



Equality Action Plan

2023 – 2025



Waterways For All



1. Introduction

This Equality Action Plan 2023-2025 has been developed from the outcome of an Audit of Inequalities conducted by Waterways Ireland

Note on terminology

In this Action Plan, the terms “persons with disabilities” and “disabled people” are used interchangeably. The term ‘disabled people’ is recognised by many within the disability rights movement to align with the social and human rights model of disability, as it is considered to acknowledge the fact that people with an impairment are disabled by barriers in the environment and society. However, we also recognise that others prefer the term “persons with disabilities” because of the inherent understanding in the term that they are first and foremost human beings entitled to human rights. This reflects the language used in the UNCRPD. Finally, we recognise that some people do not identify as being disabled.

Alternative Format

Copies of this document are available on the Waterways Ireland website and in paper format. Documentation will be made available on request in formats such as Easy Read, Braille, audio formats, large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

To request an alternative format, please contact us at:

Equality Unit, Corporate Services,
Waterways Ireland
2 Sligo Road
Enniskillen
Co Fermanagh
BT74 7JY

Tel: +44 (0)28 6632 3004

Email: informationrequest@waterwaysireland.org

You can also read and / or download this document from our website. Go to www.waterwaysireland.org

2. Background

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires Waterways Ireland to comply with two statutory duties: the Equality of Opportunity Duty and the Good Relations Duty.

- (1) A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:
 - a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
 - b) between men and women generally;
 - c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and
 - d) between persons with dependants and persons without
- (2) Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1), a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Waterways Ireland undertook an Audit of Inequalities to establish whether any of the above-mentioned Section 75 categories are or could be adversely affected or negatively impacted by the activities of Waterways Ireland and, where such inequalities were detected or suspected has developed this Action Plan to address them. While a lot of work has been done to promote equality and good relations, persistent inequalities will remain within our society.

As a North-South Body, it is also intended that delivery of the measures in this Action Plan will address the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014. This Public Sector Duty places a responsibility on all public sector bodies in Ireland to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of our employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by our policies and plans.

This Action Plan aims to reduce these inequalities through the identification and implementation of key strategic actions, with the aim of outcomes improving over time.

This Equality Action Plan 2023-2025 has been linked to the Waterways Ireland Corporate Plan 2023-2025 planning cycle.

Four themes have been identified:

1. Promote awareness of the Equality Agenda among Waterways Ireland staff.
2. Provide a working environment where employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect.
3. Attract, recruit and retain a diverse range of employees in a culture which celebrates equality, diversity and inclusion.
4. Deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to visitors to our property and waterways.

Actions are categorised according to the theme they contribute to. Each action includes a timescale for delivery, a performance indicator and the name of the department responsible for delivery.

We will also seek to promote good practice across the range of our policies and in respect of all equality categories. The Plan will build on existing equality work undertaken by Waterways Ireland and assist in meeting future equality requirements.

It is designed to be flexible and will be reviewed regularly, with the support of the Equality Commission. It is recognised that the timescale of the plan may have to be amended in response to other work priorities and available resources.

3. About Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland is one of six North-South Implementation Bodies, established under the British-Irish Agreement Act of 1999.

We are the cross-border navigational authority responsible for the management, maintenance, development, and restoration of almost 1,100 km of inland navigational waterways and over 600 km of Greenways and Blueways, principally for recreational purposes, comprising:

- Lower Bann Navigation
- Erne System
- Shannon-Erne Waterway
- Shannon Navigation
- Royal Canal
- Grand Canal
- Barrow Navigation
- Ulster Canal

In July 2007, it was agreed by the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) to include responsibility for the reconstruction of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones, and following restoration, its management, maintenance, and development, principally for recreational purposes to Waterways Ireland's remit.

Our Headquarters are in Enniskillen Co Fermanagh, with regional offices in Dublin, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co Leitrim, and Scarriff, Co Clare.

At an operational level, Waterways Ireland is responsible for a vast range of infrastructure assets including navigation channels, embankments, towpaths, adjoining lands, harbours, jetties, fishing stands, bridges, culverts, aqueducts, overflows, locks, sluices and lock houses along with buildings and archives.

Waterways Ireland's work programmes are critical to providing a safe and high-quality recreational environment for customers, whilst preserving the industrial and environmental heritage of the waterways for future generations.

Our Mission is to be the custodian of the inland navigations and collaborate to reimagine, maintain, develop, and promote them to sustain communities, environment, and heritage.

Our mission statement is: “Creating inspirational inland navigations and waterways experiences through conservation and sustainable development for the benefit of all.”

4. Key Equality Considerations

Waterways Ireland strives to fulfil its equality obligations as an employer and as a public body delivering a service to the public. Its service to the public is to manage, maintain and promote the inland navigable waterways principally for recreational use. Waterways Ireland, as a navigation authority, is therefore a provider of public space for outdoor recreation including boating, a wide range of water-based sports, walking and cycling. Whilst Waterways Ireland's remit covers 1,100 km of inland navigable waterways and 600 km of Greenways and Blueways, just 15% of its geographical remit on the inland navigable waterways is in Northern Ireland covering the Erne System in County Fermanagh and the Lower Bann from Lough Neagh to Coleraine.

Waterways Ireland has a total staff of 356¹, 89 of these are employed in Northern Ireland, 267 in Ireland.

Responsibility for the delivery of this Equality Action Plan lies with the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team. Day to day responsibility lies with the Corporate Services Section who will be responsible for the implementation of administrative arrangements to ensure that Waterways Ireland complies with its equality and good relations duties when carrying out its functions.

5. Monitoring and Review Process

The Action Plan will be monitored on a bi-annual basis by the Senior Management Team who will review progress in implementing previously agreed actions together with consideration of any new developments in the intervening period. Where appropriate, the Action Plan will be revised to reflect any new developments, consultations, the outcome of any new Equality Impact Assessments or any additional information not previously available.

Waterways Ireland will submit an Annual Review of Progress on Section 75 implementation to the Equality Commission and will report on developments and achievements in its annual report as required under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014

The collation of information on progress will allow for regular and ongoing review of the Action Plan to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to Waterways Ireland's functions. Any changes or amendments to the Action Plan will be reported to the Equality Commission.

¹ Headcount at 31/12/2022

6. EQUALITY ACTION PLAN 2023-2025

Themes

1. Promote awareness of the Equality Agenda among Waterways Ireland staff.
2. Provide a working environment where employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect.
3. Attract, recruit and retain a diverse range of employees in a culture which celebrates equality, diversity and inclusion.
4. Deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to visitors to our property and waterways.

1. Promote awareness of the Equality Agenda among Waterways Ireland staff

Ref	Actions	Performance Measure	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
1.	<p>Continue to deliver a suite of equality, good relations and diversity-awareness training to all staff including equality, diversity, disability.</p> <p>Provide enhanced training to key staff members to ensure integration of policies on disability, equality and inclusion into leadership management and other key roles within the organisation.</p>	<p>Number of staff that have received training.</p> <p>100% of Operational staff to include legislation, barriers, language/etiquette, challenging stereotypes</p> <p>100% of PTA staff complete refresher training annually</p> <p>100% of all new staff at induction</p>	<p>Staff have a robust understanding of equality and good relations and feel confident to apply relevant principles in practice.</p> <p>Integration of equality, good relations and public sector duties into all planning and decision-making processes</p>	<p>Q1 2023, 2024, 2025</p> <p>Q1 2023, 2024, 2025</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	HR / CS

Ref	Actions	Performance Measure	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
		Enhanced equality and public sector duty training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Management & Extended Leadership Teams (2023) • Corporate Services Equality team (2023) • Recruitment & selection panels (Priority HR 2023; Others 2024 & 2025) • Customer service – Reception and operations teams (2024) • Dignity at Work: Nominated Persons (2023) • Access auditors (2025) 		Q2, 2023 Q2 2023 Q3 2023, 2024 & 2025 2024 2023 2025	
2.	Appoint Equality ‘Champion’ to drive programme delivery	Delivery of Equality & Diversity Working Group Terms of Reference.	Successful delivery of Action Plan measures. Integration of equality duties into all planning and decision-making processes.	March 2023 Annual	CS WG

Ref	Actions	Performance Measure	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
3.	<p>Develop and incorporate equality and good relations actions for all aspects of the Body's work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek regular updates to capture work done and/or identify ongoing/persistent inequalities. • Monitor the number of complaints received in relation to equality / disability / good relations. • Ensure that Equality and Good Relations is embedded to all WI corporate documents 	<p>Review delivery of Action Plan measures at quarterly Equality & Diversity Working Group Meetings</p> <p>Register of Complaints.</p> <p>Positive images and content used in corporate publications, on social media and on our website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 collaborations per annum to create and capture positive imagery / content 	<p>Accessibility of Information and Services for staff and visitors to our facilities and waterways who experience information barriers.</p> <p>Integration of equality duties into all planning and decision-making processes.</p>	<p>Quarterly</p> <p>Annual</p> <p>2023-2025</p>	All
4.	<p>Create a calendar of events and awareness campaigns to celebrate diversity and inclusion across our workforce.</p>	<p>3 campaigns per annum.</p> <p>Increased opportunities for staff collaboration and participation</p>	<p>Increased awareness and celebration of diversity and inclusion.</p>	Ongoing	CS / WG / M&C

2. Provide a working environment where employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
5.	<p>Continue to provide a suite of workplace, work-life balance policies and entitlements and flexible working for staff in the organisation.</p> <p>Implementation and monitoring of Hybrid Working</p>	<p>Review of existing HR policies completed by end 2023,</p> <p>Monitoring of hybrid working across the organisation.</p> <p>All new policies developed as identified by HR “People Strategy” Review and in accordance with the Waterways Ireland Guidance on Policy Development Process and Equality Screening</p>	Workplace where staff feel valued and safe.	<p>Dec 2023</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	HR
6.	Review and develop the extent of the inclusion of equality responsibilities in performance reviews across all relevant staff.	<p>Introduction of new performance management system</p> <p>Review and inclusion of equality responsibilities, where relevant for relevant staff.</p>	Integration of equality duties into all planning and decision-making processes	<p>June 2023</p> <p>Q1 2024</p>	<p>HR</p> <p>HR / CS</p>

3. Attract, recruit and retain a diverse range of employees in a culture which celebrates equality, diversity and inclusion

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
7.	Undertake voluntary staff census to gather relevant information on equality categories covered by legislation.	Annual staff census 80% return of questionnaires from Northern Ireland workforce.	Accurate and up to date reflection of the equality groups within our workforce to inform statutory reporting, and to guide policy making	Q3 2023 2024 2025	HR
8.	<p>Develop entry to employment workforce actions within new HR “People Strategy for WI” to underpin detailed workforce planning across the organisation and include succession planning for key roles, eg engineers.</p> <p>Consider issues such as hard to recruit / retain posts and ways of effectively succession planning for future workforce needs.</p> <p>Positive targeting of under-represented groups through recruitment/promotion campaigns and engagement with representative groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disabled 	<p>Increased applications received for vacant posts identified by the HR Strategy for WI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women/Men in traditional work roles. Young people. People from Protestant community – 5% over the lifetime of Action Plan People from other racial groups – 3% over the lifetime of the Action Plan <p>Increased representation of people with a disability in the workforce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3% by December 2023 	<p>Robust understanding of our workforce and have identified and responded to areas for improvement.</p> <p>Effective succession planning for future workforce needs</p>	Ongoing	HR / CS

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racial group Protestant <p>Use of welcoming statements, where applicable.</p> <p>Engage with disability umbrella groups to promote recruitment opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.5% by December 2024 6% by December 2025 			
9.	<p>Seek to offer a range of work experience opportunities for young people, from a range of educational achievements and background.</p> <p>Raise awareness of WI jobs/skills through schools/colleges eg engineering, marketing/digital marketing, legal, HR, etc to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview skill training Student mentor programme Develop/run competition for students ie build a bridge / explore biodiversity/climate action within Waterways Ireland 	Engage 2 schools/colleges per annum, to include for example Transition Year students	Young people acquire skills and experience that will equip them to apply for positions.	2023 2024 2025	CS / WG

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to Support national programmes ie Engineers Week Support and engage female participation in STEM subjects 				

4. Deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to visitors to our property and waterways.

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
10.	<p>Continue to provide Education and Heritage/Environment programmes online with minimal or zero cost to the school or student, thereby removing cost or disability as a barrier to access or participation.</p> <p>Expand Education and Heritage Programmes to increase uptake by children with Special Educational Needs.</p>	<p>Increase in online educational, heritage and environment content.</p> <p>Engage with one SEN educational setting to deliver an education or Heritage/Environment programme per annum.</p>	Children living in poverty or with disability have access to educational programmes.	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>2023-2025</p>	<p>M&C / E&H</p> <p>M&C / E&H</p>

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
11.	<p>Continue to develop and work with strategic partners across Ireland to promote our facilities for engagement in recreational activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canoe Ireland • Rowing Ireland • Get Ireland Walking • CANI • Sport NI • Sport Ireland • Cara • NCBI c/o Vision Sports Ireland. <p>Identified target groups include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people • Women and girls • People with disabilities • Those living in areas of deprivation adjoining our waterways. 	<p>Number of programmes supported, providing opportunities for each of the identified target groups to participate in recreation /leisure.</p> <p>Target: 2 events per annum.</p>	<p>Increased visitor experience for those accessing WI facilities.</p> <p>Improved profile and understanding of our activities.</p> <p>Increased participation of under-represented groups on and along our waterways.</p> <p>Increase in number of applications to WI seeking approval for events targeting under-represented groups approval.</p>	2023-2025	WG
12.	<p>Increase Event / Awareness Programme in partnership with other government agencies, community groups, equality groups etc.</p>	<p>Establishment of at least one collaborative working group.</p>	<p>Partnerships to develop and increase opportunities for participation in leisure / recreation.</p>	Sept 2025	WG

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	Consult with Department of Communities and Equality Commission to explore the potential to create a NI wide collaborative Working Group amongst public bodies such as Councils and ourselves		Accessibility of Information and Services	Q2 2025	WG
13.	<p>Ensure the principles of Access for All and Universal Design are central to the design, upgrade and development of facilities on and along our waterways, where practical, that people with disabilities have equality of opportunity to access the recreational facilities provided by the organisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor accessibility of our buildings and facilities through Access Audits • Explore opportunities to create quiet /sensory space along our waterways 	<p>Compliance with best practice and legislation.</p> <p>3 Staff trained to undertake Access Auditing</p> <p>5 accessibility audits completed by end of Action Plan</p> <p>Completion of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shannon Greenway • Barrow Blueway • Grand Canal Greenway <p>Progress development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shannon-Erne Blueway • Royal Canal Greenway Phase 2 	<p>Facilities on and along our waterways which are designed and built, where applicable to the highest standards of accessibility for all to use and enjoy.</p> <p>Reduction in obstacles to participation in leisure / recreation</p> <p>Accessibility of the built environment for all.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Dec 2025</p> <p>Dec 2025</p> <p>Dec 2023</p> <p>Dec 2023</p> <p>Dec 2025</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	AM / TS / Ops

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage umbrella groups such as Irish Wheelchair Association <p>Consult with the public and invite stakeholder interest groups to help shape services on major capital works as appropriate to ensure views of equality groups form part of the decision-making process.</p>				
14.	<p>Ensure all third-party activity provider leases/agreements – include equality/disability clauses to ensure inclusivity.</p> <p>Collaborate with WI licensed providers to promote /encourage increased opportunities for equality groups experiencing obstacles to participation to take part.</p>	<p>Inclusion of appropriate clause in third party activity provider legal agreements</p> <p>Number of events run by third party licenced providers supported and/or promoted by WI per annum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support 2 events per annum. 	Obstacles to participation in leisure / recreation	<p>Q3 2023</p> <p>2023 2024 2025</p>	<p>P&L</p> <p>CS / WG</p>
15.	Review our user communications to make sure they are clear and easy to understand, meet the needs of all users, and are available in other languages and alternative formats.	Number of requests for information in alternative formats.	Creation of accessible communications, where applicable - written, spoken, digital and signed.	Annual	CS / M&C

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	Continue to analyse equality related complaints to identify emerging trends which will allow for targeted intervention to improve the service and support we provide our disabled users.	Number of complaints of equality/disability nature reported on Complaints Register.		Annual	CS / M&C
16.	<p>Develop an accessible information policy to highlight the organisation's commitment to communicating effectively with everyone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop opportunities to use alternative formats to communicate information for staff and public eg use of caption, audio description, sign language, training videos, Braille, large print; etc Explore the use of accessible public communication boards/signage incorporating pictogram images, Braille, tactile contrasting, illustrations systems, QR code, etc on 	<p>Website (under development) will be fully compliant with current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.</p> <p>2 promotional content (such as video, podcast or article) which include an alternative format of communication to raise awareness of the accessibility of Waterways Ireland facilities</p> <p>2 training content which include an alternative form of communication by end of Plan.</p>	Accessibility of Information and Services for staff and visitors to our facilities and waterways who experience information barriers.	<p>Dec 2023</p> <p>June 2024 June 2025</p> <p>June 2025</p>	CS / M&C / CEO

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	our facilities and at locations along our waterways.				
17.	Explore opportunities to promote the accessibility of Waterways Ireland's facilities in national advertising campaigns.	One dedicated national advertising campaign, with supporting stakeholders, showcasing the Accessibility of WI facilities/waterways	Wider audience showing accessibility of Information and Services for visitors to our facilities and waterways.	2025	M&C
18.	Develop links with advocacy and representative organisations to improve under representation in decision making processes across the equality groups.	1 service user consultative forum representative of equality groups North and South established	Improved opportunities for engagement with and influence policy makers Robust understanding of the needs of our users and stakeholder groups and have identified and responded to areas for improvement.	2025	CS
19.	Explore opportunities to source funding from other sources to support events, improved infrastructure.	Sources identified, where applicable Support / Funding Principles and Guidelines developed and approved by SMT Providers invited to apply for support funding.	Improved accessibility to information and services for visitors to our facilities and waterways.	2023 2024 2025	CS/I&D

Key to Function Lead abbreviations:

WG Equality & Diversity Working Group

HR Human Resources

E&H Environment & Heritage

I&D Innovation & Development

CEO Chief Executive's Office

Ops Operations

CS Corporate Services

TS Technical Services

M&C Marketing & Communications

P&L Property & Legal

AM Asset Management

FP Finance/Procurement