

# E-LEARNING MODULE MAPS OUT DUTY TO PROMOTE EQUALITY

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission has developed an introductory eLearning module to help local authorities meet their statutory obligations to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of public sector staff and service users.

It is the State's responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and equality, in line with its international commitments. Local government is the main vehicle of public service in local communities across the country and plays a key role towards realisation of this responsibility.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (the Commission) continues to engage with local authorities as part of its statutory role and mandate to protect human rights, promote equality and build a culture of respect and intercultural understanding in Ireland.

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (the Duty), contained in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, has been part of Irish law since November 2014.

The Commission has developed an introductory eLearning module 'Equality and Human Rights in the Public Service' to support public sector staff across all grades and functions to meet their commitments to equality and human rights and their statutory obligations under Section 42.

## ASSESS, ADDRESS, REPORT

The Duty places a statutory obligation on public bodies including local authorities to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of public sector staff and service users.

It requires local authorities to: **Assess, Address and Report** – (1) Conduct an organisation wide assessment of equality and human rights issues and to set it out in their corporate plan; (2) develop policies, plans and actions to address these issues in their corporate plan; and (3) report annually on

progress and achievements in their annual report.

Local authorities should adopt an evidence-based approach, informed by equality data and targeted consultation with staff and service users, particularly those from minority groups to identify issues and actions and monitor progress.

In 2019, the Commission worked with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to include the Public Sector Duty in the 'Guidelines for Local Authorities in the preparation of Corporate Plans 2019-2024'.

While this inclusion led to the majority of local authorities referencing the Duty in their corporate plan, making reference to Duty is not compliance with the statutory obligation in Section 42.

## IMPLEMENTING THE DUTY

Implementing the Duty means local authorities are being proactive and not waiting until a problem or complaint arises before addressing it. This ensures that they comply with equality and human rights standards, which will contribute to improving the quality-of-service delivery and the experience of staff in the workplace. The Duty provides the framework to move towards a public service that is fair and accessible to a diversity of people.

According to the Commission, it is important to integrate the learning from Covid-19 to ensure inclusive policies and practices continue and are mainstreamed across the public service where no person gets left behind.



Sinéad Gibney IHREC Chief Commissioner pictured with Labour leader Ivana Bacik TD, Chair of the Oireachtas Gender Equality Committee, Leinster House, on 14 September 2022:

In a recent briefing to TDs and Senators in the Oireachtas, Sinéad Gibney, the Commission's Chief Commissioner, described the Duty in a quite simple way: "The Public Sector Duty is a positive duty, it is not merely about non-discrimination, but about positively promoting human rights and equality. Crucially, the Duty is not just about internal human resources or equality policies, but about how a public sector body engages in the world."

For further information visit [www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty](http://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty)



To access details on the eLearning module visit [www.ihrec.ie/elearning](http://www.ihrec.ie/elearning)