

Disability Equality Scheme



The **NATIONAL**
ARCHIVES
of **SCOTLAND**

Date 4 December 2006

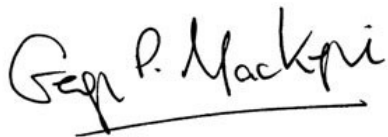
Contents	Page
Foreword by George MacKenzie, Keeper of the Records of Scotland	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Background	4
3. About the National Archives of Scotland	5
4. Challenges Facing the NAS	6
5. Assessing the Impact of our Policies and Practices	6
6. Recruitment, Development and Retention of Disabled Employees	7
7. NAS's Key Achievements on Disability & Plans for Improvements	7
8. Reviewing the Scheme & Annual Reporting	9

Foreword by George MacKenzie, Keeper of the Records of Scotland

From December 2006 the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005 places a duty on all public bodies to promote disability equality. The Disability Equality Duty requires NAS to actively promote disability equality and is similar to the duty to promote race equality under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

Our fundamental aim is to work with Scottish Ministers to improve the well-being of Scotland and its people by selecting, preserving, and making available the national archives of Scotland in whatever medium, to the highest standards; promoting the growth and maintenance of proper archive provision throughout the country and leading the development of archival practice in Scotland.

Our work gives us an important role in helping to promote equality for people with a disability. We have already taken important steps in this direction, for example in the refurbishment of General Register House and in our relaunched website. However, we need to go on working hard to ensure that there is no discrimination in access to our services. As we continue to develop the new ScotlandsPeople Centre for family history and to widen access to the records we hold, we must focus on how we can reinforce our commitment to equality for all the people of Scotland.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George P. Mackenzie". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

GEORGE P MACKENZIE
Keeper of the Records of Scotland

1. Introduction

1.1 The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 introduced a new duty on public sector bodies to promote equality of opportunity for disabled persons. Under the terms of the Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) (Scotland) Regulations, the National Archives of Scotland (NAS) and a number of other bodies are required to publish a disability equality scheme setting out what they plan to do to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. Within the scheme we are required to state:

- the ways in which disabled people have been involved in developing the scheme;
- what we have in place to measure the impact of our policies and practices on disabled people;
- what steps we will take to fulfill our obligations; and
- what arrangements are in place for gathering information on the effect of our policies on disabled people and our arrangements for making use of that information.

2. Background

2.1 The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, places on all public authorities a general duty to promote disability equality. In carrying out its functions NAS must have due regard to:

- the need to eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act;
- the need to eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disability;
- the need to promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons;
- the need to take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other persons;
- the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons; and
- the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life.

3. About the National Archives of Scotland

3.1 The National Archives of Scotland (NAS) is an Executive Agency and Government Department, associated with but not part of the Scottish Executive. The NAS is headed by the Keeper of the Records of Scotland, who is responsible to the Scottish Ministers for its management, performance and future development, within the terms of the Framework Document. The Keeper is also responsible to the Lord President for the efficient management of the court and other legal records in Scotland.

3.2 The mission of the NAS is to select, preserve, and make available the national archives of Scotland in whatever medium, to the highest standards; to promote the growth and maintenance of proper archive provision throughout the country; and to lead the development of archival practice in Scotland.

3.3 Our functions, based on the mission, are:

- to select public records regarded as worthy of permanent preservation; acquire other historical records of national importance, or which otherwise merit preservation; divert, devolve or transfer records to other appropriate repositories; and make suitable arrangements for the disposal of other material;
- to preserve to archival standards all records selected for permanent preservation in the NAS;
- to promote public access to the information in the records; and increase access to the records through electronic means, the use of copies and by producing catalogues, exhibitions and publications;
- to provide advice, guidance and support to owners and custodians of records held outwith the NAS, especially local authorities and other Scottish public authorities; and disseminate information on and facilitate access to such records; and
- to take the lead in the development of archival and records management practice in Scotland.

What We Do

3.4 The national archives play an important role in Scotland's economic and cultural life. The property market in Scotland is dependent on the services provided by the NAS to legal searchers, while its historical records are much used in lifelong learning and are a major attraction for genealogists, which helps promote tourism. In addition to advising Scottish Ministers on records and information policy, the NAS advises Scottish public authorities about the creation and management of their records, it advises public and private owners, about their historical records and it provides a reference service to the public on all aspects of the national archives.

4. Challenges facing the NAS

4.1 In addition to its continuing workload, the specific challenges facing the NAS include:

- legislation on information access, including the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations, has led to increased demand from public authorities to NAS for professional advice on managing their records and this is likely to continue throughout the plan period;
- we must continue to exploit technology to make our services more convenient to our customers, including disabled customers and improve the ways we provide information;
- electronic records, their preservation and continuing accessibility present considerable challenges for the NAS. NAS must position itself as a centre of excellence in this area and therefore needs to have a firm grasp of the fast-developing issues and must adapt its organisation to respond to these challenges. Many of these issues are being considered as part of the Digital Data Archiving (DDA) Project;
- NAS is running critically short of space to store the public records due to an unexpected rise in demand over the last few years. Government programmes of de-nationalisation, an increase in the scope and complexity of government, including the creation of a Scottish Parliament, and a general rise in court business, will result on present projections in the NAS using up all of its existing storage space in around 5 years' time. NAS currently has Ministerial approval to work on detailed plans for an extension to the repository at Sighthill, Edinburgh and will be presenting these in 2007.

5. Assessing the Impact of our Policies and Practices

Records Services in General Register House and West Register House

5.1 We regularly seek feedback on the services we provide in both of our public buildings, where members of the public can access open public records in our search rooms. We do this face-to-face, by means of comment sheets and customer surveys. Our most recent customer survey included a question aimed at understanding how we might make a visit to General Register House easier and a better experience for disabled people.

5.2 Our plans for the new ScotlandsPeople Centre include developing services for disabled people. In the first instance we will use findings from the customer survey (mentioned above), but we will follow this up with further surveys and liaison with groups representing disabled people.

5.3 Alternations to the front entrance of General Register House to provide a lift for disabled access has been forbidden by Historic Scotland, as the building is "A"

listed. However, a disabled lift has been installed at the west entrance and disabled parking will be available at the building. Tactile signage will be available throughout the ScotlandsPeople Centre. Loop induction systems for the hard of hearing have been installed in our search rooms and at reception areas. The new and refurbished search areas at the Centre have been designed to provide easy access to the records for disabled people and there will be some specialized desks for wheelchair users. Once the ScotlandsPeople Centre is fully open, we will involve disabled people as appropriate to determine how well it meets their needs and we will carry out modifications as required where it is possible to do so.

ScotlandsPeople genealogy research website

5.4 The majority of the ScotlandsPeople website is written to be accessible and complies with W3C's "Priority 1" Guidelines on accessibility. The accessible pages include the free public search, the members' search, the results pages and the help pages. However, the millions of images in the database are in a format (.tiff or .jpg) that need third party software to view them. This means that tools designed to help increase accessibility, such as 'alt tags' and extended descriptions are currently unavailable. Consequently there are limitations for visually impaired people because of the age of the records that have been imaged.

NAS website

5.5 We ensured the templates we used passed an RNIB See It Right Audit. We aim to ensure all pages on the NAS site comply with the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative level 3. We have put in place procedures which check all pages on a weekly basis using scanning software to ensure all new pages achieve maximum compliance.

6. Recruitment, Development and Retention of Disabled Employees

6.1 NAS is an Associated Department of the Scottish Executive. We follow their procedures for our Human Resources processes and they are responsible for all our staff recruitment. Information on the effect of the Scottish Executive's policies on recruitment and retention of disabled staff rests with them.

6.2 NAS has a dedicated Development Centre which aims to meet the learning needs of all NAS staff and holds learning records for all staff. For certain development needs we make use of the Scottish Executive's Corporate Learning Services but we also arrange specific learning and development events in-house.

7. NAS's Key Achievements on Disability & Plans for Improvements

7.1 Throughout NAS in recent years there has been progress in advancing disability equality.

7.2 Our key recent achievements are:

Access to Records

- making our most popular records available on the Internet has reduced the need to make visits to General Register House and West Register House;
- search places in General Register House are available which are suitable for wheelchair access;
- the refurbished search rooms for the ScotlandsPeople Centre will increase the number of places available which are suitable for disabled access. Our existing search rooms and the GRH front hall already have the Induction Loop System for hearing appliances and the new search rooms will also have this;
- procedures are in place to assist mobility-impaired customers to gain access (to all NAS buildings);
- in our customer service areas we actively seek feedback in a number of ways: face to face with customers, customer comment sheets and customer surveys. Feedback has shown that customers find the staff helpful and friendly;
- our latest customer survey included a question on disability and welcomed suggestions on how we might make a customer's visit easier e.g. access arrangements, special equipment;
- in our search rooms helpers may come in free of charge to aid customers with disabilities;
- we held a one day course in June 2005 for staff on deaf awareness;
- magnifying glasses are available in our search rooms;
- search terminals allow customers to enlarge the images on screen;
- customer care courses have been run for staff and have included techniques and approaches to assist customers with a disability. There is an ongoing programme to deliver these courses;

Plans for improvement

- we need more information on the different types of disabilities and how we can best provide access to our services and interact with customers; and
- feedback shows that access for mobility-impaired customers could be better: both General and West Register Houses are listed buildings and scope for alterations is therefore severely restricted; however we will address some access issues within the Scottish Family History Service (ScotlandsPeople) Project. (See paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 above);

General

- all of our web material complies with the current accessibility laws;

Modification in NAS Buildings

We have been working towards ensuring that our buildings comply with the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. For example we have recently:

- improved access for disabled staff and visitors;
- introduced tactile signage; and
- started to look at improving our lifts.

8. Reviewing the Scheme & Annual Reporting

8.1 We will review our scheme on an ongoing basis to ensure that we continue to meet our responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

8.2 We will review our facilities for disabled people in the ScotlandsPeople Centre early in 2008 once it is fully open.

8.3 We will publish a revised Scheme by 30 November 2009.

8.4 We will publish an annual report summarising the information we have gathered during the year about disabled people who use our services and their needs, and the use we will make of the information.