

ENCOURAGING THE PARTICIPATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN PUBLIC LIFE

A GUIDE FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES



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1. INTRODUCTION

Public authorities must consider how they can: (a) promote positive attitudes towards disabled people, and (b) encourage greater participation of disabled people in public life.

This may be demonstrated through a public authority's [Disability Action Plan](#) (or DAP) a document which outlines the measures that the authority is implementing, or intending to implement, to promote positive attitudes and to encourage greater participation of disabled people in public life.

In line with good governance practices, the measures contained in a DAP should be regularly reviewed, evaluated and further developed to ensure they are effective in meeting their objectives.

What does public life mean?

The term '**public life**' is not defined in disability equality legislation but a flavour of what it means includes being '**open to the people as a whole; involved in the affairs of the community, especially in government or entertainment.**' [A definition given in the Concise Oxford English Dictionary].

Making public appointments is an important aspect of public life but by no means the only way in which public authorities may promote positive attitudes and encourage greater participation of disabled people in public life. Engagement with public life at a community and local level may be meaningful and effective in breaking down barriers faced by some disabled people. It may also provide effective mechanisms for some disabled people to gain confidence and experience and be better equipped to apply and be successful in gaining public appointments in the longer term.

All public authorities therefore have a role to identify and implement measures which are appropriate to them in the context of the functions that they perform, measures which will promote positive attitudes and encourage greater participation of disabled people.

There are many examples of '**public life**' positions and they include the following:

- ✓ focus or working groups set up by public bodies
- ✓ community associations or fora
- ✓ Policing and Community Safety Partnerships
- ✓ Citizens' panels
- ✓ Local Strategic Partnerships
- ✓ school boards of governors and school councils
- ✓ youth councils
- ✓ public appointments made by Government departments

It is, of course, important to remember that many public appointments, especially those made by or with the approval of government ministers and departments, are subject to the [anti-discrimination provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) (DDA) in the same way that it applies to the filling conventional employment positions. This requires, amongst other things, that those who are recruiting for and making those selections must comply with the DDA's reasonable adjustment duty.

This guidance provides some practical examples that public authorities may consider taking to encourage participation of disabled people in public life positions. You may have further innovative ways to encourage participation of disabled people.

Remember to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the measures being implemented.

2. PRACTICAL MEASURES TO ENCOURAGE DISABLED PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

2.1 Audit the current level of public participation by disabled people in your organisation

- ☑ Audit all existing public life positions within your remit.
- ☑ Identify any existing barriers to participation of disabled people in those public life positions.
- ☑ Identify opportunities to create new public life positions.
- ☑ Audit existing formal and informal practices in relation to recruitment to any public life positions.

2.2 Raise awareness of public life positions and ways in which disabled people can engage

- ☑ Organise a public life/appointments event to encourage disabled people to apply for public life positions that are within your remit and communicate about the types of public life opportunities that are available.
- ☑ Organise information sessions or open days aimed at disabled people.
- ☑ Use social media to raise awareness of public life positions and encourage disabled people to apply.
- ☑ Work in partnership with other public authorities to maximise existing methods of raising awareness amongst disabled people and to explore new initiatives.
- ☑ Promote real life examples of disabled people in public life positions, for example creating 'Day in the Life Of' stories.

2.3 Remove barriers to recruitment processes and encourage applications

- ✓ Review where and how you advertise public life positions and actively seek ways to encourage disabled applicants by:
 - informing disability organisations of public life opportunities and asking them to promote in their newsletters, website, social media etc.,
 - advertising in specialist disability publications or magazines,
 - including a welcoming statement indicating that you particularly welcome applications from disabled people.
- ✓ Review all recruitment documentation relating to public life positions (e.g. advertisement, application form) to remove any barriers to disabled people applying (e.g. language/ images used, format) and include information outlining the support available to disabled people during the recruitment process, and if appointed.
- ✓ Raise awareness of the contribution made to the public authority by current/previous disabled people.
- ✓ Provide information on the support, induction or training available once appointed.

2.4 Remove barriers to the selection process

- ✓ Review the competencies and selection criteria for appointments to ensure they do not include unnecessary criteria that may make it more difficult for disabled people to be appointed.
- ✓ Ensure that all documentation relating to public life positions is available in accessible formats (and [compliant with the DDA and the Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#)) and accept applications in accessible formats.
- ✓ Ensure all those involved in recruitment and selection panels have been trained in disability awareness and disability equality legislation to ensure compliance with disability legislation and no negative attitudes in the recruitment and selection processes.
- ✓ Put in place a [guaranteed interview scheme](#) and shortlist disabled people who meet the minimum criteria for the position.
- ✓ Retain a certain number of positions for disabled people i.e. [‘ring fence’](#) positions for disabled people.
- ✓ Provide accessible transport where required and/or reimbursement of reasonable travel expenses.
- ✓ Ensure meeting times and venues are accessible (DDA compliant).
- ✓ Take steps to dispel any perceptions that may exist amongst disabled people that they will be judged negatively by selection panel members because they have a disability or that a public life position is open to a ‘certain type’ of individual.

2.5 Support disabled people to develop their capacity to participate in public life positions

- ✓ Provide placement, work experience or job shadowing opportunities that enable disabled people to acquire skills and experience that will equip them to apply for public life positions.
- ✓ Support capacity building measures in the voluntary/community sector, for example giving financial or other support to disability groups or others in relation to the provision of training for disabled people in, for example, interviewing or other relevant skills.
- ✓ Provide constructive feedback to unsuccessful disabled applicants.
- ✓ Provide training aimed at developing the skills and knowledge needed for public life positions and take measures to encourage disabled people to participate on those courses, for example, participate in the [Boardroom Apprentice](#) programme.

2.6 Create opportunities to involve disabled people in public life

- ✓ Become a host organisation for a [Boardroom Apprentice](#). Ensure this is well advertised so that any disabled people interested in participating have the opportunity to apply.
- ✓ Review organisational opportunities at all levels to engage disabled people and identify any actions. This may include:
 - Ensuring that all consultations specifically target disabled people and representative groups to seek their views.
 - Appointing disabled non-executive directors with customer focused experience to review and implement action plans.
 - Developing a Section 75 consultative group to discuss screening and EQIA assessments of policies being reviewed and ensure that disabled people and their representative groups are included.
 - Developing a disability working group, informed by disabled people, to help the public authority identify barriers to equality of opportunity for disabled people and make recommendations on remedial action. The remit of such a working group could include informing policy development, improving communications, organising events or publishing articles on the public authority website or in-house publications, to promote awareness of disability issues and overseeing the development and implementation of a disability action plan.
- ✓ Work collaboratively with other public authorities to develop a consultative group which engages with disabled people and representative groups.
- ✓ Work jointly with other public authorities on a sectoral basis to establish a consultative group to engage with disabled people e.g. in relation to health, education, justice.
- ✓ Create good practice sharing groups.

2.7 Consultation

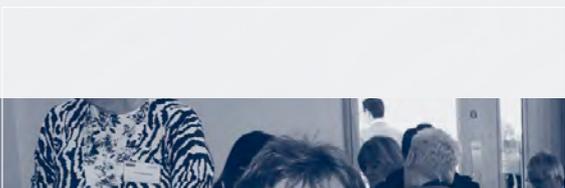
- ✓ Ensure all consultations are inclusive, targeted and use appropriate methods to ensure participation of a wide range of disabled people.
- ✓ Extend consultations on policies, if possible, where the reason for the request is disability related.
- ✓ Engage with disabled people when developing your DAP and consult on it for a meaningful period, for example, at least 2 months. By consulting on DAPs, public authorities are providing an opportunity for disabled people to participate in public life.
- ✓ Consult with disabled people when implementing and reviewing your DAP.

2.8 Employment

- ✓ Create work experience or volunteer placements for disabled people.
- ✓ Deliver capacity building training for disabled people.
- ✓ Create ring-fenced employment positions for disabled people.
- ✓ Put in place a guaranteed interview scheme, interviewing all disabled candidates who meet the essential criteria.
- ✓ Develop initiatives or liaise with voluntary organisations to help implement these positive action schemes.

2.9 Procurement

- ✓ Seek opportunities through your procurement processes to promote the participation of disabled people, for example, include criteria in procurement contracts that require private sector contractors to adopt positive action measures for recruiting disabled people to their own workforces.
- ✓ Ensure consultation processes on procurement are accessible to disabled people and proactively seek out their views.



2.10 Training and guidance

- ☑ Disability equality legislation training should include:
 - Information on employers and employees duties under the DDA.
 - The public authority's equal opportunities policies and procedures.
- ☑ Disability awareness and etiquette training should include:
 - Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.
 - Developing participants' understanding of the barriers faced by disabled people, including attitudinal and environmental factors.
 - An understanding of the social model of disability.
 - Information on the use of appropriate language and etiquette.
 - Challenging stereotypes/misconceptions about disabled people.
- ☑ DAPs should indicate who should be trained including:
 - Senior management and Boards - Leadership
 - Members of recruitment and selection panels
 - Human resources staff
 - Managers and supervisors
 - Front line staff
 - Other employees involved in taking measures to recruit/retain disabled people
- ☑ Training/guidance measures
 - Awareness of disability duties incorporated into staff and board member induction training.
 - Promotion of the importance of the disability duties by communicating information and articles, for example on staff intranet, staff newsletters and briefings.
 - Sharing disability equality and awareness training materials with other organisations, for example, on to the public authority web site.

2.11 Monitoring and review

- ☑ Monitor disabled people's participation in public life by:
 - Collecting and reviewing monitoring information on applicants, appointees, existing employees, people currently in public life positions within your own organisation.
 - Undertaking qualitative research through, for example, commissioning research on barriers to accessing and participating in public life positions within your own organisation, using focus groups and service user surveys.
- ☑ Identify gaps in monitoring data and establish how to address these.
- ☑ Set targets for increasing the participation of disabled people in various public life positions within your organisation – Board members, working groups.



3. FURTHER INFORMATION

Legislative Context

The [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) (DDA) prohibits disability discrimination against disabled people in the areas of employment and public appointments, the provision of goods, facilities and services and in the selling or renting of land, including housing.

It was later amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 to impose additional [duties on public authorities](#). These are the duties under [sections 49A and 49B](#) of the DDA which oblige designated public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to:

- (a) the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- (b) the need to encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

Each designated public authority also has a duty to prepare a plan outlining how it proposes to fulfil these duties, commonly known as [Disability Action Plans](#) (or DAPs).

Useful resources and publications

- ✓ [Lord Holmes Review](#) on opening up public appointments to disabled people
- ✓ [Commissioner for Public Appointments NI](#) – various publications, including a Code of Practice, and opportunities to attend workshops

Equality Commission's website guidance:

- ✓ [Public Sector Equality and Disability Duties](#)
- ✓ [Public Sector Disability Duties \(Sections 49A and 49B\)](#)
- ✓ [Recruiting Disabled People](#)

Related pdf publications:

- ✓ [Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people and encouraging the participation of disabled people in public life – a guide for public authorities](#)
- ✓ [Public sector disability duties – a short guide](#)
- ✓ [Disability Action Plans – example action measures](#)
- ✓ [Promoting Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement](#)

This document is available in other accessible formats so it is inclusive for everyone.

