



**Northern Ireland Authority for
Utility Regulation**

Policy Document

Disability Action Plan

**Promoting Positive Attitudes
Towards Disabled People and
Encouraging the Participation of
Disabled People in Public Life**

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INTRODUCTION

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 Authority for Utility Regulation (the Authority) 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 Authority 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.

Please note that throughout this document we have used the term 'disabled people' to reflect the Authority's belief in the social model of disability (i.e. that it is the barriers that society puts in place, rather than the nature and severity of any impairment, that truly disable people). However, we appreciate that this might not be the preferred term of some readers.

CONTACT DETAILS

Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this Disability Action Plan rests with Ian Campbell who may be contacted as follows:

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COMMITMENT

The Authority is 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 our strategic and forward business 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 all staff and to providing all necessary training and guidance for them on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

The Board will review our compliance in respect of equality issues on an annual basis. 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.

Furthermore the Authority will, where appropriate, consult with disabled people and disability groups when implementing and reviewing this action plan and other key issues affecting them.

If you require this plan in an alternative format (such as in large print, in Braille, on audio cassette, easy read or on computer disk) and/or language, please get in touch with the departmental contact (details on page 5) to discuss your requirements.

REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

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.niaur.gov.uk

FUNCTIONS

The Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (the Authority) was established under Article 3 Part II of the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 as amended by Article 3 of the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. Most of the functions of the Directors General of Electricity Supply and Gas for Northern Ireland were transferred to the Authority on 1 April 2003. The water and sewerage functions were transferred to the Authority on 1 April 2007.

For day to day business the Authority will be known as the Utility Regulator.

PUBLIC LIFE POSITIONS

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment appointed Mr Peter Matthews as Chairman of the Authority with effect from 1 April 2006. The Authority appointed Mr Iain Osborne as its Chief Executive and he took up his post on 15 June 2006.

New appointees to the Authority, for a period of three years effective from 1 October 2006, as confirmed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment are Ms Etain Doyle, Dr Clive Elphick, Mr Christopher Le Fevre, Mr Philip Johnson and Mr

James Oatridge. The Department has additionally appointed Mr Alan Rainey as a member of the Authority for a period of 3 years, effective from 1 September 2007.

PREVIOUS MEASURES

The Authority has always taken measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encouraged the participation of disabled people in public life. Notable examples include:

- Working closely with disabled people and disability groups during and following the preparation of our Equality Scheme;
- Providing disability awareness training for existing staff and new recruits. This is refreshed as necessary;
- Fully complying with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and associated Codes of Practice in the recruitment of new staff;
- Ensuring that services and premises are fully accessible to disabled people, and fullest regard being paid to future accessibility when premises are refurbished;
- Ensuring that our website (www.niaur.gov.uk) complies with the highest specifications in respect of accessibility; and
- Making all publications available in multiple formats.

This action plan enables the Authority's ongoing commitment to disability rights to be articulated in a single document, makes it easier for the Authority to account to disabled people and the disability sector for its work to promote disability equality, and evaluate the effectiveness of this work.

ACTION MEASURES

The action measures that Authority intends to take over the next few years are set out below in respect of its disability duties. The measures are grouped under headings suggested in the Equality Commission's guidance.

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

Measures	Timescale	Performance indicators / target
Mainstreaming measures		
Mainstream the disability duties into all decisions and activities	Ongoing from June 2007	<p>Consult representatives of disability interest groups as appropriate on all proposed changes to relevant policy and procedures.</p> <p>Take account of feedback and take mitigating action where possible.</p> <p>Report action taken and outcomes, as appropriate, in Disability Action Plan Annual Progress Report</p>
Explore with key stakeholders in the disability sector the potential of outreach work to raise awareness of the Utility Regulators role and functions with greater numbers of disabled people	Exploratory discussions completed by February 2008	<p>Initiation of outreach activity if feasible</p> <p>Level of awareness among disabled people of Utility regulation</p>
<p>Install an SMS text number for the Authority to further improve accessibility for deaf people, and others</p> <p>The adoption of a style guide for internal written communications which incorporates guidance in respect of font and point sizes</p>	<p>SMS text number installed by December 2007</p> <p>By September 2007</p>	<p>Increased level of contacts to the Authority</p> <p>Positive feedback from internal staff</p>
Training and guidance for staff and office holders		
Ensure that all Board Members and staff have received disability equality training, so	All Board Members and staff to receive disability equality training by end	High levels of awareness as assessed through post-training evaluation

that they understand disability rights and access issues	March 2008	
Provide specific training for reception staff and others who directly interface with the public	Training to begin by Christmas 2007	Suitable training evaluation to be incorporated
Measures relating to the recruitment, selection and participation of disabled people in public life positions		
To regularly review the composition of the NIAUR Board and its, in respect of the representation of disabled people, and consider ways of co-opting disabled people to address any under representation	Scoping exercise completed by March 2008	At least one disabled person actively involved in the Authority, at Board level
Review external and internal communication policies practices and procedures	By December 2007	Review and identify required improvements to ensure the communications policies, practices and procedures meet the obligations and requirements of the disability duties
	Jan 2008—Mar2009	Implement action required arising from above Review
Recruitment of disabled employees		
Put in place positive action measures to encourage applications from disabled people when recruiting new staff, including a statement on all advertisements welcoming applications from disabled people, guaranteeing interviews to all disabled people who meet the essential criteria specified for each vacant post, and using disability networks to circulate job vacancies	Positive action measures implemented by December 2007	Positive action measures in place Increase in the number of disabled people employed by the Authority

Measures which encourage others to adopt / promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

Review opportunities with relevant partners to promote positive images of disabled people	Revise NIAUR corporate style and external publication to include positive images of disabled people	Positive images of disabled people used
Support any staff with disabilities in respect of training and development needs and career development opportunities	Ongoing	Review and evaluate subsequent training records
Signed:		
Chairman		Chief Executive
Date:		Date: