A stack of books with electronic devices on top. The books have yellow, orange, and green spines. On top of the stack are a clear plastic electronic device, a green electronic device, and a black electronic device.

Making Access Happen



THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAIS



AN CHOMHAIRLE LEABHARLAINNA
The Library Council

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Foreword

Making Access Happen sets out practical initiatives taken by library authorities in Cavan, Dublin City, Kildare and Mayo to improve access by people with disabilities to their local libraries. It describes a unique process of training, reflection, planning and action that gave practical expression to a shared commitment that libraries provide *A Space for All* in their local communities.

Making Access Happen was stimulated and supported by the Equality Authority and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. Both organisations have been concerned to generate a new creativity and knowledge base that would assist full participation by people with disabilities in the broad range of services offered by public libraries. It builds on previous work published by both organisations under the title *Library Access*. This provides guidance to public libraries on the practice of making reasonable accommodation for library users with disabilities. *Making Access Happen* details how the four library authorities turned this guidance into practical and effective initiatives.

The starting point for this partnership between An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and the Equality Authority rests in the requirement in the *Equal Status Act 2000* that service providers make reasonable accommodation for customers with disabilities, subject to a nominal cost exemption. Reasonable accommodation involves service providers adapting what they do and how they do it where, without these adaptations, it would be very difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to access the service or goods provided. Both organisations sought to support compliance with the legislation, alongside an ambition for accessibility that catered for all needs making use of the provisions for positive action under the legislation.

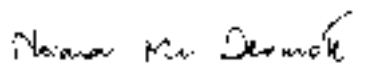
The four library authorities involved in this project demonstrated exemplary commitment, creativity and ambition. *Making Access Happen* is being published so that their example and their ideas achieve a wide dissemination. In this way it is hoped to further support the practice of reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities across all library authorities.

Making Access Happen gives continuity to the ongoing partnership between the Equality Authority and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna on the issue of reasonable accommodation of library users with disabilities and across a wider diversity of library users. This partnership has been well served by Maureen Gilbert, who has been working as a consultant to the Equality Authority on this project. The quality of her work in providing the training, supporting the project and drafting this report in very evident in the pages that follow. We are grateful for her professionalism, creativity and commitment.

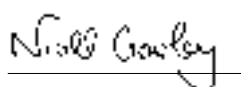
Finally, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and the Equality Authority recognise with gratitude the enthusiastic participation of:

- Josephine Brady, Emma Clancy and their staff in Cavan Library Service
- Margaret Hayes, Miriam Leonard, their staff and the members of RAG in Dublin City Public Libraries
- Breda Gleeson, Mark Reid and their staff in Kildare Library and Arts Service
- Austin Vaughan, Mary Gannon and their staff in Mayo Library Service

without whose interest and involvement this could have been just another pilot programme.



Norma McDermott
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna



Niall Crowley
Equality Authority

Background

The Library Access Project grew out of the meeting point of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna's *A Space for All* initiative and the Equality Authority's strategic aim of focusing attention on the provisions of the *Equal Status Act, 2000* in relation to the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities.

The *Equal Status Act* prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education on nine different grounds: gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller Community. The *Act* also requires providers of goods and services to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities through adapting what they do and how they do it where, without these adaptations, it would be very difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to obtain those goods and services. Reasonable accommodation, as such adaptation is generally called, in most instances involves low cost or even no cost, and there is no obligation to provide it where the cost involved is greater than a nominal cost.

The Library Access Project forms one section of a wider programme of work being undertaken by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and the Equality Authority in order to focus on reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities by the public library service. This work was founded on the premise that the exclusion of people with disabilities arises from society's attitudes, practices and responses to their needs, rather than from any impairment that people with disabilities may have. The aim was to ensure equality for people with disabilities in access to and participation in public library services including within its ambit people with all types of disability.

The programme of work began in September 2003 with the launch of *Library Access*, a jointly published booklet, which aimed to:

- support planned and systematic approaches to the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities
- develop practical supports for providers of library services to make the adjustments and to provide the facilities necessary for the reasonable accommodation of existing and potential library users with disabilities
- stimulate effective change and the implementation of good practice in the provision of an inclusive public library service
- support compliance with the *Equal Status Act, 2000*, including making use of the provisions for positive action.

The Library Access Project was designed as a short programme of training interventions to inform and stimulate a range of practical initiatives in four library authorities. These initiatives sought to implement the guidance provided in *Library Access*. The training was delivered to key decision-makers within the library authorities. An initial inter-authority exploratory workshop, involving An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the participating library authorities and the Equality Authority designed the programme. The programme involved:

- each participating authority identifying key staff for two training interventions to be provided 4-6 weeks apart
- library authorities engaging in projects identified during the training intervention
- a concluding inter-authority meeting to review progress and achievements and to identify future plans.

This approach allowed each library authority to determine who should participate and the priorities of the project work, based on local priorities and circumstances. This process of achieving buy-in and creating ownership characterised the first phase of the Library Access Project and contributed significantly to its high level of achievement.

Training methodology

The process of creating ownership began with the methodology for the training interventions which was highly participative and experiential. It aimed first to explore and then to build on existing knowledge. The exact content varied as the facilitative approach responded to issues of concern to each individual group. Using exercises, small groups and broader discussion the training challenged conventional attitudes to disability, and the custom and practice which arise from them. It deconstructed the dynamics of marginalisation before inviting participants to reconstruct what they could do from where they are now, in their present buildings and with their current level of resources. Honest, open discussion tackled fears and challenges directly and involved both exploration and reassurance, with a view to defusing anxiety and enabling the identification of practical, implementable solutions.

The use of approaches which started from the personal and expanded out to encompass the organisational, enabled the training interventions to encourage fundamental changes of perspective. In library decision-makers can make all the difference between a service which does the minimum to comply with requirements and one that actively encourages and celebrates diversity. Conscious change in personal attitudes enables initiatives which introduce new inclusive policy and practice to become embedded and natural processes, rather than well-intentioned but minimalist activity. As one County Librarian put it, *“if you engage in this process it becomes obvious – and no hassle – that you make changes”*.

The library authorities characterised the training interventions as:

- practical
- participative
- engaging, resulting in personal as well as “professional” involvement
- empowering, resulting in high levels of ownership and achievement.

The training methodology used participants’ own ideas, knowledge and priorities to create practical programmes for achievable change at every level of the system. Consideration of marginalisation in general moved from passive engagement with fixed ideas about an issue which was perceived as difficult to address, to dynamic engagement with a changing landscape of possibility. Participating authorities have all, in various ways, replicated the training methods with their own staff.

The training also stimulated a broader appreciation of the multiple experiences of marginalisation across the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation and the interplay between them. This encouraged a focus on the accessibility achieved for other groups when accessibility is achieved for people with disabilities and the multiple identities they need (for example black and minority ethnic people with disabilities, gay and lesbian people with disabilities etc). This opened possibilities for tackling issues related to other groups whose needs the public libraries are not yet meeting fully.

The library authorities' experience of working on local priorities

Cavan Library Service

Context: Cavan Library Service is currently undergoing major infrastructural development to enable it to serve the county's growing population (currently around 57,000). At present it provides 3 full-time and 9 part-time libraries, a prison library service and a primary schools service in a predominantly rural county.

Local strategy for the project: A new central library, library headquarters and heritage centre building is under construction in Cavan town. Local disability groups are concerned that a number of recent major infrastructural developments in the county have failed to meet the requirements of prospective users with disabilities. The team involved in the project decided to concentrate on consultation and preparation for the new building and allied services.

General comments: The project team reported that the training interventions provided key concepts, opportunities to stand back, open up awareness and face prejudices and fears, as a result of which the library service is now looking at things very differently.

Actions and outputs:

- people with disabilities, representative of local organisations, were invited to speak at the group's second training day. This energised participants and encouraged them to act quickly. They were "shocked" by the gratitude expressed by people with disabilities and by their low level of expectation – the opposite was expected – and this fuelled participants' resolve to get things right

- greater understanding of local disability demographics and enhanced awareness of interests and requirements has enabled more accurate targeting
- consultation with local people with disabilities and with senior occupational therapists at national level (identified by a local OT) who themselves have disabilities has resulted in significant changes to plans for the new library building, reflecting local preferences
- the need to consult with visually-impaired people has led to the development of tactile architectural plans which could be adapted for use by all building designers and clients
- a checklist of building-related issues specific to public libraries, using Part M of the Building Regulations and *Building for Everyone* as a starting point has emerged from the consultation process. This has the potential to be used as a template for all public library buildings nationwide. The checklist may also be modified by Cavan County Council for use in all its building projects in order to ensure that full access is integral to the design process
- the compilation of a database of all representative local disability groups and organisations is nearing completion, involving the development of links with key local contacts. This will enhance recent local publications which are patchy in their coverage of this sector.

Next steps:

- informal consultation will be strengthened shortly with the establishment of a formal advisory group
- a survey has just begun, to be completed within six months, with the aim of “*ensuring that the new central library and heritage centre supports fully the inclusion of people with disabilities*”. The survey will be published and is intended to provide a template for other sections of Cavan County Council, other library authorities and possibly other local authorities
- walk-throughs of the new building as it develops will result in

enhanced accessibility for everyone

- the database of all representative local disability groups and organisations will be made available on Cavan Library Service's website, which will be operational by autumn 2005. Ensuring the accessibility of the website will be a priority
- the above developments are informing the content of Cavan Library Service's Development Plan 2004-2008, with the aim of *"embed[ding] reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities into the planning and decision-making processes of all aspects of library services in the county"*.

Conclusion: the County Librarian noted that the Library Access Project fitted well with the service's current priorities and, as such, the process *"benefited hugely"* from timely interventions. Enthusiasm and the embedding of new attitudes have led to the perception of reasonable accommodation as achievable, rather than an extra burden – such work as is involved is considered *"extremely positive and productive"*. The library service's approach to consultation may be used to inform such procedures in the county council generally.

Dublin City Public Libraries

Context: Dublin City Public Libraries (DCPL) serves a population of almost 500,000 urban residents, together with commuters, students and visitors to the city via a network of 21 full-time libraries, 18 mobile library halts, a housebound service, specialist libraries and archives, a prison library service, a schools library service, an open learning centre and a website. Nearly 3.4 million people visited DCPL facilities in 2003, including attendance at over 1,600 reading events, 471 exhibitions and almost 2,600 other events.

Local strategy for the project: DCPL identified its priorities as *"people issues"* and developed a project plan to direct this focus, concentrating on *"the key interface where client meets collections and*

competence". The desired outcome was characterised as "*an organisational culture within DCPL infused and enthused with confidence and competence in providing library services to people with disabilities, an organisational culture where diversity is celebrated and difference minimised*". The process aim was that policies and plans would encourage and direct "*while being refreshed and invigorated by frontline staff*".

General comments: The project is described by participants as being "*the best project we have ever been involved in*", in terms of achievement, effectiveness and, consequently, enjoyment. It is seen to be making a real difference and is thus actualising the core motivation of library staff.

Actions and outputs:

- a small project team was established to receive the training and drive the initiative, representing an extensive functional spread of responsibilities and all management grades within DCPL. Its official title, the Reasonable Accommodation Group (RAG) quickly gained the reputation of being the noisiest and liveliest working group in DCPL
- RAG prepared *Access with Attitude*, a disability handbook for staff, which is to be enhanced during the process of training frontline staff (see below)
- library building maintenance programmes have been disability-proofed. Some building modifications have been carried out. An application has been made to the Dormant Accounts Fund with a view to providing major structural improvements at three library sites
- library purchasing policy is being reviewed from a disability standpoint
- assistive technology for people with disabilities is being tested on site

- articles in staff newsletters and agenda items at meetings of all levels of staff have been used to keep people informed of the initiative
- issues related to providing reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities have been included in DCPL's submission to Dublin City Council's Draft Development Plan. Through its involvement in such structures as Dublin City Council's Customer Care Team and Training Representatives Group DCPL is raising issues related to the reasonable accommodation of customers at Council level. DCPL has also progressed accessibility issues in relation to the new DCC website, currently under construction.

Next steps:

- RAG is training around 150 frontline staff over seven days in the summer, using the model demonstrated in the original training intervention, with the aim of “*foster[ing] cultural shift regarding disability within DCPL and enabling staff to deal with all customers with confidence and competence*”. Part of the strategy to achieve buy-in and develop ownership at branch level will involve ascertaining staff's practical suggestions for site-specific reasonable accommodation measures and for proposed changes to application forms and other procedures. These proposals will be included in *Access with Attitude*, which will be printed after the training process is completed
- plans for delivering training to branch managers and other professional staff are underway
- following preliminary briefings conducted in May, branch managers are including local disability demographics and issues in the community profiles they are preparing as part of planning for the Dublin City Public Libraries' Development Plan
- library literature is under review, with a view to providing information in alternative formats. A simple guide to library services, with the working title of *This is Your Library*, is in preparation.

Conclusion: DCPL used a learning and engagement process and identified “people issues” as key determinants of success at every level of the project. In addition, the model of cross-functional working formed by DCPL for use in the project is delivering significant results and represents a sustainable model for the future. DCPL hopes to replicate this process in its engagement with other client groups in order to progress reasonable accommodation issues across the full range of equality and diversity tableaux.

Kildare Library and Arts Service

Context: There are six main branch libraries in the biggest towns in Kildare, along with 10 smaller branches in other locations, serving a fast-growing population of around 150,000 living in mixed urban, suburban and rural settings. A significant proportion of the population commutes into Dublin for work. Because of its particular structure Kildare was the only library authority to include an arts service in the project. It also operates a schools service, a mobile service, a local studies service, archives and museums.

Local strategy for the project: Kildare’s approach to the Library Access Project was informed by the existing strategies of the local county council and County Development Board. The project fitted well with a number of other initiatives on inclusion already underway, along with the service’s long-standing practice of employing and also offering work experience to people with disabilities. The focus adopted by Kildare in this project was to empower staff throughout the service to understand and engage directly with the processes which create exclusion, with a view to eliminating such processes from the library authority’s practice.

General comments: initial training was delivered to a group comprising headquarters and other senior library staff, the County

Arts Officer and two assistant librarians. Two group members themselves have disabilities.

Actions and outputs:

- resulting from the initial training, headquarters and branch library staff developed their own work programmes, designating a person to monitor progress in each case
- a “staff library” of disability-related material, based on a collection of all resources listed in *Library Access*, was developed in each branch library
- a staff manual was developed
- the staff manual was introduced to all staff at all levels (including attendants and cleaners) in all branches, through one-day training programmes delivered personally by the County Librarian using the model demonstrated in the original training intervention. Full participation was facilitated by headquarters staff running branch libraries during the training days
- work programmes identified during the branch training are being incorporated into the staff manual
- reasonable accommodation is now an agenda item at all staff meetings at all levels throughout the service. A headquarters staff member co-ordinates the programme as a whole, communicates with branches on the topic and amends the staff handbook accordingly. Although her duties include ensuring that reasonable accommodation remains on everyone’s agenda, responsibility for delivery is devolved to branches. Supports and monitoring will be continued at this level until reasonable accommodation is “automatic”
- discussion of reasonable accommodation has been facilitated on the library authority’s intranet system. Staff participate on their own initiative, often sharing ideas and experiences. The system ensures that everyone is aware of everyone else’s work programme and of progress made

- each branch has established contact with local access and other disability groups. As well as identifying practical issues this contact functions as staff training and is also enabling branches to market their services to prospective customers with disabilities. There has been no adverse reaction from existing library users concerning short library closures to facilitate this process
- library application forms have been redesigned
- an interim library building refurbishment programme is in process of implementation.

Next steps:

- collection policies are being reviewed
- discussions are being held with the County Manager and HR function in order to “*ripple the learning*” from the project, particularly in terms of the training methodology, throughout the county council.

Conclusion: the term “reasonable accommodation” is being used in Kildare as a spirit level for locating the library’s role in ensuring access for people with disabilities to all its services. The concept gives the libraries a perspective from which to remedy the diverse levels and layers of exclusion which affect many of its existing and potential customers.

Mayo Library Service

Context: Mayo Library Service comprises five full-time and 10 part-time libraries, plus a mobile service, serving a population of 118,000 in mostly rural settings. It also provides a service to the 130 primary schools in the county. Library service delivery in Mayo covers a vast area with a dispersed population.

Local strategy for the project: Mayo's approach concentrated on practical measures that could be implemented by its wide-spread scattering of one-person operated part-time libraries. Its strategy is also driven by its conviction that for maximum effect reasonable accommodation must be implemented on a council-wide basis, and not confined to the library service.

General comments: The training programme brought about "*a huge increase in disability awareness*" among staff and led to the development of links with disability organisations. The first training intervention, with senior staff, generated 30 proposals for practical action, of which 12 were acted on by end March 2004. A subsequent session in December, involving most of the library service's frontline staff, generated 80 proposals, of which 30 were completed by the end of March.

Actions and outputs:

- many small-scale improvements have been made to layout, features etc in branches
- liaison has been established with disability organisations at regional level. This has sometimes been difficult as many are based in Galway
- out-of-hours visits to libraries by groups of people with disabilities are taking place
- internal library signage is being upgraded
- a budget has been designated to improve the relevance of collections, especially of non-print materials, for people with disabilities. The budget also provides for the purchase of other disability-related items.

Next steps:

- a policy statement is being developed, to include performance indicators, from which an action plan will be developed, showing

who is responsible for what and in what timeframe and including a review mechanism

- plans are being prepared to:
 - consider the provision of a mobile library service for people with disabilities
 - ensure the provision of appropriate software facilitating access to library computers for people with disabilities
 - conduct an annual audit of library buildings and services
 - disability-proof all library initiatives, eg Children's Book Week
 - provide one day's training on disability-related issues annually to all staff
 - track usage by people with disabilities of library services in order to assess impact of reasonable accommodation measures
 - consider how to establish an inter-library loan system for non-print material
- the library authority has recently become involved in a pilot project concerning the marketing of library services, through which it will be able to test methods of reaching potential customers with disabilities, among others
- Mayo Library Service is actively seeking the designation, at county council level, of a disability officer, with a brief to:
 - draw up policy
 - support the equality agenda
 - develop procedures
 - ensure the implementation of and monitor plans
 - liaise with appropriate organisations and council departments
 - secure funding.

At present the council employs access officers, but their role is limited to consideration of the built environment.

Conclusions: Because of its realised potential to make a real difference to current and future library users, Mayo considers the project to be one of the most important in which it has participated to date. Building local staff ownership has resulted in the implementation of many small but significant changes and improvements.



Key learning points

Each participating library authority – and the project as a whole – achieved far more than it expected to, and attributed this to the project design and the urgency engendered by the personal and involving nature of the training. There are a number of key learning points which, as well as influencing the mainstreaming of the project throughout the other library authorities, may have application for other similar programmes in the future. These include:

- **multiplier effect:** different approaches and priorities in each participating library authority enriched the process, enabling useful and productive sharing of experiences and learning. Initiatives developed in one library authority are replicable and easily adapted in another
- **applicability:** the training methodology was very participative and engaging. The results show that the approach holds lessons for the introduction of innovation in libraries and in the wider local authority arena. Participative training unlocks powerful ways of addressing issues, removing blocks to development and achieving opportunities for amelioration in “*an open, supportive and challenging dialogue which respects staff as ‘knowers’ and empowers them to make meaningful change*”
- in the public library context **elements for creating meaningful change** include:
 - **empowering staff** – including, critically, senior staff – to engage and deliver. Without first ensuring whole-hearted senior staff buy-in any enthusiasm created at more junior levels will not realise its potential
 - **empowering people with disabilities** (and, similarly, other

marginalised groups) through consultation and meaningful involvement, so that all decisions and actions are well-informed by the people who know best

- in the public library context **supports to change** include:
 - “downtime” for training, meeting local groups etc
 - using “reasonable accommodation” as a spirit level for locating the library’s role
 - eschewing “special” provision in favour of participative and inclusive development
 - advocating for a phased, planned programme of capital refurbishment, to tackle physical barriers
 - the provision of ongoing supports and monitoring until reasonable accommodation becomes automatic.

Participating library authorities recognise that a process of continual development is required though it may take 4-5 years for cultural change to become fully embedded. They are confident that this can be achieved, however, as “*the process is real*” due to the level of staff ownership.

The experience of the project also suggested directions for the future:

- **broadening agendas:** since the emphasis of the project acknowledged the links between access strategies for the different groups covered by equality legislation and the multiple identities of people with disabilities, it has stimulated practical consideration of the extension of the approach to ensure maximum participation by other marginalised groups
- **leadership within local authorities:** all participating library authorities have reported to the most senior levels of their own local authorities on the innovative nature and unprecedented level of achievement of the project. This has enabled the library authorities to demonstrate leadership within the local authority context, and to offer their expertise in – and practical templates

for – developing more effective practices within local authorities for tackling issues of reasonable accommodation, other aspects of marginalisation and exclusion, and service delivery generally.



Next steps

A key question at the beginning of the process concerned the library authorities' understanding of their slogan *A Space for All*. "How 'all' is your space?" they were asked, "not just your physical space, but your service space and, critically, your head space?" By the end of the first phase of the project a great deal more space had been created. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and the Equality Authority are now concerned with the mainstreaming of the project approach throughout the public library system.

Library Authorities are required by the *Equal Status Act, 2000* to provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities subject to a nominal cost exemption. In supporting responses to this requirement, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and the Equality Authority will continue to work with library authorities and other stakeholders as they develop a fully inclusive library service. Strengthening co-operation and dialogue between all parties is a key element in achieving this goal.

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, in co-operation with the Equality Authority, will continue to assist and advise library authorities on the inclusion of people with disabilities. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna will continue to build on the success of phase one of the Library Access Pilot Project and will:

- raise awareness of effective approaches for public libraries to fulfil the reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities through the publication and promotion of this report, and its circulation to management, staff, mayors and elected members of library authorities

- encourage, in association with the library authorities, the adoption of the approaches developed in the projects through presentations at:
 - the launch of the report
 - the Library Association of Ireland Public Libraries' Section conference in October 2004
 - the Association's County and City Librarians' seminar in November 2004
- offer training and advice on the provision of reasonable accommodation to every library authority before the end of 2004 in order to support them in providing reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities having regard to the approaches developed in this phase of the project
- develop and maintain an online resource collection for library staff on reasonable accommodation and disability issues on the website of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (*www.librarycouncil.ie*)
- incorporate best practice guidelines in advising library authorities on reasonable accommodation issues in planning and designing new libraries, in the conversion of older buildings and in reviewing existing library services.

The Equality Authority is currently working to inform people with disabilities of the public libraries' initiative and is encouraging active engagement with it. In so doing it is stressing the opportunities that involvement with organisations striving to provide reasonable accommodation can bring. In its work to encourage reasonable accommodation among other service providers the Equality Authority is instancing the public library experience as an exemplar of the breadth of what can be achieved on foot of a small-scale strategic intervention.

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