

**Promoting positive attitudes
towards disabled people and
encouraging the participation of
disabled people in public life.**

**The Northern Ireland Office
Disability Action Plan
July 2007 to April 2010**

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Office is a Whitehall Department with offices in both London and Belfast and staff from two different Civil Services, the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Home Civil Service.

Recent changes to disability legislation introduced in England and Wales in December 2006 and in Northern Ireland in January 2007 will impact on the work of the Department. In Northern Ireland the functions of the Department include supporting the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in taking forward government policy. In addition to supporting and fostering the political and democratic process the Department has policy responsibility for upholding law, order and security including the provision of criminal justice services such as policing, prison and probation services. In England the Department has an employment function for staff in the London Office.

Northern Ireland Legislation

In Northern Ireland under section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, the NIO, when carrying out our functions must have due regard to the need to:

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

These disability duties came into effect on **1 January 2007**.

Legislation in England and Wales

In England and Wales Section 49A (1) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005) which came into force on **4 December 2006** requires public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote equality of opportunity for disabled people
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Eliminate disability related harassment
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation of disabled people in public life
- Take into account disabled people's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably.

Disability Action Plans

For both new sets of regulations the NIO is required to submit a Disability Action Plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Disability Rights Commission in England showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions.

Consultation

The purpose of this consultation is to seek views from all interested parties on the disability action plan. An initial draft plan is attached and we would appreciate your assistance in the development of our plan. Views are also welcome on the implications of the proposals on equality of opportunity for all s75 groups.

The NIO follows the Cabinet Office code of practice when we consult with the public. The NIO Equality Scheme also contains specific obligations relating to consultation on the impact of proposed policies on the promotion of equality.

The Cabinet Office guidance contains six key consultation criteria:-

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
 - [Criterion 1](#)
2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
 - [Criterion 2](#)
3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
 - [Criterion 3](#)
4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
 - [Criterion 4](#)
5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation coordinator.
 - [Criterion 5](#)
6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.
 - [Criterion 6](#)

Equality Considerations

As a public authority under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the NIO is required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- 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.

This legislation requires us to consider whether any policy has a differential impact upon the relevant groups, the nature and extent of that impact and whether such impact is justifiable.

All views are welcome and we are particularly seeking views on the following questions:-

Communication

What methods of communication would be most helpful for disabled people?

What are the barriers that exist and how might we overcome these?

Accessibility

Have you experienced any accessibility problems when visiting or working in an NIO Building?

How might we improve accessibility to our premises for staff and the general public?

Participation in Public Life

How might we encourage more disabled people to apply for public appointments?

Promoting Positive Attitudes

How might the NIO best promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?

What are the key messages we need to deliver to our staff?

Duration of Consultation

The NIO Disability Action plan must be submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland by 30 June 2007. However please note the consultation period will extend beyond this deadline. In line with guidance from the Cabinet Office this consultation will run for a period of 12 weeks from 1 May 2007. All responses should therefore be submitted by 5pm on 25 July 2007.

The action plan is intended to be flexible and to change over time. It will be updated at various intervals over the next five years so it is possible to consider the inclusion of any comments or suggestions received after submission to the Equality Commission. Any changes will of course be notified to the Equality Commission.

Alternative formats

An electronic version of this document and the NIO Disability Action Plan is available on the NIO website www.nio.gov.uk. Hard copies will be posted on request.

Copies in other formats, including Braille, audio CD and digital daisy are available on request. If you need copies in an alternative format or language please let us know.

Contact details

All queries and responses or concerns about the consultation process should be addressed to:

Equality Branch

Central Management Unit

Northern Ireland Office

Room 14


Stormont House Annexe

Stormont Estate

Belfast

BT4 3SH

E-mail: donna.knowles@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk

Telephone  028 90 527 015

Confidentiality of Responses

Unless individual respondents specifically indicate that they wish their response to be treated in confidence, their name and the nature of their response may be included in any published summary of responses. Respondents should also be aware that the NIO's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act may require that any responses, not subject to specific exemptions in the Act, may be disclosed to other parties on request.



Northern
Ireland
Office

**DISABILITY ACTION PLAN
JULY 2007 TO MARCH 2010**

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1. Introduction

Northern Ireland Legislation

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), which came into force on 1 January 2007, the NIO 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 NIO is required to submit to the Equality Commission a **disability action plan** showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to its functions.

Legislation in England and Wales

In England and Wales Section 49A (1) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005) which came into force on 4 December 2006 requires public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote equality of opportunity for disabled people
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Eliminate disability related harassment
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation of disabled people in public life

- Take into account disabled people's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably.

Under the Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Regulations 2005, referenced above and imposed by section 49D of the Act, the NIO is required to submit a Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan to the Disability Rights Commission showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to its functions.

As the Departmental Board of the Northern Ireland Office, 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 where appropriate, build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans.

Overall responsibility for the Action Plan lies with the Departmental Board. Day to day responsibility for the Action Plan lies with the Equality Officer who will be responsible for overseeing the implementation to ensure that the disability duties are complied with by the NIO.

Internal arrangements are in place to ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and to provide all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Disability Rights Commission on the implementation of this plan as well as carrying out a five yearly review of this plan.

2. Consultation

The NIO is committed to actively engaging with disabled people. To inform the development of this plan the NIO consulted with disabled people and disability organisations in Northern Ireland and sought the views of staff.

Through consultation the NIO sought to:-

- identify barriers faced by disabled people in participating in public life in general and specifically any barriers they have encountered in relation to the functions of the Northern Ireland Office;
- identify opportunities for the NIO to promote positive attitudes; and
- set priorities and identify opportunities for encouraging participation in public life.

To encourage the participation of disabled people, staff and disability organisations the NIO took the following steps:-

Views from the General Public

- We contacted approximately 450 individuals and organisations registered on the consultation database to explain about the development of the Disability Action Plan and invited interested parties to contact us to work with us on the plan.
- A Criminal Justice Agencies Conference was held at the Ramada Hotel on 24th April 2007. Criminal Justice Agencies participating in the conference included the Police Service of

Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Northern Ireland Court Service (NICS), the NIO, the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Youth Justice Agency. Invitations to attend the conference issued to staff and individuals and disability organisations on the consultation database.

- A joint Northern Ireland Departments and NIO Conference was held on 15 May at the Park Avenue Hotel, Belfast.
- Following the initial consultation the draft NIO Disability Action plan was circulated to interested parties for comment.
- The NIO attended a briefing sessions on development of disability action plans held by the Equality Commission and Disability Action.
- A copy of the draft NIO Disability Action plan was placed on the intranet www.nio.gov.uk. Adverts were placed in the local press and community newsletters and feedback from individuals and organisations was invited.
- Copies of the NIO Disability Action plan are available in alternative formats, including large print, Braille, audio CD and computer disk. Interested parties were invited to contact us to discuss individual needs.

Staff Views

- Internally we sought views from staff in the following ways:-
 - A notice was issued in January 2007 to inform staff of the importance of the new disability duties.
 - This was followed up in April 2007 by a note to ask for staff views on the development of the plan. Staff were

invited to phone or email their views and the Equality Unit offered to meet with staff in person to discuss their suggestions.

- All staff were invited to attend the Criminal Justice Conference held in Belfast on 24th April 2007.
- The Equality Unit discussed the issues with the Chair of the Department Disability Network and will continue to maintain links with this group throughout the course of implementing this plan.
- A copy of the draft plan was issued to Trade Union Side.

We are very grateful for the time and expertise people have given to the development of this plan and thankful for all comments and suggestions received.

Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan and the point of contact within the NIO will be:-

Donna Knowles

Equality Officer

Central Management Unit

Stormont House Annexe

Stormont Estate

Belfast

BT4 3SH

Telephone number: 028 905 27015

Fax number: 028 905

Email: donna.knowles@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk

If you require this plan in an alternative format (such as in large print, in Braille, on audio CD, easy read or on computer disc) and/or language, please contact Donna Knowles to discuss your requirements.

3. Report on Progress

We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual progress report on the implementation of this plan to the Equality Commission and Disability Rights Commission and to completing a five year review of this plan, or further plans submitted over the five year review period.

A copy of this plan, the NIO Equality Scheme, our annual progress reports and our five year review of this plan will be made available on our website www.nio.gov.uk.

4. Functions of the NIO

The Department is organised into five Directorates with 15 Divisions. Please note chart of NIO Organisational Structure showing Directorates and Divisions at [Appendix A](#).

The five core directorates are:-

- Political Directorate
- Policing and Security Directorate
- Criminal Justice Directorate
- Information Service Directorate
- Central Services Directorate

[Political Directorate](#)

The principal function of the Political Directorate is to provide Ministers with advice on how to restore and sustain devolved government in Northern Ireland and on a range of constitutional issues (for example, elections, human rights and certain aspects of equality policy). On behalf of Ministers, it maintains relations on the subject with the Irish Government, those serving the devolved institutions (when in operation), the political parties in Northern Ireland and several NDPBs.

In addition the Directorate includes the Private Office and Parliamentary Section, which directly services the Secretary of State and Ministers across the whole range of NIO business.

[Policing and Security Directorate](#)

The Policing and Security Directorate's aim is to uphold the rule of law, combat crime and build and maintain confidence in arrangements for policing. It does so by developing and implementing appropriate policing and security policies and arrangements, including policy on parades and public order and measures to tackle serious and organised crime (including paramilitary and terrorist-related activity). The Directorate works with the Northern Ireland Policing Board and with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to ensure an effective and efficient police service. It also has responsibility for such matters as the police establishment, the funding of both organisations and taking forward action arising from the report of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland.

The Directorate is also responsible for policy in relation to firearms legislation and licensing appeals and for the protection of key individuals at their homes, and for the funding of the Police Ombudsman, the Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures, the Terrorism Act Reviewer and the Parades Commission. Together with the Irish Government it provides funding for the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, the Independent Monitoring Commission and the Independent Commission on the Location of Victims' Remains.

[Criminal Justice Directorate](#)

The Criminal Justice Directorate's aim is to secure an efficient, effective and responsive criminal justice system, and to develop and optimize the criminal law. Through the Criminal Justice Board,

it works in partnership with other concerned agencies, including the police, prosecution, courts and prisons services, to reduce criminality and the fear of crime and to improve the operation of the criminal justice system in protecting the public, dealing effectively and quickly with offenders, and supporting victims. The Directorate has oversight responsibility for the Youth Justice Agency, the Compensation Agency and Forensic Science Northern Ireland. It provides strategic direction and funding to the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, sponsors the independent Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, Law Commission and Life Sentence Review Commission and is responsible for the State Pathologist's Department and some other smaller bodies.

[Central Services Directorate](#)

The Central Services Directorate is tasked with supporting the rest of the Department in achieving its goals. It provides the Department with financial management, budgeting and accounting; procurement services; internal audit services; personnel management; IT support; facilities management and support in meeting its statutory equality obligations.

[The Northern Ireland Information Service](#)

The Northern Ireland Information Service's aim is to present and explain Government policy and activity in Northern Ireland by communicating the objectives of the Department in a positive, timely, impartial and professional manner.

[Associated Bodies](#)

There is a range of other matters which are dealt with through a network of associated bodies. These deliver the business of

Government in areas where a degree of independence is a requirement in providing service to the public.

Thus the NIO sponsors Executive Agencies, Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and other statutory and non-statutory bodies delivering a range of services. In addition it provides support for the Crown Solicitor's Office and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland which, although accountable to the Attorney General, are staffed and funded by the NIO and are subject to the internal policies of the NIO on matters such as recruitment, promotion, pay and equal opportunities.

5. Executive Agencies

[The Northern Ireland Prison Service](#) which, through its staff, serves the community by keeping in secure, safe and humane custody those committed by the courts; by working with prisoners and with other organisations, seeks to reduce the risk of re-offending; and in so doing aims to protect the public and to contribute to peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

[The Compensation Agency](#) administers the three statutory compensation schemes on behalf of the Secretary of State: the criminal injuries compensation scheme; the criminal damage compensation scheme; and Terrorism Act 2000 legislation.

[Forensic Science Northern Ireland](#) provides scientific advice and expertise to enhance the delivery of justice through scientific support for the police in the investigation of crime; scientific advice for the legal profession and objective expert testimony to the courts; training in the application of forensic science; and analytical support for pathologists.

[The Youth Justice Agency](#) works in partnership with others in diverting children from crime and assisting their integration into the community. There are three strands to the service provided by the Agency – youth conferencing, community services and custodial provisions.

6. Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)

Executive

- Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
- Northern Ireland Police Fund
- Northern Ireland Policing Board
- Parades Commission for Northern Ireland.
- Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland
- Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation.

Advisory

- Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland
- Independent Assessor for Military Complaints Procedures
- Independent Assessor for Police Service Northern Ireland Recruitment Vetting
- Office of the Justice Oversight Commissioner

Tribunal

- Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel for Northern Ireland

Independent Monitoring Boards

- Independent Monitoring Board HMP Maghaberry
- Independent Monitoring Board HMP Magilligan
- Independent Monitoring Board HMP Hydebank/ Young Offenders Centre

Other Public Body

- Chief Electoral Office

Statutory Bodies

The Department's independent statutory bodies are: -

- Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland
- Commissioner for Hearings under the Prison and Young Offender Centre Rules (Northern Ireland) 1995
- Life Sentence Review Commissioners
- Prisoner Ombudsman
- Remission of Sentences Commissioners
- Sentence Review Commissioners.

International Bodies

In partnership with the Government of Southern Ireland, the Department co-sponsors four international bodies:-

- Independent International Commission on Decommissioning
- Independent Monitoring Commission
- International Fund for Ireland
- International Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains.

7. Public Life Positions

At 31 March 2007, the NIO was responsible for making 105 appointments to Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB's), 52 appointments to three Independent Monitoring Boards, plus one further appointment to the Chief Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

Detailed information about all NIO public bodies and those holding public appointments at 31 March 2006, with details of terms of office, gender and remuneration can be viewed at http://www.nio.gov.uk/public_appointments_nio_annual_report_2005-06.pdf . The report also contains an analysis of applications received and appointments made to NIO public bodies during the year 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006. Similar information at 31 March 2007 will be placed on the same NIO web-site in mid 2007.

8. Previous Measures

Outlined below are the key measures which the NIO has already taken to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

[Employment Policies](#)

NIO Staff

The NIO, including non-prison grades in the Northern Ireland Prison Service, comprises 1,928 full time equivalent staff, of whom 48 are Senior Civil Servants. Seventy four staff are based in London, with the remaining 1,854 staff working in Northern Ireland. Staff are also drawn from two different Civil Services with 1,790 from the Northern Ireland Civil Service and 138 from the Home Civil Service.

The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) recruit staff to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and further detail on recruitment policies and practices may be found on the recruitment web site <http://www.nicsrecruitment.gov.uk>. Recruitment advertisements include statements welcoming applications from all the s75 categories, including people with disabilities. Qualification requirements are waived for disabled candidates at basic entry level and the provision of reasonable adjustments for disabled candidates includes extra time for tests.

Recruitment to the Home Civil Service (HCS) follows the principle of selection of merit on the basis of fair and open competition as set out in the Civil Service Commissioners' [Recruitment Code](#).

Further information on vacancies and career opportunities within the HCS may be found on the Recruitment Gateway site <http://careers.civil-service.gov.uk>.

NIO Equality and Diversity Plan

The Departmental Board launched the [NIO Vision and Values](#) statement in December 2006 setting the direction in which we want to go, and challenging everyone in the department to strive to live up to them. A programme of work is in hand to embed these values within the department. In particular, Board members have been asked to act as guardians in order to ensure they are effectively promoted in the department.

The NIO vision is

[“A safe and peaceful Northern Ireland with stable devolved Government working for everyone.”](#)

Our values are commitment, focus, determination, supportiveness, *consideration*, creativity and efficiency. Key to the value of *consideration* is valuing our people and encouraging diversity. The Diversity Champions supported by a Diversity Steering Group, are guardians of this value. Leading delivery of the action plan is a key part of their work as guardians of the department’s diversity value.

Equal Opportunities

The [NIO Equal Opportunities Officer](#) has responsibility for promoting a working environment within the Department which actively challenges prejudice in relation to disability. This is

managed by raising awareness of disability issues through publicising good employment practice.

The NIO has a firm corporate [equal opportunities policy](#), backed up by effective, good practice based procedures for the investigation of complaints. While not solely designed for disability related issues, the policy explicitly cites discrimination on the grounds of disability as unequivocally unacceptable and provides an effective means for victims to complain and have complaints resolved.

Reasonable adjustments

The Departmental [Disabled Persons' Liaison Officer](#) works with disabled staff (including prospective employees) and their line managers to ensure that jobs are adapted to meet the specific needs of individuals. They provide advice on and make arrangements for reasonable adjustments which may include:-

- making adjustments to premises specifically for individual staff members with access problems
- reorganizing the duties of a post to suit a particular disability, or facilitating the transfer of staff to an alternative post more suited to their disability;
- altering a person's working hours or authorizing absences from work for rehabilitation or treatment;
- modifying information to suit the needs of staff with visual disabilities i.e. conversion of documents to Braille etc;
- acquiring or adapting equipment to such as hearing aids, specialist IT equipment or special chairs; or
- the provision of sign language interpreters for staff with hearing difficulties.

Reasonable adjustments are made to the physical environment and working practices for staff with a disability to allow them to work effectively and safely.

Employment Support Scheme

The Department participates in the [Employment Support Scheme](#), run by the Department of Employment and Learning, which aims to assist people with significant disabilities who wish to work, but who because of their disability are unable to reach the output levels of employees without disabilities.

Civil Service Summer Placement Scheme

The NIO participates in the [Civil Service Summer Placement Programme](#). This scheme aims to dispel discriminatory attitudes and practices by placing disabled trainees in various government departments where they will be introduced to the interesting and varied challenges in today's modern Civil Service. The Civil Service has approximately 75 summer placements open to disabled undergraduate and graduates who have or expect to gain a 2.2 degree or above in any discipline.

Bursaries for Staff with Disabilities

Since 1998, the NIO has actively participated in the [Cabinet Office Central Bursary programme](#) to promote development opportunities for staff with disabilities who have the potential to reach the Senior Civil Service (SCS). In addition, we have developed our own bespoke version focused on disabled staff with the potential to reach Grade A. The NIO programme has additional opportunities such as:

- Analysis of individual training needs carried out by training consultant; and

- Planned work experience, secondment, interchange and other developmental opportunities.

Diversity Steering Group

In June 2005, the Departmental Board agreed that the NIO would set up a [Diversity Steering Group](#). The Steering Groups is chaired by the two Board level Diversity Champions and supported by Personnel Services Division. Its members include the Departmental Equal Opportunities Officer, Trade Union and Network Forums representatives and a mix of volunteers from different grades and business areas across the Department. The purpose of the group is to consider and debate diversity related matters, monitor and evaluate progress, identify new issues and priorities and recommend action to be taken.

Diversity Network Forums

There are currently three [Diversity Network Forums](#) covering race, disability and sexual orientation. The three Networks which have been formed by individuals within the Department are self directing and are open to any member of staff. They provide a valuable forum for mutual support and an opportunity for staff to share ideas and viewpoints on work related issues. The Networks work to identify any difficulties experienced by the groups concerned and to put forward possible solutions.

The NIO benefits from the Networks contribution to actively promoting a culture of diversity in all aspects of its business. In addition to representation on the NIO Diversity Steering Group and direct access to the Board level Departmental Diversity Champions, the Department supports the Network by allowing time

for members to attend meetings and related events and in partnering/participating in the UK Disability network to assist in the sharing and development of best practice.

Diversity and Equality Intranet site

The NIO has developed a staff [diversity and equality intranet site](#) which includes information on disability related issues and links to external disability organisations.

Staff Training

The Department is currently revising and updating training programmes promoting disability awareness.

- Equality and Diversity Awareness training, which is mandatory for new staff joining the NIO, includes a session on disability which concentrates on the law in this area, the roles and responsibilities of managers and staff in working with and providing a service to people with disabilities and where to get advice on the provision of reasonable adjustments. This training is currently being updated and the Department is committed to delivery of the new programme to all staff commencing Summer 2007.
- The Pathway Firstline Managers' programme has a 3 hour session co-delivered with the Department's Welfare Officer. It considers in detail the organisational issues and responsibilities relating to managing, and being managed as a disabled person.

Guidance for Managers

Personnel Services are currently working on a Managers guide on disability matters. This is due to launch with the new diversity training programme in summer 2007.

[Accessibility & Communication](#)

Access to NIO Buildings

Following the publication of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 the NIO appointed the Central Procurement Directorate, Building Survey Branch to carry out [Accessibility Audits](#) on NIO buildings.

These reports were prepared between October 2005 and March 2006 and issued to on site Premises Officers to agree a works schedule to be carried out by the Construction Service in conjunctions with the landlord.

All new buildings brought into the NIO Estate are now considered against the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Video Conference Facilities

The NIO encourages staff to make use of the video conference facilities when discussing business with staff from another location. Travel between London and Belfast can be difficult, particularly for staff with disabilities and this link allows for much more detailed face to face discussion when compared with audio or email based communication. The NIO has access to four dedicated videoconferencing meeting rooms; two located in London and two in Belfast. There are also NIO videoconference systems in the British Embassy in Dublin.

Section 75 Equality Screening

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations. These duties ensure that equality issues, including disability, are integral to the whole range of public policy decision making. The NIO Equality Scheme, approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) in November 2001, set out how the Department proposed to fulfill those duties with regard to its policies and functions and the NIO reports on progress under section 75 annually to the ECNI. Copies of the NIO Equality Scheme setting out details of the screening and equality impact assessment processes along with yearly progress reports may be found on the NIO web site www.nio.gov.uk.

Through its screening process in respect of s75 of the Northern Ireland Act, the NIO seeks to ensure the early identification of adverse impacts on disabled people or opportunities to promote good relations from its policies. The new equality duties for disabled people will be built into the existing [NIO Equality Screening form](#).

Consultation

The NIO follows the Cabinet Office code of practice when we consult with the public. The NIO Equality Scheme also contains specific obligations relating to consultation on the impact of proposed policies on the promotion of equality.

The guidance contains six key consultation criteria:-

7. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
 - [Criterion 1](#)
8. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
 - [Criterion 2](#)
9. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
 - [Criterion 3](#)
10. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
 - [Criterion 4](#)
11. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
 - [Criterion 5](#)
12. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.
 - [Criterion 6](#)

The application of these criteria should ensure that any consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible and staff do aim to ensure the needs of disabled people are considered during consultation. For example alternative languages and formats of written documents can be provided, signers or interpreters will be provided and accessibility for people with disabilities will be a

consideration when arranging the time and location of consultation events.

Accessible Formats

The NIO provides a Text phone service to assist those with hearing or speech difficulties and can provide a 'signing' service for those with hearing difficulties. Large print, electronic text, Braille and Audio versions of NIO publications are available on request. In addition the Department has access to translation and interpretation services (including Speedtext, British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language).

External Internet Site

The NIO website has been developed to conform to Double A for all priority 1 and 2 checkpoints as defined in the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines which is the standard on how to make web content accessible to people with disabilities.

The NIO is currently considering the application of the BrowesAloud software on the NIO internet site. This is a voice activated facility which enables the visually impaired website user to 'listen' to the content of the website by moving a mouse over the written text.

Internal NIOnet

The NIO commissioned an accessibility report on the [NIOnet](#) (the internal information internet site used by staff) in January 2007. Existing accessibility features highlighted included the following:

- Images contain a text equivalent by using the alt tag.

- The clearest and simplest language appropriate for the site is used.
- Foreground and background colour combinations provide sufficient contrast when viewed by someone having colour deficits.
- Navigation mechanisms are used in a consistent manner
- An easy access link at the top of the home page exists, which takes the user to a text only version of the site.

Working with Business in the Community

As part of the it's commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility the NIO signed up for gold membership of Business in the Community's Cares programme which committed the Department to six volunteer challenges. The theme for the NIO's community involvement was 'Children's education and development' and the projects involved working on decorating and gardening projects with schools from the special needs sector including Fleming Fulton School in Belfast, Rostulla School Jordanstown, Torbank in Dundonald, and Killard School in Newtownards.

The NIO also invited two special schools to hold a competition to design a Christmas card for use by NIO Ministers and officials.



The winning card from Killard School in Newtownards, drawn by Ben Hughes, aged 8, was selected by the Secretary of State for his own use as a Christmas corporate card.



The winning card from Rosstulla School in Newtownabbey, drawn by Lauren McAuley Hughes; aged 13, was used by Junior Ministers and NIO officials.

[Public Appointments](#)

The NIO is committed to widening the diversity of people who sit on its public bodies. Successive diversity action and public appointment plans have set out targets for increasing the numbers of women, people from a minority ethnic background and disabled people, and for making these bodies as representative as is practicable of the Northern Ireland community.

Northern Ireland Office Ministers take a close interest in all public appointments and are involved from the outset in approving role and person specifications, advertisements and the process to be followed.

Appointments to all executive and advisory Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) are carried out in full accordance with the Code of Practice produced by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA GB). Appointments to other public bodies are carried out in the spirit of OCPA Code. The principle of merit underpins all Departmental public appointments.

To encourage applications from as wide a base as possible, Northern Ireland Office public appointment opportunities are made available to the public in a number of ways. Since 1998, the Northern Ireland Office has contributed to an advance six monthly list of Northern Ireland public appointment vacancies (now known as “All Aboard”) which is circulated twice yearly to 140 community groups, representing women, young people, disabled people, ethnic groups and groups representing grass-roots interests. The news-sheet is also sent to 1400 individuals who have expressed an interest in applying for public appointments in Northern Ireland.

For all new appointment processes, the Northern Ireland Office also writes to just over 340 individuals who have applied unsuccessfully for recent Northern Ireland Office public appointments and have asked to be kept informed of opportunities. Many of these people had been identified at a series of four road-shows across Northern Ireland, which was targeted specifically at attracting disabled and minority ethnic candidates, for one particular appointment process.

In addition to advertisement in national, provincial and local newspapers, opportunities are also placed on the web-sites of the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland administration and Cabinet Office. Information packs and application forms in alternative formats, including Braille, can be provided on request.

[The Northern Ireland Prison Service \(NIPS\)](#)

Public Life Positions

NIPS are responsible for a small number of such appointments - Non-Executive Director, Loss of Remission Commissioner and Remission of Sentences Commissioner.

Previous Measures

Outlined below are the key measures the **Prison Service** has already taken to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.

Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people

- Under S75 of the Northern Ireland Act, the Service screens all new policies to ensure early identification of adverse impacts from its policies.
- As employers NIPS acts within its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended.
- Reasonable adjustments are made to the physical environment for staff, prisoners and visitors. Examples include the installation of hearing induction loops at visitors' reception in Maghaberry and HBW, and provision of portable induction loops in all establishments. Listener and safer cells have been introduced at all sites and further work to increase provision is planned. One disabled cell has been made in Foyle House, Maghaberry (with plans for more) and there is a disabled cell in Ash House.

- We have made adjustments to regimes including education and cognitive programmes to address learning disability and encourage participation eg DABBLE, RASU and introduction of dyslexia screening.
- Equality & Diversity Committees have been established at each Establishment.
- All new buildings recently constructed for example the two new 60 cell units at Maghaberry and Magilligan have been designed to be DDA compliant with all cells fitted with anti-ligature windows and low risk cell furniture, 2 disabled cells will be available in each unit with fully compliance in-cell showers and fittings. Each Unit will have 2 listener cells and 4 safer cells. In addition there will be lifts to provide access to the upper floor. Cell doors and grilles are wider, there is level access, a separate disabled toilet for staff and induction lops fitted at the reception desk and in education & treatment rooms. In addition, all other recent construction works and major refurbishment have been designed and constructed to be DDA compliant.
- The NIPS web site is Double A compliant.
- Current training provision is provided within the existing Diversity Training programme.
- Multi-Agency Resettlement Strategy in place and a key element is promoting healthier and pro-social lifestyle.
- Primary care services provided by nurse officers, healthcare officers and medical officers who refer appropriate cases to a wide range of secondary care disciplines especially mental health services. Prisoners undergo an initial health

assessment on committal and those with identified mental health problems are referred for comprehensive mental health assessment. Prisoners may subsequently refer themselves or be referred to a range of mental health care services. Specific provision is made for mental health services by sessions from a Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist supported by a Staff Grade Psychiatrist, a Consultant General Adult Psychiatrist with an interest in substance misuse, two Mental Health Nurse Therapists and an Occupational Therapist from an HSS Trust, and from Mental Health nurses employed by the Prison Service.

- Counselling services are provided by voluntary organisations such as the Samaritans and are accessed by a confidential phone line. Prisoners with substance misuse problems can apply to community organisations for a range of support mechanisms including counselling.
- Safer Custody Groups established in Maghaberry and Magilligan draw together bullying, issues vulnerable prisoners, suicide and self harm prevention, healthcare etc. A listener service also operates in Magilligan and Maghaberry. An Insider Scheme has commenced in Hydebank Wood to offer peer support to new committals.
- Maghaberry opened a new unit with a capacity for up to 20 prisoners with poor coping skills and those with Personality Disorder. The Unit offers a bespoke and flexible regime developed to meet the needs of this particular type of prisoner. A dedicated team of highly trained staff work in the Unit.

- Joint submission to transfer lead responsibility for prisoner healthcare to DHSSPS submitted in April 2005 with implementation date of 1 April 2007. Many issues related to separating of prisoners from health services in the rest of the community and to the creation of separate health services for prisoners. Transfer consistent with principle that people subject to criminal justice system should have equity of access and provision of services. Planning of future mental health and learning disability services for prisoners is integrated with the planning of these services throughout NI.

Encouraging participation in public life

- Survey conducted in 2004 to establish the number of staff who came under the DDA criteria.
- A Personnel Unit manages issues in relation to those staff who come under DDA. Limited fitness schemes available and comprehensive Occupational Support Services for staff.
- Affirmative Action Strategy, Equal Opportunities Policy published and guidance issued in January 2006 to help managers when dealing with staff with disabilities provide support/assistance on how they can meet their responsibilities and enabled staff with disabilities to participate fully in NIPS.
- Job description/person specification for vacant posts include only requirements related to the duties. The inclusion of unnecessary or marginal requirements in a job description are potentially discriminatory. The equal opportunities welcome statement on job adverts includes a general

reference to applications from applicants with a disability. Candidates for posts are asked formally in their application form if they have a disability and we follow through with them if special provisions or facilities are required in the course of the selection process. If assessment centres are used, some revision to the tests or the way there are conducted or assessed may be necessary to take account of specific disabled candidates.

- Job information documentation issued to applicants includes details of the medical criteria to be applied to that particular post. These requirements may vary depending on the nature of the job and are agreed in advance with OHS. All candidates must be assessed as fit to carry out the full range of duties or what reasonable adjustment may be required to enable them to do so. Candidates who, because of a disability, may require assistance in completing an application form are asked to contact a named individual in Personnel for assistance.
- Our selection procedures are objective and non-biased and those involved in selecting successful applicants will not let misconceptions about disability influence their view on whether a person can do the job. Disability awareness will also be delivered to panel members at pre-board briefing if a disabled candidate is to be interviewed.
- Following the appointment of a disabled person, managers and work colleagues would be suitably briefed about the nature of any adjustments required and, depending on the disability, adjustments made to the standard induction procedure.

[The Youth Justice Agency](#)

The Youth Justice Agency is committed to the inclusion of all stakeholders in the delivery of their services. Over the coming year the Agency will work closely with Disability Action to provide staff awareness sessions and to look at developing work experience opportunities for people with disability in both administration and support services.

9. Future Action Measures

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

NIO Action Measures

The NIO is committed to a series of actions which we believe will help remove the attitudinal and environmental barriers experienced by many disabled people. The plan focuses on a number of key areas to help secure improvements.

Actions in the Disability Action plan demonstrate work across the following areas:

Employment

- Providing information for managers and staff on disability matters
- Updating Equality and Diversity Awareness training for staff
- Re-launching the Disability Network
- Developing staff
- Encouraging Equality and Diversity
- Improving monitoring data

Accessibility & Communication

- Ensuring disability requirements are considered when identifying new NIO premises
- Information Services are presently considering the introduction of BroweAloud software on the NIO internet site www.nio.gov.uk

- Equality Screening will be updated to reflect the responsibilities of the new disability duties
- The NIO will consider the specific needs of disabled people when consulting on NIO policies.

[Public Appointments 2007 to 2010](#)

The NIO will continue to monitor the proportions of disabled people applying for public appointments and take further steps to encourage applications from under representative groups. The NIO's diversity targets for public appointments over the next three years are as follows:

Table 1: Diversity Targets for Public Appointments

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/2010
Women	41%	43%	45%
Ethnic Minorities	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%
Disabled People	5%	6%	7%

NIO Disability Action Plan July 2007 to March 2010

Measures	Timescale	Lead	Performance Indicators/target
EMPLOYMENT			
Personnel Services Division is developing a new Managers Guide on disability matters	By Summer 2007	Personnel Services	Leaders are visible in encouraging and supporting disabled people in teams
The Equality and Diversity Awareness training is currently being updated and the Department is committed to delivery of the new programme to all staff commencing Summer 2007.	To begin Summer 2007	Personnel Services Division Business Improvement Team	NIO staff gain awareness of some of the difficulties disabled people face in their daily work Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people
Reinforce the departments commitment to the Disability network by holding a celebration event	Summer 2007	Personnel Services Division	Staff encouraged to join the Disability Network and level of participation increases The Network is active and seen as a valuable tool

NIO Disability Action Plan July 2007 to March 2010

Measures	Timescale	Lead	Performance Indicators/target
Take full advantage of the Cabinet Office development schemes and look for other opportunities to bring in people with disabilities on work experience	Ongoing	Personnel Services Division	Programmes developed to meet the needs of disabled people
Audit the provision of training in the department to ensure the needs of disabled staff are met	By June 2007	Business Improvement Team	Recommendations from the training review will be included in this plan at a later date
Re survey the department for information on disabled staff	By December 2007	Personnel Services Division	Monitoring information provided to the Departmental Board Diversity targets are met
Personnel Services to consider further measures to ensure diversity targets for disabled staff are met	By December 2007	Personnel Services Division	Targets for 2008: Disabled staff in the SCS 7% Disabled staff at Grade A level - 3.2%

NIO Disability Action Plan July 2007 to March 2010

Measures	Timescale	Lead	Performance Indicators/target
Accessibility and Communication			
To ensure disability requirements are considered when identifying any new premises	Ongoing	Premises Officers	NIO buildings are accessible for staff and visitors
Continue to review NIO Communication processes both internally and externally and the accessibility of these for people with different disabilities	Ongoing	Info Services and NIONet team	Disabled staff and members of the public are informed about the work of the NIO
Continue to equality screen all new policies or changes to existing policies and consult policy issues with the Disability Network group	Ongoing	Policy Staff	Disabled people and disability organisations are involved in the development of NIO policies
Update the NIO Screening form to reflect the new disability equality duties	By July 2008	Equality Unit	The new disability duties are considered during the screening of policies

NIO Disability Action Plan July 2007 to March 2010

Measures	Timescale	Lead	Performance Indicators/target
Embed the new disability duties into the departmental consultation process	By September 2008	Equality Unit	Disabled people's views are sought on NIO policies
Public Appointments			
To monitor the proportions of disabled people applying for public appointments and take further steps to encourage applications from under representative groups	2006/07 to 2008/09	Public Appointments Unit	Diversity targets for disabled people over the next three years are as follows:- 2006/07 4% 2007/08 5% 2008/09 7%
The Youth Justice Agency			
The Youth Justice Agency will be working closely with Disability Action to provide staff awareness sessions	2007/08	Corporate Services	Promote positive attitudes

NIO Disability Action Plan July 2007 to March 2010

Measures	Timescale	Lead	Performance Indicators/target
The Youth Justice Agency will look at developing work experience opportunities for people with a disability in both administration and support services	During 2007/08	Corporate Services	

NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE DISABILITY ACTION PLAN July 2007 – March 2010

Northern Ireland Prison Service Action Measures

Outlined below are the measures which the **Northern Ireland Prison Service** proposes to take over the period 2007-2010 of this disability action plan, together with performance indicators or targets.

MEASURES	TIMESCALE Indicators/target	Lead responsibility	PERFORMANCE
<p>Accessibility</p> <p>1. Further developments of the Estate to include: Additional listener and safer and low mobility cells at Maghaberry and Hydebank Wood, and provision of low mobility cells in H blocks at Magilligan.</p> <p>2. Commissioning of a DDA audit to inform development of policies and procedures and the physical environment for staff, prisoners and visitors.</p>	<p>By April 2008</p> <p>It is proposed to commission this work to DFP's Property Framework consultant to start May 07.</p>	<p>Estate Management</p> <p>Estate Management</p>	<p>Within the Prison Estate the provision of safer and listener cells is increased and facilities for disabled people enhanced.</p> <p>Levels of suicide and self-harm reduced.</p> <p>Assessment of the Prison Estate is determined and action plan to address needs developed.</p>

NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE DISABILITY ACTION PLAN July 2007 – March 2010

<p>3. Establishment of separate service users groups for staff, prisoners and visitors to support DDA and provide feedback on their experiences.</p>	<p>To run in parallel with the DDA audit.</p>	<p>Prison Law & Policy Unit Personnel</p>	<p>(The outcome of this audit will inform the content of this Plan)</p> <p>Qualitative data to inform policies and procedures.</p>
<p>Communication</p> <p>4. Review external and internal communication policies, practices and procedures to meet the needs of disabled people.</p>	<p>By September 2007</p>	<p>Press, Communications & Planning Unit</p>	<p>Access to information about the Prison Service and communication with disabled people is enhanced.</p> <p>Monitoring of requests for information in alternative formats.</p>

NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE DISABILITY ACTION PLAN July 2007 – March 2010

<p>11. Assess the findings of the Mental Health Commission Report (March 2007) and its recommendations.</p> <p>12. Contribute to the implementation of the Bamford Review recommendations in relation to mental health and learning disability.</p>	<p>Prepare response to report by June 2007 and action accepted recommendations within 18 months.</p> <p>In accordance with implementation schedule.</p>	<p>Prison Health & Healthcare</p> <p>Prison Health & Healthcare</p>	<p>Improved access to mental health services for prisoners.</p>
<p>Implementation, Monitoring & Review</p> <p>13. Allocate responsibility for the achievement of the measures outlined in the Action Plan.</p>	<p>By September 2007</p>	<p>PSMB</p>	<p>Relevant staff are aware of their responsibilities and have built appropriate objectives into their performance agreements.</p>

NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE DISABILITY ACTION PLAN July 2007 – March 2010

14. Allocate responsibility for the day to day management of the action plan.	By September 2007	PSMB	Reporting mechanisms are in place.
15. Determine monitoring and reporting arrangements for the plan.	By September 2007	PSMB	
16. Include questions in periodic staff, prisoner and visitor attitude surveys in relation to disability.	As appropriate.	Personnel/ Governors/Prison Law & Policy	
17. Establish procedures to monitor complaints relating to disability internally and with the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office.	By the end of year 1	Operational Policy & Coordination Branch.	
18. Establish monitoring system using PRISM to monitor the numbers of disabled prisoners.	March 2008	Performance and Risk Management Branch	Regular reports providing high quality information on prisoners with a disability for the purposes of monitoring Prison Service statutory duties.

Signed by:

Appendix A - Functions of the Northern Ireland Office

