

APPENDIX G

THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT, 1995

**ACCESS TO CHURCHES AND PAROCHIAL BUILDINGS
FOR DISABLED PEOPLE**

CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), from October 2004 the Church of Ireland will be required to provide, as far as is reasonable, accessibility to the built environment to enable people with disabilities to participate in the full life of the Church.

The Church of Ireland is committed to creating an environment where all people whether they are Parishioners, Clerics, Employees or Visitors can worship and participate in the life of the Church.

The Disability Discrimination Act provides protection from discrimination for an adult or child if he/she is a disabled person.

The Act defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

ACCESS AUDITING

In order for the Church of Ireland to identify the extent to which its facilities will need to be adjusted to meet the needs of people with disabilities, it will be necessary for Parishes to carry out Access Audits in respect of their property.

Where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled persons to make use of a service offered to the public, the Church will have to take measures where reasonable, to:

- Remove the feature, or
- alter it, so that it no longer has that effect, or
- provide a reasonable means of avoiding the feature, or
- provide a reasonable alternative for making the service available to disabled people.

Physical Features are defined under the DDA as “anything on the premises arising from a Buildings Design or Construction or the approach to, exit from or access to such a building, fixtures, fittings, furnishings, equipment or materials and any other physical element or quality of land in the premises – whether temporary or permanent”.

Examples include:

- steps and stairways
- kerbs, exterior surfaces and parking
- building entrances and emergency exits
- internal and external doors
- toilets and public facilities
- lighting and signage
- floor coverings
- lifts

Several factors will have a bearing on whether a change is a reasonable one for service providers to have to make, particularly for physical adjustments to premises. These include:

- whether taking any particular measures would be effective in overcoming the difficulty that disabled people face in accessing the services in question.
- the extent to which it is practicable for the service provider to take the measures.
- the financial and other costs of making the adjustment.
- the extent of any disruption which taking the measures would cause.
- the extent of the service providers financial and other resources.
- the amount of any resources already spent on making adjustments.
- the availability of financial or other assistance.

The Church of Ireland is a service provider and, therefore, has a duty under the DDA to come up with solutions in regard to access to buildings that are reasonable in all circumstances and which result in as many disabled people as possible being able to access Church Property.

What to consider in interpreting “REASONABLENESS”

- consult with existing and potential disabled users of your services about the way in which you do things and the best way of prioritising changes.
- consult with “expert” organisations.
- do not assume costs and inconvenience would be high. It has been suggested by the Equality Commission (Disability Unit) that most changes are low cost.

In the case of Listed Buildings of Architectural or Historical interest the physical constraints imposed by such a building may make compliance with the regulations impossible or impracticable. In such circumstances, it may be necessary for the Church to provide a “reasonable alternative” where a similar service would be available.

The important date to note is October 2004 when service providers will have to ensure that access to their buildings is in compliance with the physical access provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995.

WHERE TO GET HELP?

ORGANISATIONS OF USE TO SERVICE PROVIDERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (Disability Unit)

Equality House
7-9 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DP

Ph: 028 90 500600
Text Phone: 028 90 500589
Fax: 028 90 331544
E-mail: information@equalityni.org
Website: www.equalityni.org

For information, advice and training on all aspects of the implementation of the DDA. All DDA related publications, including the Code of Practice: Rights of Access, Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises are available on request.

Centre for Universal Accessibility

School of the Built Environment
University of Ulster at Jordanstown
Newtownabbey BT37 OQB

Ph: 028 90 368505
Fax: 028 90 366875
E-mail: g.kane@ulst.ac.uk

Offers education and training on the principles of accessibility, undertakes access audits and provides advice on a wide range of accessibility issues.

Disability Action (Headquarters)

189 Airport Road West
Belfast BT3 9ED

Ph: 028 90 297880
Text Phone: 028 90 297882
Fax: 028 90 297881
E-mail: hq@disabilityaction.org
Website: www.disabilityaction.org

Provides a range of services in Northern Ireland including information and advice on all aspects of the DDA. A team of Access Officers provide access audits, technical advice, information and training on how proposed or existing premises can better accommodate disabled staff, visitors and customers. Disability Action has offices throughout Northern Ireland in Belfast, Carrickfergus, Derry, Dungannon and Newry.

Representative Church Body – Report 2003

ADAPT Northern Ireland (NI)

Albany House
73-75 Great Victoria Street
Belfast BT2 7AF

Ph: 028 90 231211
Text Phone: 028 90 234391
Fax: 028 90 240878
E-mail: cshiels.adaptni@dnet.co.uk

ADAPT (NI) aims to promote universal accessibility by providing advice, guidance and support. ADAPT services include accessibility appraisals and training programmes incorporating access consultancy, disability awareness and etiquette.

The William Keown Trust

3 Church View
Dundrum
Co Down BT33 0NA

Ph: 028 43 751243
Fax: 028 43 751444
E-mail: wkeowntrust@btconnect.com
Website: www.wkeowntrust.co.uk

Actively pursues a policy of improving access in the environment and carries out access audits. The trust works with individuals and organisations from all sectors to achieve a high level of access for people with disabilities.

RNIB Northern Ireland (NI)

40 Linenhall Street
Belfast BT2 8BA

Ph: 028 90 329373
Fax: 028 90 439118

Provides a range of services in Northern Ireland including information, visual awareness training and undertakes access audits on the needs of people with a serious sight loss. RNIB (NI) also offers information and advice on matters relating to information provision and access technology.

Representative Church Body – Report 2003

RNID Northern Ireland (NI)

Wilton House
College Square North
Belfast BT1 6AR

Ph/Text Phone: 028 90 239619
Fax: 028 90 312032
E-mail: Brendan.heaney@rnid.org.uk
Website: www.rnid.org.uk

Provides a range of services in Northern Ireland including information, advice and deaf awareness training. RNID NI also carries out access assessments for organisations to ensure their services and premises are accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Churches for All

Website: www.eauk.org/contentmanager/content/disability

Through the Roof (Roof Breaker Guides)

PO Box 178
Cobham
Surrey KT11 1YN
England

Ph: 01932 866333
Website: www.throughtheroof.org