relations.

Performance measures:

- Remote delivery model in place.
- Number of line managers undertaking the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice.
- % of line managers achieving the LRA Certificate in Management Practice.
- Customer satisfaction with the quality of the events.
- Number and % of line managers applying learning/skills in the workplace as a result of completing the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice.

- e) Conduct, **by March 2021**, a mapping exercise to inform a feasibility study on the accreditation of the Agency's Certificate in Effective Line Management.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.
- Secure third party support for the Agency's accreditation process.

- f) Develop and deliver an updated on-line document review service to promote legislative compliance by employers and encourage good practice in employment relations matters **from March 2021**

Performance measures:

- Online service in place.
- Number of customers using the online service.
- Customer satisfaction with the quality of the service.
- Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in applying their policies/procedures as a result of document reviews.

- g) Develop and deliver good practice facilitation service using remote techniques where possible during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Performance measures:

- Remote delivery model in place.
- Number of projects registered.
- Number of collective agreements/policies facilitated.
- % projects completed.
- Customer satisfaction with the quality of the service.
- Number of more effective policies in place.
- Number and % of customers reporting a more positive employment relations environment and reduced likelihood of disputes occurring.

- h) Work with key delivery partners, on a remote basis during the Covid-19 pandemic, on a range of events and signature projects.

Performance measures:

- Number of partners worked with.
- Number of joint events held.
- % planned events held.
- Partner satisfaction with the quality of the Agency's input.
- Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters as a result of attendance at events.
- Number and % of customers reporting a more positive employment relations environment and reduced likelihood of disputes occurring.

1.2 To help prevent and resolve individual and collective workplace employment disputes.

Objectives for 2020-21

- a) Continue to deliver an Early Conciliation service remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic that reduces the number of claims heard by an employment tribunal.

Performance measures:

- Number of employee and employer-led notifications received.
- % of cases settled.
- Customer satisfaction with the service provided.
- Number and % of cases not proceeding to tribunal (*target: no more than 20%*).
- Number and % of tribunal days saved.

- b) Contribute to a review of the first year of operation of Early Conciliation in line with a timetable agreed with the Department for the Economy.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.

- c) Develop and deliver a collective conciliation service on a remote basis during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Performance measures:

- Remote delivery model in place.
- Number of collective conciliation cases received.
- % collective conciliation cases undertaken.
- % resulting in a settlement to resolve the dispute (*target: 70%*).
- Customer satisfaction with the service provided.
- Number and % of customers reporting higher levels of engagement/trust following collective conciliation.

- d) Develop and deliver mediation services remotely to facilitate the resolution of interpersonal workplace disputes taking account of the restrictions of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Performance measures:

- Remote delivery model in place.
- Number of requests received.

- % resulting in agreement to resolve the dispute (*target: 70%*).
- % of requests undertaken.
- Customer satisfaction with the service provided.
- Number and % of customers reporting better working relationships following mediation.

e) Review, **by December 2020**, the Independent Appeals Service and make proposals to ensure its effectiveness.

Performance Measures:

- Timetable achieved.
- Efficiencies/process improvements identified

f) Deliver a remote based Arbitration and Independent Appeals Service that meets agreed performance standards taking into account the restrictions of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Performance measures:

- Number of arbitration and independent appeals cases received.
- % of arbitration and independent appeals cases completed.
- Customer satisfaction with the service provided.
- Number and % of customers reporting a difference in behaviours/attitudes following an arbitration or independent appeal hearing.

g) Work with key delivery partners in line with agreed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

Performance measures:

- Partner satisfaction with the quality of the Agency's input.

Strategic Theme 2: Working with stakeholders and delivery partners to evidence and promote the economic and social return from good employment relations and shape public policy.

Our objectives for 2020-21 envisage services being delivered remotely for the duration of the Covid-19 restrictions. We plan a gradual restoration of face-to-face service delivery when public health conditions permit, with appropriate safety measures and practices in place.

Under this theme, the key priorities are effective partnership working and policy development through both remote and face-to-face collaboration, using the most effective and safe methods of achieving this.

Strategic objectives

2.1 To facilitate the work of the NI Employment Relations Roundtable to stimulate discussion and collaboration by key stakeholders on matters of public policy, skills and research.

Objectives for 2020-21

- a) In partnership with the Equality Commission, promote the Joint Declaration for Protection (Dignity at Work/a Harmonious and Inclusive Working Environment) through virtual workshops with employers and trade unions by March 2021.

Performance measures:

- Partner satisfaction with the Agency's input.
- Workshop participant satisfaction.

- b) Complete all the necessary planning **by March 2021** to host a major employment/industrial relations conference in Autumn 2021 (re-scheduled due to Covid 19 pandemic).

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.
- Programme agreed and funding in place.
- Appointment of event planner.
- Promotional campaign agreed.

- c) Consult with members of the NI Roundtable about the sustainability of this group in light of the establishment of the NI Engagement Forum **by December 2020**.

Performance measures:

- Agreement on way forward achieved.
- Partner satisfaction with the quality of the Agency's input.

- d) Provide opportunities for Government to have early engagement with key stakeholders on the NI Engagement Forum/Roundtable on a range of policy proposals.

Performance measures:

- Partner satisfaction with the quality of the Agency's input.

- e) Support the implementation of new employment legislation, such as parental bereavement leave and pay, through guidance for employers and employees, in line with timetables agreed with the Department for the Economy.

Performance measures:

- Timetable(s) achieved.
- Partner satisfaction with the quality of the Agency's input.

2.2 To develop and promote an Employment Relations Model for Northern Ireland.

Objectives for 2020-21

- a. Publish, via a virtual launch **by December 2020**, research into international employment relations models.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.

- b. Identify, **by March 2021**, the key components of an Employment Relations Model for Northern Ireland for discussion with the NI Engagement Forum if it continues to operate or the NI Employment Relations Roundtable.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.

- c. Identify, **by March 2021**, the next steps to implement the Employment Relations Model for Northern Ireland.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.

2.3 To review the mechanisms for evidencing the economic and social return from good employment and industrial relations practice.

Objectives for 2020-21

- a) Deliver, **by December 2020**, a campaign to promote effective workplace dispute resolution practices through the dissemination of research conducted by Cardiff Business School on behalf of the Agency.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.

- b) Review and refine where appropriate the Agency's outcome based accountability measures to ensure they fully reflect our impact **by March 2021**.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.

Strategic Theme 3: Optimising the contribution of staff and resources to deliver our statutory functions through effective leadership and governance practices.

Our objectives for 2020-21 envisage services being delivered remotely for the duration of the Covid-19 restrictions. We plan a gradual restoration of face-to-face service delivery when public health conditions permit, with appropriate safety measures and practices in place.

Under this theme, the key priorities are ensuring all staff are supported to work from home effectively and adapting our offices to create a Covid-19 secure working environment for their eventual return; and identifying the most appropriate platform(s) for remote service delivery pending this.

Strategic objectives

3.1 To ensure the effective development of Agency staff and systems to deliver our statutory functions.

Objectives for 2020-21

a) Facilitate, **from April 2020**, effective remote working for all staff during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Performance measures:

- Level of employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in attendance at work.

b) Develop and implement, **from April 2020**, a programme to support the health and wellbeing of staff during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Performance measures:

- Level of employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in attendance at work.

- c) Embed, **from April 2020**, new employee engagement arrangements in line with the Agency's People Strategy.

Performance measures:

- Number of performance reviews conducted on time.
- % of performance reviews conducted on time.
- Number of days spent on learning and development.
- Number of return to work interviews conducted within three working days.
- % of days lost through sick absence.
- % of return to work interviews conducted within three working days.
- Level of employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in attendance at work.

- d) Agree, **by October 2020**, proposals for physical and behavioural safety measures to ensure a Covid-19 secure working environment to enable the phased re-opening of the Agency's offices when the public health advice and NI Executive guidance allow this.

Performance measures:

- Level of employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.

- e) Identify technological solutions to support the online delivery of all employment relations services **from September 2020**.

Performance measures:

- Customer satisfaction with the services provided.

- f) Develop and implement, **by September 2020**, enhancements to the web portal.

Performance measures:

- Customer satisfaction with the services provided.

- g) Implement, **from September 2020**, interim arrangements for the effective delivery of the Agency's IS Managed Services prior to relocation to James House in 2022.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.
- Value for money realised.

- h) Continue to grow the Agency's social media presence.

Performance measures:

- Number of social media posts.
- Level of engagement with social media.
- Reach of social media posts.
- % increase in social media followers.
- Number and % increase in public awareness of the Agency and its services.

- i) Increase awareness of the Agency and its services, particularly among key target groups (younger people, and in district council areas: Lisburn and Castlereagh; Derry and Strabane; and North Down).

Performance measures:

- Number of news releases/press statements.
- Proportion of coverage.
- Number and % increase in public awareness of the Agency and its services.

- j) Develop, **by March 2021**, a new intranet site for Agency staff and Board members.

Performance measures:

- Level of employee engagement.
- Number and % increase in employee engagement.

- k) Agree the design of the Agency Head Office's new accommodation in James House, in line with a timetable agreed with the Department of Finance.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.

3.2 To deliver excellent governance in the management of the Agency's resources in line with the requirements placed on public bodies.

Objectives for 2020-21

a) Ensure the effective quality management of the Agency's resources.

Performance measures:

- Number of internal/external/ISO 27001 audit recommendations implemented.
- Number of Customer Service Excellence Award non-conformities v conformities.
- % of internal/external/ISO 27001 audit recommendations implemented
- ISO 27001 retained.
- Customer Service Excellence Award achieved/retained.
- liP Status maintained/improved.
- Internal customer satisfaction with Corporate Services.

b) Achieve a budget outturn (resource and capital) of 99%.

Performance measures:

- Number of invoices paid.
- % of invoices paid within 10 working days (target: 90%) and 30 calendar days (target: 100%).
- % of budget spent.
- Annual report and accounts certified without qualification.

c) Implement, **from September 2020**, a new Disability Action Plan in line with the requirements of Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006).

Performance measures:

- Achievement of the plan's targets.

d) Become recognised, **by March 2021**, as a provider of official statistics.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.
- Stakeholder satisfaction with the quality of the published data.

- e) Develop and consult on a Corporate Plan for 2021-25 for Ministerial approval **by March 2021**.

Performance measures:

- Timetable achieved.
- Ministerial approval of the Corporate Plan.

- f) Induct new Board members, in line with a timetable agreed with the Department for the Economy.

Performance measures:

- New Board member satisfaction with their induction.

- g) Ensure Board effectiveness.

Performance measures:

- Compliance with recommended practice.³
- Board member satisfaction with their development.

³ Board Effectiveness – A Good Practice Guide, NIAO, November 2016 (available at: <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/sites/niao/files/media-files/Board%20Effectiveness-%20A%20Good%20Practice%20Guide.pdf>) and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Effectiveness Checklist, NAO, September 2017 (available at: https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Self_Assessment_Checklist.pdf).

RISKS

The Agency has comprehensive procedures in place for identifying and managing the risks that might prevent the achievement of the objectives contained in this Business Plan. Our Corporate Risk Register identifies the controls that are in place, and any further action that is being taken, to eliminate or manage down the likelihood of identified risks occurring and/or the impact of those risks should they materialise.

Risk management is incorporated into all of our business planning and decision making processes.

The key corporate risks that cut across the delivery of all of the Agency's Objectives for 2020-21 are:

1. **Relevance** – the Agency fails to adequately influence, or respond to, changes in the NI employment relations environment.
2. **Reputation** – the Agency's reputation for the provision of high quality, independent and impartial employment relations services is undermined.
3. **Funding**– the Agency fails to deliver its key corporate and business objectives due to budgetary constraints.
4. **Infrastructure** – the Agency's infrastructure or systems fail to adequately support effective governance and efficient operations.
5. **Staffing/Board** – the Agency encounters significant skill deficits and/or decrease in capacity among its staff and Board members.
6. **Compliance** – the Agency fails to comply with all relevant legislation and governance requirements, or fails to fulfil its statutory functions.

PERFORMANCE SCORECARDS

Advisory Services

HOW MUCH DID WE DO?	HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?
<p><u>Good Practice Seminars/Briefings/Workshops</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of events delivered • Number of participating organisations • Number of line managers undertaking the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice <p><u>Document Reviews</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number registered <p><u>Good Employment Practice Projects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of projects registered • Number of collective agreements/policies facilitated <p><u>Partnership working</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of partners worked with • Number of joint events held <p><u>Workplace Information Service</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of enquires received/handled 	<p><u>Good Practice Seminars/Briefings/Workshops</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % planned events delivered • % of line managers achieving the LRA Certificate in Management Practice • Customer satisfaction with the quality of the events <p><u>Document Reviews</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % completed within target timescale • Customer satisfaction with the quality of the service <p><u>Good Employment Practice Projects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % projects completed • Customer satisfaction with the quality of the service <p><u>Partnership working</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % planned events held • Partner satisfaction with the quality of the Agency's input • Customer satisfaction with the quality of the events <p><u>Workplace Information Service</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average waiting time • Lost call rate
<p style="text-align: center;">IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in dealing with employment relations matters as a result of attendance at events • Number and % of line managers applying learning/skills in the workplace as a result of completing the LRA Certificate in Line Management Practice • Number and % of customers reporting greater confidence in applying their policies/procedures as a result of document reviews • Number of more effective policies in place • Number and % of customers reporting a more positive employment relations environment and reduced likelihood of disputes occurring • Number and % of Workplace Information Service contacts reporting increased knowledge and understanding of good practice or the law regarding employment relations issues 	

Dispute Resolution Services

HOW MUCH DID WE DO?	HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?
<p>Individual Conciliation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of employee-led cases received • Number of employer-led cases received <p>Collective Conciliation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of collective conciliation cases received <p>Mediation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of requests received <p>Arbitration and Independent Appeals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of arbitration and independent appeals cases received 	<p>Individual Conciliation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of employee-led cases completed • % of employer-led cases completed • Customer satisfaction with the service provided <p>Collective Conciliation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % collective conciliations cases undertaken • % resulting in a settlement to resolve the dispute • Customer satisfaction with the service provided <p>Mediation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % resulting in agreement to resolve the dispute • % of requests undertaken • Customer satisfaction with the service provided <p>Arbitration and Independent Appeals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of arbitration and independent appeals cases completed • Customer satisfaction with the service provided
<p>IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and % of cases not proceeding to tribunal • Number and % of tribunal days saved • Number and % of customers reporting better working relationships following mediation • Number and % of customers reporting higher levels of engagement/trust following collective conciliation • Number and % of customers reporting a difference in behaviours/attitudes following an arbitration or independent appeal hearing 	

Corporate Services

HOW MUCH DID WE DO?	HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?
<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of performance reviews conducted on time • Number of days spent on learning and development • Number of return to work interviews conducted within three working days <p><u>Finance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of invoices paid <p><u>Quality Improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of internal/external/ISO 27001 audit recommendations implemented • Number of Customer Service Excellence Award non-conformities v conformities <p><u>Communications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of external events and exhibitions • Number of social media posts • Number of news releases/press statements • Number of pages of new/refreshed web content 	<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of performance reviews conducted on time • % of days lost through sick absence • % of return to work interviews conducted within three working days • Level of employee engagement <p><u>Finance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of invoices paid within 10 working days and 30 calendar days • % of budget spent • Annual report and accounts certified without qualification <p><u>Quality Improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of internal/external/ISO 27001 audit recommendations implemented • ISO 27001 retained • Customer Service Excellence Award achieved/retained • liP Status maintained/improved <p><u>Communications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of engagement with social media • Reach of social media posts • % increase in social media followers • Proportion of coverage • % increase in website usage <p><u>Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal customer satisfaction with Corporate Services
<p style="text-align: center;">IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and % increase in employee engagement • Number and % increase in attendance at work • Number and % increase in public awareness of the Agency and its services 	