



Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation

Five-Year Disability Action Plan

2012 -17 (Year 4)

*This document is available upon request in accessible formats such as Braille, large print, disc, audio cassette
And in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English

1.1	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Utility Regulator is required, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and • encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties'). <p>Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Utility Regulator is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a Disability Action Plan showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions.</p>
1.2	<p>As the Chief Executive and Board, 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 build appropriate objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans.</p> <p>We will also put 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.</p>
	<p>The Utility Regulator is committed to consulting with people with disabilities in the implementation and any subsequent review of this plan. Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan will lie with:</p> <p>Name: Mrs Jenny Pyper Title: Chief Executive Address: Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation Queens House</p>

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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 www.uregni.gov.uk

1.4 **Functions**
Statutory Duties and Background

The Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (“Utility Regulator”) was first established in 1992, (known at that time as Offer NI) following privatisation of the Northern Ireland electricity industry. With the development of the natural gas industry, the Utility Regulator’s role was extended in 1996 to cover gas. From April 2007 we also became the economic and customer service regulator for Northern Ireland’s water and sewerage industries.

The Utility Regulator is a non-ministerial government department. It is not a policy-making department, however its role is to ensure that the utility industries in Northern Ireland are regulated and developed within the strategic policy parameters by Ministers. The Utility Regulator needs to maintain close contact and positive collaboration with a number of companies acting in the energy and water sectors. Equally we need such collaborations with governmental organisations, including those involved in the management of the environment and in the development of Northern Ireland's social and customer-facing policy and structures.

Principal Activities

The Utility Regulator exercises its broad range of functions in line with statutory duties set out in the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 as amended by Article 3 of the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. Briefly, the Utility Regulator has a number of principal statutory objectives:

Water & Sewerage Sector:

- To protect the interests of consumers in relation to the supply of water by water undertakers and the provision of sewerage services by sewerage undertakers, wherever appropriate by facilitating effective competition between persons engaged in, or in commercial activities connected with, the supply of water and the provision of sewerage services;
- To secure that the functions of a water undertaker and of a sewerage undertaker are properly carried out as respects every area of Northern Ireland; and
- To secure that companies holding appointments as relevant undertakers are able (in particular, by securing reasonable returns on their capital) to finance the proper carrying out of the functions of such undertakers.

Electricity Industry:

To protect the interests of consumers of electricity supplied by authorised suppliers, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition between persons engaged in, or in commercial activities connected with, the generation, transmission or supply of electricity.

Gas Industry:

To promote the development and maintenance of an efficient, economic and co-ordinated gas industry in Northern Ireland.

The Utility Regulator sets out in its Corporate Strategy and Annual Forward Work Programme its policy aims and objectives, and uses these statements/plans to further publicize the manner in which it intends to carry out its functions.

1.5

Public Life Positions

We are governed by a Board (“the Authority”), made up of a Chairman, six non-executive members and the Chief Executive. The Board is responsible for the overall strategic direction of the organisation and ensuring that it meets its legal obligations.

The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) appointed Dr Bill Emery as Chairman of the Authority with effect from 1 July 2012 with a five year term.

The Utility Regulator appointed Mrs Jenny Pyper as its Chief Executive and she took up post on 1 November 2013.

The non-executive members of the Board who commenced appointment for a period of three years effective from 1 January 2011 and re-appointed for a term of five years effective 1 January 2014 (as confirmed by DFP) Mr William Cargo and Richard Rodgers . Additional appointments of Mrs Teresa Perchard for a period of 5 years effective from 1 September 2013 and Mr Jonathan Carlton and Mr Alex

	Wiseman for a period of five years became effective from 1 November 2015.
2.	<p data-bbox="322 245 667 277">Previous Measures</p> <p data-bbox="322 288 2022 368">Outlined below are the key measures, which the Utility Regulator has already taken to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and encourage the participation of such people in public life.</p> <ul data-bbox="371 421 2056 1374" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="371 421 2056 544">• Promoting the services of the Utility Regulator and consulting with groups representing those with disabilities (voluntary & community sector groups), other public authorities and mainstream political parties<li data-bbox="371 568 2056 647">• Consulting with groups representing those with disabilities on how the Utility Regulator consults and engages with them and how improvements can be made<li data-bbox="371 671 1570 703">• Publishing, consulting and making accessible consultation documents<li data-bbox="371 727 2056 807">• Ensure access requirements made available for members of the public with disabilities to take part in public consultation<li data-bbox="371 831 2056 911">• Fully complying with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and associated Codes of Practice<li data-bbox="371 935 1346 967">• Ensuring that services and premises are fully accessible<li data-bbox="371 991 1346 1023">• Providing alternative formats for publications on request<li data-bbox="371 1046 1966 1078">• Employment opportunities based on experience, rather than minimum academic qualifications<li data-bbox="371 1102 1794 1182">• Advertising positions more widely (including organisational website) and including a welcome/positive action statement<li data-bbox="371 1206 1715 1238">• Supported a two-year employment support placement for a disabled individual.<li data-bbox="371 1262 1957 1374">• Disability awareness promotion through a formal training programme attended by all staff and Board members

- Awareness training for staff members participating in recruitment & selection processes
- Establishment of a Staff Representatives Committee to discuss issues relating to Section 75 and Disability Discrimination
- Designated harassment advisors were appointed and trained following the implementation of discipline and grievance policies
- A corporate style guide in respect of fonts etc for all corporate publications and letters was issued to all staff
- Emergency evacuation chairs were purchased and training of staff conducted
- Deaf awareness guidance provided to all staff and new staff on induction.

3. **Action Measures**
 Outlined below are the measures which the Office proposes to take over the period (2012 -2017) of this disability action plan, together with performance indicators or targets.

Measures	Timescale	Performance Indicators/target
We will continue to develop and provide staff (and Board) awareness workshops to staff with on-going equality training & specific guidance on Disability Equality legislation and awareness. Equality training will commence at Induction stage and be continuous thereafter. Priority on the above workshop will be given to those staff engaged in recruitment panels, and to those individuals dealing with consultation papers.	On-going	100% adherence of staff in post by the completion of the 5 year review period
We will provide Equality Screening training for key staff	Year 3 and on-	Achieved key staff are adequately

	going	trained and competent in the screening process outlined in UR's Equality Scheme (s75)
We will maintain training of at least two Harassment Officers	Ongoing	Achieved. Staff aware of independent Harassment Officers available of they feel they are needed.
We will train all existing and new staff on the organisation's new Equality Scheme submitted to the Equality Commission in 11/12	Year 1 and ongoing	100% adherence of staff in post by the completion of the 5 year review period
We will continue to fulfil the role otherwise fulfilled by an Equality Working to discuss Section 75 & Disability Discrimination issues through the offices of the Staff Representatives.	Ongoing	Part of Staff Representatives remit
We will carry out a review of internal and external communications processes and consider areas for improvement in accessibility for people with disabilities.	Year 1 and on-going	Revised Communication policy
We will review our consultation procedures which will include consideration of how we consult with all kinds of consumers	Year 1 on-going	Review to take place in Year 1 and implemented thereafter
We will develop organisational website to ensure conformity with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines	Year 2 and on-going	Achieved in year 1 ahead of schedule
We will review the accessibility of our communications.	Year 1 and	Review to take place in Year 1 and

and information	ongoing	implemented thereafter
We will consider subscription to Browse Aloud to improve access availability for the website, www.uregni.gov.uk .	Year 2	Under review - Installing browse aloud, following completion of updated website. Website was enhanced for accessibility in 2012.
We will review of accessibility of Organisational Communications Strategy We will produce accessible corporate documents		Organisational Communications Strategy Reviewed 2014- change of attitude and all inclusive policies and procedures. Awarded Crystal Mark for clarity of Corporate Strategy 2015-19
We will consider the introduction of a textphone facility to be included in all advertising and publications	Year 2	Staff member successfully using text phone- no requests for mini-com for public use. SMS facility on a dedicated number available.
When carrying out annual “personal details” profile of staff members, we will include a statement inviting staff who may have acquired a disability in the last previous year, to discuss the issue and any attendant matters confidentially with our Human Resources Department.	On-going	100% return rate of forms required
We will continue upon request, to provide publications from the Office in alternative formats, such as audiotape and Braille.	On-going	Feedback from consultees
We will provide text service and sign language interpreters where possible for our public meetings and consultation exercises	On-going	Feedback from consultees
We will continue to place positive action measures in	On-going	Feedback from candidates

recruitment & selection activities. Additional support will be provided to disabled candidates, e.g. sign language interpreters, note takers, additional time.		
We will investigate and consider the purchase of evacu-chairs for the building and training a select group of staff in their use	Year 5	Achieved 3 years ahead of schedule
We will liaise with Autism Adult Service and consider options for staff/manger training and support for staff member diagnosed with Autism.	Year 4/5	Pending- contact has been made with Northern Trust HSNi to explore options in supporting adults on the autism spectrum. Consideration will be given to training, awareness and support.

CHAIR

CHIEF EXECUTIVE