



DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

2014-2019

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Introduction

Under Section 49 A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), which came into force on 1st January 2007. The British Council 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 British Council is also required to submit a Disability Action Plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions.

As the primary cultural relations organisation in the UK, the British Council is committed to effectively implementing the Disability Duties and this Disability Action Plan.

The Action Plan explains what the British Council intends to do to implement the disability duties over the next five years.

We will allocate appropriate resources (in terms of people, time and money) in order to effectively implement this plan and, where appropriate, build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans.

We will also ensure the communication of the plan to all staff and provide all necessary training and guidance on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

We are committed to engaging effectively with people with disabilities and their representative groups in the development, implementation and review of this plan.

Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this Disability Action Plan will rest with the Equality Officer and Deputy Director.

The main point of contact shall be Jonathan Stewart, Deputy Director

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The British Council

1.1 Who we are and what we do

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. Our purpose is to build mutually beneficial relationships between people in the UK, including Northern Ireland and other countries and to increase understanding of the British Council's programmes and cultural relation endeavours.

We are on the ground in six continents and over 100 countries bringing international opportunity to life, every day. Each year we work with millions of people, connecting them with the United Kingdom, sharing our cultures and the UK's most attractive assets: English, the Arts, Education and our ways of living and organising society. We have 80 years experience of doing this.

In line with our Royal Charter, we aim to bring high quality English materials to every learner or teacher who wants them around the world. We work with governments to transform whole education systems to increase opportunity and employability through English. We also deliver English teaching and train teachers by radio, web and broadcast in developing and post conflict countries.

In the Arts we work with the best of British and international artistic and creative talent to develop events and collaborations which link thousands of artists, organisations and audiences worldwide. In addition to staging shows and exhibitions, we partner with others on joint Arts projects and help develop creative leadership, professional networks and cultural educational programmes worldwide.

All over the world, people want greater educational opportunities to enhance their lives and employment prospects. We live in a globalised world so our focus in education is on bringing an international dimension to education in schools, technical colleges and universities, on raising educational standards by sharing the UK's expertise, and on encouraging the best international students to study in the UK.

The British Council's high profile work in English, the Arts and Education & Society helps hundreds of millions of people worldwide to learn about and experience creativity and excellence from the UK. Millions of talented people of all ages – but particularly younger people – engage face-to-face and online with us learning English, developing new skills, experiencing life and study in the UK and earning UK qualifications.

Finally, thousands of policymakers, academics, researchers, artists, sportspeople, scientists, curators, creative entrepreneurs, head- and classroom teachers work through us with their counterparts in the UK to develop policy, professional standards and participation in English, the Arts, Education and civil society. In the process, they create new opportunities and possibilities for the UK and their own countries.

By teaching English, changing the way we see each other through the Arts, offering international education opportunities and sharing the UK's ways of living and organising our society we create opportunity, trust, prosperity and security for the people of the UK and the many other countries we work in around the world.

1.2 Organisational Values

We believe that Equality and Diversity are central to our objectives and our cultural relations role. We are conscious of the fact that effective partnership relationships require a shared commitment to equality of opportunity, valuing and actively managing diversity.

Our Equal Opportunities Policy helps to ensure that there is no unjustified discrimination in the recruitment, retention, training and development of staff on the basis of gender including transgender, marital status, sexual identity, religion and belief, political opinion, race, work pattern, age, disability or HIV/AIDS status, socio-economic background, spent convictions, trade union activity or membership, on the basis of having or not having dependants, or any other irrelevant grounds.

We progress our Equal Opportunities Policy through our Diversity Strategy, which is reinforced by our Equality Scheme.

1.3 The promotion of Disability Equality is in line with our corporate values:-

Valuing people:

We treat people with courtesy and respect

We listen to what people have to say and respond helpfully

We give people the opportunity to use and develop their talents

We value diversity

Integrity

We are honest

We are consistent both in what we do and say

We take responsibility for our actions and decisions

Mutuality

We wish to learn from and share with other people

We put effective relationships at the heart of our work

We work towards common goals

Creativity

We encourage people to develop new ideas in an environment of trust

We are resourceful and innovative in our approach

We actively seek and present the best in creativity

To espouse these values we must respect the rights and treat as absolute equal, all those with disability.

The British Council Northern Ireland is committed to implementing effectively the Disability Duties and acting upon measures identified in this action plan. We will allocate resources in so far as is within our remit to do so 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 which are reviewed annually.

We will ensure effective communication of the plan to staff and to providing all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

The social model of disability adopted by the British Council challenges traditional thinking about disability, asserting that disabled people can be disadvantaged by the limitations imposed on them by social, cultural, economic and environmental barriers. It has been identified the way society is organised can discriminate against people with impairments and exclude them from involvement and participation. This approach does not deny the existence of impairments that may affect disabled people's daily lives, but it shifts the emphasis onto the real barriers which affect participation.

The social model locates the "problem" outside the disabled person and therefore offers a more positive approach because:

- it doesn't "blame" the individual or turn them into the problem
- it involves everyone in identifying solutions
- it encourages co-operative problem solving
- it removes barriers for others as well as disabled people, that is, it is an equal opportunities model
- it acknowledges disabled people's rights to full participation as citizens.

Having acknowledged the social model of disability in the British Council, we do all we can to identify and dismantle the barriers facing disabled people who come into contact with us, whether as staff, partners or customers. The duty of reasonable adjustment helps with this and taking proactive measures such as; e.g. changing steps into ramps, providing information in Braille and other formats, providing textphones or minicomms, and valuing different learning styles of our varied service users across the broad range of our courses and programmes.

It is our intention to communicate the Disability Action Plan to all staff. The plan will be made available via the British Council's intranet site and will be emailed to all Northern Ireland staff ensuring all staff are aware of its existence. We will run refresher training on the disability duties to compliment compulsory training monitored by the Equality, Opportunity and Diversity team in the UK, to complement training already provided this year on legislative requirements and ongoing disability awareness.

Compliance and Implementation of the plan, together with any feedback received shall be the responsibility of the Deputy Director, Jonathan Stewart.

We confirm our commitment to submitting an Annual Progress Report on the implementation of this plan to the Equality Commission in a timely manner and carrying out a five year review of this plan, submitted to the Equality Commission over the five year review period.

A copy of this plan together with our Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission will be made available on our website www.britishcouncil.org/northernireland-diversity

In writing this Disability Action Plan we shall consult with disability bodies and disabled persons on the content of the plan, and consider any recommendations put forward within due timelines with a view to amending/reviewing the plan in accordance with this feedback.

1.4 Equality Opportunity and & Diversity at the British Council

Our vision is to use our increasing knowledge and experience to make a leading contribution to international aspects of equality and diversity. We will work energetically toward this by a mainstreaming approach, highlighting what our collective efforts can achieve for individuals, communities, organisations and nations. Our emphasis will be on the potential of equality and diversity to help create more inclusive societies. We believe these contribute to greater trust, security and stability in the world where shared aspirations can flourish.

We will draw on the rich diversity of the UK and our workforce, partners, friends and contacts worldwide to nurture programmes and activities around shared interest and ambitions. We will develop new relationships and partnerships that deliver co-operative advantage and impact for our environments.

The diverse contributions and considerable talents of our staff and those we work with worldwide will be harnessed to provide the very best practices and services we can, in line with our organisational values and human rights' principles

1.5 Public Life Positions

Disability Working Group and Disability Advisory Panel

To help us make progress we have an internal group and an external group who work with us to give us advice and to suggest ways we can promote disability and equality throughout all we do.

Disability working group

Our internal group are called the Disability Working Group. They comprise staff from across the UK who give 5% of their time to the group. They meet about six times a year and help to take forward the disability related action points in our Integrated Equality Scheme and to generally keep disability on the corporate agenda. Members of this group act as advisors putting forward suggestions for further promoting disability equality, particularly from their own disability and individual experience perspective

The British Council Advisory Panel

Our external group are called the Disability Advisory Panel. They comprise people who have significant professional and/or personal experience of disability and who agree to support the British Council in its efforts to mainstream disability equality throughout all aspects of the organisation worldwide. Some of them have been participants on British Council programmes, or have worked with us in a consultancy role. The group conduct studies and write up papers outlining findings and recommendations, aiming to highlight the value of creating a more inclusive society for all people, irrespective of different needs and abilities. They represent different ages, different areas of the UK and they have experience of different aspects of disability. The Panel meet with us face to face twice a year and have regular email contact.

The Advisory Panel's remit is to help us promote disability equality. They do this by asking questions about the way we do things and by sharing examples with us of good practice they have seen elsewhere. Panel members seek solutions as well as identifying areas of concern and areas of strength, they agree to respond to 80% of requests for involvement and/or attendance to meetings so they have a visible and affirmative presence.

1.6 Reasonable Adjustment

Under disability equality legislation, the British Council is ordered to make reasonable adjustments to facilitate the inclusion of disabled people. We are required to ensure wherever reasonably possible disabled people don't receive a less favourable service than their non-disabled counterparts. This holds for employment as well as participation in our programmes and services. A number of initiatives support this measure.

The Disability Symbol is displayed on all British Council UK job advertisements (internal and external), application forms, recruitment literature and personnel communications.

1.7 Accessibility of Our Offices

In recognition of our commitment to make our services as accessible as possible, the Enterprise and Risk Management team have produced a document to support colleagues in involved in (or planning) access audits and/or office moves/re-designs. The document, Designing for Accessibility, outlines the various issues to be considered, as well as practical guidelines as to their implementation. A full access audit was undertaken when we moved office premises in 2012 to our current location the action point list was re-audited in January this year to ensure compliance with all points noted.

1.8 Promoting Disability – A Guide for British Council Staff

This guide is for all British Council staff and aims to support the organisation to mainstream disability across all our work, acknowledging some of the positive work that is already taking place in this area and suggesting tips and guidance that will support us to further improve our working culture.

The latest equality monitoring analysis of UK-contracted staff shows the percentage of staff with a declared disability is gradually rising but has yet to reach its target set by the Diversity Team. The aim is that by 2015, disabled staff will account for 5% of the most senior roles in the organisation (current rate is 2.9%).

1.9 Useful resource on disability matters

The British Council are subscribing members of the Business Disability Forum, which is an employer network that exists to support organisations to see the business benefits of promoting disability equality.

The Disability Forum has identified

“Any person may have or acquire impairment that can be permanent or temporary. Disability affects every aspect of business – employees, customers, markets, suppliers and stakeholders”

Business Disability Forum offers a recruitment audit service that will assess the accessibility recruitment processes and procedures offering support and guidance where needs have been identified. The pool of talented disabled people in the UK is large: over seven million people, or 18 per cent of the working-age population

Supporting Disabled Applicants and Participants

- If any publications or forms are requested in alternative formats, such as Braille, they can be obtained free of charge upon request to the British Council Northern Ireland

HIV and Aids Policy for the British Council employing staff with HIV and AIDS. This policy states what treatment staff are eligible to while in British Council employment. It also covers the eligibility for treatment after they leave British Council employment.

-We also have our own *Guide to Promoting Disability Equality* which aims to support colleagues to think about how to build disability equality into all the work we do.

-Colleagues working in Education have developed some pointers to consider when working with groups of applicants with specific needs.

Encourage the Participation of Disabled People in Public Life

The British Council has drawn on advice gathered over a number of years from a wide range of disability specialists, partners and stakeholders, including disabled and non-disabled British Council staff from over 20 countries. In addition, focus groups took place in Argentina, Canada, Israel, Jordan, Malaysia and Pakistan, bringing together people with substantial professional and personal experience of disability issues.

As a multi-national global organisation staff work cross across many countries and regions whilst carrying out their work, organising and participating in programmes and events, therefore initiatives taken have a global reach

Measures that have been taken to increase participation;-

We are members of the Employers' Forum on Disability and this brings many benefits, including access to information, good practice, conferences and benchmarking exercises. More information about how to access the services of the

Employers' Forum on Disability can be found on the Equal Opportunity and Diversity Unit intranet site.

In the UK, the British Council has hosted events for national and international disability organisations.

A number of British Council offices around the world celebrate the International Day of Disabled Persons. For example, recently British Council Egypt held seminars on issues relating to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The seminars included presentations about initiatives that can help young disabled people gain employment after training. Schools were invited to performances on social inclusion and to participate in question and answer sessions on how to use arts as a tool for social dialogue

British Council internal initiatives, local and global;-

- In the UK and many other countries, the following statements are used on all externally-placed adverts:
- “The British Council is committed to a policy of equal opportunity and is keen to reflect the diversity of UK society at every level within the organisation. We welcome applications from all sectors of the community in line with the British Council's Child Protection Policy, any appointment is contingent with thorough checks. In the UK, including Northern Ireland and in other countries where appropriate systems exist, these include criminal record checks.
- We are committed to employing disabled people.
- Learning and Development use the following wording on their application forms: “If you have a disability, please tell us how we can meet your specific needs.”
- The Recruitment Team in Human Resources use the UK company, Adept-UK, to respond promptly to requests for documents (such as application forms and other recruitment material) in alternative formats, including large print, Braille, diskette or audio. Additionally they use Specialist Recruitment partners who specialise in the recruitment of people with Disability e.g. Employability, Equal Approach, Disability Jobs.
- Buildings in the UK (used by NI staff also) have been subject to an extensive disability audit and the recommendations have been implemented. In Manchester, changes have been made to ramps, handrails, light-switches, carpet colour, the height of reception desks, and automatic doors and accessible toilets have been installed. In Edinburgh, a lift has been installed to the mezzanine floor to make it more accessible.

- British Council Guangzhou reviewed recruitment opportunities for disabled people and targeted disabled people when recruiting exam invigilators.
- British Council Armenia fitted stair-lifts to improve access to their library facilities.
- The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) administrators test centre has a resource entitled 'Special Circumstances' in the Administrators Manual that offers specific provisions to support candidates with a wide range of disabilities.
- British Council China welcomed their first blind candidate to take an exam in 2005. Working with Cambridge ESOL, they have since enabled a number of other disabled candidates to take tests by providing lip-read listening tests for deaf candidates, allowing extra time for candidates with motor impairments, offering papers in Braille, and providing a scribe.
- British Council Hong Kong employed a local disabled people's organisation called Rehabilitation Power to carry out an access audit of their premises. The approach involved many BC Hong Kong staff, as well as disability consultants, and was highly informative and successful.
- The Teaching Centre in British Council France has developed guidance on meeting Specific Educational Needs in the classroom

Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People

Measures	Timescale/ Indicators/ Target	Performance Indicators/ Outcomes	Responsibility
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Disability Action Plan to be included in disability awareness training and equal opportunity diversity training	Ongoing	Increased awareness of issues facing those with disability	EO&D Team Equality Officer Department Heads
Ensure EO&D Disability Issues are covered with permanent and temporary staff, completing e-learning modules at the initial induction process. Locally, automatically incorporated into permanent and temporary staff induction and currently covered in Induction Health and Safety Training. Extend to all contractors, consultants and interns also.	Ongoing	Raise awareness further by incorporating into short term temporary staff and intern/student placement inductions and communication to business partners	EO&D Team Equality Officer Recruiting Managers
Ensure the Disability Symbol is displayed on all job advertisements to show commitment to employment and retention of those with disability.	Ongoing	Evidence via recruitment records	Recruitment Teams Equality Officer
Share Action Plans with all recruitment managers and teams to help make progress towards achieving disability targets for both new positions, moves or promotions	Ongoing Increase communications	Monitor progress percentages and target achievement	EO&D Team Department Heads HR Recruitment teams Equality Officer
Ensure appropriate and accurate collation of monitoring data UK wide and provide in an appropriate format for reporting and monitoring purposes.	Work in progress	Consistent data available in a timely fashion upon request	HR Recruitment teams IT data managers
Development of more robust systems for maintaining equality monitoring data on internal and external job applicants facilitating easy and accurate retrieval via hub UK systems.	Work in progress	Original copy documents available if/when required	HR Recruitment teams IT data managers
Sharing of affirmative recruitment measures/action taken to extend opportunity to job applicants with disability by use of specialist recruitment partners.	Share networks/communications beyond HR recruitment teams	Contacts and information more readily available to recruiting managers at large	HR Recruitment teams

Encouraging Participation by Disabled People in Public Life

Measures	Timescales/ Indicators Target	Performance Indicators/Outcome	Responsibility
<p>As member of the Business Disability Forum communicate more broadly to staff members what this means and what they offer i.e. membership provides; an evaluation of the Disability Standard, consultative advice, tailored training and master classes and a content license for our full range of toolkits available for member distribution.</p>	<p>Improved communication and proactivity</p>	<p>Broaden scope for participation by those with disability – job applicants, staff members, programme users and business partners.</p>	<p>Comms Teams EO&D training evaluation teams</p>
<p>Mainstreaming Disability and Accessibility Awareness into Event Management. While guidelines are circulated to all event management teams, budget ringfencing for making 'reasonable adjustment' is not clearly communicated.</p>	<p>Need to improve</p>	<p>Increased awareness of measures which can be taken to facilitate participation in events by those with disability</p>	<p>Comms Teams EO&D Teams</p>
<p>Identify a local 'diversity champion' who can co-ordinate with an established diversity working group to facilitate training, communication, and adherence to EO&D principles providing feedback to teams locally on disability and EO&D organisational and local issues.</p>	<p>Enhance existing support (currently off-site)</p>	<p>Increased communication and tighter monitoring of desired outcomes against targets</p>	<p>Comms Teams EO&D Trainers</p>

