



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Disability Action Plan for Northern Ireland

MAY 2007

**Disability Duties
Disability Action Plan**

for

**Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
Northern Ireland**

JUNE 2007

This Disability Action Plan can be obtained from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in alternative formats, including in large print, in Braille, on audio-cassette and on computer disc. It can also be downloaded from the QCA website. If you would like a copy in an alternative format, please contact:

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Introduction

1.1 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 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need:

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

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, QCA is 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.

The plan is also important because it outlines how disability issues can be more effectively mainstreamed within the QCA, thus ensuring that they are central to the whole range of policy decision-making within the QCA.

1.2 As Chairman and Chief Executive of QCA, 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.

This action plan sets out the internal arrangements in place to ensure that our disability duties are complied with. We will ensure the effective communication of the plan to all staff together with training and guidance on the general disability duty and implementation of the plan.

1.3 We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual report to the Equality Commission on the implementation of this plan as well as carrying out a five yearly review of this plan.

QCA is committed to working in partnership with disabled persons, representatives of and organisations for disabled people, other public authorities, the voluntary and community sector, trade unions and those with a legitimate interest in the development, implementation and ongoing review of this plan.

Specifically we will invite the following organisations to be involved in the development of our Disability Duties:

- Cedar Foundation
- Disability Action
- NI Association of Mental Health
- Mencap
- PHAB (NI)
- Royal National Institute for the Blind
- Royal National Institute for the Deaf

The QCA is keen to ensure the highest level of inclusivity in our meetings with interested parties and therefore we will consider the following:

- the time of day, of the meeting;
- the appropriateness of the venue, and whether it could be accessed by those with disabilities;
- how the meeting will be run;
- the use of appropriate language;
- whether a signer or interpreter is necessary;
- the provision of childcare
- provision of expenses

We have placed press advertisements in local papers to allow individuals the opportunity to comment on the draft plan. In addition the draft plan was placed on our website, seeking views from individuals and organisations.

Responsibility for consulting on, implementing, and reporting on this disability action plan and the point of contact within the QCA Northern Ireland office will be:

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

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

A copy of the disability action plan, our annual progress to the Equality Commission and our five year review of this plan will be made available on our website www.qca.org.uk/ni and will be issued by email to interested parties.

1.4 Functions

QCA is a UK non-departmental public body established under the 1997 Education Act and accountable to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

Most of QCA's work relates to the education and training system in England, but it is also responsible for accrediting national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in Wales and Northern Ireland. In accordance with national policy, QCA works closely with its regulatory partners in Wales and Northern Ireland to establish a national qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

QCA derives its functions in relation to NVQs in Northern Ireland from the Education Act 1997 and the functions are:

- to keep under review all aspects of such qualifications
- to advise the Secretary of State on such matters concerned with such qualifications as he or she may refer to them or as they see fit
- to advise the Secretary of State on, and if so requested by him or her, assist with carrying out programmes of research and development for purposes connected with such qualifications
- to provide support and advice to persons providing courses leading to such qualifications with a view to establishing and maintaining high standards in the provision of such courses
- to publish and disseminate, and assist in the publication and dissemination of, information relating to such qualifications
- to develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of such qualifications
- to accredit, where they meet such criteria, any such qualifications submitted for accreditation
- to make arrangements for the development, setting and administration of tests or tasks which fall to be undertaken with a

view to obtaining such qualifications and which fall within a prescribed description.

QCA will also meet the general and specific duties in our role as an employer and procurer and supplier of services.

1.5 Public Life Positions

QCA has no responsibility for, or influence on, public life positions in Northern Ireland. Through the measures we have proposed in Section 3 however, we hope to encourage greater participation by disabled people in all aspects of QCA policy development, implementation and review.

2. Previous Measures

The QCA has already taken a number of measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage their participation in public life as a result of the duties under Section 75.

QCA has also produced its Disability Equality Scheme (England) in December 2006 and has recently set up a disabled people's advisory panel to advise and assist in review of the Scheme.

A Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Group has been established with members representing each of the relevant QCA divisions (Regulation and Standards, Qualifications and Skills, National Assessment Agency, Human Resources, Curriculum, Communications) and QCA's Manager in Northern Ireland. The role of the group is to ensure that the general and specific duties of the DDA (together, the disability equality duties) are effectively implemented throughout the organisation.

QCA has met with disabled staff to discuss the establishment of a disabled staff network in November 2006 to create a space for disabled staff to share experiences of employment in the QCA.

QCA provides a textphone service for all of its helplines. The publications used by QCA promote the textphone service. This is available to Northern Ireland users accessing QCA in England. They can also use this service to ensure contact with staff in Northern Ireland.

2.1 Publications

A statement to ensure QCA's commitment to accessibility appears on all publications: 'QCA wishes to make its publications widely accessible. Please contact us if you have specific accessibility requirements.'

QCA's commitment to its customers is that all publications:

- are in plain English
- are in easily legible type sizes and approved typefaces
- are short and simple where possible
- use illustrations to clarify or simplify the meaning
- use colours that meet the requirements of people with visual impairments.

QCA has produced an *Imagery Guide* that ensures that publications present a diverse range of people including men and women, disabled learners and learners from ethnic minority communities. In Northern Ireland regional promotional materials present examples from different parts of the country, reflecting the diversities highlighted above and are representative of both Protestant and Catholic traditions.

QCA has produced guidelines on inclusive language for staff who are planning and writing publications. These guidelines acknowledge the needs of all learners including learners with disabilities, those with special educational needs, all cultural/ethnic origins both sexes, and whose first language is not English.

2.2 Websites

QCA's websites are being developed to comply with Information Age Government (IAG) guidelines as far as is reasonably practicable. The corporate site www.qca.org.uk is currently being revised to enhance accessibility for users and to meet W3C's and WAI 'A' standards QCA is committed to leading standards of accessibility by addressing the needs of those with learning disabilities, motor disabilities, sensory disabilities as well as those who have old computer hardware and therefore have technical 'disabilities'.

2.3 Events

QCA ensures that at all events (whether internal or external):

- attendees are asked if they have specific requirements (such as speech-to-text software or induction loops)
- presentation materials are easily legible
- signage is clear
- handouts are in an accessible format
- venues are easy to reach and accessible
- delegates are aware of relevant fire evacuation policies and the location of toilets
- in Northern Ireland venues are chosen to ensure they are welcoming and harmonious for all communities.

2.4 Alternative formats

QCA provides information in a variety of formats, on request, which will make their information accessible to the user. On occasion specific needs may be met by technological alternatives, such as information being emailed, placed on the QCA website, provided on disc or CD-ROM. The following alternative versions are also available on request, where this is reasonably practicable:

- large-print Word version
- audiotape
- Braille version
- personal telephone call or face-to-face meeting; where the customer does not speak English, a QCA staff member who speaks the customer's language makes the call or attends the meeting
- videos for deaf users of sign language.

The current level of demand does not warrant QCA keeping stocks of materials in alternative formats – rather the organisation provides an on-demand service. If the level of demand changes, QCA is committed to reviewing the policy.

3. Action Measures

Outlined in the next section are the measures we propose to take over the next 1-3 years, together with performance indicators or targets. These measures will be reviewed in the light of information gathered through monitoring, and as a result of lessons learnt over the period of the disability action plan.

The QCA believes it is important that disabled people are involved in the implementation, monitoring and review of the plan. We have sought views and comments on the proposed actions in our draft plan. These have been reviewed and taken into account in finalising this Disability Action Plan for Northern Ireland.

Chief Executive
Dr Ken Boston AO

Section 3 Measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

Measures	Timescale	Performance Indicators/target
<p>Ensure QCA's imagery guidelines are monitored and reviewed.</p> <p>Creative Services and marketing manager to ensure he/she is trained on the use of images and makes changes to the policy as appropriate.</p> <p>Formal monitoring of the imagery guidelines to be undertaken with disabled people.</p>	<p>Ongoing – formally reviewed annually</p>	<p>QCA's positive use of images from disabled people or those that represent them.</p> <p>Positive feedback/ lower level of complaints.</p> <p>Views from disabled people are informing the imagery guidelines.</p>
<p>Monitor the use of images in publications/websites to ensure that disabled people are fairly included.</p> <p>Creative Services and marketing manager to ensure that relevant images are available for use, and to monitor that these images are being used appropriately.</p>	<p>Ongoing – formally reviewed annually</p>	<p>Sample of publications confirms appropriate use of images.</p> <p>Views from disabled people are informing QCA's use of images</p>
<p>Consider the use of illustrations to help explain texts for people with learning</p>	<p>Ongoing – annual monitoring</p>	

<p>difficulties in its general promotional materials and review its usage.</p> <p>All Communications and Marketing staff commissioning new materials to be aware of this consideration.</p>		<p>Monitoring confirms that where appropriate, illustrations are being used.</p>
<p>Equality and diversity materials produced by QCA are being promoted.</p> <p>Communications and Marketing division to ensure that all relevant materials are being promoted.</p>	<p>Ongoing – annual monitoring</p>	<p>Monitoring confirms that equality and diversity materials produced by QCA are being promoted.</p>
<p>Regularly review QCA’s products and services (such as websites, publications and events, helplines) to ensure they meet the needs of disabled people.</p> <p>Ensure QCA’s accessibility policy, imagery guidelines and guide to inclusive language are reviewed and updated.</p> <p>Monitor feedback/complaints to ensure views of disabled people are being captured and actioned appropriately.</p>	<p>Ongoing – annual monitoring</p>	<p>Positive feedback/lower levels of complaints from disabled people on their use of QCA’s products and services.</p> <p>Views from disabled people are informing the type and nature of the goods and services QCA provides.</p>

<p>Formal monitoring of whether the products and services provided by QCA meet the needs of disabled people.</p>		
<p>Continue consultation strategy with disabled staff in QCA and relevant associated agencies.</p> <p>Set dates for coming year, generate greater attendance through increased publicity and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invite senior staff to lead – set up rota • ask existing attendees how best working group should operate: working lunch/early breakfast or social event after work and/or email/blog? <p>Consultation to determine ‘barriers’ for disabled people.</p>	<p>Ongoing – Year 1</p>	<p>Regular attendance and endorsement by senior staff</p> <p>Consultation in place – remedial action taken to ensure barriers for disabled people are removed , where relevant, on information gathered</p>
<p>Review internal communication and training</p> <p>Fully develop Qudos – (intranet) site:</p> <p>Corporate induction training – full review to</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>July 2007</p>	<p>Accessible, informative intranet, regularly updated for all to use.</p> <p>All staff recruited after this date fully trained on their</p>

<p>ensure full promotion of disability and inclusion and QCA's duty.</p> <p>Provide general awareness disability and diversity training for all staff</p> <p>Provide specific management training in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diversity and inclusion • disciplinary and grievance • performance management • work–life balance • flexible working. 	<p>June 2008</p> <p>June 2008</p>	<p>responsibilities and duties under the legislation</p> <p>Workforce fully aware of Disability Duties and their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Proactive management embracing the needs of staff who are disabled.</p> <p>Specific questions on participant feedback form at end of workshops to assess understanding.</p>
<p>Recruitment</p> <p>Promote and advertise flexible working.</p> <p>All preferred agencies and providers linked to QCA recruitment to be fully conversant and sign up to QCA's commitment to the Disability Action Plan.</p>	<p>December 2007</p> <p>December 2007</p>	<p>QCA leads as an employer for flexible working. Adverts to indicate that all disabled applicants who meet essential criteria of job will be interviewed.</p> <p>Increase of applications and recruitment of disabled people.</p>

Full review of compliance for all tenders.	Every three years and ongoing	Improved standards
Consultation with preferred suppliers on the use of websites/publications especially for disabled people for recruitment.	July 2007	Procedure established for placing adverts with appropriate suppliers.

Consideration of views received during consultation.

Mencap and RNID provided general comments on Disability Action Plans during the consultation. QCA acknowledges these general points made on issues relating to people with learning disabilities and deaf people and people with hearing impairments, and believes that the actions outlined in its Plan address these issues for people with all types of disability insofar as they relate to the new disability duties. QCA has also reviewed the comments made by Disability Action on its draft Plan, and as a result has made revisions in developing this the final version of its first Disability Action Plan.

