



Northern
Ireland
Office

Corporate Governance Team
Stormont House
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SH

23 October 2015

T 02890765497
E equality.scheme@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Consultee

www.gov.uk/nio
[@niopressoffice](https://twitter.com/niopressoffice)

Subject: Consultation on the Northern Ireland Office Disability Action Plan for period 2016 – 2019

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 Office (NIO) 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').

We have recently updated our Disability Action Plan to articulate our vision, priorities and plans for the period 2016- 2019. The draft plan sets out how we will work to achieve these goals. The plan makes a clear statement of our commitment to implementing our equality duties in relation to disability.

In line with our Equality Scheme we are committed to carrying out an appropriate and proportionate consultation to seek the views of those who may have a direct interest in our Disability Action Plan. A copy of the plan is included with this letter and will be available for download from the consultation section of our website at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?departments%5B%5D=northern-ireland-office&publication_filter_option=consultations

Consultation responses should be returned to the address below by **Friday 18th December 2015**. If you require further information, need to request an alternative format or would like to discuss our plan in more detail you should contact our Equality team.

Equality Officer
Corporate Governance Team
Stormont House
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SH

equality.scheme@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 028 9076 5497

Regards

Laura Fretwell - Equality Officer/Head of Corporate Governance



Northern
Ireland
Office

Disability Action Plan 2016-2019

October 2015

DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

Northern Ireland Office

Introduction

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 Office 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').

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 also requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, including between persons with a disability and persons without. Furthermore, as a Whitehall Department, the NIO is also bound by the statutory requirements set out in the Equality Act 2010 which provides protection on the basis of protected characteristics, including disability.

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, The Northern Ireland Office 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 As Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Permanent Secretary of The Northern Ireland Office, we are committed to implementing effectively the disability duties and this disability action plan. We 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.

We will also put appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and this disability action plan effectively implemented. We 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.

We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual report to the Equality Commission on the implementation of this plan as well as carrying out a five yearly review of this plan. We also confirm our commitment to consult with disabled people when implementing and reviewing our plans.

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

Name: Laura Fretwell

Title: Head of Corporate Governance

Address: 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

Telephone number: 0207 210 6545

Email: laura.fretwell@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk

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 We confirm our 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 <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/northern-ireland-office>

1.4 Functions

The Northern Ireland Office is responsible for overseeing the Northern Ireland devolution settlement. Our vision is a stable, peaceful, prosperous, forward-looking, mainstream, ‘normalised’ Northern Ireland.

Our key purpose is to make the political settlement work and in partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive help bring about a stable, prosperous Northern Ireland at peace with itself and ready for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. To do this we:

- support and implement the political Agreements to increase the stability of the institutions;
- work with the Executive to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy, promoting growth, trade and encouraging inward investment;
- support reconciliation and the Executive’s objective of building a shared future for all, while acknowledging the past;
- champion Northern Ireland’s interests in Whitehall making sure Cabinet takes full account of Northern Ireland and that Whitehall policies are represented there effectively;
- support democracy and take the lead against the terrorism and violence that threatens national security;
- work closely with the Irish Government on matters of common interest.

We work hard as a Department to offer our best advice and support to our Ministers and colleagues, to help us all carry out our duties and statutory obligations to Parliament, the public and others.

1.5 Public Life Positions

The range of public life positions over which The Northern Ireland Office has responsibility for, are public appointments to the following bodies:

- The core department of the Northern Ireland Office
- The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland
- The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland
- The Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland
- The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
- The Parades Commission for Northern Ireland
- The Sentence Review Commissioners for Northern Ireland

2. Previous Measures

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

Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people

- The Department has engaged with Cabinet Office reporting mechanisms to monitor the diversity of public appointments providing transparent reporting data on the number of public appointments held by persons with a disability.
- The corporate governance team has signposted staff to and maintained an “Equality” section on the departmental intranet site.
- The Department has appointed a dedicated Equality Officer to promote equality within the Department. The dedicated officer also provides guidance to staff and resolves any internal or external issues or queries in relation to equality matters.
- The Departments external website is fully accessible and in a suitable format for persons with a disability.

Encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

- The Department has a text phone service available and details included on departmental publications and letterheads.
- The Department has ensured that all Departmental documentation is in suitable formats for persons with a disability.
- The Department has incorporated the “Guaranteed Interview” scheme for all Departmental vacancies and public appointments.
- The Department has accepted applications from disabled people in accessible formats.
- All public appointments are advertised in the press as well as numerous public authority websites.
- Corporate governance team has provided constructive feedback to unsuccessful disabled applicants.

3. Action Measures

Outlined below are the measures which we propose to take over the period 2015-2018 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 Indicators/target	Performance
1. The Department will sign up to the Central Adjustment Team network group as a means of supporting staff with disabilities.	January 2016	Confirmation will be provided that Department has signed up to this network.
2. The Department will include a disability section within the induction checklist ensuring that all new employees are asked if any reasonable adjustments are required.	February 2016	The Departmental Equality Officer will work with HR section monitor completed induction checklists, ensuring Disability section has been complete.
3. A dedicated Disability section will be created and maintained on the Department's Intranet site to provide guidance and signposting to staff in relation to disability duties.	February 2016	Staff will be requested to provide regular feedback on the Disability intranet site, as a means of ensuring all relevant and up to date information is provided to assist staff.
4. All staff will be signposted to complete the ELearning "Disability" training on the Civil Service Learning site or the Centre for Applied Learning.	March 2016	Training will be made mandatory for all staff with line managers confirming staff members have completed.
5. The Departmental Equality Officer will register as a member of the MOJ Disability Network, attending seminars and workshops.	Register by April 2016/Attend seminars throughout 2016 & beyond.	Confirmation will be provided that Department has signed up to this network and a seminar/workshop attendance register maintained.
6. The Departmental Equality Officer will provide an annual progress report to the Management Board in respect of disability equality within the Department; this will be reported in tandem with the Section 75 progress reports.	Annually from June 2016	Annual Report will be an annual standing agenda item on the June Management Board meetings.

Signed by:

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

Permanent Secretary