

BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
NORTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
STAFF COMMISSION FOR EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS

INTERIM ACTION PLAN - DISABILITY DUTIES

Measure 1: Encouraging Participation in Public Life

Report on a Review of Measures taken and/or proposed to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities

January 2008

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This information can also be made available, on request, in alternative formats including in large print, on computer disc, by email, in Braille, on audio-cassette and in minority languages to meet the needs of those people who are not fluent in English. The document is also available on the Commission's website at www.staff.com.org.uk

1. INTRODUCTION

Northern Ireland Act 1998

1.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the five Education and Library Boards and the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine categories of persons namely:-

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between, men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

1.2 Section 75 also requires the Boards/Staff Commission, without prejudice to this obligation, to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995

1.3 The DDA has evolved over the past decade from protection for disabled people in the workplace through into the provision of goods and services and from December 2006 a duty has been placed on all specified public bodies to promote disability equality.

In the promotion of equality of opportunity for people with disabilities there are strong linkages with the NI Act 1998 but there are two new additional duties, collectively referred to as 'the disability duties'. Public authorities when carrying out their functions must have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

2. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

2.1 The Boards were established in 1973. Each Board is a corporate body, established under statute as the local authority for education and library services. Each Board's central core activities are provision of:

- Pre school, primary and secondary education;
- Special education;
- Youth services; and
- Library services;

throughout the geographical area encompassed by each Board.

- 2.2** To give effect to its functions each Board engages in a range of corporate activities which includes the recruitment of staff, the maintenance of the Board's estate, the delivery and development of services and the procurement of services, goods and equipment.
- 2.3** Each Board¹ consists of thirty five members appointed for a four year period by the Minister responsible for Education to represent:
- each district council;
 - the interests of transferors of schools;
 - the interests of trustees of maintained schools; and
 - the services for which each Board is responsible.

The members meet on a monthly basis (except in the summer months) and on a regular basis as committees and sub-committees.

- 2.4** The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring that the decisions of its Board are implemented, for the day to day management of the organisation, and for ensuring the organisation works effectively in accordance with Government policy and public service values. The Chief Executive is also each Board's Accounting Officer and in that capacity is responsible for the effective and efficient use of resources and the maintenance of appropriate standards of financial accountability.

3. REVIEW OF MEASURES TO PROMOTE DISABILITY EQUALITY

3.1 Interim Action Plan

- 3.1.1** The Boards'/Staff Commission's 'Interim Action Plan' identifies the need to:
'Review measures already taken and/or proposed to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.'

This review will assess the current state of play:

- What has been achieved to date?
- What else could be done?
- Action required to better promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities?

¹ SEELB suspension

3.2 Screening of Policies

3.2.1 *What was achieved?*

A screening pro forma was developed and piloted. All the Boards adopted a two-stage approach to screening. Training was provided to Board officers responsible for screening.

At Stage 2 as part of the consultation strategy regional meetings were held in partnership with a number of community/voluntary sector organisations including Disability Action and its constituents. Participants were advised in advance of all the consultation meetings that requests for assistance to ensure full participation, including any communication, transport or access needs, would be considered. All requests for assistance were accommodated and these included:

- provision of transport, including taxis suitable for wheelchair users;
- information being made available in an alternative format (Braille);
- dietary requirements;
- interpreter service; and
- signer (BSL - British Sign Language).

A supplementary report on new policies screened is published and consulted upon each year.

There is clear evidence available that disability groups have actively engaged in the screening process.

3.2.2 *What else could be done to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities?*

- screening pro forma could be enhanced to include a specific follow-up question on disability equality.

3.2.3 *Action recommended:*

Screening pro forma to include the following question:

“Consider whether the policy:

- i) discourages disabled people from participating in public life and fails to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people;
- ii) provides an opportunity to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people or encourages their participation in public life.”

The screening pro forma has been amended and was introduced with effect from April 2007.

3.3 Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs)

3.3.1 *What was achieved?*

A full report of the Boards/Staff Commission's progress in implementing its EQIA programme for the period April 2001 - March 2006 is contained in the Five Year Review of Equality Schemes. The following outcomes are noteworthy in terms of the promotion of equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.

3.3.2 *Electronic Libraries for Northern Ireland (Boards/DCAL)*

- Board Library staff have been provided with Disability Awareness training and training in the use of adaptive technology.
- Information Team Librarians offer one to one internet services to blind and partially sighted library users.
- An Adapted Technology 'expert' has been identified to assist front line library staff across the service.
- The Electronic Libraries PPP Service Provider, Amey, is required to carry out an annual technology review which includes a review of adaptive technology. As part of the technology refresh in 2006 the Browse Aloud software application has been implemented on the NI-libraries.net web portal to assist users with reading difficulties.

3.3.3 *Code of Employment and Promotion Procedures and Internal Trawl Procedure (Staff Commission/Boards)*

- This EQIA identified an under-representation of people with disabilities in employment in the Boards. The under-representation is greatest at senior levels.
- It removed the internal trawl procedure with effect from June 2004; links to the website of Disability Action and MENCAP were developed.
- A joint seminar was organised with disability groups to consider and address accessibility and reasonable adjustment issues in the recruitment and selection process.
- The Boards'/Staff Commission's Code of Practice on the Employment of People with Disabilities was redrafted.
- Draft Guidance for Applicants and Human Resource staff has been prepared.
- Equal Opportunities Policy was updated to include positive action measures including a 'welcome statement', welcoming applicants who have a disability.
- A training plan was developed and fully implemented to raise awareness on the redrafted Code and refresh panel members on the equality duties and anti discrimination legislation.

3.3.4 *Work Life Balance Policies (Staff Commission/Boards)*

- Job Sharing Scheme extended to provide that it can also be used to “allow current employees with short-term and long-term illnesses, or who develop disabilities to keep working and provide employment opportunities for disabled people generally”.
- Increased flexibility to work alternative work patterns.
- Pilot exercise on teleworking.

3.3.5 *Promotion through the Youth Service, of the personal and social development of young people (Department of Education, Boards, Youth Council)*

- BELB and SELB are working with the Deaf Youth Association;
- NEELB, in partnership with MENCAP, providing a network of support and information to young people and their parents in order to promote the participation of the young people in mainstream youth provision;
- SEELB, in partnership with Phab Inclusion Matters N.I., working on a project to break down barriers between people with and without disabilities and encourage young people with disabilities to become more active in their community;
- SELB, in conjunction with Youth Action, conducting an examination of the needs of young people in rural areas;
- The WELB project taken forward under this EQIA involved undertaking research to establish how young travellers engage with Youth Services available in the Board and how those services may be improved to meet any unmet needs.

3.3.6 *What else could be done?*

It is evident that disability equality has been an important focus of EQIAs to date. Feedback from consultees as part of the five year review was positive on EQIAs conducted and the outcomes achieved.

3.3.7 *Action recommended:*

Explore how consultations with young people, particularly those with disabilities, could be enhanced as part of this process.

3.4 Monitoring

What has been achieved?

3.4.1 *Employment Monitoring*

The five Boards/Staff Commission collect data relating to gender, community background, marital status, race and disability for applicants for non-teaching posts. The Boards collect similar data for applicants for teaching posts with the exception of community background.

3.4.2 *Schools Data*

The annual schools census operated by the Department of Education gathers data on religion, gender, age, ethnicity and on pupils with special educational needs including the type of disability or other need that such pupils may have.

3.4.3 *Geographical Information Systems (GIS)*

The Boards provide the Youth Council with statistical data related to various characteristics of both voluntary registered and controlled youth groups. The data pertains to the number of young people attending each youth group, their age, gender, ethnicity, disability and perceived religious affiliation.

3.4.4 *What else could be done?*

Review how information is collected on the experiences of inequality amongst service users.

3.4.5 *Action recommended:*

Collect information from children and young people with disabilities on their experience of the education system.

3.5 Consultation

3.5.1 *What has been achieved?*

- Clear consultation strategy in place which aims to be pro active in promoting dialogue; response to specific needs which ensures feedback is provided to consultees.
- Equality Consultation Guidelines to provide practical advice to Boards/Staff Commission officers on how best to communicate information to young people and those with learning difficulties with a view to engaging them in the consultative process were developed and launched by the Chief Executive of the Boards/Staff Commission on 10 April 2003.

- A consultation skills training package was developed, to complement the above guidelines, in partnership with Disability Action, also launched on 10 April 2003.
- Joint Consultative Forum (JCF)
The Boards/Staff Commission, in partnership with NICEM, took the lead in the establishment of the above Forum. It is representative of:
 - Public bodies in the education sector;
 - Community and voluntary sector;
 - Trade unions; and
 - Statutory equality bodies.
 Since its establishment in 2004 there have been:
 6 meetings of the JCF
 4 meetings of the Steering Group
 3 seminars on the Review of Public Administration
 10 update leaflets issued to forum members. At all of the JCF meetings to date disability equality issues have been discussed.
- Consultation has taken place with people with disabilities on the initial screening of policies, on impact assessments and Best Value Reviews. Children with learning difficulties were consulted as part of the Best Value Review of Special Educational Needs.

3.5.2 *What else could be done?*

Arising from the five year review of our Equality Schemes the Boards/Staff Commission agreed to explore, in co-operation with other education authorities and the community and voluntary sector, the establishment of a consultation forum for young people. As a first step it could consider 'access' issues and explore with young people of various ages how a representative group of the equality categories could participate more in the policy and/or decision making process.

3.5.3 *Action recommended:*

See paragraph 3.3.7.

3.6 Training

3.6.1 *What has been achieved?*

The table below summarises the training provided to staff re the Section 75 Equality duties. All of the training provided at table 1 also covered the disability equality issues.

Table 1 - Training of Staff re: Section 75 Equality Duties

Type of Training	Date	Participants	Provider
Statutory Duty Awareness	18 November 1999 24 November 1999	Inter-Board/Staff Commission	Equality Commission & Jones & Cassidy Solicitors
Equality Awareness Section 75 Pilot exercises	22 October 2001 30 October 2001	2 sessions - 70 Board staff 2 sessions - 80 Board Staff	John Kremer/Staff Commission
Equality Awareness Section 75	April 2001 to date	2,986 Board Staff	In house
Equality Awareness Recruitment and Selection	February 2004 - April 2004	24 sessions - 785 Panel Members	Staff Commission
Screening of Policies	6 November 2000	Inter-Board/Staff Commission - 50	Jones & Cassidy/Staff Commission
	7 November 2000	Inter-Board/Staff Commission - 41	Jones & Cassidy/Staff Commission
	8 December 2000	Inter-Board/Staff Commission - 48	Jones & Cassidy/Staff Commission
	15 December 2000	Staff Commission - 7	In-house
EQIA	16 Training Courses	Department of Education/ NDPBs	OFMDFM Call-off contract for training
	5 Training Courses	Staff Commission/ inter-Board	J Kremer/Staff Commission
Consultation Skills	8 May 2001	Inter-Board/Staff Commission/DCAL	In-house
	19 June 2002	Inter-Board/Staff Commission	Disability Action/Staff Commission
	5 May 2004	Inter-Board/Staff Commission	Disability Action/Staff Commission
	19 May 2004	Inter-Board/Staff Commission	Disability Action/Staff Commission

Disability Awareness Training

Disability Awareness training has been delivered on an intra-Board and inter-Board/Staff Commission basis in a number of areas using in-house and outside training providers. The areas covered include:-

- Disability awareness training:-
For library staff on the needs of people with specific disabilities, training in the use of adaptive technology and customer care.
- Disability Awareness training in relation to work experience trainees/staff.
- Disability Awareness in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.
- Disability Awareness in relation to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order 2005 (SENDO) – rolling programme.
- Targeted training in relation to raising awareness of the needs of people with specific disabilities i.e., deaf and hearing impaired, visually impaired, mental health problems, learning difficulties etc.
- Diversity and Anti-Discrimination with disability awareness featuring as a significant component.
- Equal Access training for people with disabilities.
- A seminar organised in partnership with Disability Action, Mencap, Equality Commission, RNIB, Action Mental Health, the 5 Education and Library Boards and the Staff Commission. It addressed the practical issues around the development and implementation of policies to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.
- Board officers have also attended training on:-
 - Inclusion of Children with Down's Syndrome;
 - Challenging Behaviour in Children with Severe Learning Disabilities
 - Autism Seminars
 - Dyslexia Conferences
 - Interventions for ASD

3.6.2 What else could be done?

The Boards have agreed to conduct an examination of the training and guidance provided on the promotion of equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.

3.6.3 Action recommended?

It is anticipated that this will emerge from the review referred to at 3.6.2 above. Consultees from Disability Groups have emphasised the importance of disability awareness training being provided by people with disabilities, particularly to frontline staff. This recommendation is under consideration.

3.7 Public Access to Information and Services

3.7.1 What has been achieved?

(a) Access to Information

The Boards/Staff Commission issued guidelines providing practical advice to all staff on how they should engage in consultation and/or make information available to the public. The guidelines have been made available to staff involved in consultations and are being used as part of an on-going partnership training programme established with Disability Action.

(b) Access to Services

Staff Commission publications now include the statement:

“This information can also be made available, on request, in alternative formats including in large print, on computer disc, by email, on audio-cassette and in minority languages to meet the needs of those people who are not fluent in English. The document is also available on the _____ website at _____”.

The Boards/Staff Commission have made the following arrangements to facilitate better access to services, the provision of information:-

- on computer disc;
- in Braille (each Board a Braille printer and reader installed);
- on audio cassette (an inter-Board/Staff Commission agreement was reached in August 2002 with Armagh Talking Newspapers for the provision of a reader service – this was renewed for a further two years during Year IV;
- Textphones are available in each Board as follows:

Belfast Education and Library Board -	028 9056 4167
North Eastern Education and Library Board -	028 2566 2404
Southern Education and Library Board -	028 3741 5415
Western Education and Library Board -	028 8241 1550

The South Eastern Education and Library Board and the Staff Commission use Typetalk. Their Typetalk numbers are:-

South Eastern Board: 18001 028 9056 6200

Staff Commission: 18001 028 9049 1461

- Translation and interpreter services are available and have been used in:
 - Consultation events;
 - service delivery e.g. statementing process, interpreter provided for a member of a Board of Governors who is deaf.
- Websites have been re-designed to ensure good practice.
- Board/Staff Commission staff have successfully completed sign language courses.

3.7.3 Disability Access Audit

Each Board has received from the Department of Education and Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure ear-marked funding for the purpose of improving disability access to school buildings and public libraries.

Using these earmarked funds together with monies from within its 'normal' capital budget the Boards have undertaken a significant programme of important works across the Boards' estate to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Improvement works include such measures as installing external and internal ramps, stair lifts, automatic doors and Braille signage, enlarged and improved toilet facilities and providing car parking spaces for people with disabilities. Some Boards have also installed automated wheelchair lifts in a number of school buses. Each Board's expenditure on disability access is detailed below.

Boards' Capital Expenditure – Disability Access for the Period 2001 – 2007

Board	Total
Belfast Education	£3.71m
North Eastern	£5.20m
South Eastern	£3.76m
Southern	£4.01m
Western	£4.98m
Overall Total	£21.66m

In the Staff Commission an Accessibility Audit was undertaken in 2003 to take account of the basic requirements of all potential users of the building. The

recommendations to improve access included:

- provision of designated car park or visitor spaces;
- provision of low level colour contrasted intercom systems;
- upgrade fire escape doors;
- provide new passenger lift fully compliant with DDA legislation;
- upgrade internal signage;
- provide wheelchair accessible W/C;
- provide visual indicators throughout building or alternative portable system to assist people with sensor impairments in the event of a fire alarm.

All the work specified has been completed.

3.7.4 *What else could be done?*

Monitor the arrangements put in place. Carefully consider and respond to 'Access to Services' issues which are raised.

3.7.5 *Action recommended:*

Consult service users on the provisions in place and review arrangements in light of any feedback received.

4. CONCLUSION

As a result of the duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, the Boards/Staff Commission have already taken a number of measures to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and to facilitate their participation in public life.

However, this review has enabled us to identify a number of specific measures which could be implemented to take forward the disability duties as follows:

- the amendment of the equality screening pro forma to include specific questions on disability equality (paragraph 3.2.3);
- to explore how consultations with young people with disabilities could be enhanced (paragraph 3.3.7);
- to collect information from young people with disabilities on their experience of the education system (paragraph 3.4.5);
- to consider the scope to involve people with disabilities in disability awareness training, particularly for frontline staff (paragraph 3.6.3); and
- to consult service users on public access provisions in place and to review arrangements in the context of feedback received (paragraph 3.7.5).