

## **DISABILITY ACTION PLAN**

### **5 YEAR REVIEW**

**SEPTEMBER 2016**

This report covers a review of the Disability Action Plans (DAPs) published by DEL during the period 2011-2016.

This document is available in an accessible format if required, eg Braille, large print, audio cassette or in a minority ethnic language.

(Please contact [equalityunit@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:equalityunit@economy-ni.gov.uk) Tel: (028) 9052 9827)

## **1. BACKGROUND**

1.1 Since 1 January 2007, an amendment to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) has required public authorities, when carrying out their 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 Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a disability action plan showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to its functions.

1.3 Since 2007, DEL has submitted annual Disability Action Plans (DAPs) to the Equality Commission to show how it planned to fulfill these duties. These plans contain a commitment for the Department to carry out a 5-year review of its DAPs.

## **2. DEVELOPMENT OF DAPs**

2.1 In all cases, the Department's DAPs were developed in liaison with the Equality Commission and DEL's business areas.

- 2.2 The plans followed the Equality Commission guidance, in particular the 2007 Equality Commission Guide for Public Authorities and the December 2009 Review Report on the Effectiveness of the Disability Duties.
- 2.3 All plans were signed off by the DEL Permanent Secretary. They contained a range of measures to fulfill the Disability Duties with timescales and performance indicators.
- 2.4 The final plans were circulated to staff and consultees and published on the Department's website.
- 2.5 Annual Progress Reports on the measures identified were provided to the Equality Commission.

### **3 PURPOSE OF REVIEW**

- 3.1 The purpose of this review is to identify whether the Department, through its DAPs, has met its statutory requirements to encourage persons with a disability to participate in public life and promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities.
- 3.2 The Department has conducted a review process under 4 core headings laid out by the Equality Commission. These headings are:

- What the plans have achieved.
- What remains to be done.
- How to build on success.
- How to meet the challenges identified.

Each of these is explored below.

#### **4 WHAT THE PLANS HAVE ACHIEVED**

4.1 The DAPs contained a range of measures which focused on the provision of training and guidance to employees and stakeholders on disability and equality legislation, and on disability awareness.

Achievements to date in these areas are as follows:

4.2 The NICS introduced a mandatory Diversity Awareness Training package during 2010. This training promotes an inclusive working environment and stresses the importance of valuing differences. The package also includes material on the duty to promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability. All DEL staff have now completed the Diversity on-line programme or the classroom-based Diversity programme as appropriate. All staff must refresh this training within three years and this was last delivered in 2015. The Centre for Applied Learning continues to provide classroom based training for all new recruits on Diversity Awareness.

- 4.3 A new Employment and Support Allowance Customer Journey training was designed and rolled-out to all Employment Advisers and Team leaders across the Jobs and Benefit Offices network during 2015. To date 460 front-line Advisers have been trained. The training has been welcomed by staff and has helped increase the knowledge of front-line Employment Advisers and Team leaders. This has been evidenced by the evaluation of the training and increased referrals and sign posting to specialist disability employment and health programme provision
- 4.4 The new 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' – Supporting Inclusive Employment, was launched by DEL in March 2016. Four regional public consultation and two additional disability specific consultation events were organised. Feedback from the public consultation process directly influenced the final Employment Strategy document and 9 of the 58 responses received were via the Easy Read version of the questionnaire.
- 4.5 The Department funded a flyer for the local disability consortium, Supported Employment Solutions. Five thousand leaflets were circulated to all of the DEL front-line offices to provide staff with easy tips on how to communicate better with customers who have a mental health condition or a learning disability.
- 4.6 The Department provided funding for 20 deaf tutors to undertake a specially tailored programme at Belfast Metropolitan College and the University of Ulster to enable them to gain the necessary qualifications to teach in the further education sector. Eleven

individuals, who were funded by the Department to undertake a Masters in Interpreting (Sign Language) at Queen's University, Belfast, successfully graduated in December 2013.

4.7 The Department funded the delivery of specialist training for further education lecturers who teach or support learners with a diverse range of needs, including those who are visually impaired.

4.8 The Department's Disability Employment Service (DES) in partnership with the Equality Commission and Employers for Disability Northern Ireland produced a disability awareness booklet for employers entitled "Showcasing Disability Best Practice". The booklets have been distributed to all Jobs and Benefit Offices and Job Centers and have proved to be a useful information tool for Employment Advisers.

## **5 WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE**

5.1 The Department is represented on the Diversity Working Group chaired by the Commissioner for Public Appointments (CPA). We are considering the recommendations made in the 2014 CPA Report on Under-Representation and Lack of Diversity in Public Appointments in Northern Ireland Report and will be reviewing procedures going forward. We are also working with colleagues in other Departments on a Public Appointments Forum to take forward actions from the Report on a NICS wide basis.

We have already made a number of amendments to DEL processes in an effort to increase the number and diversity of applicants to public appointment positions, such as varying our approach to setting essential criteria for posts. Regular monitoring of feedback from applicants, including people with disabilities, will also help to inform future policy and procedure.

- 5.2 Significant milestones have been achieved in the implementation of the 'Access to Success' strategy. This is an integrated regional strategy for widening participation in higher education in Northern Ireland by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The 'Access to Success' strategy articulates a longer term vision for widening participation in Northern Ireland by 2020, and maps the actions required to deliver it.

## **6 HOW TO BUILD ON SUCCESS**

- 6.1 While substantial steps have been made in increasing staff knowledge and awareness of disability, it is acknowledged that more can still be done. We must continue to train and inform staff and stakeholders about relevant issues and to report progress. Continued high level commitment and good communication are central to building on the successes of previous Disability Action Plans.

- 6.2** The new Department for the Economy (DfE) came into effect on 9th May 2016. DfE assumed most of the roles and responsibilities of the former Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) as well as functions of the former Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) with the exception of the Employment Service. Going forward, DfE has established a departmental Diversity Group. Membership of the Diversity Group will be representative of job roles directly related to equality and diversity, Trade Union Side and volunteers who express an interest in diversity. The Group will meet approximately 4 times a year and in addition to attending meetings, members of the Group will have the opportunity to contribute to the development of communications for staff by researching material, offering ideas on topical issues, drafting publications etc.
- 6.3** DfE will set up an internal forum for staff with disabilities to facilitate consultation on the matters raised by the Diversity Group. The Diversity Group will continue to seek views from the members of this group forum throughout the lifetime of the Disability Action Plan.
- 6.4** This review has helped to inform the development of the draft DfE Disability Action Plan 2016-2021. Our aim is to align the new Disability Action Plan with the Department's Equality Scheme and Action Plan to ensure confluence between the documents, the various action points in them and with the Departments business planning cycle. Following formal consultation, the plan will be communicated to all staff and uploaded onto the Department's



web pages <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/department-economy-equality>

## **7 HOW TO MEET THE CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED**

- 7.1** Training will play a central role in equipping staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver our disability duties. The Department has a training and communications plan in place to provide this training, and managers are required to ensure that where required, staff include such training in their individual 'Annual Personal Development Plans'. Also, as mentioned at 6.3, DfE will set up an internal forum for staff with disabilities to facilitate consultation on the matters raised by the Diversity Group. The Department will remain committed to implementing effectively the disability duties through future Disability Action Plans, effective monitoring, regular review and reporting of progress.
- 7.2** The Department will also continue to ensure that our services and information remain accessible to both staff and customers with a disability and are improved wherever possible.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

- 8.1** The Department has made good progress during the period of this review. We must ensure that our services are as effective and efficient as possible in meeting the needs of disabled people going

forward. We must also continue to work with our staff and stakeholders to:

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