National Disability Authority – Part 3 Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information provided by Public Bodies

Monitoring Report 2022

Executive Summary

June 2023

NDA Logo

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NDA Disability Act – Part 3 Monitoring Report 2022

# Introduction

## Who we are

The National Disability Authority (NDA) is the independent statutory body that provides information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of persons with disabilities. We work through our Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) to promote the universal design of the built and digital environments, as well as services and systems so that they can be easily accessed, understood, and used by everyone, including persons with disabilities.

## The NDA’s monitoring responsibilities

Under Part II, section 8(2) (d) of the National Disability Authority Act, 1999, (NDA Act, 1999), the NDA has a role to monitor the implementation of Codes of Practice approved by the Minister and to report the findings. This includes the Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information (“the Code”) which guides public bodies to meet requirements under Section 26, 27 and 28 of the Disability Act. Further information on statutory obligations of public bodies and the NDA’s monitoring responsibilities and functions are contained in the full report.

## The purpose of this monitoring activity

For the purposes of this monitoring activity, the NDA carried out a desk-based evaluation of conformance of all public bodies against specific statutory requirements using their websites regarding:

### Section 26 (2) Access Officer

As set out under Section 26 of the Disability Act 2005, public bodies have a statutory requirement to appoint an Access Officer in the organisation.

Each head of a public body shall authorise at least one of his or her officers (referred to in this Act as “access officers”) to provide or arrange for and co-ordinate the provision of assistance and guidance to persons with disabilities in accessing its services[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Methods

The NDA undertook a desk-based monitoring activity which consisted of analysing the websites of public bodies considered to be included in the definition of public bodies under Part 3 of the Disability Act 2005.

In 2021 the websites of each public body were monitored against an indicator composed of three criteria to evaluate if the required information was promoted with regards to the Access Officer. The three criteria assessed were:

* The promotion of the appointment of an Access Officer on the website
* Information on how to contact the Access Officer
* A variety of communication channels for contacting them.

The NDA monitoring team evaluated the information provided on the websites of 292 public bodies (later adjusted to 281) and made an assessment on conformance against the above criteria which were recorded into a database. Initial findings were communicated to Departments for dissemination to public bodies under their aegis. Public bodies and Departments were given time to respond with updated information which was then incorporated into the final analysis and report.

Further information on the methodology of this exercise is contained in the main report and detailed results from each Department following this exercise are available in Appendix A.

# Monitoring Findings - Initial Findings and Final Findings

Initial findings reported that of 292 public bodies, 134 (47.7%) promoted the appointment of an Access Officer on their public website, whereas 147 (52.3%) public bodies appeared to have no information on their websites concerning Access Officers. (See Chart 1).

Following on from the issuing of the draft report and considering the resulting updated information provided by public bodies, of 281 public bodies, 192 (68.3%) promoted the appointment of an Access Officer on their public website, whereas 89 (31.7%) public bodies appeared to have no information on their public websites concerning Access Officers. (See Chart 2).

Chart 1-Initial Findings- Access Officer Promoted

Chart 2- Final Monitoring Findings- Access Officer Promoted on Website

Overall in our initial monitoring, only 98 (34.9%) public bodies met **all** **three** criteria of the indicator with regard to Access Officer. (See Chart 3).

Chart 3- Initial Findings- Public bodies who met all criteria of the indicator

However, following the issuing of the initial draft of this report there was improvement amongst public bodies across all three criteria. In the final analysis overall, a total of 165 (58.7%) of 281 public bodies met **all three criteria** of the indicator with regards to Access Officer while 116 (41.3%) did not. (See Chart 4)

Chart 4- Final Findings- Public Bodies who met all Criteria

For further information on the assessment of public bodies against all three criteria in both the initial and final reports, please consult the full report.

# Impact of Monitoring

Overall, since the issuing of the draft report the NDA notes there has been a marked improvement in the promotion of Access Officers on public body websites. For example, the promotion of the appointment of an Access Officer on public body websites has jumped from 134 (47.7% of all public bodies monitored) to 192 (68.3% of all public bodies monitored). This represents a 43.3% increase in promotion of Access Officers on public body websites monitored. (See Chart 7)

Chart 5- Change to Promtion of Access Officers On Websites

In addition, there was a marked improvement in the provision of Access Officers’ contact information facilitating written and spoken communication and therefore meeting all criteria under this indicator. This improved from 98 (34.9% of public bodies monitored) to 165 (58.7% of public bodies monitored) representing a 68.4% improvement. (See Chart 8)

Chart 6-Public Bodies meeting all Criteria

Precise measuring of the impact of the NDA’s monitoring on these numbers is difficult as there are many factors which can contribute to the increased provision and promotion of Access Officers across the public service. However, of the 75 responses the NDA received which provided updated information on public websites, 62 (82.7% of responses) indicated that the information was updated as a result of the draft report being issued. 13 of the responses (17.3% of responses) did not specify. No responses stated that the report had no impact on the information promoted on the websites of public bodies who responded.

Further to the improvements detailed above, individual Departments such as the Department of Justice have used the opportunity, to further engage with public bodies under its remit in this regard. This engagement has led to the development of a justice sector Access Officer Network that will meet regularly to discuss best practice, advice, exchange information, listen to and learn from the lived experience of disabled people, and to keep apprised of new developments. The NDA welcomes the approach taken by the Department of Justice and would suggest this be followed as a best practice example. The NDA would therefore advise that other Departments may find it useful to set up similar networks for bodies under their aegis.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

While this monitoring exercise has resulted in a marked improvement in the promotion of Access Officers on public body websites monitored, there are still 116 public bodies (41.3%) which did not meet the requirements under the Access Officer indicator. It is therefore clear that public bodies still need to improve awareness of their responsibilities under the Section 26(2) of the Disability Act and to take action to ensure they make the relevant information available to the public.

The NDA advises public bodies to update their internal procedures if the appropriate processes/appointments are not in place.

In addition to this, public bodies with an Access Officer in place must ensure that the Access Officer has appropriate training, resources, and information to support them to carry out their duties as specified by the Disability Act 2005. Guidance from the NDA is available in the [Access Officer Guidance for Public Bodies](https://nda.ie/publications/access-officer-guidance-for-public-bodies) document regarding appointment, training, duties and processes surrounding Access Officers.

Further recommendations and advice can be found in the full report.

1. The NDA has produced [Access Officer Guidance for Public Bodies](https://nda.ie/publications/access-officer-guidance-for-public-bodies) to assist public bodies and Departments in understanding the role of access officer and providing information on how best to support and make use of the Access Officer role [↑](#footnote-ref-1)