

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY SCREENING**

**FOR**

**PROVISION OF DIGITAL DEVICES – A FAIR START  
ACTION (KA3 (X) 2022/23 ONWARDS**

**GUIDANCE**

- Please note that this document should always be referred to as an [Equality Screening](#) not an [Equality Impact Assessment](#) (which is a more detailed document requiring a consultation period of at least three months).
- Please use easy to understand language and short sentences. Try to aim for a comprehension level for a P7 pupil.
- Hyperlinks may be added (as can annexes) but avoid tables.
- The screening must explain which Section 75 categories are likely to benefit from (or be impacted by) the policy and how/why this is likely.
- The [screening](#) should show data/statistics specific to the "policy" being screened.
- Monitoring (follow-up action) is an important part of the screening.

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**Equality Screening:** Provision of Digital Devices 2022/23 onwards

Further advice can be found in [ECNI - Screening for Public Authorities, Effective Section 75 Equality Assessments: Screening and Equality Assessments \(ECNI, 2017\)](#) and [Section 75: Using Evidence in Policy Making - a signposting guide](#)

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## Equality Screening: Provision of Digital Devices 2022/23 onwards

### PART ONE - BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This is a new policy generated from a recommendation contained within the [Fair Start Report and Action Plan](#) which was endorsed by the NI Executive 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

As set out in New Decade New Approach, an Expert Panel on educational underachievement was established in September 2020 to examine and address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, including the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys.

The [Action plan](#) contains 47 actions spanning a number of departments including Education, Health, the Executive Office and Economy and numerous Arms' Length Bodies requiring collaboration across the public sector and beyond. One of the actions is that Department should expand and accelerate delivery of digital devices and broadband to learners to support more equitable access to digital learning.

The report's action plan sets out investment of £1 million per annum and highlights that an investment of £1m per annum would mean c.3,000 pupils per year would have access to such devices.

It is estimated by the EA that this would be able to provide circa 4,000 devices to allocate to schools.

- 1.2 Type of policy

This is a new policy

- 1.3 Click here to enter description of the policy including:
- Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?
  - What is the policy trying to achieve? (aim/outcomes)
  - How will this be achieved?

To continue to provide devices to disadvantaged learners. £1m of capital funding has been secured in 2021/22, and a further £1m in 2022/23 following the cessation of the "[Lending Digital Devices Scheme](#)" in June 2021.

At the end of June 2021, the "[Lending Digital Devices Scheme](#)" closed after lending almost 25,000 new devices to schools in response to the

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COVID-19 pandemic and the requirement for remote learning. The scheme, which provided digital devices to children, young people was announced in May 2020 and support was targeted at disadvantaged and vulnerable learners.

### 1.4 What factors could contribute to, or detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy?

Financial – this is an on-going project which requires £1 million capital funding per annum. The Education Technology Services (ETS) Programme being taken forward separately will refresh the current C2K system and may therefore supersede this project if funding for ETS includes a sufficient level of budget to replace the digital devices in all schools. However, funding may limit whether this can be achieved.

### 1.5 Main stakeholders affected

**Pupils** will have access to a device in school for learning.

**Parents**, if the schools decide that devices can be used at home.

**Teaching Staff**, as it provide further devices for the classroom to support learning.

### 1.6 Who is responsible for?

(a) Devising the policy/policy review/revised policy/pilot/project

(b) Implementing it

(c) Explain the relationship?

The policy will be devised by the Department of Education who will identify and contact schools with the highest FSME percentage initially (49.5%+). This will see contact made with approximately 131 schools in total. The Education Authority will be responsible for delivery of this scheme and will also provide all technical support required.

### 1.7 Other policies or objectives with a bearing on this policy

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As set out in New Decade New Approach, an Expert Panel on educational underachievement was established in September 2020 to examine and address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, including the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys.

The Fair Start Report & Action Plan identified eight Key Areas covering 47 actions for change.

Within Key Area 3, one of the actions from the report was that “*the Department should expand and accelerate delivery of digital devices and broadband to learners to support more equitable access to digital learning*”. The report’s action plan set out investment of £1 million per annum from year 1 onwards and highlights that an investment of £1m per annum would mean c.3,000 pupils per year would have access to such devices.

The proposed initial pilot scheme will contribute to the following Executive and Department’s strategies and priorities:

- PFG Outcome “We give our children and young people the best start in life” and “We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect”.
- DE Priority 6: Tackle Disadvantage and Underachievement; Priority 2: Improve the quality of learning for our children & young people and Priority 5: Improve the learning environment.
- The Children and Young People Strategy Outcome 3: Children and young people learn and achieve; 6: Children and young people make a positive contribution to society and 8: Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.

From a wider strategic context perspective, it is clear that the provision of technology services and educational support in schools can help improve the skills development of young people particularly digital skills so that they are better equipped for the workforce and the needs of the economy when they leave school. This is critical to the delivery of the UK’s Industrial Strategy and the Economy 2030 Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland.

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The provision of additional devices to schools with high concentrations of disadvantage to provide additional support in school and to provide devices to support access to digital learning and wider learning support is strategically aligned with the key corporate goals of the Department of Education and the wider needs of the economy.

## **EVIDENCE**

- 1.8 What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy/policy review/revised policy/pilot/project in respect of each of the categories?

### Religious Belief

In 2020/21, 47.9% (465) of Protestant boys entitled to free school meals achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A\* - C or equivalent including GCSE English and maths compared with 58.3% (895) of Catholic boys entitled to free school meals.

A greater proportion of Protestant boys with entitlement to free school meals have achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A\* - C or equivalent including GCSE English and maths in 2020/21 when compared with 2019/20, representing an increase of 1.2 percentage points. The corresponding measure for Catholic boys with entitlement to free school meals has increased by 5.3 percentage points from 2019/20 to 2020/21.

Source: [Qualifications and destinations of Northern Ireland school leavers - 2020/21](#)

Within Phase 1 of the scheme the religious breakdown of pupils across the 131 eligible schools is as follows:

Total number of pupils: 44,061

Protestant: 10,683 (24.2%)

Roman Catholic: 26,232 (59.5%)

Other: 7146 (16.2%)

The religious breakdown across those eligible schools in Phase 1 displays results weighted towards those pupils identifying as Roman Catholic. This is due to the higher concentrations of deprivation in catholic communities. However, those identifying as Other should not be ignored. When Other is added to Protestant, the proportion of pupils covered equates to 40.4%. The Programme will continue with future phases which will see a working through the list of schools in descending FSME% order. This will provide greater coverage to S75 groups over time.

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### Political Opinion

The political opinion of pupils is not known as it is not collected. See above as a proxy for political opinion.

### Racial Group

WHITE	Number	%
3+ A-levels A*-C	11014	52.9
3+ A-levels A*-E	12064	57.9
2+ A-levels A*-E	12579	60.4
At least 5 GCSEs A*-C	19224	92.3
At least 5 GCSEs A*-C incl. English and maths	16210	77.8
At least 5 GCSEs A*-G	20323	97.6
No GCSEs	144	0.7
No Formal Qualifications	120	0.6
<b>Total white</b>	<b>20826</b>	<b>100.0</b>
MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS	Number	%
3+ A-levels A*-C	413	52.7
3+ A-levels A*-E	471	60.1
2+ A-levels A*-E	489	62.4
At least 5 GCSEs A*-C At least 5 GCSEs A*-C incl.	687	87.6
English and maths	571	72.8
At least 5 GCSEs A*-G	727	92.7
No GCSEs	20	2.6
No Formal Qualifications	19	2.4
<b>Total Minority Ethnic Groups</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: [Qualifications and destinations of Northern Ireland school leavers - 2020/21](#)

Schools are increasingly becoming more ethnically diverse. Nearly 19,700 pupils in schools in Northern Ireland are recorded as “non-white”, and this



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represents 5.6% of the school population (Table 6a). This is an increase of nearly 6,500 pupils and 1.7 percentage points compared to 2016/17<sup>1</sup>.

In the proposed Phase 1 of the distribution of digital devices, the proportions are as follows:

- White: 91.5%
- Non-white: 8.5%

This is above the NI average in terms of proportion of children who are considered to be non-white and is most likely driven by the schools with highest FSME in this particular phase of the distribution.

### Age

There are 22,939 pupils enrolled in funded pre-schools, 172,325 pupils in primary schools (years 1-7). In total, 151,901 pupils are enrolled in post-primary schools. Over 6,600 pupils are enrolled in 39 dedicated special schools. In total, 474 pupils were enrolled in EOTAS centres with just 28 pupils are 'single registered' at EOTAS centres; this means that they no longer have a link to a mainstream school<sup>2</sup>.

Within Phase 1 of the scheme the distribution of educational settings across the 131 eligible schools is as follows:

Total number of pupils: 44,061

Primary: 92 settings with 24,054 pupils (54.5%)

Post - Primary: 21 settings with 16,836 pupils (38.2%)

Special: 18 settings with 3,171 pupils (7.2%)

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [Annual enrolment at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2021-22](#)

<sup>2</sup> Source: [Annual enrolment at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2021-22](#)

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The Programme will continue with future phases which will see a working through the list of schools in descending FSME% order. This will provide greater coverage to S75 groups over time.

### Marital Status

In 2019 there were 7,255 marriages in Northern Ireland; in the age band 16-19 there were 63 males and 102 females. In the same period, there were 206 civil partnerships; in the under 25 age band there were 4 partners - 0 male partners and 4 female partners.

Source: [Registrar General Annual Report 2019](#)

### Sexual Orientation

Proportion of respondents who said the impact of their experiences as an LGBT student had a negative impact on...	LGB (n=467)
<i>Educational achievement</i>	19.4% (n=90, base=463) of respondents

Source: [Department of Education - Post Primary School Experiences of 16-21 year old people who are LGBT](#)

### Men and Women Generally

Information drawn from the annual [school census exercise \(2021/22\)](#) shows that there is a fairly even distribution of males and females within the school population, with 50.7% male pupils and 49.3% female based on those pupils attending primary, post primary and special schools. See table below:

#### Gender breakdown, 2021/22

	male	female	total
Voluntary and Private Preschools	3,735	3,592	7,327
Nursery Schools	2,964	2,831	5,795

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Primary and Prep (N-Y7)	92,647	89,495	182,142
Secondary	42,920	43,668	86,588
Grammar	32,457	32,856	65,313
Special	4,705	1,948	6,653
<b>Total</b>	<b>179,428</b>	<b>174,390</b>	<b>353,818</b>
<b>Perc</b>	<b>50.7%</b>	<b>49.3%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: NI school census

Notes:

Data is based on pupils enrolled on Census day i.e. The Friday of the first full week in October (In 2021/22 this was the 8 October 2021)

70.7% of the Special School population are male with 29.3% female

Within Phase 1 of the scheme, the distribution of males and females across the 131 eligible schools is as follows:

Total number of pupils: 44,061

Female: 22,118 (50.2%)

Male: 21,943 (49.8%)

This almost mirrors the statistical distribution from the 2021/22 school census. The Programme will continue with future phases which will see a working through the list of schools in descending FSME% order. This will provide greater coverage to S75 groups over time.

### Disability

Data gathered as part of the annual school census exercise in 2021 shows that 18.2% (64,500) pupils in schools were recorded as having special educational needs; and that 6.3% (22,000) had a statement of special educational needs.

Source: [Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2021-22 \(page 12\)](#)

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Within Phase 1 of the scheme the numbers of pupils statemented and with SEN Stages 1&2 are as follows:

Total number of pupils: 44,061

Statemented: 6,042 (13.7%)

SEN Stages 1&2: 8,480 (19.2%)

Phase 1 of the scheme will therefore see an above average representation of pupils with a statement of special educational needs and an average involvement from those pupils with SEN stages 1&2.

The programme will continue with future phases which will see a working through the list of schools in descending FSME% order. This will provide greater coverage to S75 groups over time.

### Defendants

The [2015 YLT Survey](#) (of 16-year-old young people) reported 9% of their respondents had caring responsibilities. The average age of a young carer is 12 (Barnardo's).

At 31 March 2020, there were 3,383 looked after children in Northern Ireland<sup>11</sup>; at that time the total population of children was 440,705,12. Furthermore, 22,414 children were known to Social Services and 2,298 were on the Child Protection Register.

In 2019/20, 2,635 looked after children were in education; 80 in pre-school; 1,168 in primary education; 1,092 in post-primary school and a further 295 in Special Schools<sup>1</sup>

Source: [A Life Deserved - Caring for Children & Young People in Northern Ireland Strategy](#)

## NEEDS, EXPERIENCES AND PRIORITIES

1.9 Taking into account the evidence gathered at 1.8 what are the needs, experiences and priorities of each category in relation to this particular policy?

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### Religious Belief

The Equality Commission in their [Summary of policy positions relating to poverty and socio-economic disadvantage](#) state, “a trend of underachievement and lack of progression persists for those entitled to free school meals (FSME), particularly boys, notably Protestant boys”.

### Political Opinion

The political opinion of pupils is not known as it is not collected. See above as a proxy for political opinion.

### Racial Group

The language skills of pupils may have been insufficient to maximise on-line learning opportunities and parents/guardians may not have the technology or literacy skills to provide back up.

### Age

The Equality Commission in their [Summary of policy positions relating to poverty and socio-economic disadvantage](#) state, “High quality early years provision plays a key role in children’s development, and can have significant beneficial impacts for those children most at risk of educational underachievement. It has a significant impact on children from particular equality groups – including children from minority ethnic communities and children with disabilities.”

### Marital Status

The percentage who reported high levels of anxiety significantly increased for people who are married or in a civil partnership during lockdown to 39%, up from 19% in the last quarter of 2019; prior to the pandemic. Those who are married or in a civil partnership are more likely to be balancing homeschooling alongside other commitments, with 1 in 4

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people homeschooling during the pandemic, compared with approximately 1 in 10 people who are single, separated or divorced.

( More information can be found here: [Coronavirus and anxiety, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-and-population/life-events-and-transitions/coronavirus-and-anxiety) )

### Sexual Orientation

[Growing up LGBT+: The impact of school, home and coronavirus on LGBT+ young people \(Cibyl. 2021\)](#) states, “68% of LGBT+ young people say their mental health has ‘got worse’ since the pandemic, compared to 49% of their non-LGBT+ peers”.

### Men and Women Generally

In the 2022/23 academic year, schools will be asked to complete a plan in the TSN Planner entitled “Digital Devices 2022/23”. These will set out the targets for the year, which year groups will be targeted, particular cohorts of children, gender, SEN, whether it will prioritise literacy, numeracy, digital skills etc. To enable an evaluation to be carried out this year, we will ask schools to complete an evaluation by 31 December 2022 and 30 June 2023. This information will help us plan for the distribution of devices in 2023/24.

### Disability

[Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Young People with SEND in NI \(NCB. 2021\)](#) states, “School closures generally impacted negatively on children with SEND, not only due to a loss in learning, but also in terms of social and emotional development and in terms of missing out on valuable therapies (i.e. speech and language therapy; physiotherapy; occupational therapy; sensory therapy)”.

In the 2022/23 academic year, schools will be asked to complete a plan in the TSN Planner entitled “Digital Devices 2022/23”. This will set out the targets for the year, which year groups will be targeted, particular cohorts of children, gender, SEN, whether it will prioritise literacy,

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numeracy, digital skills etc. To enable an evaluation to be carried out this year, we will ask schools to complete an evaluation by 31 December 2022 and 30 June 2023. This information will help us plan for the distribution of devices in 2023/24.

### Dependants

The results of a 2020 Carers Trust [survey](#) into the impact of Covid on young carers aged 12 to 17 and young adult carers aged 18 to 25 was, “67% of young carers and 78% of young adult carers are more worried about the future since Coronavirus”.

**PART TWO – SCREENING QUESTIONS - LIKELY IMPACT**

2.1 What is the likely impact of this policy on equality of opportunity for each of the Section 75 equality categories?

Religious Belief                      Minor

Political Opinion                      Minor

Racial Group                      Minor

Age                      Minor

Marital Status                      Minor

Sexual Orientation                      Minor

Men and Women Generally                      Minor

Disability                      Minor

Dependants                      Minor



**OPPORTUNITIES TO BETTER PROMOTE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

2.2 Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equality categories?

Religious Belief No

Political Opinion No

Racial Group No

Age No

Marital Status No

Sexual Orientation No

Men and Women Generally No

Disability No

Dependants No



## **MULTIPLE IDENTITIES**

2.5 Please provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities and specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

There is a strong link between household income and school achievement. Children with multiple Section 75 characteristics are likely to be impacted to a greater degree than others and the effects of socio-economic disadvantage similarly impacts across all Section 75 categories. Children with multiple Section 75 characteristics are more likely to be selected for the programme as these groups have higher levels of educational underachievement and are more likely to require support to engage.

### **PART THREE - SCREENING DECISION**

3.1 Please select as appropriate and provide details and reasons:

- a) The decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment.

#### **Reasons**

Given the unique and continuing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, all pre-primary settings, EOTAS, primary, post-primary and special schools across Northern Ireland will be provided with varying levels of funding to provide additional learning resource.

The Digital Devices Programme will provide the greatest level of support and resources to schools/settings with higher concentrations of disadvantage.

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## **MITIGATION**

3.2 Although option a. was chosen, it may be useful to give some further background on the programme and other supports available.

Key Area 3 of the Fair Start Report has as one of its actions that “the Department should expand and accelerate delivery of digital devices and broadband to learners to support more equitable access to digital learning”.

The report’s action plan set out investment of £1 million per annum from year 1 onwards and highlights that an investment of £1m per annum would mean c.3,000 pupils per year would have access to such devices.

Other supports available for pupils and their parents/guardians within the education sector include:

- [Emotional Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Support for parents and pupils](#)
- [Counselling service in schools](#)
- [Pupil Support Services - Education Authority](#)
- [SEN Early Years Inclusion Service - Education Authority](#)
- The [Intercultural Education Service](#) helps schools to meet the additional educational needs of pupils from our target communities: Traveller; Newcomer; Asylum-Seekers; Refugees and Roma.

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### PART FOUR- MONITORING

Please detail what data you will collect in the future in order to monitor the effect of the policy on any of Section 75 equality categories:

If feedback from this year's pilot is positive, the allocation of devices in future years could involve schools with lower concentrations of FSME as resources and demand requires. We will work with the Education Authority to gauge potential uptake by schools for teaching and learning in the classroom (and at home).

In the 2022/23 academic year, schools will be asked to complete a plan in the TSN Planner entitled "Digital Devices 2022/23". This will set out the targets for the year, which year groups will be targeted, particular cohorts of children, gender, SEN, whether it will prioritise literacy, numeracy, digital skills etc. To enable an evaluation to be carried out this year, we will ask schools to complete an evaluation by 31 December 2022 and 30 June 2023. This information will help us plan for the distribution of devices in 2023/24.

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### PART FIVE - DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION

- 5.1 Will the policy in any way discourage persons with disabilities from participating in public life or fail to promote positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities?

No

- 5.2 Is there an opportunity to better promote positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities or encourage participation in public life by making changes to the policy or introducing additional measures?

No

- 5.3 Please detail what data you will collect in the future in order to monitor the effect of the policy with reference to the disability duties.

In the 2022/23 academic year, schools will be asked to complete a plan in the TSN Planner entitled "Digital Devices 2022/23". This will set out the targets for the year, which year groups will be targeted, particular cohorts of children, gender, SEN, whether it will prioritise literacy, numeracy, digital skills etc. To enable an evaluation to be carried out this year, we will ask schools to complete an evaluation by 31 December 2022 and 30 June 2023. This information will help us plan for the distribution of devices in 2023/24.

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**PART SIX - HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

6.1 Does the policy/policy review/revised policy/pilot/project review/revised policy/pilot/project affect anyone's Human Rights?

Particularly consider:

- [The Human Rights Act \(1998\)](#)
- [The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)

No

6.2 If you have identified a negative impact; what Human Right is impacted, what is the nature of the impact and who is affected and how?

N/A

9.3 Outline any actions which could be taken to promote or raise awareness of human rights or to ensure compliance with the legislation in relation to the policy/policy review/revised policy/pilot/project .

None



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**PART SEVEN - RURAL NEEDS**

The undertaking of a [Rural Needs Impact Assessment \(RNIA\)](#) is an integral part of the development, adoption, implementation or review of a policy, strategy or plan or the design or delivery of a public service.

Will a separate RNIA be completed? Yes

Reason for non-completion: N/A

Completed RNIA's are published on the Department's Internet site and shown under [Rural Needs Impact Assessments](#).

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## **PART EIGHT - APPROVAL AND AUTHORISATION**

### FOR COMPLETION BY POLICY TEAM

Screened by: Peter Lockhart    Grade    SO    Date 1 July 202

Approved by: Dale Heaney    Grade    7    Date 1 July 2022

### **Notes:**

The Screening Form must be approved and 'signed off' by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

The TRIM version of the completed Screening Form must be sent to the Equality Team (DE.Equality@education-ni.gov.uk) for quality assurance

### FOR COMPLETION BY EQUALITY TEAM

Screening Decision    Agreed.

Quality Assured by: Catherine Service    Date 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Team Informed:    Date 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022

### RECORDING AND PUBLISHING BY POLICY TEAM

You must store this completed screening form on Content Manager and finalise it. Use the record naming convention "Completed Screening form of....."

Content Manager Ref No:    xxxxxx

Placed on Internet by policy team    Date xxxxxx

As soon as possible, following quality assurance, you must publish a copy of the screening form in Microsoft Word (or other Open Document Format) on the Department's website: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications> with a link on the "Policy Screening" page: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/de-equality-screenings>