

BELFAST EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD
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STAFF COMMISSION FOR EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD

January 2007 - March 2008

Interim Action Plan to:

**Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and
encourage the participation of disabled people in public life**

8 May 2007

Introduction

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended ('the Act'), public authorities, when carrying out their functions must have due regard to the need to:

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

Under Section 49B of the Act, public authorities are also under a duty to submit to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland plans (referred to as 'disability action plans') showing how they propose to fulfil the disability duties in relation to their functions.

Context

On 22 November 2005, the Education Minister announced, as part of the Review of Public Administration the following changes in relation to education:

- the establishment of a single Education and Skills Authority for Northern Ireland (ESA) with responsibility for the functions performed currently by the Education and Library Boards including the Regional Training Unit; the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA); front-line support and related functions currently undertaken by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE); and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CNaG). It is to become the employing authority for all teaching and other staff employed in grant-aided schools and will absorb some functions of the Staff Commission, while others will no longer be required.
- To transfer certain functions from the Department to the proposed new Education and Skills Authority, following an Internal Review.
- To transfer ownership of the controlled schools' estate, currently with the Education and Library Boards to the Education and Skills Authority.
- To appoint a Director of Children's Services to co-ordinate the Education and Skills Authority's responsibilities for children.
- To establish a new statutory Education Advisory Forum to act as a unified advisory interface between the Department and the education sector.
- To establish a new Regional Library Authority.
- Youth Services administration will be placed within the new Education and Skills Authority as will the functions of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.

In addition to the proposed administrative upheaval it is also proposed to radically change the nature of the work currently carried out by the Education Authorities.

It is proposed that the Education and Skills Authority and the Regional Library Authority will be operational from 1 April 2008 and in shadow form from 1 January 2008.

The Boards/Staff Commission fully recognise the importance of the disability duties proposed under the Act. However they questioned whether the effort involved in preparing a disability action plan in the present context and validating it, is disproportionate to its impact on promoting positive attitudes towards disabled persons and encouraging participation by disabled persons in public life in Northern Ireland.

A case was made to the Equality Commission that the Boards/Staff Commission be exempted from the requirement to provide such a plan. The Boards/Staff Commission in seeking such an exemption outlined the actions they proposed to take in the interim period. An exemption was granted on the condition that certain actions were taken.

In this context, the Boards'/Staff Commission's aim is to implement a programme of work which will pave the way for the development of a comprehensive Disability Action Plan which could be taken forward by the Education and Skills Authority.

Commitment to the Implementation of the Interim Action Plan

The Boards/Staff Commission are fully committed through the implementation of their Equality Scheme to the promotion of equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. The Boards/Staff Commission fully recognise the importance of the new disability duties proposed under the Act and accept that they have an important contribution to make to ensure people with disabilities enjoy equal respect and full inclusion in our society.

An Interim Action Plan showing how the Boards/Staff Commission intend to fulfil their disability duties in relation to their functions is attached.

This interim plan will complement work already underway in relation to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and includes a programme of work agreed with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

The Boards/Staff Commission will submit to the Equality Commission on 31 July 2007 and 31 March 2008 a summary progress report outlining the steps taken to implement the Interim Action Plan in the period leading to the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority.

Measure 2: Promoting Positive Attitudes

Action	Timescale	Outcome
<p>Conduct an examination of training and guidance provided on the promotion of equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.</p>	<p>June 2007</p>	<p>Provide a baseline of training conducted. Identify training needs. Develop a draft training plan for consideration by ESA.</p>
<p>Organise a joint seminar with Section 75 Groups to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) explore how public life positions could be made more accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities; (ii) examine how to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and (iii) identify measures which could be considered for inclusion in the disability action plan for ESA. 	<p>October 2007</p>	<p>Identify barriers to participation and how these can be removed. Ensure better recognition of the contribution of disabled employees and office holders. Prioritise actions required to fulfil the disability duties.</p>

Measure 3: Reviewing Progress

Action	Timescale	Outcome
<p>Preparation of progress reports</p>	<p>31 July 2007 31 March 2008</p>	<p>Submission of reports to the Equality Commission and update provided to Section 75 Equality Groups</p>