

Public Appointments Service

‘Features and services of the Public Appointments Service for customers with special needs’



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Public Appointments Service: Information for special needs customers

Contents	Page
Introduction	3.
Our Services	5.
Environmental Accessibility	6.
Customer safety	13.
Accessible testing and interview services	14.
Additional resources	21.
Conclusion and further information	22.

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Introduction

The Public Appointments Service is the primary recruitment service provider for government departments and certain state bodies. The Office is located in a modern building consisting of a ground floor and three additional floors above street level.

The Public Appointments Service is committed to providing a recruitment service that is accessible and user friendly to all its customers. In this context the Office is conscious that the attitudes of people towards those with disabilities can impact greatly on their quality of life. This can include how a person is treated by society, whether by individuals or organisations, both public and private, and the services accessible to them in their day-to-day lives.

The biggest obstacle facing people with disabilities is not necessarily the lack of ramps, signs or guide dogs, but the negative attitude which can come to the fore when approaching the concept of providing accessible services. If the attitude of individuals and organisations is open and positive, then the provision of accessible customer and environmental services becomes a natural part of individual and corporate thought. Conversely, negative attitudes can present the biggest barrier to people with disabilities in partaking fully in Irish society.

The Public Appointments Service recognises that disability is often seen in the context of providing services which address the physical needs of people. While this is an important aspect of accessibility, it is equally so that disability does not necessarily manifest itself in a physical way. Members of the public with dyslexia, colour blindness / limited sight, mental health issues or hearing impairment to mention a few are not so easily recognisable. As a result, accessible services are often thought of and addressed in the context of providing environmental remedies.

Public Appointments Service: Information for special needs customers

The Office through its experience of dealing with and providing services to a wide range of people with various individual needs, has, and continues to learn from its interaction with its customers. As part of our commitment to addressing the needs of customers with disabilities, we have compiled this information booklet to highlight the various aspects of our accessible recruitment service and the physical accessibility of the Office in general.



Our services:

The Public Appointments Service approaches accessibility of its office and services in a structured planned manner under the auspices of the Equality Monitoring Committee. The Office's implementation of customer services can be categorised into three primary areas as follows.

- Environmental Access;
- Accessible testing and interview services;
- Information Communication Technology.

The respective headings and associated services are outlined in detail overleaf.



Environmental Access:

A consultative planned approach.

The opportunity of designing and building our new Office in Abbey Street offered the organisation, in consultation with the architects and developer, a chance to address the accessibility of the Office from its inception. This involved not just the bricks and mortar of the building, but also the layout and internal fittings which were required to be user friendly to all users of the building irrespective of whether they were customers or staff. Outlined below are the core physical accessible features of the Office.

Environmental Access:

First Impressions: The Career Store.



Careers Store: A fully accessible walk-in store where the public can get information on vacancies, career opportunities and apply directly online for recruitment opportunities.

Accessible features:

- **Entrance:** the entrance to the Career Store is through clear glass doors. The glass doors are an important accessible feature. They allow people to



see each other before approaching the door, prevent accidents if a visually impaired person is using them and allows staff at reception to help a disabled / limited mobility person if they are having difficulty.

While this feature is a positive contribution to our accessibility approach, the Office is aware that there are shortcomings to manually operated doors.

- **Large open spaces:** An important aspect of the Career Store is the use of large open spaces. This ensures, for example, a user friendly environment for our wheelchair-using customers.
- **Strong colour contrast throughout the store:** This helps aid partially sighted / colour impaired persons to distinguish objects and permanent fittings. In addition there are no steps or weather mats which might obstruct the customer.

- **Varying height reception desk:** Both receptions in the Careers Store and first floor were designed and built to ensure maximum accessibility. Typical users would include wheelchair or smaller stature persons allowing access to writing surfaces and direct eye contact with staff.



- **Free moving chairs:** This allows for persons with a range of physical / medical impairments to select a seat suitable for their needs. For instance, persons with back problems often prefer a high chair, while wheelchair users often prefer a low seat for easy transfer.

- **Alarmed Accessible toilets:** The central alarm system notifies reception if a person gets into difficulties while using an accessible toilet and where an incident has occurred in the building. A siren and warning light is activated both at the location of the incident and the Careers Store. In order to ensure access can be gained to a person in difficulty, all accessible toilets are fitted with a lock which can be opened from the outside.



- **Hearing Loops:** Two systems are located in the Careers Store at ground level and another system is located at reception on the first floor. Appropriate signage is located at these points to alert persons who may wish to use the system.



- **Mobile Hearing Loop:**

A mobile hearing loop is provided to give staff and customers maximum flexibility and mobility in the Office. This lightweight unit is a stand alone wire free



system which members of staff can use while accompanying audio impaired customers about the building.

In addition, these units are on hand for example, to facilitate interviews, training, meetings and one-to-one testing (in-house or off-site).

- **Accessible signage:** The Office has installed an extensive bilingual way finding and information signage throughout the Office. The signage features colour contrast, tactile and Braille. In addition internationally recognised symbols and fonts are used to ensure consistency.



Around the building:

Many of the features outlined above are common to other parts of the building. Outlined below are a few additional examples:

- **Large open spaces:**

Each level of the building has large open lobbies and corridors which use natural light where possible to avoid shadows. The minimising of shadows allows persons with a visual impairment to distinguish objects. This is particularly important in staircases where shadows can obstruct a person's visual judgement of steps and possibly lead to injury.



- **Interview suites:**

Our interview suites are located on the first floor of the building. All suites, like our training and testing suites, have been designed and furnished to give maximum access to people with a range of individual needs. Use has been made of free moving furniture, colour contrast surfaces and natural light where possible. Fittings such as door handles have levers rather than knobs which allow for maximum dexterity use.



- **Special Needs Assessment Suite (DORAS):**

In early 2008 we introduced the concept of DORAS (*Disability Orientated Recruitment Assessment Service*). DORAS is both a practical and theoretical approach to meeting customers needs. DORAS now includes a full equipped special needs testing suite resourced with a variety of assistive tools and technologies. A two module disability equality training programme is also in place to ensure a continuing culture of assisting customers.



- **Accessible elevators:**

All three lifts in the Office are designed to be accessible to all our customers, taking into account visual, audio, mental and physical impairments. Features such as colour contrast call buttons, voice announcement, tactile



Public Appointments Service: Information for special needs customers

control panel, directional mirror, hand rails, non slip surface and time delayed / motion sensor doors are fitted (e.g. aids wheelchair users to reverse out).

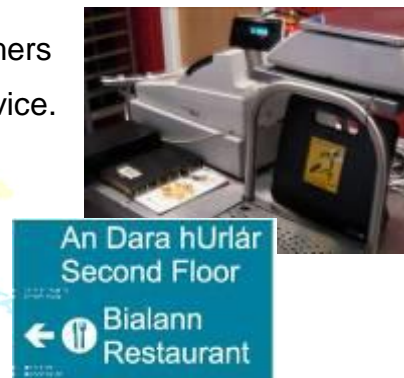
- **Staircase:**

The Office staircase which acts as an alternative access to the building has also been fitted with a number of accessible features. This includes tactile flooring, colour contrast steps and floor level indicator.



Office Restaurant:

- The office restaurant is available to customers while visiting the Public Appointments Service. The restaurant includes a number of accessible features including signage, free moving furniture, colour contrast fixtures and a T Loop at the pay station.



Customer safety:

Emergency procedures.

- The Office has a safety procedure and specialised equipment in place in the event of an emergency occurring in the building. This includes fire wardens who have been trained to ensure each area of responsibility is evacuated safely. A number of fire drills are carried out annually by the Office to ensure staff are familiar with the evacuation plan.
- In the event of an evacuation, all security doors automatically release. Persons such as wheelchair users are evacuated using Evac chairs (by consent) which are located throughout the building. Where a customer is visually impaired, a staff member acts as a designated buddy to ensure the safe evacuation of that individual.
- There are currently thirty eight members of staff who are trained in the use of the Evac chair in an appropriate and sensitive manner.



Accessible testing and interview services:

The Office, in consultation with representative organisations, researches and develops best practice in delivering customer services to persons' with disabilities.

As part of our ongoing identification of customers' needs, the Office introduced, in consultation with a wide range of representative bodies, the **"Equality Monitoring Form"** which each candidate is asked to complete in a voluntary capacity. This information is not used as part of the recruitment process but kept separately in order to monitor general trends and equality proof our services under the nine grounds of the Employment Equality Act (1998).

Ability not Disability: Assessing the customer's needs.

As a means of continuing to identify customers' individual needs, the Office has incorporated a **Special Needs Identification Form** into all recruitment application documents. The special needs form is in essence the Office's ears to what customers with special needs require to partake in the recruitment process in a fair manner. When a customer fills out this part of the form, the Office in turn endeavours to provide the service and/or equipment required by the applicant.

It should be noted that all the following services are provided both on and off site as the need arises (there can be an exception regarding assistive equipment). Outlined below are a number of services and accommodations offered to aid candidates during the recruitment process.

- **Staff Awareness:**

Our staff receive disability equality training through our DORAS programme (DORAS: *Disability Orientated Recruitment Assessment Service*). This is a two module in-house designed social model based training course. Module 1 has a particular focus on the principle of 'independent living' through which our staff interact with special needs customers prior to, during, and post recruitment drive (in addition to day to day enquiries).

The course also address the key issues of accessibility, the recruitment process, accommodations and customer service in PAS. The course includes mock interview role-plays between board members / staff and external persons with special needs, and subsequent feedback to participants.

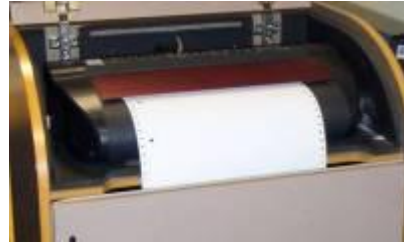
Module 2 focuses on training staff on the use of assistive technology including Jaws, Hal, Kurzwell, Duxbury and the production of alternative formats on request.

- **Sign language interpreter:**

The Office provides sign interpreters for testing and interviews if the customer wishes. Alternatively some customers avail of the mobile hearing loop unit or lip read. In relation to lip reading, staff are aware to speak slowly and clearly. This ensures that the customer lip reading clearly understands the directions / questions been asked.

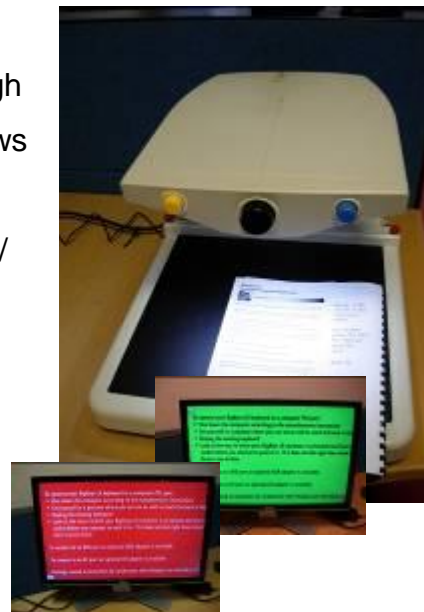
- **Braille:**

Where a customer identifies they have a visual impairment, the office can supply Braille versions of tests / assessment materials through its in-house Braille service.



- **CCTV:**

Our CCTV unit is linked to a 22inch High Resolution Flat Panel monitor and allows us to provide a number of accommodations. This includes image / text magnification, background colour contrasting, screen reduction and reading assist line.



- **OpticBook 3600© :**

The introduction of the OpticBook 3600 combined with Kurzweil software has been particularly beneficial to our Office in meeting the needs of customers with special needs. The systems ability to scan existing publications accurately and promptly has lead to greater response times in meeting our customers' needs.



- **Large print:**

Information and testing material can be provided in large print format of your choice.

- **Extra time for tests:**

Based on our own research and experience we are in a position to allocate extra time to candidates depending on their particular circumstances. Typical customers would include those who have dyslexia, limited mobility or medical conditions which require the customer to have rest periods during the assessment / interview.

In this case we generally ask for some further information to help us arrive at an appropriate allocation of time for the assessment/interview.

- **Larger desks:**

These are provided for persons who, for instance, have limited mobility or who are using Braille or large print documentation.

- **Assistance of a scribe:**

Some customers may suffer from limited mobility and in this case the Office will provide a scribe (trained member of staff) to write down the customer's answers on her/his behalf.

- **One-To-One testing:**

Customers with a mental health issue are offered one-to-one assessment in an environment that they are comfortable with. Examples may include persons with agoraphobia, claustrophobia or customers who experience severe stress during assessments which might affect their performance.

The emphasis on one-to-one testing is to remove any social or environmental fear the customer might experience during the assessment due to their disability.

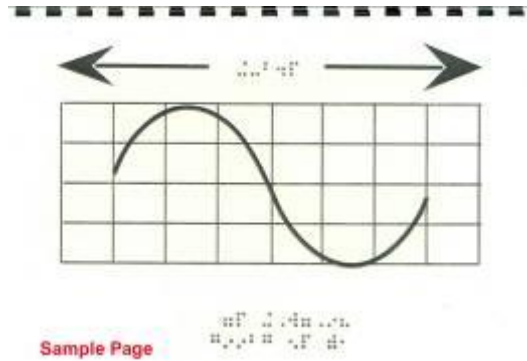
One-to-one testing is also provided in certain instances to facilitate candidates who for individual reasons are unable to attend the main assessments due to travel logistics, etc.

- **Colour contrast paper:**

Exam, interview and answer sheet papers can be provided with a variety of colour backgrounds which suit the customer's specific needs. Typically customers with dyslexia / limited colour vision avail of this service.

- **Embossing (Raised Line Diagrams):**

In 2007 the Office sourced and introduced embossed testing papers for the numerical reasoning test. Embossed papers allow visually impaired candidates to read diagrams / images.



- **Adaptive Technology:**

The Office has a variety of accessible PC mouse substitutes to include roller ball and joystick versions.



- **BigKeys Keyboard:**

A keyboard with larger than standards key/lettering for customer who may find it challenging to use a standard sized keyboard.



- **Voice packages:**

Electronic software such as JAWs , Kurzweil and Hal is provided for visually impaired persons who are familiar with this technology. Candidates have a choice between electronic or more traditional formats such as Braille.



- **ZoomText Magnifier**

ZoomText is a integrated magnification and screen reading software which is available to vision impaired customers using our computers.



Additional resources:

- **Access Handbook:**

The Access Handbook is a tool for all customers and staff, whether they have a disability or not. It is a customer way-finding guide to the Office's location, means of access, transport options, accessibility and emergency evacuation procedure. The information guide also outlines the functions and services of the Office.

- The Access Handbook covers a number of topics to include:
 - A description of the Office floor-by-floor and accessible features.
 - Emergency evacuation procedure and accompanying diagrams.
 - A detailed section on how to get to the Office from any part of the country including contact details and disabled services provided by a variety of transport companies such as Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus, Irish Rail, Dart and Luas. Included are network maps of each service.
- The Access Handbook has been evaluated by the National Disability Authority and a copy can be download from our website at:

<http://www.publicjobs.ie/en/about/findus.asp>

- **Website:**

Publicjobs.ie has been designed with accessibility and usability standards in mind. The Office is committed to ensuring Publicjobs.ie is a user-friendly portal for customers. Future developments coming online will greatly enhance the customer's experience.

Conclusion:

We are still listening; this is the mantra of the Public Appointments Service. Providing customer service to persons with special needs has been and continues to be a learning process. What is apparent is that listening to individual needs of customers and putting in place the tools they need to show their ability is the best approach.

In this context, the services we provide and environment we operate in, is continually under review as developments and trends emerge. In turn we strive where appropriate to incorporate what we have learnt into our corporate philosophy of access for all customers.

Further information:

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this booklet, the Public Appointments Service cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions and reserves the right to change the content of this publication at any time without prior notice.

If you have any observations which you would like to make about this publication or wish to have it provided in an alternative format, please contact the Access Officer:

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