

**CIVIL SERVICE
COMMISSIONERS FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND**

Disability Action Plan

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DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Introduction

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Civil Service Commissioners are required when carrying out their functions to have due regard to the need to:

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

For the purpose of this disability action plan the two elements are referred to as “the disability duties”.

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Civil Service Commissioners are 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.

As Chairperson of the Commissioners, I confirm that 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 objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans.

We will also put effective internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and this disability action plan is fully implemented. We will ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and provide all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan and the point of contact within the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners will be:

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A copy of this plan, the annual progress report to the Equality Commission and five year review of the plan will be made available on our website www.nicscommissioners.org.

PROTECT – MANAGEMENT

2. Commitment

The Civil Service Commissioners are committed to fulfilling their disability duties in all their functions. A planned programme of communication and training on the disability duties will be undertaken by all staff and Commissioners.

Overall responsibility for determining policy on how this will be achieved lies with the Commissioners. Day-to-day responsibility for implementation of the Action Plan lies with the Secretary to the Commissioners who, through the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners, will be responsible for the implementation of administration arrangements to ensure that the disability duties are complied with by the organisation in carrying out its functions.

As part of our business planning process, the Commissioners will build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into the business plan. These will be reflected at all levels of strategic planning within the organisation including individual staff objectives and annual plans. Progress on meeting objectives, including those relating to the disability duties will be monitored and reported upon at the most senior level within the organisation on a quarterly basis. Individual performance will be monitored and reviewed through performance review arrangements.

The Commissioners confirm their commitment to submitting an annual progress report on the implementation of this plan to the Equality Commission. We will also undertake a five year review of the Plan and submit that to the Equality Commission.

3. Consultation

The Civil Service Commissioners' statutory responsibilities and main functions are set out below. The Commissioners' primary responsibility is to regulate and bring independence and objectivity to Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) recruitment policies and practices. The impact of their work is constrained by their clearly defined remit and 'constitution' – the primary impact of the Commissioners' influence is on the recruitment activities of the NICS. The Commissioners believe it is important that disabled people are involved in the implementation, monitoring and review of the Disability Action Plan. Commissioners are committed to carrying out consultation in a meaningful manner in the development of their disability duties.

As part of the consultation process barriers to effective consultation will be removed by ensuring accessibility to documents in appropriate formats. Information will be made available on request in accessible formats including large print, digital daisy, Braille and audio CD. Information will also be made available in accessible formats. It will also be important to establish with disabled people the basis for dialogue and engagement during the life of the Plan. Consideration will be given to how best to communicate information to young disabled people as well as considering additional dimensions such as ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation and religious belief.

4. Role

Outlined below is the range of functions of the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland.

Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland were first appointed in 1923. They constitute an independent statutory body. The Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland currently derive their powers from Orders made by the Secretary of State. The Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 sets out the principle that – "... a person shall not be appointed to a situation in the Civil Service unless... the selection ... was made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition." The Order gives Commissioners the responsibility to maintain this important principle, known as 'The Merit Principle'.

5. Main Functions

The Order provides for Commissioners to discharge their responsibilities by:

- publishing and maintaining a Recruitment Code setting out the essential principles and procedures on which recruitment to the NICS must be based;
- making General Regulations prescribing certain Exceptions to the principle of selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition;
- approving the procedures for appointment through open competition to senior positions in the NICS;
- auditing the recruitment policies and practices followed by Departments and Agencies in making appointments to the NICS to ensure that they meet the Commissioners' requirements in regard to the Merit Principle; and
- requiring Departments and Agencies to publish information about their recruitment activity.

Under the terms of the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, Commissioners also have the power to consider, and make decisions on, appeals to them under the NICS Code of Ethics which is published by the Department of Finance and Personnel. The Order requires Commissioners to publish, annually, a report on the number of appeals they received under the Code of Ethics, together with a summary of each appeal.

6. The Organisation

The Civil Service Commissioners are a diverse group of people who are independent of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). The Commissioners come from different areas of life and none is a serving member of the Civil Service. Since 2002, they have been selected through open competition.

Civil Service Commissioners are appointed by the Crown and they are supported by a secretariat of six people based within the Northern Ireland Office. They report annually on their work.

Day-to-day management of the Commissioners' responsibilities is delegated to the Secretary.

7. Public Life Positions

The Commissioners are not a body corporate and are not responsible for employing or managing staff. Their primary function is to ensure that appointments to the NICS are made on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition. Such appointments do not fall within the Equality Commission's definition of public life positions. The Commissioners will, however, seek at every opportunity to promote the disability duties in carrying out their statutory functions.

8. Action Measures

Taking account of the constraints highlighted 7 above, Commissioners have endeavoured to consider fully their disability duties and have outlined below the key measures which they believe they are able to take within their narrow statutory role, over the period of this Disability Action Plan from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2017, together with performance indicators or targets.

9. Proposed Measures

Commissioners are committed to monitoring and reviewing policies and practices to ensure that their statutory disability duties are being met. Commissioners will monitor the progress of this Plan on a quarterly basis.

The annual review of the Plan will become part of the Commissioners' regular process of monitoring and reviewing progress of business performance. This review will assist in drafting appropriate targets and Performance Indicators for the next period, while reporting on the achievement, or otherwise, of those set for the period of the review.

Targets and Performance Indicators have been set out in the Action Plan. Some targets are of a more general nature reflecting the nature of the challenges.

The Commissioners will be directly responsible for compliance with the requirements of the Act and the reporting arrangements to the Equality Commission. They are committed to engaging effectively with disabled people in the draft, implementation, monitoring and review of this Plan. This will be achieved through taking forward the measures in the attached table.

Signed by:

Chairperson
Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland

PROTECT – MANAGEMENT

STATUS: 12 December 2011 draft issued for consultation

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ACTION MEASURES

| Measures | Timescale | Performance | Outcome / Impact |
|---|------------------|---|--|
| Encourage the NICS to actively take forward their disability duties and other diversity matters in relation to recruitment. | Ongoing | Continue to encourage the NICS to ensure that panels are equipped to address diversity considerations in selection and recruitment processes. | The NICS are encouraged to ensure that the selection and recruitment processes address diversity considerations. |
| | Ongoing | Where possible and appropriate, promote, to the NICS, the positive benefits of supporting and employing people from all Section 75 Groups. | Diversity, including issues facing disabled people, remains a live issue with Permanent Secretaries. |
| | Annually | Require the NICS, to publish statistical summaries, in a format which the Commissioners may specify, of all recruitment activity during the publication period, including analyses by all categories covered by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and discuss trends, actions or initiatives with NICS. | <p>This information is published by the NICS as required by Commissioners and annual updates are received from the NICS on any actions or initiatives undertaken in the reporting year to attract candidates, and advance a recruitment-related agenda for diversity, inclusivity and equality of opportunity and which specifically target areas of under-representation.</p> <p>Commissioners review and discuss these Annual Reports.</p> |
| Ensure training is provided on the disability duties to all staff and Commissioners. | Annually | Undertake an annual review of Commissioners' and the Secretariat's training needs in relation to the disability duties and the Disability Discrimination Act. Address, as appropriate, identified development needs. | Commissioners and the Secretariat will have an increased awareness and knowledge of the disability duties. |

PROTECT – MANAGEMENT

| Measures | Timescale | Performance | Outcome / Impact |
|--|------------------|---|--|
| Ensure specialist training is provided for Commissioners and Secretariat staff involved in recruitment and selection panels. | Annually | Commissioners and relevant staff to have attended a training event on recruitment and selection during each reporting year. | Commissioners and staff enhance their knowledge and understanding of various strands and elements of the recruitment and selection processes and, in particular, emerging legislative changes and relevant case law. |