



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

**The
Autism Strategy
(2013 – 2020)**

Second Progress Report

2018

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Under the Autism Act (NI) 2011 (the Act), the Department of Health (DoH) has a statutory obligation to prepare, review and monitor the implementation of a cross-departmental strategy setting out how the needs of autistic people and their families are to be addressed throughout their lives. All Departments must cooperate with DoH in relation to the duties set out in the Act.
- 1.2 The Act also places a requirement on DoH to prepare a report on the implementation of the Strategy at intervals of no more than three years. This is the second progress report prepared on the current Autism Strategy (2013-2020) (the Strategy).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Strategy was published in 2014, together with an Action Plan covering the period from 2013 to 2016 (subsequently extended)¹. The Strategy contains 11 key themes, within which 16 strategic priorities are defined in relation to the future development and delivery of services for autistic people and their families and carers. These themes formed the basis of the Action Plan, which contained 34 cross-departmental actions.
- 2.2 The targets in the Action Plan were developed in partnership with autistic people and families, through a series of engagement events across Northern Ireland, including two pre-engagement events with children and young people in Belfast and Omagh. These two events were facilitated by some autism voluntary sector organisations with active participation from all Government Departments and relevant agencies.
- 2.3 An online questionnaire was used to gather the views of autistic people who were unable to participate in the engagement events, and the feedback from this helped to inform the structure and content of the draft Strategy and Action Plan, which was then subject to a formal public consultation.

¹ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/autism-strategy-and-action-plan>

- 2.4 Oversight of the implementation of the Action Plan was through the Autism Strategy Regional Multi-Agency Implementation Team (ASRMAIT), established to direct, co-ordinate and manage the implementation of the Action Plan on a cross-departmental strategic basis, with a membership drawn from a wide range of agencies, including health and social care, education, justice, employment and learning, and arts. This group was chaired by the Regional Autism Coordinator, who was based in the Health and Social Care Board.
- 2.5 The ASRMAIT reported to the Autism Strategy Inter-Departmental Senior Officials Group (ASISOG), chaired by DoH and made up of representatives from relevant Government Departments.
- 2.6 The first report on the implementation of the Strategy was laid before the Assembly in November 2015². It provided an assessment of the progress made towards implementing the Action Plan, and highlighted a range of achievements intended to improve the lives of autistic people, including for example:
- The provision of autism training for front line staff, education professionals, youth workers and parents of autistic children;
 - The development of 'One-Stop' Shops by the Northern and Belfast Health and Social Care Trusts for adults to obtain employment, careers and benefit advice;
 - Adjustments made to the theory and practical driving test;
 - The introduction of a free Access Travel Wallet to encourage autistic people to travel independently and with confidence on public transport;
 - The Assured Skills Project which helped participants with autism secure employment;
 - Tailored support offered to Further Education Colleges and Universities;
 - Improved support for those detained by police; and
 - The introduction of regular programmes by the Arts Council, Museums sector and the Inland Fisheries Group.

² <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/autism-strategy-2013-%E2%80%93-2020-action-plan-2013-%E2%80%93-2016-progress-report-september-2015>

2.7 The first progress report also signalled the unprecedented rise in demand for autism services, and the impact on waiting times across Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. From approximately 1,500 referrals in 2010, this had risen by two-thirds in 2014/15 to 2,489. The figures for 2017/18 show this trend continuing with the number of referrals increasing to 4,097.

3. REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN

3.1 To inform this second progress report, DoH reviewed the Action Plan published in 2014. A full summary of that review is set out at in the Annex to this report. Out of the 34 actions in the Action Plan, 32 of these were rated and agreed by ASISOG as green (fully or mostly achieved), and 2 were rated as amber (partially achieved).

3.2 While this is considered to be positive, this report cannot ignore the clear messages that have been conveyed by stakeholders to us since the publication of the first report, and indeed the issues relating to autism services that have given rise to considerable public concern during the same timeframe. These are outlined in more detail in this report in the sections below.

4. WHAT YOU HAVE TOLD US

4.1 The success or otherwise of any strategy/action plan should ultimately be judged on its outcomes – in this case essentially the extent to which it has made a tangible difference to the lives of autistic people and their families and carers. Key to assessing outcomes is of course hearing directly from people who either use or come into contact with services. Provided below are summaries of work undertaken/published reports that have provided us with important information/feedback since the first progress report.

Stakeholder Workshop

- 4.2 DoH held a workshop in April 2016 facilitated by the HSC Leadership Centre which was attended by 55 representatives from Departments, the health and social care sector, education sector and the voluntary and third sector as well as autistic people and carers. The objectives of the workshop were to share success stories to date, and begin the process of developing further actions for the next phase of cross-departmental working under the Strategy.
- 4.3 The workshop showcased a number of projects as examples of good practice and innovative partnership working involving a range of statutory and third sector organisations, in fields as diverse as education environment design, physical activity, work experience, training and employment, and integrated joined-up support services. There was, however, also concern expressed around the implementation of the current Strategy and Action Plan and in particular the need for much greater cross-departmental working to deliver real improvements for autistic people and their families and carers.
- 4.4 Specific issues raised included:
- The importance of translating awareness raising work into increased understanding of the challenges faced by people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD);
 - The need for more family support through short breaks;
 - The need for increased autism specific provision in mainstream schools;
 - The importance of effective arrangements to support transition from children to adult services; and
 - The appointment of an autism champion within justice services.

“Broken Promises” report

- 4.5 Further feedback on user experiences of autism services was contained in ‘Broken Promises’, a report of the results of a survey of parents and carers of autistic people, which was jointly published by the National Autistic Society (NI) and Autism NI just after the workshop referred to above in 2016.
- 4.6 The report drew on the results of a survey designed to find out more about the experiences, attitudes and opinions of autistic children and adults and their families and carers about support and services in Northern Ireland. A total of 425 people responded to the survey, with the majority of these (82%) from parents or carers of autistic people. Over four-fifths (84%) of the responses related to a child or children under the age of 17.
- 4.7 The report highlighted concerns around the involvement of autistic people and their families in developing services, waiting times for diagnostic services, support for carers, support for autistic people to access education and employment, and the provision of training and awareness raising in wider society.

10,000 Voices Initiative

- 4.8 To capture the experiences of people who have used Paediatric Autism and Child and Adolescent Health services, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) worked in partnership with the Public Health Agency (PHA) through the 10,000 Voices Initiative in 2016 to provide an opportunity for children, young people, parents, carers and staff to tell their story and produced a report setting out the key findings³.
- 4.9 The 10,000 Voices Initiative is designed to capture the lived experience of people who use services and affords an opportunity for people to tell their story in a way which enables services to identify those things which need to change

³ <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/10000-voices-regional-report-experience-paediatric-autism-and-camhs-project>

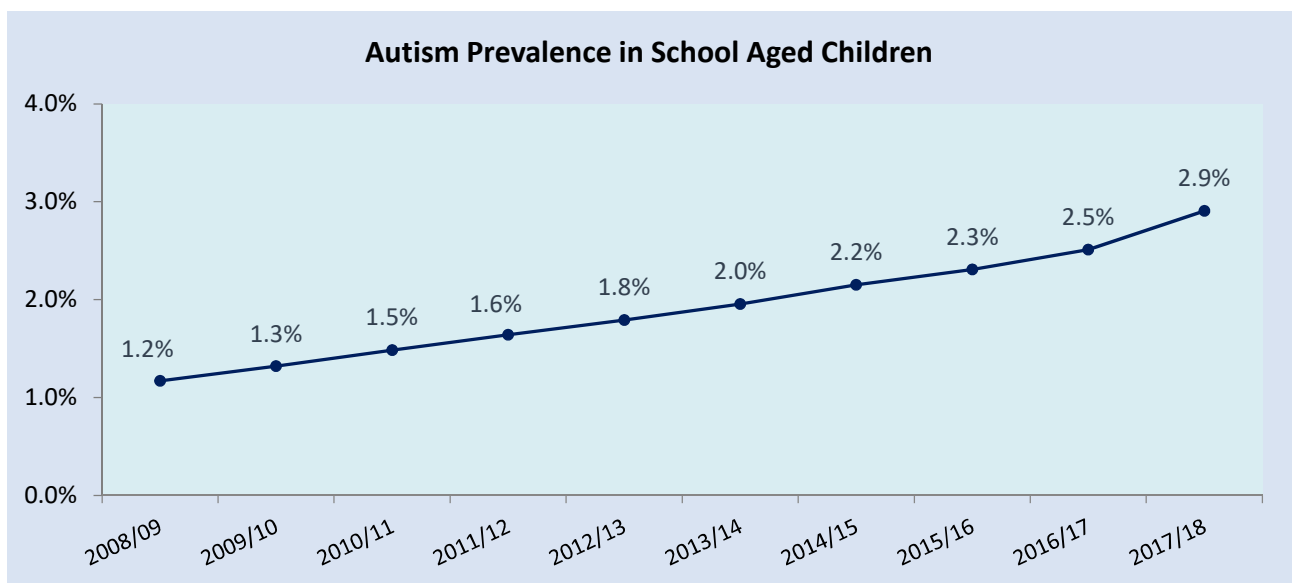
in order to improve outcomes and their experience of care. The initiative uses an evidenced based methodology called Sensemaker to capture both qualitative and quantitative information about people's experience. The quality indicators are co-designed and tested with people who have lived experience. Children, young people and their families were involved in developing the quality signifiers.

- 4.10 As part of this initiative, 456 families shared their story, of whom 217 (54%) had direct experience of autism services. While 60% of participants rated their experience as being either very good or good, there were some perceptions of being passed around the different parts of health, social care and education systems which was not found to be helpful or conducive to a joined up response to their individual or family needs. This was particularly evident when the young person had co-occurring neurodevelopmental, (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) & Autism), emotional, behavioural and mental health needs.
- 4.11 Others reported difficulties being experienced in schools and during school transitions, with insufficient support available in schools to enable smooth transitions. There was also a perceived lack of support for over 18s, particularly when their formal education came to an end, particularly for young people with significant sensory needs.
- 4.12 Participants also described some difficulties in gaining access to assessment and to early support while waiting for the outcome of their assessment. They experienced variation in the availability and scope of services across Northern Ireland, including contact points for support outside of regular working hours, and a general lack of personalised support to help young people realise their goals.
- 4.13 Along with the findings of the Broken Promises report and the workshop, this feedback has been carefully considered, and has informed the next steps contained within this second progress report. DoH is grateful to the National Autistic Society (NI) and Autism NI for their work in preparing the Broken

Promises report, and also to the HSCB/PHA and people who shared their experiences of living with autism through the 10,000 Voices Initiative.

5. WHAT WE HAVE DONE

5.1 The Department publishes a statistical bulletin each year on the prevalence of autism in school age children. Recent years have shown a steady year on year increase in autism prevalence rates in school age children in Northern Ireland. The most recent bulletin at the time of writing showed that, at the time of the school census in 2017/18, 2.9% of all children of compulsory school age here were identified as having Autism (including Asperger syndrome)⁴. This represents a significant rise from 1.2% in 2008/09.



Source: Northern Ireland School Census

Fig. 1: Autism prevalence in school age children in NI⁵

5.2 To better understand the reasons for this would require further research. One possible explanation might be the increase in societal awareness of autism, as

⁴ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/autism-statistics>

⁵ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/prevalence-autism-including-aspergers-syndrome-school-age-children-northern-ireland-2018>

would appear to be reflected in the rise in internet searches in Northern Ireland for autism and autism related items shown in the graph below. Broadly speaking, the graph indicates an increase of 51% in searches within Northern Ireland for autism and related terms between 2013/14 and 2017/18. Of note are the increased searches during April which may be related to awareness exercises associated with National Autism Day, World Autism Awareness Week and World Autism Awareness Month, all of which are held during that month.

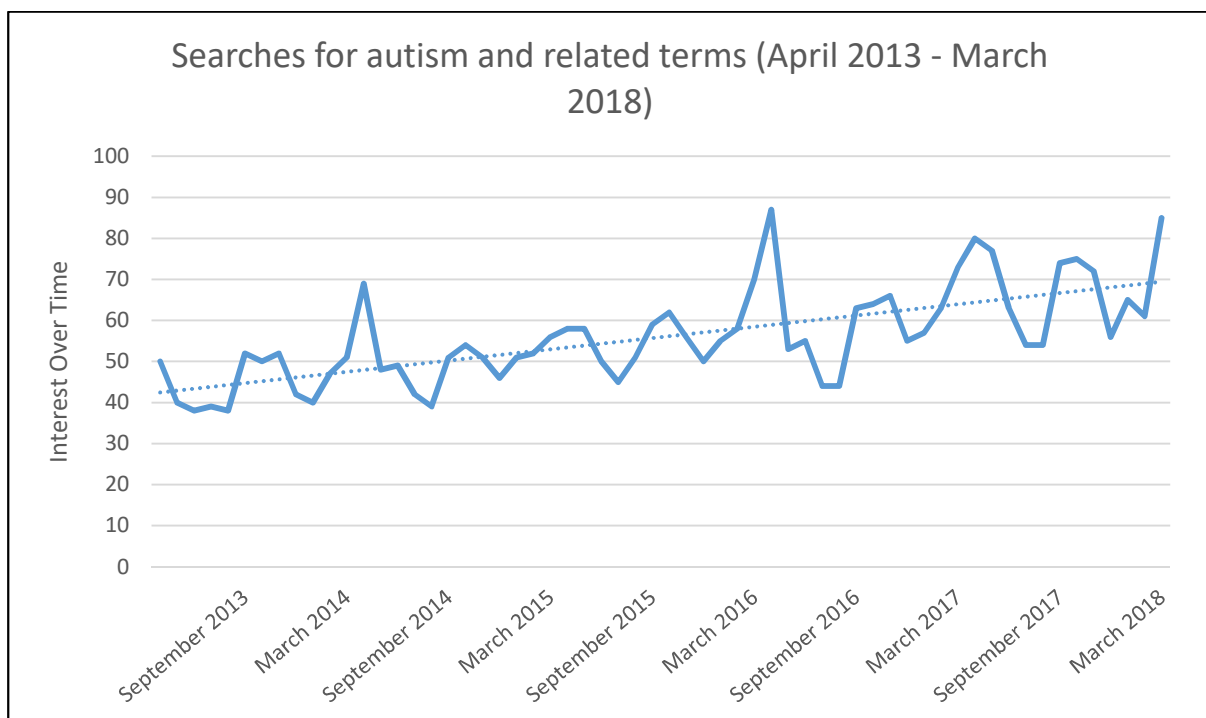


Fig 2: Internet searches for autism related terms in NI⁶

⁶ Source: Google Trends

Please note that the line does not represent the actual number of internet searches but reflects Interest Over Time.

Interest Over Time is defined as the search interest relative to the highest point for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term (based on a weekly search). A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means there was not enough data for this term. The above graph reflects monthly searches. Search terms include: Autism, ASD, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Asperger, Asperger's and Autistic.

Other search engines are available and these figures should be treated as indicative only.

- 5.3 While this increased awareness is a positive development, the knock-on effect on public expectation and consequently demand for services has been stark.
- 5.4 For example, in 2015/16, there was a 17% increase overall in demand for an autism assessment in children's services. The number of referrals received in that year – almost 3,000 in total – was double the number the current system is designed to deal with. Demand continues to grow with year on year increases of 14% in 2016/17 and 24% in 2017/18.
- 5.5 In 2017/18, the number of referrals – 4,097 in total – was close to three times the number the current system was designed to deal with. During the quarter ending 31 March 2018, 1,144 children had been referred for an autism assessment. This was an increase of 13% on the previous quarter (1,010) and an increase of 32% on the number of referrals received during the same quarter in 2017 (865).
- 5.6 A total of 2,265 children and young people were reported to be waiting for an assessment at 31 March 2018, an increase of 8% on those waiting for assessment at 31 March 2017 (2,091). However, over the same period there was a decrease of 7% in the numbers of children and young people waiting over 13 weeks for an assessment from 1,372 to 1,271.
- 5.7 The number of children waiting for specialised intervention following an autism assessment at 31 March 2018 was 762.
- 5.8 Ensuring that services are adequately positioned to cope with the rising demand has therefore been our key priority. To this end, in 2016, the then Minister for Health announced that an additional £2m was being invested recurrently in children's autism services to tackle the growing waiting list position. HSC Trusts have used this funding to enhance their capacity by employing additional staff, including psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, speech and language therapists, Autism intervention therapists, occupational therapists, paediatricians and administrative staff.

- 5.9 While, by the end of 2016/17, the Health and Social Care Board was reporting progress in terms of a reduction of 10% in the numbers waiting for an assessment regionally against the position at June 2016 despite an overall 14% increase in demand, it was nevertheless clear that, in order to secure sustainable improvements in outcomes for autistic children and their families, significant reform was required. It was in this context that the HSCB was commissioned by the Department to review children's autism services, the outcome of which has been the development of a new regional framework for the delivery of children and young people's emotional well-being, autism and ADHD services.
- 5.10 It is intended that this framework will form the basis of the next phase of cross-departmental working (see next steps section of this report), which also must take account of recent strategic developments in health and social care and beyond as outlined below.

6. WIDER STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS

- 6.1 Since the development of the Strategy and Action Plan in 2013, much has changed, both in terms of the strategic direction of health and social care services and wider Government policies and plans.
- 6.2 Following the Fresh Start agreement in 2015, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed a re-structuring of Government Departments, with a view to providing better co-ordinated and more efficient public services to the citizens of Northern Ireland. In practice, this meant a reduction from 12 to 9 in the number of Government Departments with effect from 9 May 2016 and a corresponding re-distribution of a range of Government functions, which had implications for the Action Plan.
- 6.3 The Northern Ireland Executive also agreed a draft Programme for Government (PfG) in 2016. This contained 14 strategic outcomes, which, taken together, provided a framework for addressing the big issues facing our society and making a difference to the things that matter most to people. A key feature of the

draft PfG is its dependence on collaborative working between organisations and groups, whether in the public, voluntary or private sectors.

- 6.4 From a health and social care perspective, there has been an emerging political consensus in recent years around a realisation that demographic changes and rising public expectations mean that the current funding requirements for services are unlikely to be sustainable in either the medium or long term.
- 6.5 'Systems, not Structures', the 2016 Report of the Expert Panel led by Professor Rafael Bengoa noted that we invest annually almost £4.6 billion, or 46%, of the entire Northern Ireland budget in providing health and social care services. Assuming costs rise as predicted, the report predicted that this requirement will double to more than £9 billion by 2026/27 simply to maintain the current system, which is clearly not sustainable given the many other public services needed by the population, many of which also impact significantly on health and wellbeing through provision of employment, education and housing.
- 6.6 In response to the Expert Panel's report, the then Minister set out in October 2016 an ambitious roadmap for reform of health and social care services in a 10 year vision 'Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together'. In line with the draft Programme for Government, this will see a move from a focus on action based targets to one based on patient outcomes and the co-production of services.
- 6.7 In parallel with this work, the report of the Expert Panel on Adult Care and Support was published in 2017. The 'Power to People' report recognised the potential for improved outcomes for individuals and savings to the system if expertise and need can be brought together in a well matched and timely fashion through a whole systems approach to facilitating joint working between service commissioners, health services and care providers which include a clear mechanism for involving people receiving services and their carers.

6.8 To support the vision for transformation of health and social care services outlined above, £200m is being invested under the funding arrangement provided for by the Confidence and Supply Agreement to transform the ways health and social care service are delivered, reduce health inequalities and improve access to services across the region. This additional investment has provided us with a unique opportunity to progress key actions which will enable change, including the finalisation and implementation of the new draft regional framework for children's autism services referred to already in paragraph 5.9 and in the next steps section of this report.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The first four years of the Strategy have seen much work taken forward across Government to improve the lives of autistic people and their families and carers. Initiatives have been introduced in the health and social care, education, training and employment, and justice sectors intended to improve the services and support available to autistic people to enable them to fulfil their potential and live full and active lives.

7.2 We have seen an increase in societal awareness of the different needs of autistic people, evidenced by a range of organisations, including cinemas, shops and supermarkets, hotels, libraries, hospitals, airports, museums and public transport providers making specific adjustments to meet the different needs of autistic people and their families.

7.3 Newcastle has been declared as the first autism friendly town in Northern Ireland, with the support of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. The first children's TV series to feature an autistic child in the starring role was developed with the help of funding from Department for the Economy (DfC) and was broadcast on national television in the UK and Ireland in 2017.

7.4 These are all positive developments, and point to a growing understanding and acceptance in broader society of the specific needs of autistic people.

7.5 The life of the Action Plan also coincided with a consistent rise in the autism prevalence rate in Northern Ireland, and a greater demand for support and help, which in turn has placed a significant strain on services. As already noted, in recognition of this, an additional £2m was allocated recurrently to HSC Trusts in 2016, bringing the total annual investment in autism services to around £6.5m.

7.6 It is clear, however, that more fundamental reform of how Trusts deliver their autism services is required to ensure that they are able to respond in a planned and effective manner to the increasing demand. This requirement for reform is not unique or confined to services for autistic people, but part of the wider realisation that health and social care services generally must come to terms with changing demographics and public expectations to ensure that they can continue to respond to people's needs in a manner that is effective and, importantly, sustainable into the future. It is also part of the overarching drive towards focusing on delivering better outcomes for people by working across departmental and sectoral boundaries in line with the ambitions set out in the draft Programme for Government and the NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan. It is in this context that the next steps outlined below are framed.

8. NEXT STEPS

8.1 It is intended that the new regional framework developed by the HSCB will underpin the next phase of cross-departmental working and, importantly, stakeholder engagement around the future of autism services. When finalised, the framework will require further engagement and consultation with all stakeholders, and will inform an agreed set of outcomes focussed actions for consideration by an incoming Minister and Executive. These will be developed on a co-production basis in line with the Department's commitment to involving all stakeholders and partner organisations, with a particular emphasis on the views of autistic people and their families and carers. To facilitate this work, a new role has been created within DoH.

ANNEX

REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN - SUMMARY

THEME 1 – AWARENESS

Strategic Priorities:

- (i) To work in partnership with representatives from all government departments to access a range of awareness training which will support the public and private sector in providing services to autistic people, their families and carers.*

- (ii) Increase awareness and understanding about autism among the general public with the aim of promoting positive attitudes towards autistic people.*

Northern Ireland Civil Service

- Within the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) a wide range of autism information and resources have been produced through the work of the Autism Strategy and Action Plan which include e-learning packages, videos demonstrating life for an autistic person, articles on departmental intranets and seminars to heighten awareness of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Government departments and Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) have made awareness training available to front line staff.

- The NICS training provider, the Centre for Applied Learning, secured an e-learning package developed by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust entitled 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder Awareness'. The training package has been available to all NICS staff since May 2016.

- In December 2018 the NICS announced that it would become a JAM Card friendly organisation. The JAM Card allows people with a learning disability, autism or a communication barrier to tell others they need 'Just a Minute (JAM)' discretely and easily.

- IT staff in the Department of Finance (DoF) received training in 2016 from Specialisterne, a specialist consultancy that recruits and supports talented people with ASD or communication difference in the workplace, as part of a leadership

programme and also as part of the recruitment process for panel members on a student placement competition. The sessions included how to interview applicants with social communication differences such as ASD. A total of 68 delegates from across the NICS were in attendance. Feedback was positive and indicated a greater understanding of people with ASD in creative sector roles and increased awareness of how behaviours at work may have different meanings for someone with ASD. Further sessions on managing and coaching employees who have a Social Communication Difference were delivered in 2018. Training was rolled out to 38 staff.

- In October 2018 Autism NI delivered autism awareness training to DoF Welfare Officers and Occupational Health Nurses. Feedback from training was positive and attendees stated an increase in knowledge to enable appropriate support for people with ASD.
- Whilst the Action Plan initially proposed a stand-alone awareness campaign, the Inter-Departmental Senior Officials Group agreed that resources should be targeted through NICS awareness initiatives and publicity with a particular focus on promoting events organised around autism awareness month in April each year.
- Increased provision of training and awareness to NICS staff has enabled staff to be better equipped to recognise and understand signs of ASD and the potential impact on individuals of environmental factors. Where possible, adjustments are made in accordance with individual needs. Greater awareness has also enabled staff to signpost people who have an ASD diagnosis, or suspected ASD, to appropriate services at an early stage.
- The NI Direct website provides information and signposting for people with disabilities on behalf of many government departments and according to Sitemorse ratings, used to gauge the performance with regards to accessibility and other aspects, is currently ranking 10th out of 205 UK Government websites.

The Health Conditions A-Z section includes a page on autism. The Department of Finance welcomes the opportunity to further expand citizen facing information.

Justice

- Northern Ireland Prison Service developed autism training to be delivered to all recruits as part of their training. Since 2014 a total of 450 members of Prison Service staff have received training. As a result staff within the Prison Service are better equipped to understand the impact that a prison environment may have on individuals who have ASD. During a committal process an individual will be assessed to identify difficulties in communicating, or for signs and symptoms of ASD and whether a diagnosis for autism is declared. Where concerns are identified a referral is made to both Healthcare and Psychology and adjustments can be made for the individual.
- Children with ASD who are in custody are assisted through the use of 'soft rooms' available at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre to provide a calming effect. Family evenings are arranged to enable parents of children in custody to be reassured of the care and treatment provided to their children.
- Autism awareness training was provided for the Probation Service of Northern Ireland by Autism NI; 85 Probation Officers have now been trained.
- The Department of Justice, alongside their Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), continue to share '*Autism: A Guide for Criminal Justice Professionals*' to raise awareness among staff.
- Increased judicial awareness has enabled individuals to be addressed in a sensitive manner if they come before the Court.
- Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) have delivered training within the Police College to student officers. The training course was designed by a trainer Constable who held appropriate qualifications to develop the course. Community

engagement evenings are held for student officers during the training programme with awareness sessions provided by advocacy groups. During this training the NOW Group attend to introduce students to the JAM Card initiative. Autism awareness is also provided to Custody Officers and Detention Officers during their training. The Autism Alert Card is displayed on the walls of the training room.

- PSNI also participate in Autism Awareness month using social media to promote events. Internal communication is promoted through Corporate Communications to remind officers and staff of the challenges that people with autism experience daily.
- PSNI Autism Support is an internal support group for employees who have caring responsibilities for autistic people. An internal autism community provide input to PSNI policy to ensure that autistic people are represented.

Education

- The Middletown Centre for Autism continues to improve parental awareness through training by increasing parents' knowledge of autism, how it impacts on their child and how to enable them to support their child's development. The Centre hosted international autism conferences in 2015 and 2017 designed to raise awareness of autism and provide advice and guidance to professionals and parents.
- The Centre has promoted World Autism Day by publishing two animated short films designed by Centre staff and produced professionally; the first of these films went viral within hours. A display of artwork postcards, produced by children with whom staff have been working, have also been published.
- In June 2016 the Department of Education afforded staff the opportunity to attend autism awareness sessions provided by the Centre; feedback was extremely positive.

- The Autism Advisory and Information Service (AAIS) in the Education Authority offers parent and teacher support to assist in meeting the individual needs and direct pupil intervention to students as required. A regional website for the Service has also been established.
- Since April 2015 school based autism awareness training has been provided to 6,127 frontline staff in schools within the Education Authority. In addition, autism awareness has been provided to cover 700 frontline staff from other organisations, including school transport, canteen staff and youth organisations. A total of 6,022 frontline staff have also availed of further in service training. The AAIS have supported school staff in the design of assemblies and in raising peer awareness and have also participated in community events and information days with local Health Trusts to promote ASD and provide signposting to services.

Infrastructure

- The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) through the 2015/16 Road Safety Grant Scheme provided funding to enable Parents Education as Autism Therapists (PEAT) to develop and provide a road safety teaching tool, accessible by parents, carers, teachers and community groups, to help children including those with autism and related disorders to improve their road safety.
- Translink have worked with the NOW Group on the JAM Card initiative to raise awareness of autism amongst their driving staff and to alert public transport staff that the card holder may require additional time in their interactions with them.

Economy

- In April 2018 the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland became a JAM Card friendly organisation. The Council offers training to staff to ensure that they are equipped to provide excellent customer service to people with learning difficulties and communication barriers, this includes autism.
- The President of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal organised training for 19 employment tribunal judges and 75 lay panel members on 'Handling vulnerable witness in the Tribunal setting to ensure a fair hearing for all parties'. This training was also adapted for approximately 40 administration staff from the Department for the Economy (DfE). Whilst training was not exclusively related to autism, a focus was given to ASD and the associated difficulties with communication.
- NI Screen awarded funding to Paper Owl Films Ltd who worked with writers, who have ASD, to produce 'PABLO' a ground breaking new children's TV series featuring a child who has autism in the starring role. The series had 52 episodes with live action and 2D animation and was broadcast on CBeebies and RTEjr from October 2017. The series tells the story of a five year old boy who has ASD and uses his creativity and magic crayon to invent an imaginary art world filled with animal characters which help him make sense of social situations and to process emotions. Additional funding for a second series was awarded in December 2018, it is hoped that production will begin early in 2019.
- 'Nobody Nowhere' is a documentary film also from Paper Owl Films Ltd about what it means to live a full life. When Donna Williams published the book in 1994 it became an international bestseller. Through footage filmed in the final months of her life Donna tells the story of her journey through autism, abuse and homelessness to becoming an advocate, artist and role model.
- Purple Finch Productions are working on a short film 'The Infinite Bond' which has been funded by the Department for the Economy. The film focuses on autism and was completed at the end of 2018. The Director conducted audio interviews with

a number of families who have children, grandchildren or siblings with autism. Actors were then brought on board to re-record their thoughts and words. Names and other identifying details are changed to protect their identity.

Health

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

- The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) offers observation sessions to Speech and Language Therapists working across Surestart and community clinics as well as special schools to support awareness training and identification of children with possible ASD. Trainee health visitors and junior doctors also observe ASD clinics. To increase awareness among professional staff, observation sessions are offered to psychiatrists and psychologists working within Mental Health and Gender Identity services.
- Provision of training in Surestart schemes has improved access and inclusion for preschool children with confirmed or suspected ASD with developmental progress highlighted as an outcome. Parents reported high levels of satisfaction regarding the supportive communication environments for their children and the ability to feel empowered with knowledge and skills to provide support.
- Partnerships with Surestart and the Solas charity in 2018 provided improved support in the community for pre-school children with or without an autism diagnosis. These relationships will continue to be built to ensure improved care and support for autistic children and their families.
- The BHSCT has provided bespoke training packages, coaching sessions and shadowing for staff working in Surestart programmes in Belfast supporting autistic children (both diagnosed and undiagnosed). This training was provided in 2017 to Glenbrook Surestart, Beechmount Butterflies and Alessie Shankill Nurture Programme. Specialist ASD training was provided in 2017 to 12 staff in the Trust's Primary Mental Health Team and also to 28 volunteers and staff in the Belfast Fighting Words Cross Community Programme. The Trust partnership with the Fighting Words campaign, a creative writing project, has enhanced the skills and

confidence of volunteers to further improve and increase the inclusion of school aged children with autism.

- Further sessions of training and awareness have also been provided to 80 health visitors; the Eating Disorder Team; a range of psychology professionals at Queens University Belfast; Belvoir ASD Parent Support Group on anxiety in autism and visuals; medical, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy staff on parent training sessions; and delivery of annual carers and staff workshops in participation of World Autism Awareness Day.
- Prior to Autism Awareness Week in 2018 the BHSCT held four art workshops for young people with autism, their families and carers. Young people and their parents were assisted in creating an original piece of art to be displayed at an Autism Art Gallery at The Arches Wellbeing and Treatment Centre from 26 March – 13 April 2018. The gallery not only raised awareness of autism but provided a platform for many talented artists to share their thoughts and ideas through art.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

- The Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT) is developing an ASD awareness DVD which has been developed through co-production with clinicians, young people and parents and will be delivered to the wider community.
- The SHSCT hold events each year to celebrate the achievements of young people. A summer festival, Halloween event and Christmas formal is held for those young people who would not normally attend their school formal. The Trust also worked with young people who had been socially isolated to form a band called 'On the Spectrum'. Through the awareness campaign the band perform most weeks and receive payment.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

- The Paediatric ASD service in the Northern Trust has developed its Parent Training programme to offer further specialist courses in relation to managing

difficulties that children and young people may experience as a result of ASD. The service has also delivered bespoke specialist ASD training packages to other health and social care providers within the Trust. This training has assisted people, who are working with people who have an ASD diagnosis, to be equipped with strategies to support them and improve potential to reach therapeutic outcomes.

- The Trust has also promoted ASD awareness through the opening of new clinic accommodation specifically modified to support autistic people and their families. This has benefited the service by increasing clinical capacity for appointments and providing a familiar building to attend with specialist equipment to meet their needs.

Agriculture and Environment

- The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) have provided autism factsheets to their staff and also provided awareness training to all frontline staff and to Brexit Programme staff. An autism awareness section is available on the DAERA intranet and is accessible to all staff.
- World Autism Week was promoted to staff via the Team Brief and Departmental intranet.
- Angling First, a charity supported through the angling events fund continues to provide taster sessions for a wide variety of groups which includes autistic children.
- Inland Fisheries attended a Disability Exhibition in both 2017 and 2018 to establish contacts and encourage further engagement.

THEME 2: ACCESSIBILITY

Strategic Priorities:

- (i) Eliminate the barriers that autistic people face in accessing the physical environment, transport, goods and services so that they can participate fully in all areas of life.*
- (ii) Increase the level of accessible/inclusive communications so that autistic people can access information as independently as possible.*

Autistic people can have difficulties with social interaction, social communication and social imagination. The Strategy and Action Plan sought to ensure that the most effective approaches and ways of helping an autistic person cope with these difficulties are adopted across a wide range of services. In order to achieve this the Action Plan focused on improving or eliminating the barriers that autistic people face in accessing the physical environment, transport, goods and services and increase the level of accessible and inclusive communications in order to access information as independently as possible.

Northern Ireland Civil Service

- The NICS provides information and signposting for people with disabilities on behalf of a number of governments and according to Sitemorse ratings, used to gauge performance regarding accessibility and other aspects, is currently ranking 10th out of 205 UK Government sites. The 'Health Conditions A-Z' includes a page on autism and the Department of Finance welcome the opportunity to expand further citizen facing information.

Infrastructure

- The Department for Infrastructure (Dfi) fund the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee to obtain advice on mobility issues that affect older people and people who have a disability. The current membership includes representatives, or relatives, of autistic people. Input from this Committee has resulted in a number of changes:
 - The Driver and Vehicle Agency now offer adjustments to the theory and practical tests for drivers to accommodate candidates with disabilities;
 - The Metro Bus Service Audio Visual (AV) Project involves the installation of an AV passenger information system on all bus services and at all bus stops on the Metro network; and
 - Increased awareness of the JAM Card has continued to contribute to improvements in accessibility for card holders.

- Dfi also provide a number of aids to independent travel. The 'Travel Safe Guide' was developed in conjunction with road safety officers, the police and people with a learning disability and is written in an easy to read style with accompanying photographs and provides the basics of how to stay safe when travelling independently. It was refreshed in 2014 following consultation with groups such as Autism NI and has been promoted widely on NI Direct and through posters at Translink stations and provision of copies in libraries.

- In developing the Glider service, Dfi and Translink worked in partnership with the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) to ensure that the views of people with disabilities were included in the design of the service from an early stage. This partnership led to a number of improvements being made to the design of the Glider's infrastructure, including its vehicles and halts. All Glider drivers undertook Transport for All Disability Equality training to ensure that frontline staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to better serve the needs of disabled customers.

- Translink, working in conjunction with the Department and IMTAC have produced a new 'Access to Glide' guide, which sets out a range of useful advice to assist

disabled people, including those with autism, when using the Glider service in Belfast. The guide presents useful information in a user friendly and inclusive way so that passengers are supported in considering what accessibility features are available in terms of vehicles, ticketing, passenger facilities and route information.

Education

- Work has been taken forward to increase collaboration between ASD services in the Health and Education sectors and improved signposting of services for children and young people. This has included provision of joint initial training of parents with children and young people who are newly diagnosed. The Autism Advisory and Information Service (AAIS) are now promoted on the regional Education Authority website.
- The AAIS provide information on advocacy services at parent training sessions, for example, signposting to the Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service and to Special Educational Needs Advice Centre.
- The Middletown Centre for Autism provides a research and information service and has invested in the development of online resources to make high quality advice and guidance more accessible to children, parents and educational professionals. A phone and e-mail advice service is also provided by the Centre.

Economy

- The Consumer Council Northern Ireland launched a factsheet 'Access to Air Travel Factsheet – Travelling with a child with Autism' in 2015. This was developed in conjunction with Autism NI and promoted through their networks and local media. The factsheet was updated in 2016 to include a case study from a parent who has a child with ASD, ADHD and dyspraxia.
- The Council carried out a site visit in 2016 at the City of Derry Airport to examine the special assistance services provided at the airport and how these could be

improved. The Council also attended Disability Action Exhibition events in 2016 and 2018 to promote awareness of air passenger rights, including passengers with autism.

- The Careers Service within the Department of the Economy is available to people in education, training, employment and to the unemployed. Professionally qualified careers advisors provide an impartial and professional service to people, including those with autism, to assist them in realising career aspirations and achieve their full potential in education, training or employment. Advisors can assist and inform autistic people, and their guardians, of accessibility to career pathway options and the associated support available. The Careers Service have produced a Learning Disability Resource to support advisors providing guidance to clients with a learning disability, this includes autism.
- Partnerships have been established with the five Regional Autism Co-ordinators within the Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that autistic people have access to careers services and that effective referral arrangements are in place.
- The Careers Service in Ballymena participates in a multi-agency service initiated by the Northern Adult Autism Service. The service is for people over the age of 16 with an autism diagnosis, and those who support them and are resident in the Northern Trust area. Through partnership working with the Department for Communities the service has established effective links and referral processes with Disability Action Employment Support Officers.
- As part of the recruitment process for applicants on to the Assured Skills Academy, additional time is provided through the 'Mindmill' recruitment process for applicants who declare they have a disability. For applicants who have advised that they have autism and who are called for interview to the Academy they are made aware of the Specialisterne Foundation.

Health

- All local Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT) provide a wide range of information through individual Trust websites and information sessions. With the exception of the South Eastern Trust, all now have One Stop Shops and links to this service are available on Trust websites.
- The Belfast Autism Advice Service 'One Stop Shop' has been running since 2015. This service provides people aged 16 years and over the opportunity to obtain advice on a wide range of social issues and support. The service is held on a weekly basis in Belfast Central Library.
- The South Eastern Trust have involved parents and young people in the production of a video which is delivered to other parents and carers during training events.
- The Northern Trust has partnered with the 'RAFT Service' project delivered by Autism NI which aims to build and strengthen relationships for families of children who are aged 12 and under with autism, in the Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey areas, by encouraging early childhood intervention through a programme of practical skills training, provision of training courses for parents and family member and support groups for family members in the community. Families referred to the RAFT Service will engage in a home-based programme for up to six weeks with the intention of providing family members with practical tools and support to manage their children's behaviours. Ongoing support is provided through support groups.
- The Trusts have a range of Advocacy services in place which are accessible and available to help maximise decision making and control for autistic people:
 - In the Southern and Western Trusts, advocacy services for adults are commissioned via Disability Action. Staff within the Adult ASD service provide advocacy for clients in their interactions with a variety of services.

- The Western Trust commissioned Cedar Right 4U One to One project which advocates for clients and families when interacting with services and can also support clients to do this for themselves.
- The Southern Trust are currently engaged with an independent family advocacy service and parent support group on 'Getting Our Voices Heard' project. The aim of this project is to develop a shared vision for improvement of the service experiences of people who have autism and ADHD.
- The Northern Trust extended family or family support workers may accompany parents to core ASD training workshops to support parents whilst learning more about ASD and how they can support their child. The Trust also has a contract with Autism NI to offer family support home visits following an ASD diagnosis. This service provides help and support and, if appropriate, signposts to relevant services and support groups. When adults receive a diagnosis of ASD they are offered the opportunity to attend Post Diagnostic Information Groups accompanied by a carer who may advocate for the adult if required.
- The Belfast Trust have allowed family support workers, carers and extended family to accompany parents to core workshops to support parents in learning about their child's diagnosis. Parents who have difficulty participating in a group session are offered one to one sessions to learn about ASD. Autism NI and the Trust have been offering a home visit from an Autism NI Resource Officer to provide post-diagnosis support while families are waiting to avail of the Trust's core workshops. The informal meeting provides support and signposting to relevant services and support groups and provides information on benefit and grant entitlement.
- The Belfast Trust Speech and Language Therapists will also encourage family support workers, carers and/or extended family to attend ASD assessment and intervention appointments to provide support. Home

appointments can be arranged if these are more suitable as some people may have difficulty coping with a clinic environment or a new environment.

Justice

- Information is now more readily available to people with ASD who come into contact with the Criminal Justice System. Information on statutory Trust services, such as referral process and intervention pathways, is made available to individuals through consultation with staff and the Probation Board Psychology Department. Clients and their families are signposted to services offered by Autism NI and Autism Initiatives.
- PSNI have initiated a referral mechanism with 'Active Listening' a community registered charity who provide support with face to face confidential listening and signposting to adults deemed in need of additional support beyond the Criminal Justice System. Whilst not specific to autism, this service is aimed at providing support to potentially vulnerable people within local communities.
- In collaboration with a range of statutory partners, PSNI initiated Support Hubs in order to provide early intervention and support for individuals in crisis. There are currently four hubs in operation: Derry City and Strabane, Antrim and Newtownabbey, Causeway Coast and Glens, Mid and East Antrim. Plans are being advanced for further roll out. Whilst not specific to autism, the purpose of the hub is to focus on people with mental health problems.
- The Registered Intermediary Scheme was introduced in the Justice sector involving the use of registered intermediaries who are communication specialists to assist vulnerable victims, witnesses, defendants or suspects with significant communication deficits to communicate their answers more effectively during police interview and when giving evidence at trial.
- Advocates are also available within the Youth Justice Agency to raise concerns about the needs of individual children; these are recorded and appropriately

actioned. This is important especially for a child who may have arrived in custody and not disclosed (or indeed may not know) they have ASD requirements.

- The Northern Ireland Prison Service use a range of advocacy service including Start 360, Adept, the Chaplains, Prisoner/Student Development Units, Healthcare, Learning and Skills, Safety and Support and the Independent Monitoring Board. Issues are raised and escalated between all of these services as appropriate.
- In conjunction with the Department of Finance, the Department of Justice is considering recommendations which have been made by the Law Commission's with regard to the handling of vulnerable witnesses in civil proceedings. The Commission has made a series of recommendations which are designed to help vulnerable witnesses, including those with autism, to give evidence. Work has commenced on a recommendation relating to the voice of the child and vulnerable adults, however implementation will require the input of Ministers and, potentially, legislation.

THEME 3: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Strategic Priority

- (i) Ensure that children and young people with autism and their families have access to effective and appropriate support, where required, to help them with the everyday challenges of family life.*

Education

- In Health and Education, ASD services work in partnership to ensure the need of children are met and appropriate support is provided within the school setting. Multi-agency meetings to consider diagnostic outcomes with case planning meetings for children who have complex conditions are convened as required when detailed planning regarding a multi-agency approach is required.
- The Autism Advisory and Information Service provide intervention services to include parent and teacher training and, where required, individual pupil support for autistic children.

Health

- Health Trusts offer a Carer's Assessment based upon assessment of need to all families when a child receives a diagnosis of autism, with family support opportunities and onward referrals made as required.
- There are now well established links between ASD and Family Support Hubs where services can be accessed. The Children's ASD teams work closely with community, voluntary and statutory providers to enhance working practices.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

- The Western Trust work in partnership with the Cedar Foundation to deliver a family education project to assist families who are caring for a child under 12 years with ASD to improve community opportunity for their children and to build capacity and resilience within the whole family, referrals are made directly from the Trust. The project commenced in April 2015 and is funded for 5 years employing 3 staff based in Enniskillen, Omagh and Derry to deliver a range of family intervention programmes to thirty families at a time. Services include:
 - At home family support to enable families to acquire the skills to manage and understand the family member with ASD;
 - Family Peer Support sessions allowing families to come together to learn; and
 - Monthly activity programmes to provide individual families to allow parents to have a break from care.
- The Western Trust also has a contract with Positive Futures to provide family support to children and young people with autism.
- Small grants are issued to the community and voluntary sector for a range of activities and family support interventions for autistic children.
- The Avalon residential short break facility, within the Western Trust, has enabled those children and young people who have been assessed as requiring residential short breaks to access the service. There are also a number of children, young people and adults being supported with care packages via the family support panel.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

- The South Eastern Trust have developed a robust Single Point of Entry process to co-ordinate referrals for assessment and intervention and to direct children and

families to the most appropriate service to meet their needs and improve access to family support and intervention.

- The Trust also has a contract with Barnardo's to provide home based intervention and support. Representatives from third sector organisations participate in parent training sessions which enable parents and carers to link directly with these organisations providing support. The Trust has also established links with the YMCA, Patrician Youth Club and the National Autism Society to provide social opportunities for young people.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

- The Northern Trust provides intervention programmes to support children and young people with autism and their families. Post diagnostic support is offered to all families once a diagnosis of autism is confirmed by the Trust. Parents and carers are offered a post diagnostic follow up clinic appointment with an ASD therapist when an assessment of need is undertaken to determine the difficulties the young person is experiencing in relation to their diagnosis and discuss any concerns with parents and carers. Initial autism specific advice is provided and a tailored intervention package is developed, if required, based on need at this appointment. The service currently offers a number of intervention programmes, for example:
 - Parents and carers education programmes;
 - Specialist training seminars on specific topics;
 - Individual assessments with the young person to draft a joint action plan;
and
 - Language and social skills groups to develop social use of language.

The intervention service has received positive feedback and the Trust are currently engaged in an outcome measures project to ensure the support provided meets the needs of young people and their families.

- The Trust also delivers 'About Me' in conjunction with the National Autistic Society; a one to one time limited intervention package suitable for those aged 10 years and over.
- The Trust has joint working arrangements in place with the Education Authority to deliver joint training sessions for education staff. Education Authority staff also provide training on transition to nursery school and from nursery to primary school as part of the parent education programme. Joint working arrangements are in place with regional colleges to provide training to young people and their families on education support for young people over 16 years.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

- The Belfast Trust have a central point of referral for all new referrals and offer core workshops as an initial point of contact. This allows families to have quick access to a professional who can suggest strategies early in their child's journey and triage all internal referrals on a fortnightly basis so that children don't wait longer than 2 weeks for a discussion by the multi-disciplinary/multi-agency team, once needs are highlighted and referred to the Family Hub, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Social Services. Families are provided with a Carer's Assessment Leaflet at their initial appointment and signposted to relevant services and support groups in the local community. The Trust also currently fund the Cedar Right 4U ☺ Service, the Barnardo's Forward Steps programme and SENSations support.
- The Trust offers a range of tailor made interventions for pre-school autistic children, with or without diagnosis. Where appropriate, Trust staff continue to provide direct sessions in the child's private day care setting to support the child and ensure a child's placement is maintained. A range of supportive programmes is offered tailored to meet individual children's needs within their home and educational environment. Programmes can be clinic, school or home based.

- Trust staff working in the Mencap Children's Centre make a significant contribution to supporting the development of ASD services within the voluntary sector. The staff have worked alongside Mencap staff to facilitate and deliver a range of parent training programmes and provide in-service staff training on supporting autistic children in the centre.
- Parent workshops on puberty are also run by the Trust to assist parents in supporting young people with ASD to understand and manage the changes in their bodies and will refer young people to the Promoting Positive Friendships Group run by Cedar. In response to concerns about the lack of opportunity for their children to have access to community groups or clubs, a summer and autumn holiday scheme was established for young people with ASD and their families.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

- Within the Southern Trust, based on assessed need, families are offered a carers' assessment at the initial point of contact and these are reviewed in line with local policies and procedures. All families, both pre and post diagnostic, are allocated a key worker as a central point of contact.

THEME 4: HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Strategic Priorities

- (i) Promote the physical, psychological, emotional and social health and wellbeing of people living with autism and their families and carers.*
- (ii) Enhance the commissioning and provision of health and social care services of people living with autism throughout their lives.*

Health

The Health and Social Care Trusts offer a range of health and wellbeing programmes available to autistic people.

All Trusts have established a single point of entry for access for diagnostic assessment for children's services. This ensures that intervention and assessment needs are identified at point of referral with appropriate services put in place reducing the need for multiple referrals.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

- All families within the Southern Trust can access the service for assessment and intervention within 13 weeks.
- A health improvement nurse specialist develops health and wellbeing programmes for children, young people and adults and uses a health needs assessment to signpost or refer individuals to specialist services appropriate to their needs. A range of bespoke programmes for young people including walking groups, selfcare groups, refresh groups, sleep assessment and counselling intervention has also been developed. Young people can access the health and wellbeing service at any time without a diagnosis and are supported to continue with the intervention.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

- Existing service provision across both children's and adult ASD services in the Western Trust has been reviewed and aligned to ensure that most effective use of resources available. The Avalon residential short break facility now enables children and young people who have been assessed as requiring residential short breaks to access the service.
- Referrals are accepted for diagnostic assessment from health professionals who must provide evidence that the person being referred requires specialist assessment for ASD. The Trust has a single point of entry for all queries regarding ASD assessment in adulthood. Depending on the person being assessed the service may or may not seek additional or supporting information from their GP and other health services and may draw on previous assessments. For diagnostic assessment the adult service follows guidance laid down within the Northern Ireland Adult ASD Care Pathway and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidance GC142. Observation, specialist assessment, self-report and corroborative information are sought.
- A service improvement initiative has reduced the number of appointment slots required in the ASD diagnostic process thus increasing capacity as well as improving the experience of families.
- Children's diagnostic assessment processes are multi-disciplinary and adhere to NICE Guidance. This involves consideration of the child's development history, a child assessment and other assessments or observations as required. All relevant professionals liaise closely and information is obtained from educational settings to add to the assessment process. On completion a diagnostic summary is completed for all children and copies provided to health, education, parents and carers. The Trust is undertaking a service improvement initiative in relation to the diagnostic assessment process.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

- The South Eastern Trust, in partnership with the Family Planning Association delivers health and wellbeing programmes to teenagers with a diagnosis of ASD. In addition the Trust is developing anxiety and emotional regulation groups for young people and offer a range of parent workshops on issues such as sleep, eating and anxiety.
- In partnership with third sector organisations, the Trust has also developed social opportunities for young people and adults to support their emotional health and wellbeing. The Trust regularly circulates information from their Health Development department signposting parents and carers to community based initiatives.
- The Single Point of Entry within the Trust ensures that young people have access to the full range of health and wellbeing services appropriate to their needs, including Primary Health, CAMHS and the Family Support Hub.
- The Trust's Adult ASD Service is designed to deliver to the Adult Autism Care Pathway, referrals are made via GP's, or other health care professionals, to the autism service. Additional information is requested, if necessary, to evidence the impact of concerns relating to autism on the daily functioning of the adult concerned. The team is multi-disciplinary, including psychologists and occupational therapists. The Trust has undertaken a waiting list initiative and has significantly reduced the waiting time for adult diagnostic assessment. An ongoing process to improve access to support and intervention services for adults across the Adult Directorate has also been established. Individual and group intervention is provided for adults and a contract is in place with a third sector organisation to provide support and intervention for adults with an ASD diagnosis and their families and carers.
- The Adult ASD Service offers emotional regulation training to adults with an ASD diagnosis and is engaged with the Ulster University in a project aimed at improving the physical health needs of adults with an ASD diagnosis.

- The Trust is currently implementing a Neurodevelopmental Model moving from a linear assessment and intervention model to an integrated one. Intervention services are being remodelled so that parents of young people undergoing assessment can avail of parent workshops which were previously only accessible post diagnosis. The findings of the 10,000 Voices Report were used to design this service.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

- Within the Northern Trust a parent training session on Teenlife assists parents with information on puberty and provides advice and understanding in order to support their young person through this life stage.
- The Recovery College provide health and wellbeing programmes which are available to autistic people. An individual with learned experience of ASD and staff within the Trust co-facilitate a workshop to the Recovery College on 'making sense of feelings'.
- Evaluations completed from parent training sessions within the Trust have reported positive outcomes.
- In addition the Northern Trust Paediatric ASD Service engaged in an innovative project to adopt new diagnostic criteria (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5) to diagnose ASD in paediatrics and to provide a safer diagnosis for children and young people in line with current research. This has paved the way for a better understanding of ASD, as a condition, for families, professionals and within education. Many parents and carers have reported that the diagnostic criteria is more helpful in assisting them to understand their young person's diagnosis. The diagnostic criteria takes the person's views and functioning ability into consideration, promoting a holistic assessment and person centred approach.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

- The Belfast Trust has developed a highly specialist parent training programme for parents of young people with the most severe social and communication difficulties. This programme is offered to suitable families before formal diagnosis and supports parents to develop early social interactions with their children. The programme runs 4 times per year providing parents with an opportunity to meet with other parents who have children with the same level of needs.
- A specialist group intervention programme was run in 2018 with the aim of improving a range of skills including social communication, attention, language and cognitive perceptual skills and fine and gross motor skills. The Programme ran over a three month period and was offered to pre-school children with or without diagnosis. Parents attended all sessions to observe the intervention and were provided with home programme activities to support their child's development. All pre-school diagnosed children are automatically prioritised for support within Children's Autism Intervention Service and those most in need are provided with a place in a pre-school programme.
- Multi-disciplinary core workshops are provided to the parents of all children with a new diagnosis, this ensures as a first step in the service to enable them to support their child at home from the first appointment.
- In 2017 additional staff were recruited to the Trust to deliver early intervention training to professionals, including family support hubs and health visitors as well as evidence based parenting programmes and one to one intervention with families.

THEME 5: EDUCATION

Strategic Priority

- *Ensure that autistic children and young people receive a high quality education that prepares them for life and work and enables them to fulfil their potential.*

Education

- The Education Authority's Autism Advisory and Information Service (AAIS) provide training, advice and support to mainstream and special schools and to Learning Support Centres. Provision has been made for specialist autism specific classes in some mainstream schools and a high level of AAIS support is available in such provision. The AAIS provides effective support and advice to parents. Parent or carer consultation is provided, on parental request, at all stages of the Code of Practice for children and young people who have an ASD diagnosis or are waiting assessment. During pupil support, contact is maintained with parents and, in some cases, home based support is provided. AAIS has provided a high level of training to parents often in partnership with the local Trust. Since April 2015 over 3,000 parents have availed of training delivered by AAIS.
- The AAIS is instrumental in capacity building of frontline staff in schools and youth services. Since April 2015, AAIS has delivered autism awareness training to over 6,120 frontline staff in school and to over 710 frontline staff from other organisations including transport services and youth organisations. In the same time period AAIS has also delivered further in-service training to over 6,020 school staff including Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, teachers and classroom assistants.
- For pupils who are at least Stage 3 of the Code of Practice, AAIS provide structured and focused direct intervention, working in partnership with school staff and the pupil. The Education Authority Youth Service has availed of training, advice and support with regard to supporting pupils with ASD in youth clubs and activities. AAIS advocates multi-disciplinary working and partners in collaboration

with other Education Authority services and with external agencies to meet the holistic needs of each child and young person with ASD.

Middletown Centre for Autism

- Middletown Centre for Autism assists referred children and young people with autism to maximise the benefit from the current education placement through:
 - Provision of a trans-disciplinary assessment by the Learning Support and Assessment Service, currently in Ireland, for up to 66 children per annum; and
 - Development and implementation of a Learning Support Plan which will be reflected in a revised Educational Plan for the child or young person.

- The number of parents and professionals who were offered and accessed the Centre’s training programmes between April 2015 and May 2017 is set out in the table below:

	Parent	Professionals
Training places offered	7,209	13,966
Training places taken	3,167	11,038

- In addition, from April 2015 to May 2018 the Centre provided individual support on a one to one basis for 96 children, while 1,309 children with autism in the referred child’s school received group support through whole school training, the development of an autism competent environment in the school and also access to new resources.

- The Centre currently produces an extensive range of online learning material, resources and courses. Second level support is delivered to parents in Northern Ireland and second level specialist support services are delivered to front line professionals who work in education with children and young people who have autism.

- Feedback from training provided by the Centre has stated that 79% of parents have found the training beneficial and over two thirds of parents felt that they had acquired new information. Positive feedback has also been received from professionals.

Health

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

- The Southern Trust works in partnership with the AAIS and provides intervention services to include parent and teacher training and, where required, individual pupil support for autistic children.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

- The Western Trust convenes multi-agency meetings with the Education Authority when necessary and, when involved, Middletown staff to ensure a collaborative approach to a child's care and a smooth transition between services.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

- The AAIS co-deliver parent training and workshops with South Eastern Trust staff six times per year. The Trust will be introducing Care Planning appointments for each child undergoing diagnostic assessment and it is intended that education staff will be in attendance to promote joined up intervention and support. The Trust also provide signposting advice for parents to organisations who can provide support regarding educational issues.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

- Staff from the Northern Trust attend and contribute to multi-disciplinary meetings in respect of service users which may include staff from education.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

- The Belfast Trust provide training, advice and direct support into the educational placement of the child. The Trust actively liaises with school staff to ensure the strategies and support mechanisms developed are implemented as far as possible across all environments and offer sessions in the child's playgroup and nursery school. Shadowing and coaching in implementing communication and play supports is an inherent part of the Speech and Language Therapy treatment programme. Detailed written care plans of advice are provided. Educational Psychologists attend Child Development Clinics across the Trust so effective planning regarding a child's educational needs can be arranged.

THEME 6: TRANSITIONS

Strategic Priority:

- *Transform the process of transitions for autistic people so that a co-ordinated approach is adopted in planning and providing for transitional needs, programmes and supports for autistic people across their lifetime.*

Health

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

- The Belfast Trust provide key workshops for each of transition stage for parents. The Key workshops include Social Communication Workshops, a Behaviour and Anxiety Workshop, a Puberty and Managing Difficult Emotions Workshop. Key contracts for these stages are held with third sector organisations including Barnardos, SENSations and Cedar.
- The Trust has also refreshed the Belfast Multi-Agency Steering Group to include stakeholders from education and training who are involved in transition.
- The Child Development Speech and Language Therapy/Glenbrook Little Learners support young autistic children's transition to nursery school. With support from Speech and Language Therapy, Surestart staff now develop Communication Passports for all children leaving the Little Learners programme. Staff also arrange for teachers to visit the programme.
- The Child Development Speech and Language Therapists involved in specialist Surestart programmes (Beechmount Surestart) will follow the children from the Surestart and provide advice and support to the child as they start nursery school.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

- Children, young people and their parent or carer in the Southern Trust have a named key contact within the service. All cases are discussed within the multi-disciplinary team and this focus is held with all interventions. CAMHS, paediatrics, and the children with a disability team all work collaboratively on transition arrangements, based on assessed need.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

- In the Western Trust area children and adult services work together to make transitions function as seamlessly as possible. However, the less extensive range of support available in adult services can sometimes mean that immediate access cannot always be offered.

THEME 7: EMPLOYABILITY

Strategic Priorities

- *Increase the number of autistic people entering all levels of employment and safeguard the rights of those autistic people already in work.*
- *Increase the opportunities for autistic people to attain skills and qualifications through access to appropriate training and lifelong learning opportunities.*

Northern Ireland Civil Service

- The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) work experience programme for people with disabilities was piloted in 2016 and has become a permanent work placement scheme. Through this scheme the Department of Finance has worked with various disability organisations, including Action Mental Health and the NOW Group to agree a number of placements in government departments for individuals who have ASD as well as those with other disabilities. Information regarding the scheme and an application form are available on the NICS Recruitment website, and the scheme is open for applications all year round.

Economy

- The Department for the Economy (DfE) introduced a number of initiatives to support access to post-secondary education for autistic people, including “Reach Higher”, the DfE higher education awareness raising campaign which involved TV, Press, outdoor multi format and digital advertising. The aim was to raise awareness of the potential value and accessibility of higher education in particular to those groups who are currently under-represented, including students with disabilities, learning difficulties and autism. The campaign literature and posters promoted the NI Direct website as a single point of access to a wide range of information relating to higher education. This included information on routes into higher education, choosing a University, how to apply to higher education and the financial support available to students, including Disabled Students Allowances which cover the extra costs of any support the student may require throughout

their course as a direct result of their disability, mental health condition, or specific learning difficulty. Although this campaign has now come to an end, the information remains accessible on the NI Direct Website.

- Higher education providers who levy charges in excess of the basic level tuition fee are required to have in place a Widening Access and Participation Plan approved by the Department for the Economy. These plans are produced annually and include information on what the institution plans to do to:
 - (i) encourage students from disadvantaged backgrounds including students with disabilities and learning difficulties to apply or enrol on its courses; and
 - (ii) support these students to progress through their course and achieve a successful outcome.

- In addition, Further Education Colleges and Universities carry out a disability needs assessment on each higher education student who presents with autism. This is an assessment of the support needs of the student including their specialist equipment requirements and non-medical support provider needs. Based on the medical evidence provided by the student as part of the needs assessment, institutions will put in place a package of support measures and will make reasonable adjustments to allow students with learning difficulties or disabilities access to provision. There is a Register of Support Providers at both Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. The Register is a unique service which provides one to one personal support to disabled students registered on recognised higher education courses at any of the colleges or universities in Northern Ireland. The Register maintains and develops a resource of freelance professional and non-professional support providers, who act in specialist roles to support disabled students. The support providers include audio-typists, note-takers, dyslexia coaches, study skills mentors, sign language interpreters and campus assistants. Students on the autism spectrum are supported effectively through widening participation and individual assessments of need. Reasonable adjustments are made as necessary.

- Further Education Colleges provide additional support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including those with autism. The additional support is designed to assist students in meeting their goals in education, progression to employment, training or towards independent living. It can include specialist software and one to one support in the classroom. This support is available in mainstream classes but there are also separate classes specifically designed for students who need to be in a more supported environment because of their learning difficulties or disabilities.
- The European Social Fund (ESF) has funded 24 projects in Call 1 focused on the disability sector, with a further 24 planned in Call 2. As of 31 December 2017, 3,814 participants were enrolled in Call 1 disability projects, with a further 10,931 targeted for enrolment in Call 2 disability projects.
- Given the availability of Widening Access and Participation Plans and the range of support available at Higher Education Institutions and Further Education Colleges, there is now clear information available to autistic people and their families should they be considering Higher Education. The support mechanisms were available in the past, however, people should now be more aware of them, making Higher Education more accessible.

Communities

- In relation to support for employment, the Department for Communities (DFC) provides a range of programmes and services, all of which are available to people with disabilities, including those on the autism spectrum.
- Steps 2 Success is the Department's main employment programme which has the primary aim of helping eligible benefit recipients find and sustain work. Over the past year, the Department has been focused on increasing the number of people with disabilities on the programme by promoting Steps 2 Success to those customers claiming Employment and Support Allowance and encourages others

with significant barriers to work to avail of the programme at an early stage. All participants on Steps 2 Success receive individually tailored support to help them overcome any barriers they face entering employment. More specifically, the Department provides a comprehensive package of support measures, aimed at helping people with a full range of disabilities, including ASD to progress towards, move into and sustain paid employment. For people with disabilities who obtain employment, or for those in work and who are struggling to remain so, the Department manages the very successful Workable (NI), Access to Work (NI) and conditional management programmes.

- The Workable (NI) programme, which is delivered by specialist disability organisations, is currently supporting 837 disabled people in employment across a full range of occupations and sectors, of which 107 have an ASD.
- Access to Work (NI) is a flexible programme designed to overcome employment related obstacles faced by people with disabilities. The programme helps people with disabilities that need support, to start work or to stay in their job. During 2017/18 the programme supported 1037 disabled people in paid employment including 152 new clients. Currently 15 autistic people are being supported on the programme.
- The Condition Management Programme is delivered by health and social care professionals in the five Health and Social Care Trusts. The programme utilises health professional expertise and support to help the individual client to progress towards, move into or return to paid employment. It is currently supporting 215 people, 4 with autism.
- The Work First initiative aims to build on relationships to enhance the transition between colleges' vocational programmes for young people with disabilities. This provides a link between students who are seeking to enter the labour market and employers by sourcing work placements and progressing into paid employment

using support available through disability organisations and programmes such as Workable and Access to Work.

- Work Psychology Services provide an employment assessment service to the Department's customers who have health and disability barriers to employment. The employment assessment is aimed at helping customers identify the impact of their condition, their strengths and abilities for work or training. Employment assessments can be accessed through Employment Advisers in the local Jobcentre or Jobs & Benefits Offices.
- Many of the 17 disability projects that the DfC currently match funds, through the European Social Fund, are aimed specifically at people with a learning disability or difficulty, as well as people on the autistic spectrum. These projects provide employability and vocational skills training and accredited qualifications. They also provide work placements for the project participants and then support those who are ready to move into paid employment during their time on the ESF programme. Many are supported in their place of work through the aforementioned Workable programme.
- As well as the range of health and employment programmes on offer, the Department has implemented a Work and Wellbeing Service across the Jobs and Benefits Office network in Northern Ireland. The aim of this service is to improve the timing, nature and depth of DfC's engagement with people with health conditions and disabilities, including autism. To do this people with a health condition or disability are being invited into DfC offices at an earlier stage in their claim for benefit for a Health and Work Conversation.
- The DfC Senior Occupational Psychologist sits on the Belfast Multi-Agency ASD Steering Group. This provides opportunity to share information across agencies and assist adults with a diagnosis of autism to transition into preparation for work programmes and employment.

- The support provided through DfC's employment programme promotes independence, social inclusion, increases confidence and empowers individuals with an ASD to reach their full potential in the workplace.

THEME 8: INDEPENDENCE, CHOICE AND CONTROL

Strategic Priority

- *Increase the level of choice, control and freedom that autistic people have in their daily lives.*

Education

- In the education sector, life skills training is a core focus of training across the ages, and includes capacity building in schools and with parents in preparing young people for independent living, focused life skills training in Special Schools and life skills awareness training provided to parents and pupils. Training has been provided for the adolescent age group through the development of collaborative training with the Education Authority, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Occupational Therapy.
- The Education Authority's Autism Advisory and Information Service delivers a five-week capacity-building course for parents: - *"Life Skills Course for Parents of Year 10 pupils with ASD"* and bespoke life skills training is provided to pupils on individual or small group basis. The Middletown Centre also delivers life skill sessions for parents and teachers. As part of the Department for Education's (DE) policy for youth work, an inclusion team will be providing a welcoming strategy for Education Authority youth workers to implement within their youth clubs which will include young people with autism. Inclusion funding applicants have successfully bid to provide a range of programmes for young people with autism across Northern Ireland.

Health

- All Trusts now have mechanisms in place to ensure information on appropriate services is available and shared, and individuals and families are signposted to suitable services and opportunities to access guidance on Autism Spectrum

conditions, health and wellbeing, education, employment and learning, careers advice, social security benefits, local community groups and activities, housing issues, and carers support.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

- The Southern Trust provide life skills training through third sector partners. The Trust have seen an increase in direct payments and personalised budgets for individuals living with autism. This is based on assessed need following a carers assessment.
- The Southern Trust have worked in partnership with third sector partners on a lottery proposal to develop a social enterprise with young people. This proposal was developed following consultation with young people and after holding an employability consultation. The Trust are working to establish a coffee dock and arts co-operative where young people can attend and source information on jobs, benefits, housing, transport etc. The Trust also hold a quarterly ASD confederation and this information is shared with young people.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

- Within the Western Trust adult services regular carers assessments are offered. Carers' cash grants have been used to support carers. In keeping with the Northern Ireland Adult ASD Care Pathway, information and support is provided to carers and this can also be requested as required. The Cedar commissioned service also provides some short breaks in the summer with the aim of assisting carers. Self-directed Support packages have also been used to support carers in their caring role. With regard to independence and independent living options, adults with ASD who experience significant co-morbid challenges can access the range of services available within intellectual disability or Mental Health services, such as supported housing options. People with ASD but no significant co-morbid conditions who require independent living facilities are managed on a case by case basis. Services available include use of Supporting People funding and self-directed support options can also be considered. The Trust also offers the

Western Adult Autism Advice Service (WAAAS) who work with other statutory agencies, for example housing and social security, to provide information on independence for young people over 16, adults and carers. In addition, the Trusts internal and commissioned services engender a recovery model ethos of attempting to assist clients to develop independence skills, social, occupationally, educationally and relationally.

- The Western Adult Autism Advice Service 'One Stop Shop' was officially launched in October 2016 (the service has been running since 2015). The events are held quarterly in different locations in libraries across the Trust area.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

- The South Eastern Trust's Adult Service provides life skills training for adults with a diagnosis, with a view to enhancing their independence skills. Work is ongoing with the Recovery College, which offers educational courses about mental health and recovery designed to increase knowledge and skills and promote self-management in relation to this with courses being co-designed and co-delivered by Trust staff and autistic people. The Trust also has a contract with the Cedar Foundation which offers support to autistic people in developing independence skills and opportunities. The Trust continues to seek opportunities to develop alliances and partnerships with community based organisations such as Autonomie, to highlight the needs of adults with ASD and ensure support services are accessible to them. Services are provided across the Adult Directorate to adults with autism and co-morbid conditions – mental health and intellectual disability; these include care management and direct payments. The Trust has in place an ongoing process to improve access to support and intervention services for adults with ASD across the Adult Directorate and will seek to access additional funding to develop adult services.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

- In the Northern Trust, carer's assessments are offered within the adult ASD service, along with applications for Carer's cash grants. Information is also

provided about direct payments as required. The Northern Adult Autism Advice Service (NAAAS) also provides opportunity for individuals with ASD and their families to receive advice and support to help with independence in terms of education, employment, benefits, health and wellbeing. The Adult ASD Service, and commissioned work from National Autistic Society, promotes the development of daily living skills, education, day opportunities, employability skills, social skills, social integration and help recognising and managing emotions.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

- The Belfast Adult Autism Advice Service 'One Stop Shop' has been running since 2015. This service provides people aged 16 years and over the opportunity to access advice and guidance on: ASD conditions, health and wellbeing, education, employment and learning, careers advice, social security benefits' local community groups and activities, housing and support for carers. The service is held on Tuesday from 1.30 – 4.30pm each week in Belfast Central Library.

THEME 9: ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Strategic Priority

- *Ensure that autistic people are treated equally by the law have access to justice and can live safely in their own community.*

Justice

- The NI Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS) has made available a range of information about the criminal justice process and autism awareness in criminal justice organisations; this has been promoted both internally and externally. The NICTS website includes information on attendance at courts, paying fines, appealing a sentence, jury service and the work of the tribunals. NICTS complies with Youth Court Guidelines which are compatible with recognised standards for the best interests of the child, a children's version is also available. Victim Charter cards and information are available at all court venues to inform victims that there are rights in terms of their information, their requirements, support available and how to complain throughout their involvement with the criminal justice process.
- Within the Youth Justice Agency, on admission to Woodlands care is taken to assess children's emotional, physical and mental health needs. Additionally, access to children's medical and educational records are sought to better inform need assessments.
- The publication "Autism: A guide for criminal justice professionals" has been made available to criminal justice practitioners. This provides background information about ASD and aims to assist professionals in the criminal justice system who may come into contact with autistic people. This is particularly relevant to police officers, solicitors, barristers, the Public Prosecution Service, the judiciary and the courts. The publication has also been used to promote awareness of autism in criminal justice organisations.

- The new five year strategy and subsequent action plans have given rise to a range of improved services for victims and witnesses, assisting a wide range of people (including those with autism). Key actions taken forward include the publication of Victim and Witness Charters (setting out their entitlements as they move through the criminal justice system), the establishment of a Victim and Witness Care Unit (providing victims and witnesses with a single point of contact from the decision to prosecute) and the introduction of Registered Intermediaries (communications specialists who assist those with significant communication difficulties to give evidence to the police and at court).
- The 'Achieving Best Evidence' guidance for practitioners is currently being revised and will make reference to interviewing autistic people. Under the Victim Charter, the police will carry out an assessment to consider what help and support an individual may need to give evidence. The Victim and Witness Care Unit will carry out a needs assessment, at prosecution stage, to identify any support or potential eligibility for special measures that may help victims and witnesses to give their best evidence; this includes autistic people.
- A range of leaflets are available providing information on the criminal justice process. A Victim of Crime leaflet is also available where a crime has been committed. This sets out what victims can expect from key service providers at key stages of the criminal justice process. An 'Autism Alert Card' was developed through partnership with the Police Service Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue and Youth Justice Agency. This enables the holder to identify themselves as having an ASD, and provides an emergency contact that can be called if necessary.
- An assessment tool in the form of a 'Vulnerability Risk Assessment Matrix' has been introduced by PSNI and is used when dealing with victims of crime. This tool will pick up on the needs of autistic people and will enable relevant support and safeguarding measures to be set in place.

- A PSNI document provides guidance on the various aspects of the Criminal Justice process, this is available on the PSNI internal intranet. This document provides clear guidance on practical issues such as interview room ambience and guidelines for communication.
- Within the Justice sector, autistic people and their families can now be better informed about victims' rights and standards, and about how child defendants are treated in the court system. Following assessment in a residential settings, teachers, nurses and social care staff will adjust care plans and treatment interventions to take account of autistic conditions.
- Awareness of autism has been increased amongst Criminal Justice system practitioners, with a range of new services introduced in recent years, to the benefit of a wide range of victims and witnesses of crime, including those with autism. Around 13% of requests for Registered Intermediaries, or 270 cases, since 2013 have involved autistic people, enabling cases to progress that may not otherwise have proceeded. Assessments are undertaken to support individuals to give evidence, including the provision of special measures at court. More information is available on the services that can be provided, as well as improved services, for victims and witnesses of crime.
- The Probation Board NI (PBNI) have made all staff aware of the 'Autism: a guide for Criminal Justice Professionals for Working with ASD', which is readily accessible on the staff intranet. PBNI had four trained trainers to develop in-house autism awareness training to be delivered as required.
- The PBNI have explored the use of ASD screening tools in consultation with Health and Social Care Trust ASD services and have opted to refer those suspected of ASD to Trust services for a comprehensive assessment of need. Staff refer people they suspect may have ASD or with a diagnosis to the PBNI Psychology Department to signpost or further assess. Autism Awareness cards provided by Autism NI have been provided in several PBNI offices.

THEME 10: BEING PART OF THE COMMUNITY

Strategic Priority

- *Improve access to sport, arts, leisure and other cultural activities so that autistic people can be part of the community.*

Communities

- Supporting autistic people and their families in the community is important for their livelihood and independence. Interacting with others by participating in sporting events or joining a local club can improve self-esteem and confidence. The Department for Communities, along with its Arm's Length Bodies, have established a range of social activities to date designed to improve participation of autistic people.

National Museums Northern Ireland

- Museums are inspiring places for children to visit. National Museums NI (NMNI) understand that public outings with children who have ASD can be challenging. By working with families who have children with ASD, NMNI has created some useful guides on each of its sites, designed to help them make the most of their visit. These guides assist families to prepare for their visit before they arrive, provide information on quiet times to visit, have free admission for someone with a disability and a carer, allocate quiet spaces and additional resources such as ear muffs.
- During the planning stage of NMNI's Dippy on Tour exhibition in the Ulster Museum, four autism friendly sessions were designed for the first Sunday of every month. These sessions allowed visitors to explore the Dippy on Tour exhibition in a calm, relaxed atmosphere at one of our four closed quiet sessions. These early morning experiences were specifically designed for visitors requiring modifications to the sensory inputs and outputs within the exhibition. Sessions were attended by 360 visitors.

- As a result of the success and uptake of the Autism friendly sessions, NMNI has committed to offering a similar service during the Tim Peake space craft tour at the Ulster Transport Museum taking place from February to May 2019.

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

- The Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (AOP) provides therapeutic placements for three people, all of whom have learning disabilities and/or complex needs including ASD. The AOP also regularly have school group bookings with autistic children and work with their leaders to meet the individual needs of the children through use of brighter lights, lower sound levels and personal attention in workshop areas.
- In July 2018 AOP held a Heroes and Legends Event with over 1,500 people in attendance over two days. The AOP was able to facilitate an autism group from Armagh who required a quiet room away from the crowd to experience the event. The children were able to meet characters and enjoy the interaction whilst feeling comfortable and safe.

Libraries NI

- Since 2017 Libraries NI has provided 79 activities for adults and children who have autism and their carers; 413 people have participated. The activities included storytelling, craft sessions, Lego, mindfulness, information roadshows and school visits to libraries and reading groups for adults.
- Information sessions, held by Autism NI have been attended by 144 staff from across the organisation and one manager has attended a two day Autism Workshop and has since been designated Autism Champion for the organisation.
- A total of 6,152 books which dealt with supporting autistic people were loaned between April 2017 and December 2018. Additionally a 'My visit to the Library' leaflet has been developed to support adults with autism and a child friendly version will be available as part of the staff toolkit from early 2019.

- Libraries NI staff continue to develop links with groups supporting people living with autism, for example, with the Solas group in Belfast where library staff provide storytelling and read aloud sessions to autistic children and the NOW group supporting and developing reading for autistic adults.
- An Out of Hours service has been implemented in six rural libraries providing access to library facilities on a self-service basis. This has enabled autistic people to visit the library when it is quieter and provides fewer distractions.
- Customer feedback from Libraries NI indicates that parents who have autistic children now feel more confident about bringing their child to the library.

THEME 11: PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Strategic Priorities

- *Increase opportunities for autistic people to influence policies and programmes in Government including the delivery of the Autism Strategy and the subsequent Action Plan.*
- *Improve interaction between all sectors to achieve the social inclusion of autistic people.*

Justice

- The Department of Justice undertook a process of consultation on the Victims and Witnesses Strategy, which was then used to underpin the associated action plans. In developing and taking forward new policies the Department also engages with representative organisations, as relevant.
- The Probation Board actively involves people with ASD and their carers in the implementation of policy through proactive service user involvement. The Board will aim to be represented on the Vulnerable Individual Group and disseminate relevant policy developments within the organisation.

Economy

- The Consumer Council for NI is working with the Utility Regulator and water and energy companies to improve the care register for vulnerable consumers, which will include consumers who have Autism.

Health

Within the health sector, parents, carers and young people are active participants within all local Trust fora. These forums provide an opportunity for active involvement and integrated working across services to deliver upon the autism strategy.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

- Plans are in place to reinvigorate the Western Area ASD Forum with new members going forward. The Trust also has ASD sub groups for both children and adults which meet on a regular basis to take forward the implementation of the autism strategy. Representatives from the statutory, community and voluntary sectors sit on the sub-groups alongside carers.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

- The views of service users in the South Eastern Trust have been sought in relation to service reform initiatives within the Trust and these have informed developments. As well as involvement of their service users locally, the Trust has also incorporated feedback from the 10,000 Voices project to shape service reform. The Trust are also currently engaged with an independent family advocacy service and parent support group on a 'Getting Our Voices Heard' project. The aim of this project is to develop a shared vision for improvement of service users' experiences of autism and ADHD services. It is hoped that this can be rolled out as a model for co-production across children and adult services.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

- The Northern Area Reference Group has a key role in supporting the local Autism Forum, comprised of representation from all relevant operational sectors, including local councils, to ensure service-user, family and carer representation and involvement of voluntary and community organisations. The key functions of the local Fora and Reference Group are to represent the views of autistic people, their families and carers and voluntary and community sector groups, in the implementation of relevant actions in the cross-departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan. The Group meets monthly, and actively participates in the plan to influence, support and advise service providers in making sure that the services they provide for all the people on the spectrum are accessible, appropriate and equitably provided and to reduce any stigma attached to autism. It is also committed to leading the way in encouraging best practice and working to promote an ongoing commitment in continuous service improvement. It is chaired by a

service user/carer and there is Trust representation on a bi-monthly basis when the Trust ASD Coordinator and a Director attend. The Northern Area ASD Forum continues to meet quarterly. It is chaired by the lead Director for the Trust. A strategic action plan for the Northern Area Forum has been developed following a very successful workshop in September 2017.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

- In 2018 the Belfast Trust has reformed the Belfast Multi-agency Steering Group to include stakeholders to include representatives who have autism.

THEME 12: LEADERSHIP AND IMPLEMENTATION

Strategic Priority

- *To provide governance, leadership and direction.*

Health

- The Department of Health (DoH) has worked in partnership with other government departments, their agencies, autistic people and their families and carers and the third sector to implement the actions in the first Autism Strategy Action Plan.
- Implementation of the 2013-2017 Action Plan was overseen by the Regional Multi-Agency Implementation Team (ASRMAIT) and the Interdepartmental Senior Officials Group (ASISOG).
- The Department chaired the Autism Strategy Interdepartmental Senior Officials Group, which met on a bi-annual basis throughout the life of the action plan. The Regional Multi-Agency Implementation Team was chaired by the Health and Social Care Board, and also met on a bi-annual basis through the life of the first Action Plan.
- The implementation structures established under the strategy made provision for both autistic people/carer and third sector representation. Efforts to secure nominees from the third sector, however, did not prove successful. However, the sector was well represented at an event hosted by the Department in April 2016 to begin the process of reviewing the first Action Plan.
- The first progress report was prepared in 2015 and the then Minister for Health, Simon Hamilton, confirmed in a written Ministerial statement on 13 November 2015 that a copy of the report had been laid in the Assembly Library.

- The DoH publishes data on autism services including information on referrals, people seen and diagnosis. The Department publishes statistics annually on the 'Prevalence of Autism (including Asperger's Syndrome) in School Age Children in Northern Ireland' which updates data on prevalence of ASD in school children aged 4-15 years. It also reports quarterly on the number and rate of children referred for an assessment for autism and the number and rate of children diagnosed with autism each quarter. This information is available at:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/autism-statistics>

- All Departmental and Arm's Length Bodies policies are screened for equality impacts under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. Impacts are assessed against all 9 categories under Sections 75, including disability. All Departmental and ALBs' statutory Section 75 consultee lists contain disability representative groups, which are updated on a regular basis.
- The governance and reporting structures established as part of the work to implement the Autism Strategy have ensured a focus across Government organisations on measures to raise awareness of the specific needs of autistic people. This is evidenced by, for example, the provision of additional training for front line public sector staff and adjustments made to service delivery arrangements.
- A broadening of the information collected by DoH and Health and Social Care bodies will enable the targeting of available resources to where they can be most effective in meeting the needs of autistic people, and will help inform future service planning and commissioning decisions.

**Prepared by: Department of Health
Learning Disability Unit
Room D1, Castle Buildings**