

## **BE REASONABLE: IT PAYS – BY NIALL CROWLEY, CEO, EQUALITY AUTHORITY**

Reasonable accommodation is about special treatment or making adjustments to enable people with disabilities to access a service or to perform to full capacity in their job. Reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities is now a legal requirement under both the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000. It is not a requirement if it gives rise to more than a nominal cost – a figure which will depend on the scale and resources of any particular organisation.

Making reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities is currently a particular focus in the work of the Equality Authority. We have sought to raise awareness about the concept. In partnership with the European Year of People with Disabilities we ran a television advertisement on the concept entitled “Be Reasonable – It Pays”. We are building a knowledge base on how to make reasonable accommodation. This year we published “Library Access” with the National Library Council on making reasonable accommodation for library users with disabilities and we are currently working on similar guidance for the banking sector with the Irish Bankers Federation. We have also sought to stimulate new practice in relation to reasonable accommodation. We are currently working with County Librarians in Mayo, Kildare, Dublin and Cavan to support pilot projects in this area.

Dialogue and consultation are at the heart of making reasonable accommodation. Dialogue with the individual employee with a disability or customers with a disability is required to identify needs and the adjustments or initiatives necessary on foot of these. Consultation with disability organisations will build a wider knowledge base in the organisation to cater for potential future employees and customers with disabilities. Wider communication and marketing strategies also need to communicate this commitment to people with disabilities and to making reasonable accommodation.

Auditing for access is another valuable foundation for reasonable accommodation. Auditing is about examining the workplace and work procedures to identify barriers to people with disabilities, examining the design and delivery services to identify barriers and exploring skills and knowledge already held by staff that would assist in making reasonable accommodation.

A third foundation is equality training. Training can build an awareness among staff about disability issues. It can challenge negative stereotypes and assumptions and build skills to communicate and relate effectively with colleagues and customers with disabilities. It can develop a knowledge and a skill base in the organisation to be effective in making reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities in all areas of the organisation.

These foundations should assist in building ambitious approaches to reasonable accommodation. This ambition should resource a society that currently disables to emerge as one that enables.