

DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

2025-2030

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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 Manager and Director.

The main point of contact shall be Sarah Brisbane, Equality Manager

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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 connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language.

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 85 years' experience of doing this.

In line with our Royal Charter, we aim to bring high quality English materials to every learner or teacher 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 artistic and creative talent in the UK and internationally to develop events and collaborations which link thousands of artists, organisations and audiences worldwide. In addition to staging shows and exhibitions, we partner with other organisations 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 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.

Our strategic priorities to 2025 are to:

- Build stronger international connections for the whole of the UK.
- Deliver more flexible and personalised offers to more people through arts and culture, education and English – on and offline.
- Create deeper, more inclusive relationships.
- Deliver ever better value for money and financial sustainability.
- Strengthen how we work well together as one British Council.

1.2 Organisational Values

We believe that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) 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 EDI 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 EDI Policy through our EDI 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 is 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 Diversity unit 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 Equality Manager, Sarah Brisbane and 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 Equality Scheme, Annual Progress Report and Action Plan 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, Diversity & Inclusion 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 is called the Disability Working Group. It comprises 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

Disability Advisory Panel

Our external group is called the Disability Advisory Panel. It comprises 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.

Two representatives from Northern Ireland currently sit on the panel: Louise Neeson, Equality Manager for Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and Sean Fitzsimons, Employment Advocacy Officer at Disability Action. Both Louise and Sean have excellent direct and indirect experience with disability and have broad areas of expertise.

1.6 Reasonable Adjustments

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 HR communications.

The British Council is a Disability Confident Employer, a scheme designed to help organisations recruit and retain disabled people and people with health conditions for their skills and talent.

1.7 Accessibility of Our Offices

A full access audit was undertaken when we moved to our current office premises in 2012 to and re-audited in 2015 to ensure compliance with all points noted. Facilities staff create an environment in which all customers and colleagues can feel safe and secure by ensuring all refurbishment projects incorporate communication of a clear message of inclusion and accessibility to a wide range of people, including disabled people and people with young children. In the Northern Ireland office, we took advice from Disability Action to support us in addressing access issues and ensuring personal evacuation plans are in place for anyone who might need additional support in the event of an emergency.

An Evacuation Chair lift has been fitted for use throughout the premises and training has been provided to staff. The front door of the building has been fitted with automatic opening to enable ease of access for visitors with disabilities. A security officer has also been employed to reside in the main foyer area and can provide assistance to visitors.

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 2025, disabled staff will account for 7%, (current rate is 2.9%). This target is supported by our UK Disability Working Group and senior level Disability Champions.

1.9 Useful resource on disability matters

The British Council subscribes members of the Business Disability Forum, 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 assesses 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 16 per cent of the working-age population.

2.0 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.

-British Council Northern Ireland is a JAM Card Friendly Organisation <https://jamcard.org/>. The JAM Card is a social innovation from the NOW Group (an organisation that supports people with learning difficulties and autism into employment). We are committed to showing people with learning difficulties and communication barriers that as a JAM Card friendly organisation we will give them a little extra time and patience in customer service situations. We used our website and social media channels to widely promote our membership of this initiative.

Our staff have undertaken the Customer Care Training course to ensure they are

equipped to provide excellent customer service to people with learning difficulties and communication barriers.

The British Council participates in the Global Disability Summit and pledges two commitments – to seek to *increase the representation and empowerment of disabled people and to develop capability in the area of inclusive education*. A group of internal Disability and Inclusion Facilitators work alongside the Global Disability Working Group to support this area,

3.0 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.

3.1 Global Disability Charter and Our Commitments

The British Council is a signatory of the global Charter for Change on disability and development. DfID is the main lead on the Charter for Change, along with the International Disability Alliance.

In addition, we have also made two commitments to take action in support of the Charter for Change goals. We are committed to allocating resources and improve our approach to disability and inclusion in our programmes and processes. We measure and report on the progress we are making through a new Charter for Change platform.

Commitment 1 is an organisation wide commitment. It relates to the Charter for Change Stigma and Discrimination article and, specifically to the Representation and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.

Statement: The British Council commits to taking action to support disabled people to increase their voice, skills and agency to influence others and shape change in their own lives, the lives of others and wider society. We will do this through the meaningful involvement of disabled people within our own workforce and in our programmes in Arts, Education, Society and English and Exams, seeking to identify and remove barriers to inclusion and create conditions that encourage and value diversity.

Timeframe/ Action statement: To achieve this, the British Council will actively seek to engage and involve disabled people in our work and workforce. We will improve how

we collect, analyse and act on data about disabled people's participation. We will make adjustments to support disabled people's access and engagement. We will make targeted interventions, working with disabled people, DPOs and other stakeholders, to influence policy, build capacity, challenge assumptions and shape perceptions to increase disabled people's empowerment.

Commitment 2 relates to our work in inclusive education in Education, English and Exams. It is in the Inclusive Education outcome and specifically for Capacity Building of Teachers and Staff.

Statement: The British Council commits to use the relevant parts of our international cultural and educational work to support the provision of good quality education for young disabled people and to enable them to shape and lead change for the benefit of disabled people of all ages. This supports our wider commitment to more inclusive education systems based on the principles of access, engagement, empowerment and enablement aimed at ensuring the highest quality of education for everyone.

Timeframe/ action statement: The British Council will focus on creating more inclusive education systems based on policy and practice through collaboration and project partnerships with educational partners, school leaders, teacher educators and teachers. This will be implemented through policy dialogue, tools for developing more inclusive schools and our inclusive education learning resources aimed at solutions that are evidence based and appropriate for context.

3.2 Disability-related work in our programmes:

- Disability Arts International - Promoting increased access to the arts for disabled artists and audiences around the globe.
- Unlimited Access is a Europe-wide dance and dance theatre project designed to support best practice in the commissioning, creation, dissemination and programming of performing arts by Deaf and disabled artists.
- Our programmes on Inclusive Arts aim to utilise world-leading innovation and creativity to make a positive contribution to society, institutions and government policy. Over the last two years, research has been undertaken in Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan to scope potential opportunities and development in the area of arts and disability and the results will inform and shape our programme direction in consultation with local partners. Inclusion, diversity and equality are at the core of the British Council's cultural relations aims and part of building trust, respect and understanding between the UK and Singapore.
- British Council supports the Arts Council Northern Ireland's work with fourteen deaf and disabled artists from Northern Ireland who are recipients of the iDA (Individual Disabled/Deaf Artists) scheme, a dedicated arts stream delivered through the Arts & Disability Forum (ADF), which allows them to develop their professional artistic careers.

- British Council works strategically with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland under a joint MOU aiming to internationalise opportunities for the artists and arts organisations we jointly work with.
- British Council Northern Ireland collaborates with University of Atypical to support young people with learning disabilities to link up with their peers in Europe in a project to improve digital skills and produce new artistic performances
- Inclusion policy for Teaching Centres (Special Educational Needs/Disability).
- Special Educational Needs Teacher Development – a programme of course for those involved in teaching.
- IELTS requests for adjustments (China).

Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People

Measures	Timescale/ Indicators/ Target	Performance Indicators/ Outcomes	Responsibility
Regular provision of Disability Awareness training for staff covering: • e-learning modules at induction stage (within Health and Safety Training) • Disability Action Plan • Use of disability guides and organisational resources including: mainstreaming guides, guide to support inclusive activities and events, equality screening, DAF (diversity assessment framework), disability checklists and accessibility audits, guide to reasonable adjustments (inc. ringfencing budgets and recording for future reference) • Internal and external customer equality monitoring and disability targets • Use of contracts which reference EDI • Disability language and etiquette • JAM Card (see below)	Ongoing	Increased awareness of issues facing those with disabilities and how we as an organization can help recognize and address these issues. Increased awareness of measures which can be taken to facilitate participation in events by those with disability	Equality Manager, Director, Diversity Unit, Department Heads
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 Manager, Department Heads
'Time to Talk' days to be held annually for staff to discuss, share and reflect about mental health and wellbeing and share organisational resources	Annually	Increased awareness of organisation's Keep Well Campaign and support offered to staff	Equality Manager, Director, Department Heads, Wellbeing Officer
As a JAM Card Friendly organisation, ensure Customer Care Training is provided to all new staff (and refresher training to existing staff) to ensure they are equipped to provide excellent customer service to people with learning difficulties and communication barriers.	Ongoing	Improve our customer care to people with learning difficulties and communication barriers that we will offer extra time and patience in	Equality Manager

		customer service situations	
Ensure EDI Toolkit for staff contains up-to-date resources and information on reasonable adjustments, accessible venues, disability guides and local places of worship etc for staff and visitors	Ongoing	Staff to be equipped with knowledge and information to provide customer service excellence to disabled customers and visitors	Equality Manager
Celebrate the annual International Day for people with Disabilities	3 December (annually)	Increased awareness of issues facing those with disabilities and how we as an organisation can help recognize and address these issues	Equality Manager, wider team representatives
As signatory to the Mental Health Charter, promote positive mental health initiatives which will be beneficial to Northern Ireland staff and wider community. This will include a consultation to staff by Disability Action NI representative and member of our Disability Advisory Panel, and initiatives to address the issue of staff wellbeing, including nomination of mental health champions, physical health assessments, quiet/prayer room and mental health awareness training for staff	Ongoing	Increased awareness of issues facing those with disabilities and how we as an organisation can help recognize and address these issues	Equality Manager, Director
As signatory to the Equality Commission's Every Customer Counts' Commitment, ensure staff are aware of our commitment to promoting accessible services to our customers and that we welcome reasonable adjustment requests	Ongoing	Increased awareness of issues facing those with disabilities and how we as an organisation can help recognize and address these issues	Equality Manager, Director

Further develop our relationship with Disability Action NI, links with British Council Pakistan and explore opportunities for further collaboration and training sessions for staff	Ongoing	Mutual opportunities for future collaboration and learning	Equality Manager, Director
Further develop disability related arts projects such as Unlimited Disability Arts Festival, Bounce Festival and University of Atypical to support disabled and deaf people's involvement in the arts and facilitate the dissemination of artists' work to reach UK and international audiences,	Ongoing	Promote positive attitudes towards disabled artists and their work	Equality Manager, Arts Manager, Director

Encouraging Participation by Disabled People in Public Life

Measures	Timescales/ Indicators Target	Performance Indicators/Outcome	Responsibility
Help address our disability target of 5% by sharing of affirmative recruitment measures/action taken to extend opportunity to job applicants with disability by use of specialist recruitment partners and disability organisations in Northern Ireland	Ongoing	Contacts and information more readily available to recruiting managers	Equality Manager, Director, Department Heads
Establish an EDI working group to facilitate training, communication, mainstreaming and adherence to EDI principles, providing feedback to teams locally on disability and EDI organisational and local issues. Also conduct direct consultation with disabled organisations/disabled people to obtain meaningful feedback.	Ongoing	Increased communication and tighter monitoring of desired outcomes against targets	Equality Manager, Wider team representatives, Director
Seek action locally to better mainstream people with disabilities into the workforce by exploring opportunities for work shadowing/mentoring.	Ongoing	Deliberate and sustained action to support the involvement of disabled people in our work or wider society	Equality Manager, Director, wider team Representatives
Seek opportunities for staff to volunteer in local disability-related projects/events	Ongoing	Deliberate and sustained action to support the involvement of disabled people in our work or wider society	Equality Manager, Director, wider team Representatives
Use data collated through customer monitoring to find ways to increase the number of disabled people participating in our Northern Ireland programmes and establish the barriers to their involvement	Ongoing	Deliberate and sustained action to support the involvement of disabled people in our work or wider society	Equality Manager, Director, department heads

