

Equality and Good Relations Unit



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Inclusive Customer Service Policy

1. Promoting Accessible Services

It is important to us that every customer experiences the same high level of service from us. We therefore will make every effort to accommodate all reasonable requests for assistance from customers seeking to access the services that we offer. To assist us to do this effectively we would be grateful that, whenever possible, customers contact us in advance to discuss their specific needs.

Alternative Formats

If you require this document in an alternative format such as Braille, audio CD/MP3, easy read, computer disc and/or another language, please contact us to discuss your requirements on 028 90 418 377.

To enquire about accessibility, or make a specific request, please contact the relevant number below. If you are unsure which number you should dial, please contact the Equality and Good Relations Unit on 028 90 418 377.

Assembly Committees:	028 90 521 213
Assembly Events:	028 90 521 802
Assembly Engagement:	028 90 521 019
Assembly Communications:	028 90 521 137
Assembly Education Service:	028 90 521 833
Assembly Facilities:	028 90 525 999

2. Our Commitment to Customers

We aim to provide an exemplary and accessible customer service that all our customers can use and benefit from in a manner that respects their dignity and independence and promotes equal opportunity and choice. Our aim is to provide an inclusive environment, and we will make all efforts to remove any physical, sensory and intellectual barriers to disabled people when accessing our services. This includes a commitment to uphold the spirit and letter of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and we will strive to make all possible reasonable adjustments to make our services accessible to disabled people. This is consistent with our values and our vision of being an Assembly for everyone.

3. How we will achieve this commitment

Our approach to promoting accessible services is fully supported by the Assembly Commission and has been developed in consultation with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Directors and Heads of Business have responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy, and we expect all our employees, customers, suppliers and service users to abide by the policy and help to promote and maintain an accessible environment for all. We will promote inclusion by taking the following steps:

- ✓ **Consider the unique needs of each customer:** We will do our best to accommodate any reasonable adjustment requests you may make.
- ✓ **Take action to make our premises, facilities and services accessible:** We will carry out regular assessments to identify potential barriers for disabled customers and make all possible reasonable adjustments to remove or minimise any barriers identified.
- ✓ **Strive to meet best practice standards for access and inclusion.** Our approach will be informed by best practice guidance promoting accessibility.
- ✓ **Train our staff:** All staff will be made aware of this policy and our commitment to accommodating reasonable adjustment requests.
- ✓ **Provide accessible web content:** Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), Version 2.0, Level AA compliant.
- ✓ **Provide auxiliary aids and assistive technology:** Where reasonably possible we will provide assistive technology to make our services easier to access. This may include induction loops, signed video tours, etc.
- ✓ **Welcome assistance dogs:** We will provide a bowl of water and place to rest for assistance dogs if required.

- ✓ **Carry out effective monitoring and review:** We will regularly monitor and review progress in relation to our commitments. We will keep track of how requests for reasonable adjustments from customers are managed.
- ✓ **Encourage feedback:** We will actively engage with customers in order to identify areas that require change and encourage service improvements.
- ✓ **Welcoming the customer:** Our staff are committed to ensuring all customers feel at ease and that we help maximise their experience during their visit to Parliament Buildings. Our frontline staff will wear name badges with their first name displayed as a means of increasing approachability on first contact.

4. Question and Answer Guide

Below you will find a range of questions and answers that you may find useful in relation to answering any questions you have concerning accessibility. However, if you have any further questions, or are unsure of what to do in certain circumstances, please contact the Equality and Good Relations Unit on 028 90 418 377.

What facilities are available for wheelchair users in Parliament Buildings?

Disability access to Parliament Buildings is via ramps at the front entrance and also at the east and west side of the building, with access through automatic doors. Car parking beside the building is also available on request. Disabled toilets are available throughout the building.

Within the public viewing gallery in the Plenary Chamber there is access for a maximum of three wheelchairs, dependent on size. There is also space for wheelchairs in the public gallery of Committee rooms.

What facilities are available for people with a hearing impairment?

The Northern Ireland Assembly became the first legislature in the United Kingdom to be awarded the prestigious Action on Hearing Loss “Louder than Words” best practice charter mark. Assembly staff have undergone training in deaf awareness and communication tactics to ensure that they are able to recognise and facilitate the very particular needs of deaf and hard of hearing visitors. A number of staff have attended basic sign language training. New equipment such as an upgrade to the hearing loop system and additional signage have been introduced. Sign language guidance has been developed for Secretariat staff to help them to make provision for visitors to Parliament Buildings who are deaf or have hearing loss.

An induction loop system has been installed in all Committee rooms, function rooms and the Chamber, and a number of portable loops are available from reception. A signed tour in British and Irish sign language is also available. A Hearing Helper radio system is available for people who are hard of hearing or large groups.

A whispering tour is also available. This is a special tour organised by the Assembly using the Williams Sound tour guide system provided by Action on Hearing Loss. Tour participants wear individual headsets so that everyone receives the same hearing experience regardless of where they are located in the group or on the tour. The Williams Sound tour guide system sends the guide’s message directly to the listener without background noise and at a distance of up to 150 feet. Deaf Alert Fire Alarm Warning Messaging Systems are also available at reception. Events staff have been trained by Action on Hearing Loss to assist guests as required. For further enquiries and information, please contact the Events Office on (028) 90521802 or e-mail events.office@niassembly.gov.uk

The Assembly Commission can provide an interpreter or other forms of communication support if required and where it is reasonable to do so. To find out more about this, or to advise of additional adjustments, please contact the relevant business area to discuss your requirements.

The Assembly's Education Service provides subtitled videos, and its website meets the relevant web usability standards.

What facilities are available for people with a visual impairment?

Working in conjunction with RNIB, the Assembly has produced a Braille tour guide which provides historical and general information on Parliament Buildings and the Assembly. It also includes a tactile map of the entrance, Great Hall, Assembly and Senate Chambers, and tactile images of the front of Parliament Buildings, the Assembly logo, the ceiling of the Great Hall, the linen damask wall covering of the Senate and an overview plan of the Assembly Chamber.

A copy of the Braille guide can be borrowed from reception, and the events team and education officers also hold copies. Events staff have been trained by RNIB to assist guests as required. The Assembly welcomes assistance dogs onto the premises. For further enquiries and information, please contact the Events Office on (028) 90521802 or e-mail events.office@niassembly.gov.uk

Assembly documents and papers can be provided in alternative formats, such as Braille or large print, on request and where it is reasonable to do so. Please contact the relevant business area to discuss your requirements.

What facilities are available for people with autism?

In November 2011, the Northern Ireland Assembly began making the building even more accessible and friendly for people with autism. This started with some physical changes to the building such as setting up a quiet room behind our reception area and looking at our signage; for example, placing warning stickers on noisy hand dryers and symbols on toilet doors.

Autism awareness training was rolled out to front line staff in December 2011 and March 2012. There are also 11 Autism Champions in Parliament Buildings, including one of our Education Officers, and they act as points of contact if anyone with autism needs assistance.

The Assembly has produced an access video showing what to expect when someone arrives at the entrance to the Stormont Estate and makes their way up to Parliament Buildings. A group of young adults with autism helped us with the content and direction of the video – their assistance was fantastic.

A page on the Assembly website provides information for visitors on the autism spectrum, including useful contacts, links, the access video, guidance and information on sensory issues that may be encountered. The link to the webpage is here: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/visit-and-learning/autism-and-the-assembly/>.

The Northern Ireland Assembly was the first organisation in the UK to receive the Autism Access Award from the National Autistic Society in 2012, and we have been re-accredited every year since.

Are there accessible toilets in Parliament Buildings?

There are several accessible toilets in Parliament Buildings. There is also a changing places facility on the ground floor. This provides fully accessible public toilet facilities for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. A changing places toilet provides:

- The right equipment
- A height adjustable adult sized changing bench
- A tracking hoist system, or mobile hoist if this is not possible
- Adequate space in the changing area for the disabled person and up to two carers
- A centrally placed toilet with room either side for the carers
- A screen or curtain to allow the disabled person and carer some privacy
- A safe and clean environment
- Wide tear off paper roll to cover the bench
- A large waste bin for disposable pads
- A non-slip floor

Assembly Committees

Information and contact details for individual Committees can be found at the following link:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/>

Can I submit evidence in an alternative format to written?

All organisations and individuals are welcome to submit evidence. Committee staff will make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities to enable them to submit evidence in an alternative format. Organisations and individuals wishing to submit evidence in an alternative

format should advise the relevant Committee office in advance. If you would like further information, please contact the relevant Committee office.

Are Committee papers available in alternative formats?

Written evidence in an alternative format can be requested and a copy will be forwarded by the relevant Committee office thereafter. Written evidence submitted will usually be made public by the Committee. Please contact the relevant Committee office as soon as possible to discuss your requirements.

What does giving evidence entail?

Information on calls to evidence and a short video on giving evidence to Committees can be found at the following link:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/>

Can a helper or carer accompany me?

Witnesses in need of assistance due to a disability are permitted an additional aide; please contact the relevant committee office as soon as possible to discuss your requirements.

I want to give evidence but cannot attend Parliament Buildings; can this be accommodated?

Committee meetings can take place away from Parliament Buildings. Witnesses will be notified of alternative meeting arrangements. Witnesses should advise the Committee office of any specific needs/special requirements they may have which would facilitate attendance at a Committee meeting. Staff will endeavour to arrange a venue which is accessible and suitable for all. For further enquiries and information, please contact the relevant Committee.

Accessing Papers and Information

I have difficulty accessing information or reading papers online - can I get them another way?

Assembly documents and papers can be provided in alternative formats, on request and where it is reasonable to do so. Alternative formats include Braille, large print, Easy Read, audio formats such as CD, mp3 or DAISY. Please contact the relevant business area to discuss your requirements.

Education Service

I am a young person with a disability. What services and facilities are in place to assist me if I want to participate in the Assembly's Education Programme?

The Education Service delivers programmes to school and youth groups in Parliament Buildings and will also go out to schools and youth groups in the community as part of its outreach programme. There is a fully accessible ground floor education room in Parliament Buildings. When booking an educational visit, groups will be asked about special requirements and the Education Service will adapt presentations and activities to suit the needs of the students/young people.

For further information on the Education Programme and how to book an educational visit please go to education.niassembly.gov.uk/visit. You can also contact the Education Service directly on 90521833 or email education.service@niassembly.gov.uk.

Translators

Can I book a translator for my visit?

Where reasonable, a translator can be provided for guests. All requests should be made in advance. Please contact the relevant business area to discuss your requirements. (Contact telephone numbers are available on page 1).