

DISABILITY ACTION PLAN 2021-2026



Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Introductory Statement

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties').

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, NIAO is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a **disability action plan** showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to its functions.

1.2 Commitment

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) as head of the NIAO, is committed to implementing effectively the disability duties and this disability action plan. NIAO will allocate all necessary resources (in terms of people, time and money) in order to implement effectively this plan and where appropriate, build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans.

It will also put appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and this disability action plan effectively implemented. It will ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and to providing all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

The NIAO is committed to full and meaningful consultation on its Disability Action Plan. It recognises the importance of consultation in all aspects of the implementation of its statutory duties. It affirms that all consultation will be carried out in accordance with the guiding principles set out in the Equality Commission's 'Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people and encouraging the participation of disabled people in public life'. In particular, it will conduct all consultations in a timely, open and inclusive way in accordance with the Equality Commission's guidance.

The NIAO has consulted with a range of organisations in the preparation of this review of its original plan. Ongoing feedback is welcome from any organisation or group which has a legitimate, particular interest in the NIAO's work and/or likely impact of its policies on its disability duties.

Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan and the point of contact within the NIAO will be:

Name: Brian O'Neill

Title: Director of Corporate Services

Address: Northern Ireland Audit Office, 106 University Street, Belfast BT7 1EU

Telephone number: 028 9025 4323

Email: equality@niauditoffice.gov.uk

If you require this plan in an alternative format (such as in large print, in Braille, in audio format or easy read) and/or language, please contact the above person to discuss your requirements.

1.3 Review

The NIAO confirms its commitment to submitting an annual progress report on the implementation of this plan to the Equality Commission and carrying out a five year review of this plan in 2026, or plans submitted to the Equality Commission over the five year review period.

The NIAO Disability Action Plan and our annual progress reports to the Equality Commission will be made available on our website:
<https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/equality>

1.4 Functions

Our purpose is making sure public money is spent properly. Our vision is to provide independence and excellence in audit to improve public services through independent scrutiny based on impartial and innovative reporting, underpinned by our commitment to our values of partnership, authoritative, curious and truthfulness to make a difference for the people of Northern Ireland. In fulfilling this purpose, our corporate plan for 2024-2029 sets out three key strategic priorities:

- High-Quality Public Audit: Support, enhance and promote high standards in public service administration, accountability arrangements and financial management;

- Improve Outcomes and Accountability: Promote and influence public service reform and improvement; and
- Invest in our People and Resources: Be a high-performing, people-focussed organisation.

Our main activities are:

Financial Audit	Forming an opinion on financial statements; assessing whether expenditure is regular and in accordance with the intentions of the Assembly when it granted the money; & providing assurance on the Accounting Officer's Governance Statement.
Public Reporting	Independently examining and reporting to the Northern Ireland Assembly on whether public bodies spend taxpayers' money economically, efficiently and effectively. Examination, assessment and reporting on district council performance improvement responsibilities. Providing public bodies with constructive advice in the form of good practice reports across a range of areas.
Governance and Fraud Prevention and Detection	Helping public bodies improve their corporate governance, financial control and risk management arrangements, and assisting in the prevention and detection of fraud by conducting and reporting on data matching exercises.
Support to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the public	Working closely with the Public Accounts Committee on evidence sessions based on our reports; providing support to Departmental committees; and responding to enquiries from elected representatives and citizens.
Comptroller function	Authorising the issue of public funds from the Consolidated Fund for Northern Ireland.

1.5 Public Life Positions

Under the provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) for Northern Ireland is a Crown appointment made on the nomination of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The C&AG for Northern Ireland retains office for a term of ten years unless removed by a resolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly and supported by at least two thirds of its members. Under the provision of the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 the C&AG is a Corporation sole. The current C&AG for Northern Ireland is Dorinnia Carville (replacing Kieran Donnelly in August 2022).

The Northern Ireland Audit Office supports the C&AG in fulfilling her responsibilities. Certain NIAO staff are also designated by the Department for Communities, with the consent of the C&AG, as local government auditors. Colette Kane, a Director in the NIAO, is the Local Government Auditor. Local Government auditors are mainly responsible for the audit of Northern Ireland Local Government Bodies.

The Comptroller and Auditor General and the Northern Ireland Audit Office are wholly independent of Government. As a direct result of maintaining this independence, neither the C&AG nor NIAO has responsibility for any public life positions in relation to external organisations.

Internal appointments include non-executive positions in the governance structures of the NIAO. All such positions are externally advertised in order to encourage full participation in the recruitment process and to create opportunities for involving disabled people in public life. This demonstrates that we are seeking to comply fully with our legislative requirements and encourage participation in the work of NIAO.

We do, as appropriate, consult with relevant third parties when we are undertaking public reporting exercises. Depending on the study, we seek views from relevant groups, which may include disabled people.

Section 2: Action Measures

Outlined below are the measures which we propose to take over the period 01 September 2021 to 31 August 2026 of this disability action plan, together with performance indicators or targets.

Measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

Measures	Timescale	Performance Targets
1. Training and Guidance (i) Training on Diversity and Inclusion encompassing disability equality legislation and disability awareness to be included within mandatory training programme to be delivered to all staff.	(i) March 2023	(i) Appropriate training will be sourced and included in mandatory training programme for all staff and office holders as required.
2. Leadership (i) Ensure that leadership and management training (directed specifically at managers and senior staff) includes training on disability equality. (ii) Relevant NIAO staff trained in and responsible for equality compliance, including disability equality.	(i) December 2022 (ii) March 2023	(i) Staff and Management are aware of the specific duties placed upon public sector organisations in relation to disability equality. (ii) Visible ownership of equality and diversity issues.
3. Involving Disabled People (i) Continue to ensure recruitment and selection procedures comply with best practice and are accessible to all. (ii) Continue to ensure equality of opportunity in the	(i) Ongoing at the outset of each recruitment drive (ii) Ongoing	(i) Adjustments provided for candidates who request them. (ii) Create an environment where all staff are valued and

<p>workplace, through policy formulation, Recruitment and Selection, and service provision reviews; and formulating Learning and Development training plans.</p> <p>(iii) Proactively assess if any reasonable adjustments are needed and ensure that any appropriate equipment is available.</p> <p>(iv) Ensure newly refurbished building at 106 University Street, Belfast complies with all disability requirements.</p> <p>(v) Ensure all publications comply with Accessibility requirements.</p>	<p>(iii) Ongoing</p> <p>(iv) July 2022</p> <p>(v) Ongoing</p>	<p>encouraged to develop to their full potential.</p> <p>(iii) Staff have equipment that meets their individual needs.</p> <p>(iv) Building Control sign off on newly refurbished building to ensure compliance with Building Regulations (NI) 2012 Technical Booklet R.</p> <p>(v) Publications reviewed to ensure compliance with Accessibility requirements. The Office is currently in the process of conducting a major review of its website to ensure that meets accessibility requirements as set out in Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1).</p>
<p>4. Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>(i) Promote the Employee Assistance Programme and the benefits of a healthy, resilient workplace.</p> <p>(ii) Promote an open and inclusive culture supporting health issues and</p>	<p>(i) Ongoing</p> <p>(ii) Ongoing</p>	<p>(i) Provision of leaflets and contact details, information on the WellHub, training opportunities.</p> <p>(ii) Promoted in line with a Health and Wellbeing programme</p>

establish Wellbeing Committee.		in the NIAO set up by Wellbeing Committee.
5. Policies and Strategy (i) Annual Review of Progress on Disability Action Plan. (ii) Ensure all internal and external communication is in line with current best practice on accessibility. (iii) Continue to screen policies and consult as widely as possible to ensure that any organisation or group which has a legitimate, particular interest in NIAO's work and/or likely impact of NIAO's policies on its disability duties will be included in the process of engagement.	(i) Annually (ii) Ongoing (iii) Ongoing	(i) Complete annual progress report and submit it to Equality Commission. Publish report on NIAO website by 30 September. (ii) All communications are presented in plain language and accessible to all. (iii) Policies are inclusive and accessible for all.

Signed by:



Dorinna Carville
Comptroller and Auditor
General

29 August 2025



Rodney Allen
Chief Operating Officer

29 August 2025