



Department for
Communities

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Department for

Commonities

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Draft Disability Action Plan 2025-2030 Consultation Document

April 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1. Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Department for Communities (DfC) 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.

These are referred to as the ‘disability duties’. For the purposes of section 49A of the DDA 1995, a public authority is defined in the same way as in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Department for Communities is designated as a public authority for the purposes of section 75 and must take its disability duties into account when carrying out its functions.

1.2 Under Section 49B of the DDA 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.

1.3 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.

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

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

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

DfC Equality Unit
Department for Communities
Causeway Exchange
7th Floor
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG

Telephone: **028 9082 3440**

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

2. Consultation

- 2.1. We welcome feedback on the draft Disability Action Plan we are presenting during a 8 week consultation which will run from 3 April 2025 to 30 May 2025.
- 2.2 This consultation will be hosted online at the following website: **<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/disability-action-plan-consultation>**. The Citizen Space website has been specially designed to be as user friendly and welcoming as possible for those who wish to complete the consultation. It also allows DfC to rapidly collate results. For this reason, we would encourage anyone who is interested in responding to this consultation to utilise Citizen Space as the method of their response.

If this is not possible, you can however respond to this consultation via email to **equality.unit@communities-ni.gov.uk** or you can respond in writing to the following address:

DfC Equality Unit
Department for Communities
7th Floor,
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast BT2 7EG

- 2.3 When responding via email or in writing, please state whether you are responding as an individual, or representing the views of an organisation (please state the name of the organisation). Please also quote the following reference in your response: "Disability Action Plan Consultation". Responses must be received by 30 May 2025.

3. Implementation, Monitoring and Review

- 3.1 This Disability Action Plan sets out the actions that the Department for Communities plans to take forward over the 5 year period of the plan. It is intended to remind all staff of our commitment to people with disabilities both within the department and those who engage with the department. It also demonstrates our commitment to our service users and the wider community. It will be treated as a live document to which other actions can be added throughout its lifespan.
- 3.2 We are committed to monitoring and reviewing our policies and practices to ensure that they have no negative impacts on people with disabilities or any of the other Section 75 categories. We do this through the process of equality screening and we will provide annual progress reports to the Equality Commission outlining the steps we have taken to ensure that we continue to deliver an effective service to people with disabilities.
- 3.3 We will carry out a review of this Disability Action Plan in 2030 when we will also review the department's Equality Scheme. The review will be submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and published on the Department's website.

4. Disability Strategy

- 4.1 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; coordination of information in respect of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) across Northern Ireland Civil Service departments; and awareness raising about the issues faced by disabled people in our society.
- 4.2 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 his Executive colleagues, a separate public consultation exercise will be carried out in relation to this work.

5. Disability, Diversity and Policy Champions

- 5.1 The Northern Ireland Civil Service has a Disability Champion who has responsibility to promote equality and inclusion for staff with a life-long or acquired disability or a serious health issue. The Disability Champion works with the Disability Working group to promote greater awareness and understanding of disability issues. The Working Group has delivered a number of initiatives to promote equality and inclusion for disabled colleagues within the Civil Service and launched a Northern Ireland Civil Service Disability Staff Network during 2021. The NICS Disability Staff Network (DSN) is a support, social, educational, and consultative group, aimed at raising awareness of disability issues and supporting the working lives of disabled colleagues.
- 5.2 The Department 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. The Department has established a Diversity & Inclusion Steering Group made up of a group of volunteers who regularly come together to discuss all things related to diversity and inclusion across our Department and identify a number of key issues to take forward within the yearly Action Plans. Chaired by the DfC Diversity Champion the group meet regularly throughout the year with the aim of creating and maintaining an inclusive workplace culture within the Department, where we each understand and value differences and gain insight through different perspectives. Additionally, group members have the opportunity to contribute to the development of staff communications, offering insight on topical issues and promoting awareness events.
- 5.3 The Policy Champions Network is a group of senior civil servants, whose role it is to build capability in policy making across the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Every department, including the Department for Communities, has a dedicated Policy Champion responsible for leading the work to grow policy capability and capacity across the NICS. The group provides a forum to consider all aspects of policy development, including the needs of people with disabilities and section 75 groups, and to improve communication and best practice.

6. Training

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 Managers within 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 as the Department is a JAM card friendly employer and also autism awareness training for front-line staff.

7. Action Measures

- 7.1 The following pages detail actions, performance indicators/targets, timescales and intended outcomes to display due regard to the disability duties.

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|--|--|--|-------------------------|
| 1. | Develop and publish a Disability Strategy to promote social inclusion of disabled people. | To issue draft Disability Strategy for public consultation within the current Assembly mandate (subject to Executive approval). | Publication of a Northern Ireland Disability Strategy. | Director Central Policy |
| 2. | Take action to raise awareness via UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPWD) events and increase DfC's visibility as the provider of services that are disability friendly | Annually through to 31 March 2030. | <p>To deliver an IDPWD event annually.</p> <p>To promote event on the DfC Intranet.</p> <p>To promote event via Communities Connect.</p> <p>Record and monitor the number of people who attend the event annually.</p> | Director Central Policy |
| 3. | To keep disability legislation under review and to introduce new legislation as appropriate. | To complete a comprehensive scoping exercise on disability legislation within the current Assembly mandate (subject to the availability of resources). | International standards such as UNCRPD and national standards in neighbouring jurisdictions | Director Central Policy |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|--|------------------------------------|---|--|
| 4. | <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer of Guaranteed Interview Scheme for those with a disability - Engagement with disability representative groups to raise awareness of public appointment opportunities - 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 - Engagement with the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI and The Executive Office Central Appointments Unit to ensure appointment processes in place reflect best practice | 31/03/2026 and annually thereafter | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Update of the Guaranteed Interview Scheme - The level of engagement with disability representative groups - The level of support offered - Annual public appointment statistics published by the NI Research and Statistics Agency - Feedback from the selection panel diversity champion | Director of Governance and Commercial Services |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|--|---|
| 5. | 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. | 31/03/2026 and annually thereafter | <p>Regional Development Office will collaborate with local councils to ensure that disabled people and representative groups are consulted and engaged in the development and implementation of Public Realm / Environmental Improvement Schemes.</p> <p>Belfast Regeneration Directorate will continue to engage with representative groups to encourage active participation in working groups established for consultation and engagement purposes in the development, design and delivery of capital infrastructure schemes, such as the Five Cs, Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5 Blackstaff Square and Grosvenor Road and Sandy Row Public realm schemes.</p> | <p>Director Regional Development</p> <p>Director Belfast Regeneration Directorate</p> |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 6. | To enhance the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities, we will build capacity within our referral partnerships to provide information on energy efficiency and support resources through the DfC website and internal/external communications, and conduct focus groups to capture real-life experiences that inform policy decisions for both people with disabilities and their carers. | 31/03/2028 | <p>To keep the lived experience of fuel poverty at the centre of the Fuel Poverty Strategy, by holding 6 focus groups and/or engagement events with people with disabilities/ caring responsibilities, building their confidence and capacity to engage/ participate.</p> <p>By 31 March 2028, DfC will have developed and published clear resources on energy efficiency measures and behavioural change actions for people with disabilities.</p> | Director of Climate Change Division |
| 7. | 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. | 31/03/2026 and annually thereafter | <p>The percentage of people with disabilities participating in sport and recreation (to encourage an increase against the 2022/23 baseline of 26%).</p> <p>This will be measured using data from the Continuous Household Survey.</p> | Director Active Communities Division |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|---|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 8. | Develop and introduce to the NI Assembly a Sign Language Bill | To introduce a Sign Language Bill to the Assembly in the current mandate; and monitor the implementation of the Sign Language Act annually thereafter. | Introduction of a Sign Language Bill | Director of Culture |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|--|------------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| 9. | <p>Through the work of the Sign Language Partnership Group, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 | 31/03/2026 and annually thereafter | <p>a) Family sign language in the home training to deaf children & families</p> <p>b) British Sign Language (BSL) courses to deaf children, their families and professionals working with them</p> <p>c) BSL and Irish Sign Language (ISL) training to people in the North West to improve communication with users in the region</p> <p>d) BSL/ISL deaf awareness courses to voluntary and community groups to improve access to their services for BSL/ISL users</p> | Director of Culture |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|--|------------|--|---|
| 10. | To continue to deliver 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. | 31/03/2026 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of organisations supporting people with disabilities involved in the engagement - The action taken on the feedback | Director of Universal Credit Programme and Working Age Services |
| 11. | To continue to engage with all relevant stakeholders on all aspects of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Finance Support (including Discretionary Support) delivery. | 31/03/2026 | <p>Number of meetings held with various disability groups.</p> <p>Number of presentations delivered on how to access ESA and Finance Support</p> <p>Utilise feedback from stakeholder organisations to offer support for anyone with an enhanced need, including referrals to Make the Call for outreach visits.</p> | Director of Working Age Services |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 12. | <p>To provide support and assistance through a suite of programmes that will support 11,000 people with disabilities and/or health conditions progress towards, secure, and retain employment. The programmes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Work (NI) • Workable (NI) • Condition Management Programme | 31/03/2026 and annually thereafter | The number of people supported by the programmes | Director of Work and Wellbeing |
| 13. | Labour Market Partnerships (LMP's) will develop programmes for people with disabilities to increase their employability and move them closer to the labour market | 31/03/2027 | LMP Action Plans are agreed annually in March, prior to the start of each financial year. The performance indicators will provide the number of people and employers participating in disability related provision. | Director of Work and Wellbeing |
| 14. | Continue to connect employers with job seekers who have disabilities, Disability Consortia and the NI Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE) through a range of networking/engagement opportunities including Job Fairs. | 31/03/2026 | - Participation of Disability organisations at Job Fairs. | Director of UC Operations |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|---|-----------|--|----------------------------------|
| 15. | <p>The Department endeavours to meet the requirements of the international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2, which were introduced by legislation passed in 2018. The Guidelines require all public bodies to ensure that websites are more accessible by making their content ‘perceivable, operable, understandable and robust’</p> <p>Continue to improve accessibility and usability of Department’s webpage and other social media outlets.</p> | Annually | <p>DfC Corporate Communications Web Team ensure compliance with international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2, by checking all content (including documents) being published to the website.</p> <p>All Images have alternative text added to support screen readers.</p> <p>All videos have an accompanying SRT file produced and uploaded to vimeo to ensure closed captions are available for users.</p> <p>An annual accessibility audit is carried out to test accessibility and the website Accessibility statement is updated periodically following any changes.</p> <p>Drupal 10 migration on 5 November 2024 has ensured many previous developer issues impacting accessibility have been rectified.</p> | Director Machinery of Government |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|---|-----------|--|----------------------------------|
| 16. | <p>Identify opportunities to promote positive attitudes to disability through images on the Departments website, on social media and in Departmental publications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy read documents for key departmental publications on the website in liaison with the business area. - BSL and ISL signed Videos | Annually | <p>Number of publications featuring positive imagery</p> <p>Easy read documents which convey the key information for important departmental publications on the website are produced, for example the DfC Budget EQIA and Employment Support Scheme.</p> <p>Signed videos to convey the key information for important departmental messages on the website are produced, for example the DfC Budget EQIA and Employment Support Scheme</p> | Director Machinery of Government |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|---|-----------|--|---|
| 17. | DfC, through internal briefing mechanisms such as the Department's intranet, will publish articles to promote awareness of the Disability Action Plan and statutory duties as appropriate. | Annually | Number of publications featuring positive imagery | Director Machinery of Government |
| 18. | <p>To align to the NICS commitment to the Mental Health Charter by :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promoting wellbeing amongst staff via the monthly Wellbeing Matters ezine - promotion and participation in any NICS initiatives | Annually | <p>Number of ezines published</p> <p>Number of events attended & number of attendees</p> | <p>Director Machinery of Government</p> <p>Director, People & Property/ (Organisational Development Branch)</p> |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| 19. | Work Psychology Service (WPS) will provide support to front-line Jobs & Benefits office (JBO) staff to build their skills and confidence to engage with UC customers with health conditions and disabilities to support them to move into the labour market or towards a health journey. | 31/03/2026 and annually thereafter. | WPS action plans are agreed prior to the start of the financial year and will provide the number of Work Psychology engagements with JBO staff to support UC customers with health conditions and disabilities. This includes number of office visits or contacts made to support front line teams, as well as case conferences, clinics and bitesize training sessions facilitated by Work Psychologists to build the skills and confidence of frontline JBO staff. | Director of Work and Wellbeing |
| 20. | Induction training for all new entrants, including information on the disability duties. | Bi-annually | Post event evaluation forms will capture information on awareness raising | Director, People & Property/ (Organisational Development Branch) |

| No. | Action Measures | Timescale | Performance Indicators | Branch/Contact |
|-----|---|-----------|---|---|
| 21 | Implement the NICS Policy on reasonable adjustments by ensuring all line managers are knowledgeable of the disability duties and associated relevant legislation. | Annually | <p>Number of Enrichment sessions for line managers to ensure awareness</p> <p>Reasonable adjustments in place</p> <p>Established accessible guidelines that outline the reasonable adjustment process.</p> <p>Continuous support and advice to both staff and line managers.</p> <p>Regularly review effectiveness of reasonable adjustment process</p> | Director, People & Property/ (Organisational Development Branch) |

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