



Department for
Communities

An Roinn

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Department for

Commonities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk



Disability Action Plan 2020-2024

March 2021

This document is available in a range of formats. To request an alternative format please contact:

Equality Unit
Department for Communities
Level 8, Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
BELFAST
BT2 7EG

Telephone: **028 9082 3440**

E-mail: **equality.unit@communities-ni.gov.uk**

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1. Introduction

1.1. Under section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Department for Communities is required, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

1.2. These are collectively referred to as the ‘disability duties’ and the following Disability Action Plan sets out the actions which the Department will take to meet these obligations.

1.3. Under section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the Department for Communities is required to submit a Disability Action Plan to the Equality Commission, showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions.

1.4. The Department is fully committed to the effective implementation of this Plan. All necessary resources in terms of people, time and finance will be made available for this purpose.

1.5. We will ensure the effective communication of the Plan to all staff and will provide guidance for staff in relation to their responsibilities.

1.6. We are committed to engaging effectively with people with disabilities and their representative groups in the development, implementation and review of this plan.

1.7. While this Plan has been developed with input from across many business areas within the Department, the first point of contact for enquiries about this plan is:

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1.8. We also confirm our commitment to submitting an annual progress report to the Equality Commission as well as undertaking a four yearly review of this Disability Action Plan. The annual

progress report will be included in the Department's general Section 75 Annual Progress Report.

1.9. A copy of this Plan, our annual progress report to the Equality Commission and our four-year review of the Plan will be made available on our website www.communities-ni.gov.uk

1.10. In addition to the disability duties, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is an international human rights agreement that:

- recognises that we are all equal and that disabled people should be able to participate fully in society by receiving the same opportunities as others;
- brings together disabled persons' basic human rights in one place; and
- describes what governments, which are parties to the convention, have agreed to do to make these rights real.

1.11. The Department co-ordinates and ensures that Northern Ireland's input is adequately reflected in UK Responses to UNCRPD requests.

2. About the Department

- 2.1. The Department for Communities (DfC) was established on 9 May 2016.
- 2.2. It delivers a wide range of services to the public, both directly and through its Arm's Length Bodies, which will impact the lives of most people at some point to support people, build communities and shape places.
- 2.3. The Department's main functions include:
- Promoting work, wellbeing and fairness, and provide important support to those most in need through the delivery of a social welfare system and pension service.
 - Supporting people to find work and the provision of a tailored recruitment service for employers across the region.
 - The delivery of a Child Maintenance Service, geared to secure more money for more children.
 - The provision of decent, affordable, sustainable homes and housing support services.
 - Enabling, encouraging and promoting social inclusion, diversity, and participation in society.
- Reducing fraud and error and protecting public funds.
 - Bringing communities together and delivering programmes that target social need through social, economic and physical regeneration of cities, towns and villages.
 - The administration of sport, promoting a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport.
 - Supporting the work of the Voluntary and Community sector.
 - Supporting district councils to deliver strong and effective local government.
 - Realising the value of our built heritage.
 - Supporting creative industries, oversight and delivery for the arts, cultural and language sectors.
 - Supporting museums and libraries.
 - Protecting and providing access to public archives and records.
- 2.4. Further information on the work of the Department can be accessed on our website at: **www.communities-ni.gov.uk**
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3. Public Appointments and Participation in Public Life

3.1. The Department believes that it is important that people from a wide range of backgrounds take up public appointments so that the boards of public bodies reflect the rich diversity of our society and better understand the needs of the communities they serve. Appointments are made on merit and applications are welcome from all sections of society.

3.2. In fulfilling its role, the Department currently has responsibility for 15 Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and other advisory bodies and it is through these Bodies that the Department will deliver much of its work. These are:

NDPBs:

- Armagh Observatory & Planetarium
- Arts Council for Northern Ireland
- Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
- Commissioner for Older People Northern Ireland
- Libraries Northern Ireland
- Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland
- National Museums Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People

- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Northern Ireland Local Government Officers Superannuation Committee
- Northern Ireland Museums Council
- North South Language Body – Ulster Scots Agency
- North South Language Body – Foras Na Gaeilge
- Sport NI
- Ulster Supported Employment Limited

Advisory NDPBs:

- Charity Advisory Committee
- Historic Buildings Council
- Historic Monuments Council
- Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment

Other:

- Discretionary Support Commissioner
- Vaughan’s Charitable Trust

3.3. All public appointments by the Department will be made, as far as practicable, in accordance with the Code of Practice for Ministerial appointments to Public Bodies and regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (CPANI).

4. Promoting Positive Attitudes

4.1. The Department is committed to promoting positive attitudes toward people with disabilities, and does so in a range of ways, including those set out below.

Section 75 Duty

4.2. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory obligation on all designated public authorities to ensure that they carry out their various functions having due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across nine social categories, including:

- a) persons of different religious belief;
- b) political opinion;
- c) racial group;
- d) age;
- e) marital status;
- f) sexual orientation;
- g) men and women generally;
- h) persons with dependants and persons without; and
- i) persons with a disability and persons without.

Equal Opportunities Policy

4.3. The Northern Ireland Civil Service Equal Opportunities Policy, developed centrally through the Department of Finance,

applies to all aspects of working life and is fully implemented within the Department for Communities. Further information, including details of any actions taken or planned centrally in respect of the disability duties, is contained in the Department of Finance's Disability Action Plan.

4.4. The Department follows the Northern Ireland Civil Service principles of equality, diversity and inclusion and now has its own Diversity Champion who, in conjunction with representatives from all Departments, looks at what the Northern Ireland Civil Service needs to do in overall terms to advance awareness, knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity issues. Under the leadership of our Diversity Champion, the Department established a Departmental Diversity Working Group and produced a Diversity Action Plan in April 2019 to reflect what staff want to see happening to address the diversity issues they face while working in the Department. Our aim is to ensure that diversity and inclusion are firmly embedded within the Department in a way that embraces and values difference. The Department is also represented on the Northern Ireland Civil Service Disability Working Group, which is chaired by the NICS Disability Champion.

4.5. The Department is specifically responsible for disability in relation to the promotion of the social inclusion of disabled people in Northern Ireland. This work includes developing and maintaining the overarching policy and legislative framework in respect of providing for equality of opportunity for people with disabilities; co-ordination of information in respect of UNCRPD across Northern Ireland Civil Service departments; and awareness raising about the issues faced by disabled people in our society.

The Department is leading on the development of a new Disability Strategy, which is being developed using a co-design approach, with involvement from disabled people and their representative organisations throughout the process. Once a draft Strategy has been prepared and considered by the Minister for Communities and her Executive colleagues, a separate public consultation exercise will be carried out in relation to this work.

5. Training

- 5.1. Since April 2017, responsibility for the Human Resources function in all Northern Ireland Civil Service departments has passed to NICSHR which is located in the Department of Finance.
- 5.2. Equal Opportunities training for civil servants is provided by the Centre for Applied Learning. Further information, including details of proposed training in relation to the disability duties, is contained in the Department of Finance's Disability Action Plan.
- 5.3. Managers with the Department for Communities can, on a one to one basis with their staff, agree required training, which may include disability training, as needed. In addition, Department specific training can be instigated; this would include training such as JAM card awareness training that was introduced in the Department in 2019 and also autism awareness for front-line staff.

6. Action Measures

6.1. The nature of the work of the Department means that the delivery of our everyday functions will have an impact on people with disability. Some examples are:

- employment programmes to support benefit claimants, including those who have health conditions and/or disabilities, towards sustained employment; and
- activities to encourage disability inclusion in sports events.

6.2. Outlined, therefore, in the following Plan are the actions which the Department proposes to take until 2024, with associated targets and timescales, that it feels meet the disability duties.

6.3. This Disability Action Plan is a living document and as such will be subject to change as actions are completed and new actions added over time. It will be monitored on an annual basis and updated as appropriate.

Disability Action Plan 2020/21 - 2023/24

To promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

Action 1

Action Measures

To invest approximately £11.6m and support 3,100 people with health conditions and / or disabilities through Employability Programmes.

These programmes include:

- Workable NI (This provides a flexible range of long term support to help people with disabilities, who have a lot of barriers to employment, to find and keep work).
 - a target to support 900 people
- Condition Management Programme (this Programme helps people manage their health condition to allow them to progress towards, move into and stay in employment. The Programme is led by healthcare professionals, such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and mental health nurses).
 - a target to start 900 participants

Performance Indicators

- numbers supported by each Programme over the year:
- numbers supported by the programme
- numbers started by the programme; and
- support for 20% of completers into employment within 6 months

- Access to Work (this can help people with disabilities who wish to take up employment or who are in work and experience difficulty related to their disability. It can also help employers who wish to recruit or retain people with disabilities in employment).
- a target of 20 new clients who are considered unemployed introduced on to the programme
- a target of 150 new applicants whose status is employed or self-employed introduced on to the programme
- Number of new clients/applicants introduced on to the programme.
(Director of Work & Wellbeing)

Timescale:

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter

Action 2

Action Measures

To continue the promotion of disability inclusion and the improvement of life experiences, health and well-being of people living with physical, sensory and learning disabilities through participation in sport and physical activities through sport.

Performance Indicators

- The percentage of people with disabilities participating in sport and recreation (to encourage at least a 6% increase against the 2011 baseline of 23%. (Sport Matters 2009-2019)

(Director of Active Communities)

Timescale:

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter

Action 3

Action Measures

To raise awareness of, and encourage involvement from, young people with disabilities on the T:BUC Uniting Communities programme, using sport and creativity to engage in activities that support increased participation in public life.

Performance Indicators

- the number of participants engaged with a disability;
2018/19 (baseline) : 35%
- the number of young leaders who have undergone disability awareness training;
2018/19 (baseline) : 55
- qualitative and quantitative information on any Uniting Opportunities projects which specifically target young people with a disability (numbers engaged, activities undertaken, increases in confidence and self-efficacy levels, and instances of further engagement in community activity.)
(Director of Active Communities)

Timescale:

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter

Action 4

Action Measures

Through the work of the Sign Language Partnership Group, to:

- Provide personal and social development programmes to redress the educational academic under achievement of Deaf people in order to reach their full potential and gain better employment prospects
- Build capacity to enable all services to become accessible to allow the sign language user to be fully included
- Provide additional support to young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to enable them to seek further education and qualifications, including providing sign language and personal development programmes for deaf children

Performance Indicators

- The number of Deaf tutors/ session workers recruited
 - The number of people who received sign language qualifications
 - Numbers of families of deaf children, schools (pupils and staff), voluntary & community sector groups and citizens participating in funded courses and projects
 - a) Family sign language in the home training to 20 deaf children & families
 - b) British Sign Language (BSL) courses to 60 deaf children, their families and professionals working with them
 - c) BSL and Irish Sign Language (ISL) training to 120 people in the North West to improve communication with users in the region
 - d) BSL/ISL deaf awareness courses to 30 voluntary and community groups to improve access to their services for BSL/ISL users
- (Director of Culture)

Timescale:

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter

Action 5

Action Measures

To encourage greater participation in volunteering by people with disability.

Performance Indicators

- Deliver a new volunteering website and database by July 2020 which will provide improved access to volunteering opportunities and better information about the needs of volunteers with disabilities.
- The proportion of adults with a disability who volunteered
2018/19 (baseline): 23% (Source: CHS)
(Director, Voluntary & Community Division)

Timescale:

July 2020 (database development)

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter (participation levels)

Action 6

Action Measures

Working in partnership with district councils and the Public Health Agency, to implement the DfC Access and Inclusion Programme which aims to improve access at arts and cultural venues across NI for people with disabilities.

Performance Indicators

- Completion of accessibility audits at arts and culture venues (a proposal has been submitted to the Department to provide a regional based Accessibility Audit Training module for all councils. This will include involvement of people with disabilities);
- Increase in the number of venues that are more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities (the 2018/19 programme provided support to improve accessibility at 32 venues across NI);
- Increase in the number of people with disabilities participating in arts and cultural activities;
- Greater engagement between central and local government (In 2018/19, 8 district councils participated in the programme. This increased in 2019/20 to all 11 councils plus a funding contribution from the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).
(Director of Active Communities)

Timescale:

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter

Action 7

Action Measures

To display positive messages and images of people with disabilities internally and externally on the DfC website (internal and external) and communications with staff, customers, stakeholders and the public.

(This includes working with business areas within the Department on business specific matters as well as a reflection of events in the diversity calendar).

Performance Indicators

- Number of positive images and messages published, internally and externally on the Department's website.

(Director of Strategy, Communication & Engagement)

Timescale:

Annually

Action 8

Action Measures

To raise awareness with staff regarding the Disability Discrimination Act and Disability Action Plan, through internal communications channels.

Performance Indicators

- Number of articles / updates per year in the Corporate and Team Briefs.
(Director of Strategy, Communication & Engagement)

Timescale:

Annually

Action 9

Action Measures

To keep disability legislation under review and to introduce new legislation as appropriate.

Performance Indicators

- International standards such as UNCRPD and national standards in neighbouring jurisdictions.

(Director Central Policy)

Timescale:

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter

Action 10

Action Measures

To develop a toolkit for employer facing staff that supports awareness and confidence when engaging with employers to promote the value of employing those with disabilities and health conditions. This product will be co-designed with the membership of the Department’s Disability Stakeholder Forum, and will include a ‘compelling story’ narrative, myth busting, advice on overcoming barriers, and connectivity to resources and services within the voluntary and community sector.

Performance Indicators

- Creation and launch of a toolkit product for employer facing staff within the Department and Disability Sector.
(Director of Work & Wellbeing)

Timescale:

31/09/2021

Action 11

Action Measures

To co-design and deliver an annual programme of awareness training for employer facing staff within the Department and Disability Sector. This training will focus on building general awareness of disability employment, share lived experience of disabilities in work, set out legislative responsibilities and good practice, and build better relationships and connectivity between Departmental and Disability Sectoral employer facing staff, to better support employers to be more confident and active if offering more inclusive employment practices.

Performance Indicators

- To develop and deliver an annual Awareness Programme jointly between the Department and Disability Sector.
- To deliver this training to over 180 employer facing staff and their managers through an annual series of workshops.
- To establish a baseline and achieve increased staff awareness and confidence levels of discussing disability employment with employers.

(Director of Work & Wellbeing)

Timescale:

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter

Disability Action Plan 2020/21 - 2023/24

To encourage participation by disabled people in public life

Action 12

Action Measures

To ensure the boards of our Arm's Length Bodies reflect the rich diversity of our society by drawing members from the widest talent pools through:

- Guaranteed Interview Scheme for those with a disability
- Engagement with disability and women's representative groups to raise awareness
- Provide offer of reasonable adjustments to help public appointees carry out their duties, as well as being offered support for interviews
- Appointment of a diversity champion on each selection panel
- Implementation of a cross-departmental policy on public appointments and board effectiveness to increase the participation of under-represented groups, including those with a disability.

Performance Indicators

- Uptake of the guaranteed interview scheme
- The level of engagement with disability and women's representative groups
- The level of support offered
- Annual public appointment statistics published by NI Research and Statistics Agency
(Director of Governance & Commercial Services)

Timescale:

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter

Action 13

Action Measures

Working with partners, complete the introduction of Work and Wellbeing Hubs across the Jobs & Benefits Office network to support customers with a disability or health related issues towards and into work.

Performance Indicators

- Number of offices with hubs established and operational.
(Director of Work & Wellbeing)

Timescale:

31/12/2021

Action 14

Action Measures

To have developed and delivered an effective approach to external stakeholder engagement in relation to the planning and development of the next phase of implementing Universal Credit - Move to UC, to include appropriate representation by disability groups.

Performance Indicators

- The number of people with disabilities involved in the engagement
- The action taken on the feedback
(Director of Universal Credit Programme and Working Age Services)

Timescale:

31/03/2023

Action 15

Action Measures

To continue to actively encourage disabled people and representative groups, e.g. IMTAC/Disability Action, to participate in working groups established for consultation and engagement purposes for Urban Regeneration.

Performance Indicators

- active participation in working groups established for consultation and engagement purposes in the development, design and delivery of capital infrastructure schemes; e.g.
 - Belfast Regional Development: Inner North West Masterplan and Portrush (collaborating with Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council)
 - Regional Development Office: collaboration with 7 district councils to design and deliver a capital regeneration programme across urban town and city centres, including schemes in Lisburn, Antrim, Ballymena, Lurgan, Portadown and Larne
 - North West Development Office/ West Team-partnering and collaborating with Derry City & Strabane District Council, Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council, Mid Ulster District Council and Fermanagh & Omagh District Council to deliver urban regeneration.
(Urban Regeneration Directors)

Timescale:

31/03/2021 and annually thereafter

Available in alternative formats.

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