

Public Sector Duty assessment and action plan

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General Assessment under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014

Section 42 of the [Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014](#) requires public bodies to carry out a specific assessment of human rights and equality issues relevant to the performance of its functions and purpose. The section, also referred to as the 'Public Sector Duty', imposes a statutory obligation on public bodies in performing their functions, to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment of staff and persons to whom it provides services and protect the human rights of staff and services users.

Section 42 states:

A Public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination,
- b) promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and
- c) protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

It also sets out three core steps to be taken by public bodies:

- 1) set out in a manner that is accessible to the public in its strategic plan (howsoever described) an assessment of the human rights and equality issues it believes to be relevant to the functions and purpose of the body and the policies, plans and actions in place or proposed to be put in place to address those issues, and
- 2) report in a manner that is accessible to the public on developments and achievements in that regard in its annual report (howsoever described).

The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Office) is committed to ensuring that there is a culture of respect for human rights and equality among our staff, for the staff in public bodies which who we engage, and for the public.

The Office committed to formally assessing compliance with section 42 in its Statement of Strategy 2021-2025. As part of this commitment a Human Rights and Equality Working Group was established in November 2021. The cross-grade working group reports to Management Board periodically and assists with assessing what human rights and equality issues or risks are relevant to Office's functions and identifying the policies, plans and actions in place to address those issues.

Assessment of human rights and equality issues

The working group conducted a survey in 2022 to identify the human rights and equality issues or risks relevant to the Office. As the Office is not a public facing body, the focus of the assessment was on the Office's staff.

Potential human rights and equality issues or risks identified included:

- need to raise awareness of Human Rights and Equality obligations within the Office, including awareness of relevant policies and procedures in place to address any issues that may arise
- need to raise awareness of the Public Sector Duty and IHREC within the Office
- training should be made available, highlighted and encouraged for all staff

- risk of potential for discrimination
- need to raise awareness around LGBTI+ issues and increase awareness for staff who have disabilities, for example who staff can contact.

A further assessment was carried out in 2024 to identify if levels of awareness of human rights and equality obligations and the Public Sector Duty had risen within the Office and to ascertain if there were any further human rights and equality issues or risks that staff felt are relevant to the Office. Issues identified in the 2024 assessment included:

- need to improve the level of awareness of IHREC and the Public Sector Duty
- risk of potential for discrimination or bias, for example in promotion, recruitment or staff assignment
- need to increase awareness of internal policies around human rights and equality and the avenues for reporting concerns.

Office policies, procedures and initiatives

The Office has a number of policies, procedures and initiatives currently in place to support human rights and equality issues and risks relevant to the purpose and function of the office.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

The Office has published on its website a [diversity and inclusion statement](#). The Office is committed to maintaining a positive workplace environment in which all staff feel valued and included. The Office aims to generate an atmosphere of equality, dignity and respect for all staff and to promote an environment free from discrimination on any grounds. The Office's diversity, equality and inclusion efforts focus on further developing a culture where all employees are inspired to share their ideas, talents and passions.

Recruitment and Promotion

The Office's recruitment and promotion activities are undertaken in accordance with the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004 and the code of practice issued by the Commission on Public Service Appointments. The Office operates under the framework of the civil service policies and procedures, which incorporate all legislative requirement in relation to equality, disability and human rights legislation.

Wellbeing

The Office is committed to running a number of well-being initiatives and provide staff with the support and resources to manage their own health and wellbeing. The Office has also made available a Wellhub to support the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of their staff. A Health and Wellbeing programme with a calendar of events was launched in 2023 and continued in 2024.

Polices, statements and working groups

The Office has a number of polices, procedures and working groups that focus on the areas of diversity, equality and human rights. These include:

- Diversity statement
- Speak up policy
- Dignity at work policy
- Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2025

- Hybrid working policy
- Staff rotation policy
- Bród - LGBTI+ employee and allies' network
- Staff wellbeing forum
- Staff development forum
- Human Rights and Equality Working group

Accessibility

The Office recognises the importance of accessibility, diversity and inclusiveness of those who wish to access our website. In 2020, the Office installed accessibility software on our website which allows a wider variety of people to access our website content in a way that takes account of their individual requirements and abilities. The software provides text to speech functionality, fully customisable styling features, reading support aids and a translation tool with over 100 languages, including 35 text to speech voices and many other features. The Office ensures that all vacancies are advertised on the Office's website.

Disability Liaison Officer

The Office has assigned a disability liaison officer to act as a point of contact and to provide information and assistance, as required, to staff with disabilities and their supervisors. The disability liaison officer works in conjunction with other units of the Office to source and provide disability aids as and when deemed necessary.

Bród

Office staff established an Office LGBTI+ employee and ally group called Bród, which means pride in the Irish language. The group was established to offer support to our LGBTI+ colleagues and allies, and to foster the Office's growing and diverse culture. The aim is to contribute to the culture and environment of the Office by adding to existing wellness and employee assistance programmes currently in operation and to engage with other international and national civil and public LGBTI+ employee networks.

Action plan 2024 – 2026

Further to the current policies, procedures and initiatives, the Office developed an action plan to address issues and risks identified in the 2022 and 2024 assessments of human rights and equality issues.

Assessment	Action required	Timeframe for implementation
Need to raise awareness of Human Rights and Equality obligations within the Office, including awareness of relevant policies and procedures in place to address any issues that may arise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure current supports available in the office that assist in addressing human rights and equality issues are continually highlighted, for example on the Office intranet or through the well-being programme. In particular, highlight these supports to new staff through the induction process.• Conduct staff survey annually to gauge changes in level of awareness and to identify any new potential issues.	Annually
Need to raise awareness of the Public Sector Duty and IHREC within the Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrange speaker(s) from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to give a talk to staff about the work they do and provide information on the Public Sector Duty.	Y2
Training should be made available, highlighted and encouraged for all staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlight to staff the eLearning course available through OneLearning: <i>Equality and Human Rights in the Public Service</i>.• Consult staff regarding additional training they think is necessary.	Annually
Risk of potential for discrimination or bias, for example in promotion, recruitment or staff assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annually remind staff of the methods available to them to report any issues they are concerned about.• Annually remind staff of supports available to assist staff with any issues that may arise.• Provide training to interview panel members regarding human rights and equality issues and the risk of discrimination or bias in assessing candidates.	Annually Y1