

**NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE**  
**DISABILITY ACTION PLAN**

**Northern Ireland Audit Office  
106 University Street  
Belfast  
BT7 1EU**

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the 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, the 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 The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) as head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office, is committed to implementing effectively the disability duties and this disability action plan. The 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 will provide 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 in the preparation of this plan with its own staff and a range of disability organisations. The NIAO will continue to consult as widely as possible to ensure that any organisation or group which has a legitimate, particular interest in its work and/or the likely impact of its policies on its disabilities duties will be included in the process of engagement.

Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan and the point of contact within the Northern Ireland Audit Office will be:-

Name:	Janet Sides
Title:	Director
Address:	Northern Ireland Audit Office, 106 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1EU.
Telephone Number:	028 90251118
Fax Number:	028 90251051
Email:	equality@niauditoffice.gov.uk
Textphone:	028 90251050

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

- 1.3 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, or plans submitted to the Equality Commission over the five year review period.

A copy of this plan, our annual progress to the Equality Commission and our five year review of this plan will be made available on our website at <http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/>. The plan will also be issued directly to a range of disability organisations and representative groups.

- 1.4 Outlined below is the range of functions of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The Office's Corporate Plan covering the three years 2007-08 to 2009-10 informs on the Office's work programme and forward plans. In this planning period, the Office has the following strategic objectives:

- a. to provide effective support to the Northern Ireland Assembly in its task of holding Northern Ireland departments, executive agencies and other public bodies to account for their use of public money;
  - b. to provide effective local government audit to the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland;
  - c. to provide support to Northern Ireland public sector bodies in their pursuit of improved financial reporting and value for money, including support for efforts to combat public sector fraud;
  - d. to meet the requirements placed on the Office by legislation (principally, the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987; the Northern Ireland Act 1998; the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001; the Audit and Accountability (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005). This includes fulfilment of the Office's obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in relation to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations in all its policies and procedures; and
  - e. to value staff and develop their full potential.
- 1.5 Under the provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland is a Crown appointment made on the nomination of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland retains office 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 Comptroller and Auditor General is a Corporation Sole. The current Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland is John M Dowdall CB.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office supports the C&AG in fulfilling his responsibilities. Certain Northern Ireland Audit Office staff are also designated by the Department of the Environment, with the consent of the C&AG, as local government auditors. Local government auditors are mainly responsible for the audit of Northern Ireland District Councils.

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 Comptroller and Auditor General nor the Northern Ireland Audit Office 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.

## SECTION 2: PREVIOUS MEASURES

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Outlined below are the key measures which the Northern Ireland Audit Office has already taken to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life:

**a. Accessibility and Resources:**

- (i) The removal of barriers to accessibility in the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The Office at University Street has recently undergone refurbishment. The access plans went beyond just focusing on ramps, lifts and steps, but reflected the priorities of all disabled people including induction loops in training/meeting rooms, lighting, air conditioning, acoustics, door furniture, colour contrast, seating, etc. NIAO gained advice from experts regarding accessibility for disability standards and best practice. The NIAO now has a working environment that meets best practice for inclusive design and provides an accessible working environment that meets the needs of existing and future disabled workers and NIAO visitors.

**b. Employment – Recruitment and Retention:**

- (i) Disability questions are asked of all applicants to provide adequate information to monitor and assess recruitment and to monitor and identify trends in the representation of disabled applicants and employees.
- (ii) Northern Ireland Audit Office recruitment advertising encourages equal opportunities.
- (iii) Exit interviews are conducted for all staff leaving the Office to determine the factors which influenced their decision.

**c. Communication:**

- (i) The NIAO ensures accessibility of published documents with processes for disabled people to access documents in alternative formats i.e. Easy-read, Large Print or Braille from the Office. Published documents are accessible in alternative formats in line with FOI requirements and within timeframes.
- (ii) An equality/disability representative is appointed at Directorate level to promote Disability Equality in the Office and work with the Senior Management Group.
- (iii) The content and design of internet services ensures accessibility to all.

**d. Training:**

- (i) Staff members involved in recruitment and selection panels are trained in equal opportunities and fair employment practices.
- (ii) Equality induction training for all new staff is undertaken on commencement of employment.

- (iii) Equality training covering all areas of equality is undertaken by staff in accordance with the commitment set out in the NIAO Equality Scheme.

**e. Procurement**

- (i) An equality clause is included in procurement contracts.

## SECTION 3: ACTION MEASURES

Outlined below are the measures which we propose to take over the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2007 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012 of this disability action plan, together with performance indicators or targets.

<b>Leadership</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Target</b>
<p>Build on existing training to ensure that leadership and management development programmes include training and development on disability equality.</p> <p>Senior Management Group (SMG) and Managers in NIAO to demonstrate high level commitment to and enthusiasm for disability equality.</p> <p>SMG to make staff aware of Disability Action Plan and policies.</p>	Ongoing	<p>Commitment moving beyond policy, into practice.</p> <p>Clear commitment from the top.</p> <p>SMG and managers skilled and competent at articulating the equality and diversity issues in the workplace.</p> <p>SMG and managers are aware of the specific duties placed upon public sector organisations in relation to disability equality and what this means for the organisation and their specific areas of responsibility.</p> <p>Visible ownership of equality and diversity issues.</p>
Integration of disability equality objectives into NIAO's corporate plans.	Annually	Set organisational objectives relating to disability action.

<b>Employment – Recruitment and Retention</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Target</b>
<p>To continue to monitor number/type of disabled people applying for vacancies in the Office, and take corrective action, as appropriate, to influence the number of applications for vacancies from disabled people.</p> <p>To review recruitment advertising to ensure it reaches as wide an audience as possible.</p> <p>To review measures for appointing to public life positions in NIAO.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>September 2007</p> <p>September 2007</p>	<p>To encourage applications from disabled applicants.</p>
<p>Disability Monitoring Exercise to collect information from all employees including performance information on disability.</p>	<p>December 2007</p>	<p>To monitor and identify trends in the representation of disabled employees.</p>
<p>Explore short-term placement for disabled person(s).</p>	<p>June 2008</p>	<p>A completed assessment with recommendations.</p>

<b>Involving Disabled People</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Target</b>
<p>Continue to develop working relationships with disability organisations to establish current best practice in the recruitment and employment of disabled people.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>To ensure NIAO follow current best practice.</p>
<p>To seek the views of all NIAO staff on the implementation of the Disability Action Plan and disability equality generally.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Views and experiences to influence decisions and priorities.</p>

<b>Involving Disabled People</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Target</b>
Ensure all external training venues for NIAO training events are accessible.	Ongoing	External training events are inclusive and accessible for disabled employees.

<b>Communication</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Target</b>
<p>Intranet development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The content and design of internet services should be accessible to all.</li> <li>Key policies to be presented in plain language and accessible to all.</li> <li>Contact details for sources of expertise to be displayed.</li> </ul>	March 2008	<p>Easy reference for all staff to understand.</p> <p>Easy reference on disability issues.</p>

<b>Training &amp; Guidance</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Targets</b>
Review of induction process to promote positive attitudes towards disabled employees and workers and enable NIAO staff to be confident in the recruitment and management of disabled people, working alongside disabled colleagues.	August 2007	All employees completing mandatory training on induction.
<p>Training on Disability Equality Legislation and disability awareness and etiquette to be included within Equality training programme. To promote positive attitudes towards disabled employees and people, to improve staff's knowledge across the Office on Disability issues and increase the appreciation of difficulties faced by disabled people.</p> <p>This will include involvement of external disability bodies.</p>	March 2008 and ongoing thereafter	<p>Delivered to all employees, and office holders as required, to increase knowledge of disability issues.</p> <p>Decrease in the attitudinal barriers faced by disabled employees.</p> <p>Visitors to the NIAO are effectively welcomed and have their individual needs met.</p>

<b>Training &amp; Guidance</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Targets</b>
Training contractors to take disability equality into account when designing courses to make the course inclusive.	November 2007	Training and Development Courses are inclusive and accessible for disabled employees.
Joining instructions for all courses will ask disabled employees to identify any workplace adjustments they need to actively participate in the course.	July 2007	Any reasonable adjustments are implemented.

<b>Policy and Strategy</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Targets</b>
Review complaints policy/procedures for accessibility.	March 2008	Complaints policy reviewed and any recommendations acted upon.
Annual Review of progress on the Disability Action Plan.  Produce a report on the implementation of the Disability Action Plan for submission to the Equality Commission.	Annually	Ensure implementation of the Disability Action Plan.  Submit annual review to Senior Management Group.
Formal review of the Disability Action Plan.  To carry out a five year review of the Disability Action Plan and forward a report of this review to the Equality Commission.	Every 5 years	To highlight what the Disability Action Plan has achieved, what remains to be done and how to build on success and to meet the challenges identified.

<b>Corporate Service Delivery</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescales</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Targets</b>
Ensure the Accessibility and Diversity issues are identified at the outset of system development for any IT projects which affects disabled employees.	Ongoing	Any IT systems developed meet the accessibility and diversity aims.

<b>Corporate Service Delivery</b>		
<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescales</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/Targets</b>
To proactively assess equipment needs and procure appropriate equipment.  Ensure that diverse needs can be catered for.	Ongoing	Users have equipment that meets their individual needs.

**Signed by:**

**JOHN M DOWDALL CB**  
**Comptroller and Auditor General**

**27 June 2007**