



Disability Equality Scheme

ANNUAL REPORT

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Introduction by George Mackenzie, Keeper of the Records of Scotland

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Introduction by George MacKenzie, Keeper of the Records of Scotland

I am pleased to introduce this Report on the National Archives of Scotland Disability Equality Scheme.

We first published our Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan in December 2006. You can see the Scheme on our website at: <http://www.nas.gov.uk/documents/NASDisabilityEqualitySchemeDec2006.pdf>

Since we published our scheme we have been working to improve our services for disabled people. We did not produce an annual report for 2007 due to a delay in the opening of the ScotlandsPeople Centre for family history (see <http://www.scotlandspeoplehub.gov.uk/>) The Centre means improvements in access facilities and we wanted to be able to report actual progress.

As we move into a new phase where the Centre is fully open to visitors, and as we develop our websites for those who wish to access our records on-line, we remain strongly committed to meeting our disability equality duty.

GEORGE P MACKENZIE
Keeper Of the Records of Scotland

1. Progress made since the publication of our Disability Equality Scheme

1.1 The ScotlandsPeople Centre

1.1.1 The ScotlandsPeople Centre, a joint venture between ourselves in the National Archives of Scotland (NAS), the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) and the Court of the Lord Lyon (CLL) opened all 4 search rooms on 12 January 2009, following a restricted opening (introductory taster sessions and a shop in our General Register House building) in August 2008.

1.1.2 We have tried to ensure equality for people with disabilities who visit the Centre by making improvements to facilities and services as described below:

- Facilities are located on the ground floor of General Register House and New Register House. These can be accessed by means of a ramp rather than lifts, with automatic doors leading to both the Matheson Dome and the Dundas Room, which in turn lead to all areas within the Centre;
- A lift has been installed at the west entrance to General Register House. As an alternative, customers can use the ramped access to the Matheson Dome;
- The door to the dome in New Register House has been widened to improve access for wheelchair users;
- Supervisors' desks are fitted with induction loop systems for hearing appliances; these are at desk height to make them easier to use for wheelchair users. There is also a recess at each desk which allows wheelchair users to get close to the supervisors to be able to speak to them more easily;
- Electronic rise and fall desks (two in the Reid Room and one in the Adam Dome) have been installed to provide better access;

- Toilets for disabled people have been installed in the front reception area and in the Robertson Wing;
- Two disabled parking spaces are available in the courtyard outside New register House. These can be booked by calling the Centre; and
- To help people who are visually impaired, each search room has access to a 19" monitor. Software on each monitor allows the text on the entire screen to be enlarged using the "zoom text" function. It also allows the image on every screen to be altered to give a "negative" appearance, which can be helpful for some forms of visual impairment.

1.1.3 We have plans to put an electronic customer feedback form on the new system/network to improve the way we seek feedback and to encourage customers to provide feedback.

1.2 The NAS Websites

1.2.1 The NAS uses its websites to improve accessibility to its services and to the historical records it holds in two ways. Firstly it uses digital imaging and website technology to make digital copies of historical records available online on a very large scale. Secondly, it ensures that all corporate information and information about its services on its main website, www.nas.gov.uk, is accessible for all.

1.2.2 In terms of public access to historical records, the primary service of the NAS is to make historical records available for research in its public search rooms in Edinburgh and disabled access to its buildings is covered elsewhere in this report. The NAS is, however, aware that in some cases people with some disabilities, especially if they live some distance from Edinburgh, will find access difficult. In using digital imaging technology to make copies of historical records available, the NAS has recently begun to open up access to records, which otherwise would require researchers to travel to Edinburgh to use the NAS search rooms.

1.2.3 On the Scottish Government's official genealogy site (www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk) the NAS makes its index to wills and testaments available free of charge and allows researchers to order digital copies for a small fee, obviating the need to travel to Edinburgh to make such a request.

1.2.4 The NAS is currently testing a system for making digital images of unindexed records available via the Internet (at www.scottishdocuments.com) to local archives in Scotland, which will multiply the number of places where records can be consulted. It is envisaged that eventually a parallel e-commerce service to this will be developed. The NAS also uses digital images of records and website technology for specific educational purposes (on www.scottisharchivesforschools.org, and www.scottishhandwriting.com).

1.2.5 While technology improves access in physical terms, it relies on the use of digital images to display surrogates of records, which does not improve their accessibility for visually impaired users. The NAS has used data-capture to make electronic transcripts of historical records available online, most notably in the Highlands and Islands Emigration Society records on the SCAN website (www.scan.org.uk). This allows access by screen readers, but an electronic transcript is more prone to error than a digital image and is much more costly to produce. Nevertheless, the NAS is currently considering more use of data capture to this end.

1.2.6 At the very least the NAS attempts to ensure that all corporate information and essential information about its services is accessible to all on its main website (www.nas.gov.uk). It does this by ensuring that the website meets at least AA standard of accessibility, in accordance with government guidelines, and it aspires to AAA (the highest) standard. Not all documents on the NAS website currently meet AAA accessibility standards, but we are working on identifying and amending the ones that do not. Consistent branding of all web documents is catered for in our Accessibility Policy, which is available on the NAS site. Our Outreach Services Branch and our Information and Communications

Technology Branch are in the process of improving the preparation of PDF and other documents prepared for dissemination on the website. We have recently audited our website to ensure that all links are named consistently and adequately for screen readers to read correctly, and that images and icons are kept to a minimum and contain alternative text tags to maximise accessibility. Since December 2006, we have redesigned the Online Catalogue and made it more accessible to visually impaired users. Work is also underway to improve the technical accessibility of the entire site by adding a facility to change the font size and page contrast.

1.3 Visitors to the NAS

1.3.1 A major customer survey conducted in 2002 indicated that 15% of customers had reported that they had some form of disability, most commonly affecting hearing. The survey provided a good deal of information on how our disabled customers felt about a visit to our two public buildings. Suggestions for improved accessibility from disabled users included the need for:

- better information on access and information
- access to lifts
- better lighting
- the provision of other eyesight aids; and
- assistance with mobility needs

1.3.2 The vast majority of responses related to our West Register House (WRH) building. Since 2002, many changes have been made to this and our General Register House (GRH) building which have addressed many of the main criticisms. These include:

- refurbishment of the West Search Room (WRH)
- refurbishment of the reception area (WRH)
- installation of a lift in GRH for customers with mobility problems
- installation of loop systems for people with a hearing impairment

1.3.3 NAS participated in the Public Services Quality Group for archives and local studies (PSQG) UK Survey in late 2007. The survey results produced vastly fewer comments on problems with accessibility than in 2002.

1.3.4 We will participate in the next PSQG survey this summer.

2. Conclusion

2.1 We continue to make good progress on our Disability Equality Scheme. We have challenging work to do on our websites and we will ask and pay attention to our visiting customers' needs particularly as we move beyond the very early days of the ScotlandsPeople Centre.