

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

November 2024



Introduction

The purpose of this document is to outline the IPA's approach to the assessment stage of the IPA's Public Sector Duty (PSD) obligations and related action plan.

Section 42 of the [Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014](#) places a positive duty on public sector bodies to have regard for the need to:

- eliminate discrimination;
- promote equality of opportunity and treatment for staff and persons to whom it provides services; and
- protect human rights of staff and service users.

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty places equality and human rights at the heart of how the Institute as a public body fulfils its purpose and delivers on its strategic plan.

About the Institute of Public Administration

The mission of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) is to advance the understanding, standard and practice of public administration and public policy and to build the capacity and capability of the Public Service workforce into the future. Our intent remains constant to be Ireland's recognised Centre of Excellence for Learning and Leadership Development for the Public Service.

Under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR), the IPA is unique in terms of the breadth and depth of multi-disciplinary expertise within the Public Service, comprising a multi-faceted approach including accredited third-level education, professional learning, development and advisory services. This cross-sectoral approach affords the Institute the basis for applying a unique, whole-of-government perspective to its activities, providing solutions to the demands of state and government.

The IPA has evolved considerably since its foundation in 1957 with over 19,000 public servants attending courses and programmes today. The Institute has multiple specialist departments to support and advise on different approaches to capacity building within the Public Service. These departments include Professional Development,

OneLearning, Senior Public Service and the Whitaker School of Government and Management.

Our Mission

To advance the understanding, standard and practice of public administration and public policy, supporting our public service on the complex challenges it faces.

Our Vision

To be Ireland's recognised Centre of Excellence in building capacity and capability across the public service.

Our Values

Integrity: to be honest, sincere and ethical in our dealings with one another and with clients.

Client-Centred and Responsive: To act efficiently and effectively in the best interests of the client and in meeting their needs.

Openness and Accountability: To act and take decisions in a transparent manner and be open to scrutiny.

Trust and Respect: To ensure we are trustworthy both to clients and to colleagues and those with whom we come in contact.

Innovation and Learning: To always strive for new ideas, best solutions and the acquisition and dissemination of new knowledge.

Research-Led: Contribute to knowledge creation and use of evidence-based research in our decision making and the services we provide.

Practice-Led: To pursue good practice and facilitate practitioner knowledge; insight and experience to be shared and implemented across the public service.

Background to Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (PSD) and the IPA

In line with our commitment to fulfilling the organisation's Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, we initially established a core internal PSD group comprised of three members, with the full support of the Director General. This core group laid the foundation for our approach and ensured alignment with our strategic priorities.

Building on this groundwork, the group was then broadened into a cross-functional working group, consisting of 8-10 members from across the organisation, including representatives from Professional Development, the Education team, Facilities & Services, HR, and Communications.

This diverse team was tasked with reviewing current practices, identifying areas for improvement, with a view to ensuring compliance with equality and human rights standards, and fostering an inclusive and fair environment for all stakeholders.

The consultation process took account of inputs available from those to whom the IPA provides services. This included Whitaker School student input via quality assurance surveys, supplemented by qualitative inputs from students via direct contact on an individual basis. Feedback from attendees of Professional Development programmes is continuously gathered, and this was reviewed and reflected in the workshop. Feedback from prospective recruitment candidates was provided by the HR representative. Contractor staff input was provided via the Facilities representative.

Timeline

Key actions undertaken during the period are set out in the timeline below.

November 2023: Core PSD working group was established to map out the projected journey and approach, agreed with Director General.

December 2023: Consultation between core PSD working group and a representative from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Public Sector Duty team.

January 2024: Presentation to all IPA staff including a short video from IHREC. Volunteers sought from wider Institute to join the IPA PSD working group. Six volunteers joined the group.

March 2024: Initial awareness raising workshop carried out at IPA for PSD working group, delivered by IHREC Public Sector Duty team representative. Following this workshop, a number of items were identified informally, and it was agreed that a facilitated workshop would be of benefit in capturing all of the relevant material and agreeing a structured approach in developing an action plan.

April 2024: All members of the working group were requested to consult with colleagues in their departments to gather information on potential items that could be considered in the context of an action plan.

May 2024: A facilitated workshop using external project management expertise was conducted with the working group members. Through open dialogue and group discussions, participants highlighted several areas that were relevant to the human rights and equality agenda, including accessibility, inclusion, enhanced support services and promoting an environment of collegiality and psychological safety. The workshop fostered a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities in promoting equality and human rights across the Institute. The insights gathered directly informed our initiatives and action plan.

July 2024: A meeting of the working group was convened in order to collate and discuss the outputs of the facilitated workshop. It was agreed that all members would be consulted by survey for their views.

August 2024: Members of the working group were asked to participate in an online survey to indicate their preferred order of prioritised issues.

October 2024: Members of the core working group met to prepare the IPA's action plan based on feedback received from working group members, collate results of the assessment stage and identify the key priorities. Drafting an action plan to address those priorities was the next step.

November 2024: The draft action plan was shared with working group members, the Director General and the IPA's Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

December 2024: Publication of the assessment and action plan on the IPA website as an appendix to the IPA Strategic Plan. Communication to IPA staff with timeline for implementation.

Process

Below we outline our approach to the stages of the IPA's Public Sector Duty (PSD) obligations and related action plan.

While the assessment stage outlined below covers a range of matters, it is not an exhaustive list of the range of items that we cover in our everyday operation in the Institute. It is a list of targeted actions we are undertaking in respect of the legislative requirements.

Assess, Address, Report

The Institute under the Act is required to:

1. **Assess** – set out in its strategic plan an assessment of the human rights and equality issues it believes to be relevant to the functions and purpose of the body;
2. **Address** – set out in its strategic plan the policies, plans and actions in place or proposed to be put in place to address those issues;
3. **Report** – report on developments and achievements in its annual report.

Assess

Over the course of the two workshops, the PSD working group identified over 25 items for consideration. These ranged from short-term items to longer term physical infrastructure items, along with an array of suggestions that crossed over into staff development and organisational culture.

The longlist was evaluated, and a shortlist of priorities was agreed and these form the basis of the action plan (Appendix). The goal of the working group was to select items that would be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-specific) and would make an impact for our staff, learners, and stakeholders in the immediate future.

Conscious of the ongoing infrastructural plans for potential relocation of the Institute, the group agreed that items related to buildings and facilities would be addressed as part of the infrastructure project collectively within the timeline of the project (2025+).

It is envisaged that the items on the longer list will be addressed in the future as the action plan evolves and the immediate priorities have been achieved. A re-assessment exercise may be undertaken during the period of the current strategic plan as many other organisations have done to update the list of priorities and plan for addressing same.

The full action plan is set out on page X, with six identified issues/topics as follows:

1. **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy** – Development and implementation.
2. **Plain English** – Awareness raising and promotion of same.
3. **Review Applications forms for Institute services and programmes** – with regard to collection of personal details.
4. **Access Officer** – Consider the need for this type of role in the Institute.
5. **Neurodiversity awareness** – Develop and roll out awareness for staff.
6. **Staff Development** – Ongoing PSD awareness, Review of human rights and Dignity at Work training for staff.

Address

The sponsor of the PSD Action Plan is the Director General.

The responsibility for monitoring the Action Plan rests with the PSD Working Group.

Delivery of the items on the Action Plan rests with various members of management with the contribution of the PSD working group.

Responsibility for reporting on the outcomes of the Action Plan rests with the Core Working Group.

Report

The developments and achievements as per the Action Plan which have been put in place or are proposed to be put in place will be outlined in the annual report. The activities that took place in 2024 will be reported in the IPA's annual report 2024, which is expected to be published in Q3 2025.

The Institute's assessment and action plan will be included as an appendix to the IPA's Strategic Plan – *A New Era of Learning* – 2022-2027.

Action Plan

Issue	Task	Responsible	Suggested Actions	Timeline
1. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy	1) Draft a policy for EDI for the Institute.	Head of HR	Draft a policy taking into account best practice in the area of EDI. Review the policy with unions, PSD working group, Executive Leadership Team.	Q4 2024
	2) Share the policy with all employees	Head of HR	Briefing at staff monthly get-togethers, Share policy via IPA website, Webinars on EDI-related topics available through OneLearning for staff.	Q1 2025
	3) Behaviour and culture guidelines for contractors on site	Senior ICT & Support Services Manager	Ensure that all workers within the IPA are delivering their work in a manner that is aligned with IPA values.	Q1 2025
2. Plain English	Raise awareness for need and use of plain English in IPA documents.	Head of Communications and relevant Institute staff	Organise plain English seminar for staff.	Q2 2025
			Develop guidelines for using simple language (e.g., avoiding jargon, using short sentences). Engage Stakeholders – Involve staff and audiences for feedback and improvement.	
3. Review Applications forms for Institute services and programmes	Review all Institute application forms where personal detail is included.	Whitaker School nominee;	Ensure all forms have the option for the user to select the appropriate title.	Q4 2025
		Prof Dev nominee; HR nominee; ICT nominee SPS nominee OneLearning nominee	Ensure where gender is collected as part of the form that it is relevant and necessary and that a range of options are available. Where applicable, allow for recording of special requirements regarding accessibility or accommodations. Ensure adherence to GDPR requirements.	

Issue	Task	Responsible	Suggested Actions	Timeline
4. Access Officer	Consider the need for an Access Officer in the IPA.	Organisation-wide PSD Working Group & Heads of Function	Research best practice for Access Officer role and responsibilities in other HEIs and Public Sector bodies. Consider role profile within the IPA context to include disability officer responsibility and any other related duties. Establish the extent of the requirements of the role e.g. part-time, or in conjunction with other duties, or contract basis.	Q4 2025
5. Neurodiversity awareness	Develop and roll out Neurodiversity awareness sessions for staff	Head of HR & Head of OneLearning Organisation-wide PSD Working Group Head of Whitaker School Director of Professional Development	Source neurodiversity training and awareness sessions for staff. Determine the appropriate needs for staff in Whitaker School and in Professional Development to address neurodiversity in training/classroom context. Include feedback from quality assurance survey in assessing future needs for neurodiversity initiatives.	Q2 2025
6. Staff Development	1) Develop staff learning and development framework which includes PSD-related items. 2) Review human rights training for all staff. 3) Review Dignity at Work training for staff	HR Organisation-wide PSD Working Group	All office staff to complete the revised IHREC PSD training module through OneLearning. Build into the monthly staff get-togethers a series of external speakers/advocates on a variety of human rights and equality-related topics. Include the IPA's commitment to PSD in the new Induction framework for new employees	Q1 2025 (framework) Q2- Q4 (training)

Note: Issues regarding access and facilities for staff, students and participants including restrooms, quiet spaces, disability-friendly facilities etc are to be addressed under the Institute's current infrastructure project and plans.



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