

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

1 April 2022 to 31 March 2027

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

1.1 Introduction

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland 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 ('the disability duties').

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Civil Service Commissioners are also required to submit to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) a **disability action plan** showing how they propose to fulfil these duties in relation to their functions.

1.2 Statement of Commitment

As Chairperson of the Civil Service Commissioners, I confirm that we are committed to implementing effectively the disability duties and this disability action plan. The Office of the Civil Service Commissioners 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.

The Office of the Civil Service Commissioners will also put appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and this disability action plan is effectively implemented. The Office of the Civil Service Commissioners will ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and provide the necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

Commissioners confirm their commitment to submitting an annual report to the Equality Commission on the implementation of this plan as well as carrying out a review of this plan. We also confirm our commitment to consult with disabled people when implementing and reviewing our plans.

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:

Secretary
Office of the Civil Service Commissioners
7th Floor
Erskine House
20-32 Chichester Street

Belfast
BT1 4GF
Tel: 028 90523577
Email: info@nicscommissioners.org

If you require this plan in an alternative format (such as large print, Braille, audio cassette or in a language other than English) please contact the Secretary (contact details above) to discuss your requirements.

A copy of this plan, the annual progress reports to the ECNI and review of the plan will be made available on our website: <http://www.nicscommissioners.org>.

1.3 Development of the Disability Action Plan 2022-2027 and Consultation

The Civil Service Commissioners' statutory responsibilities and main functions are set out below. In developing their Disability Action Plan, Commissioners sought to carry out consultation in a meaningful manner and invited representative Equality organisations and stakeholders including the NICS Disability Working Group to comment and provide feedback on Commissioners' draft Disability Action Plan. A report of the Consultation Summary of responses to Commissioners' draft Disability Action Plan will be made available on Commissioners' [website](#).

1.4 Functions

The Commissioners' main purpose is to perform regulatory functions in relation to open recruitment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) at all levels.

Commissioners are responsible for ensuring appointments to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) are made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. Commissioners also have a role in hearing appeals made by existing civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics. The Civil Service Commissioners' statutory responsibilities and main functions are set out below.

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'.

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. The Order requires Commissioners to publish, annually, a report on the number of appeals they receive under the Code of Ethics, together with a summary of each appeal.

1.5 Public Life Positions

Commissioners are appointed on merit by HM The Queen, following public advertisement by fair and open competition. There are currently three Commissioners who bring a wide range of experience from the public, private and third sectors, and they report annually on their work. Commissioners are supported by a small Secretariat team sponsored by the Northern Ireland Office headed by the Secretary to the Civil Service Commissioners.

Commissioners are an Arm's Length Body of the Northern Ireland Office and do not have responsibility for making appointments to public life positions.

Commissioners will seek at every opportunity to encourage participation by disabled people in public life in carrying out their statutory functions.

2.0 Previous Measures

The impact of Commissioners' 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.

Outlined below are the key measures that Commissioners have already taken to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and to encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

2.1 Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people

- Commissioners and Secretariat staff have received equality and disability awareness training in accordance with our Equality Scheme. The need for refresher training is considered annually.

- Specialist training has been provided for Commissioners involved in recruitment and selection panels.
- The website is accessible to people with disabilities and publications are available in alternative formats upon request.

2.2 Encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

- Commissions have proactively been involved in the formation of the NICSHR-Commissioners Recruitment and Selection Transformation Group established to formalise discussions on matters of Recruitment and Selection policy in the NICS, in response to Recommendation 3.4 of the NIAO Report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS, as follows:-

The NICS and the Civil Service Commissioners should work in partnership. Taking account of how other models operate, to explore how they can best support the delivery of the transformation agenda and the changes needed to reform the recruitment and selection process throughout the NICS.

The work of this group/partnership shall focus on the transformation agenda and shall be discreet from other audit and engagement work that is regularly undertaken by Commissioners and NICSHR in the discharge of Commissioners' statutory functions.

- Commissioners have proactively engaged with the Equality Commission, Disability Action and the NICS disability working group.
- Commissioners regularly engage with the NICS Permanent Secretaries and senior officials and encourage the NICS, in accordance with the Recruitment Code, to consider how best to facilitate disabled people in fair and open competition with others.
- Commissioners use their influence with the NICS to ensure that diversity considerations, including the needs of disabled people, are properly considered by recruitment panels.
- Commissioners require the NICS to publish statistical summaries, in a format which 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, including disabled people.
- Commissioners periodically review their Recruitment Code to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

3.0 Action Measures

Commissioners' primary function is to ensure that appointments to the NICS are made on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition. Taking account of their remit and 'constitution', Commissioners have endeavoured to consider fully

their disability duties which they believe they are able to take within their narrow statutory role. The **action measures** over the period of this Disability Action Plan from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2027, together with performance indicators or targets, are outlined in the table below.

Signed by:



DEIRDRE TONER
Chairperson
Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland

DISABILITY ACTION PLAN: ACTION MEASURES

The following measures aim to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation of disabled people in public life for the period 1 April 2022 - 31 March 2027.

Action	Timescale	Performance Indicator/ Target	Outcome / Impact
Publish the Commissioners' Disability Action Plan.	By 31 July 2022	Commissioners' Disability Action Plan will be submitted to the Equality Commission and published on the OCSC website.	The general public and key stakeholders will be aware of Commissioners' commitment to the disability duties and implementation of their Disability Action Plan.
Commissioners' Recruitment Code outlines the principles to be followed to ensure appointments to the NICS are made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. The Code promotes equality of opportunity for all groups of people including people with disabilities.	Ongoing	All NICS Departments and Agencies are required to adhere to the Code. Commissioners periodically review their Recruitment Code to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Any revisions to the Commissioners' Recruitment Code are subject to equality screening.	NICS and the general public are aware of the Commissioners' expectation in relation to the principles to be followed to ensure that appointments to the NICS are made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.
	Annually	Monitoring of NICS adherence to the Code through Commissioners' audit and assurance requirements, including NICS annual statement of compliance submitted to Commissioners.	

Action	Timescale	Performance Indicator/ Target	Outcome / Impact
Commissioners require NICS to provide statistical summaries and analysis for all categories covered by Section 75, including people with disabilities in line with the requirements of Appendix C of the Recruitment Code.	Annually	Commissioners publish a commentary on the NICS annual statistical summaries and analysis in their annual report.	NICS, Commissioners and the general public are informed by a strong evidence base in relation to monitoring data for all Section 75 groups including disabled people.
Engagement with the NICS to support diversity and inclusion in recruitment-related matters.	Quarterly/ Annually	Commissioners will have regular engagement with NICS through quarterly meetings of the Recruitment and Selection Transformation Group and annual meetings with the NICS Board to collaborate and support employment of people with disabilities and seek regular feedback on new initiatives within the NICS.	Through the Recruitment Code Commissioners support the NICS in driving forward its agenda for diversity and inclusion and to address under representation of people with disabilities within the NICS workforce.
	Annually	Commissioners will take advantage of the opportunity to discuss diversity and inclusion in the NICS at their annual meeting with the NICS Board.	
	Ongoing	Commissioners will use their influence with the NICS to ensure that diversity considerations, including the needs of disabled people, are properly considered by recruitment panels.	
Ensure the Commissioners' Recruitment Code remains fit for purpose.	On-going	Monitor the continued effectiveness of the Recruitment Code and make amendments, as considered appropriate, in support of the introduction of new initiatives creating pathways to employment and	The Recruitment Code will remain current and reflect progression in the Recruitment and Selection Transformation of the NICS.

Action	Timescale	Performance Indicator/ Target	Outcome / Impact
		improving access to the NICS for people with disabilities.	
Ensure equality and disability awareness training is provided to Commissioners, and Secretariat staff.	Ongoing	All Commissioners and staff will receive training to improve disability awareness. Training will be provided as part of the induction for new Commissioners and staff as they take up appointment.	Commissioners and the Secretariat will enhance their knowledge and understanding of disability duties and obligations under equality and disability legislation.
	Ongoing	Commissioners and staff will seek opportunities to engage with a range of Disability organisations. Commissioners and staff will avail of ongoing training provided by ECNI and others on disability related duties.	
	Annually	The need for refresher training will be reviewed annually.	
Ensure specialist training is provided for Commissioners and Secretariat staff involved in recruitment and selection panels.	As required, and at least every two years.	All Commissioners and relevant staff attend regular training on recruitment processes and practices within the NICS.	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.
Ensure Commissioners and Secretariat recruitment and selection procedures are inclusive to those with disabilities.	Ongoing	NIO sponsor unit to consider as part of arrangements for competitions to appoint new Commissioners.	The Office of the Civil Service Commission promotes the positive benefits of supporting and employing people with disabilities.
		All recruitment to the Office of the Civil Service Commission is carried out in accordance with equality legislation and best practice.	

Action	Timescale	Performance Indicator/ Target	Outcome / Impact
Ensure compliance with the statutory disability duties is embedded in the Commissioners' strategic and annual business planning process.	By Autumn 2022	Update Commissioners Strategic Priorities 2020 - 2025, Annual Business Plan 2022/23 and Risk Register 2022/23 to specifically include compliance with the statutory disability requirements.	Commissioners, staff, key stakeholders and the general public will be aware of Commissioners' commitment to the disability duties.
Produce an annual report in line with statutory requirements.	Annually by 31 August each year	Monitor and review the Disability Action Plan and submit progress against the Disability Action Plan, annually, to the ECNI in the Section 75 Annual Progress Report.	Key stakeholders will be aware of Commissioners' commitment to the disability duties and progress against implementation of their Disability Action Plan.