



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission
**Draft Five Year Review of
Disability Action Plans**



**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION
FIVE YEAR REVIEW OF DISABILITY ACTION PLANS (DAPs) 2013-
2018**

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March 2018

A copy of this report will be made available on the Assembly's website. A hard copy of the report, or a copy in a different format, can be provided on request by e-mailing, or telephoning, as below:

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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 This report represents a 5-year review of Disability Action Plans (DAPs) published by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (“the Commission”) covering the period 1 April 2013 - 31 March 2018.

1.2 The Commission, as a designated public authority, is subject to two interrelated duties under Sections 49A and 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act (“DDA”) 1995. Section 49A places a duty on the Commission to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

Section 49B places a duty on the Commission to prepare a plan outlining how it proposes to fulfil the Section 49A duty. This plan is a description of procedural and practical arrangements that the Commission has committed itself to. This plan is called a **Disability Action Plan (DAP)**.

1.3 The Commission is required to submit a DAP to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) setting out how it proposes to fulfil the duties outlined above (known as the Disability Duties) in relation to its functions.

1.4 Since 2007, the Commission has submitted four DAPs to the ECNI to show how it planned to fulfil these duties:

- The first DAP covered the period 15 December 2007 - 30 June 2011, it is accessible via the following link:
<http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/commission/disability/dap.htm>
- The second DAP covered the period 1 July 2011 - 30 June 2012, it is accessible via the following link:
<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/ABOUT-THE-ASSEMBLY/Corporate-Information/Policies/Disability-Action-Plan1/Disability-Action-Plan-2011-12/>
- The third DAP covered the period 1 July 2012 - 30 June 2016, it is accessible via the following link:
<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/ABOUT-THE-ASSEMBLY/Corporate-Information/Policies/Disability-Action-Plan1/Disability-Action-Plan-2012-2016/>
- The fourth, and current, DAP covers the period 1 July 2016 - 30 June 2021, it is accessible via the following link:
<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/equality-and-good-relations/disability-action-plan-2016-21/>

1.5 DAPs are fluid documents and measures can be added throughout the lifespan of the plan. This is within the scope of the disability legislation which allows public authorities to update their action measures at any time.

- 1.6 Progress on all DAPs can be viewed via the Commission’s annual equality progress returns to the ECNI which can be accessed via the following link: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/ABOUT-THE-ASSEMBLY/Corporate-Information/Publications/Annual-Reports-to-the-Equality-Commission/>
- 1.7 In accordance with ECNI Guidance (para 3.41-3.44)¹, the Commission must carry out a review of its DAP every five years. A copy of this review report will be forwarded to the ECNI. This is the second 5-year review that the Commission has undertaken. The first 5-year review can be accessed via the following link: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/equality-and-good-relations/disability-action-plan-2016-21/>
- 1.8 The current 5-year review covers the period 1 April 2013 - 31 March 2018. This timeframe takes account the actions contained within two DAPs which cover the periods 1 July 2012 - 30 June 2016 (2012-2016 DAP) and 1 July 2016 - 30 June 2021 (2016-2021 DAP) respectively.
- 1.9 The organisational structure for the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat was amended on 1 October 2017. The revised structure is shown at Annex 4. The actions flowing from the 2016 –

¹<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/DisabilitydutiesGuideforPAs2007.pdf>

2021 DAP are unaffected by the structural changes in the organisation.

2 PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

2.1 The purpose of this review is to report on whether the Commission has met its statutory requirements to encourage persons with a disability to participate in public life and promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities.

2.2 The recommended assessment criteria for the review is as follows:

- what the disability action plan has achieved;
- what remains to be done;
- how to build on success; and
- how to meet the challenges identified?

2.3 Data sources used to inform the findings of this report were the annual equality progress reports, monitoring reports, feedback from the External Disability Advisory Group, visitor's surveys, Directorate level returns, relevant papers to the Secretariat Management Group (SMG) and the Commission, relevant equality screenings and research conducted by the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe).

2.4 The details of the five-year review are provided in the remainder of this report.

3. WHAT THE DISABILITY ACTION PLANS HAVE ACHIEVED

3.1 In order to address measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and to encourage the participation of disabled people in public life, the current 2016-2021 DAP has focused on the themes of:

- staff training
- representation
- communication, consultation and engagement
- outreach and education
- structural changes to increase participation and accessibility
- awards and accreditation

Action measures and performance outcomes in the 2016-2021 DAP are therefore associated with each of the themes outlined above.

3.2 From the 2012-2016 DAP, there were 13 action measures and 42 associated performance indicators that were relevant to the review period. Of these, 12 of the 13 action measures were achieved. The 1 action measure not achieved was to 'Provide briefing guides for staff on the practical day to day implementation of the DDA' and this was carried over to the 2016-21 DAP. Of the 42 performance indicators, 35 were achieved, 3 were partially achieved and 4 were not achieved. Within the 2016-2021 DAP, there were 37 action measures and 86 associated performance indicators relevant to the review period. Of these, 33 action measures were achieved, 3 were partially achieved and 1 was not achieved. Of the 86

performance indicators, 76 were achieved, 9 were partially achieved and 1 was not achieved. On an exception basis, the partially achieved and not achieved action measures are detailed at Table 1.

Table 1: Action Measures partially achieved and not achieved 2013-2018		
Action Measure	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved
Ensure staff receive training and guidance on disability equality legislation and disability awareness	Training programme content considered and agreed as a mandatory e-learning course which has been scheduled for delivery in May 2018.	
Explore concept of Parliament for People with disabilities	The concept has been explored. Consultations have taken place with a number of disability groups with a view to considering implementation when full Assembly business resumes.	
Provide guidance for visitors and staff on further disability access arrangements in relation to participation in Assembly Business and Events e.g. Committees, seminars	Guidance provided through the Inclusive Customer Service Policy and Sign Language guidance. A more detailed guide and a checklist for accessible events have been drafted and consultation with business areas is under way. Due to the temporary redeployment of staff as a result of the ongoing political situation, and to allow for additional consultation on issues which have arisen, the completion date for this piece of work has been extended to June 2018.	
Accessibility web publishing for staff		Formal guidance will not be created in the medium term due to staff temporary

Table 1: Action Measures partially achieved and not achieved 2013-2018		
Action Measure	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved
		redeployment and potential redevelopment for the site.

3.3 **Examples** of the main achievements within this five-year review period, which demonstrate what the DAPs have achieved, are detailed below.

3.3.1 Thematic examples

a. **External Disability Advisory Group**

The Equality and Good Relations Manager chairs the Disability Advisory Group, which was established in 2009 to facilitate discussion with external disability organisations on disability issues relating to the work of the Commission. Meeting notes are available on the Assembly website:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporateinformation/equality-and-good-relations/disability-advisory-group/>

b. **Every Customer Counts Initiative**

In October 2016, the Commission signed up to the ECNI's 'Every Customer Counts' initiative, which aims to encourage organisations and businesses across Northern Ireland to consider if they can improve the service they offer to clients and customers with a disability. As part of this initiative, and working in consultation with the ECNI, the Equality and Good Relations Unit developed an Inclusive Customer Service Policy.

c. **Inclusive Customer Service Policy**

This policy sets out how to provide an accessible and inclusive environment for people with disabilities, the range of facilities and services available at Parliament Buildings, and accessibility arrangements across business areas, including the Education Service, Events and Committees. The policy is available on the Assembly website:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/corporate/inclusive-customer-service-policy/may17inclusivecustomerservicepolicy.pdf>

In addition, a more detailed guide and a checklist for accessible events and meetings have been drafted and consultation with relevant business areas is under way. Consultation is also planned with the external Disability Advisory Group. Through this guide and checklist, we aim to incorporate best practice and learning from a range of organisations across the public and private sectors, locally, nationally and internationally. Due to the temporary redeployment of staff as a result of the ongoing political situation, the completion date for this piece of work has been extended to June 2018.

d. **Sign Language Guidance for Commission Staff**

Sign language guidance for Commission staff has been developed which provides information on how to make provision for visitors to Parliament Buildings who are deaf or have hearing loss. This includes information on how to book sign language interpreters, types of sign language and communication tips.

3.3.2 Examples from Building Services

a. **Accreditations and Access Information**

Accreditation awards for the 'Louder than Words' and the Access Award (National Autistic Society) Standards (see accreditation standards at Annexes 1 and 2) were maintained. Front of house staff received a range of training including autism training and autism champions are in place.

An accessibility webpage was developed containing accessibility information for visitors with a visual impairment, visitors who are deaf or hard of hearing, visitors with autism, information on public tours, wheelchair access arrangements, the Assembly's Inclusive Customer Service Policy and other sources of additional help.

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/visit-and-learning/accessing-parliament-buildings/> .

The web page on autism entitled 'Autism and the Assembly' continues to be updated and maintained to provide information to the public on access arrangements when visiting the Assembly

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/visit-and-learning/autism-and-the-assembly/> .

In addition, a web based video has been produced showing how to access Parliament Buildings. This details what is involved in the security checking process and what to expect whilst visiting Parliament Buildings. This video was created for visitors on the autism spectrum but others wishing to plan their visit have also found this useful. A subtitled version of the video is also available

as is a printable version to download.

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/visit-and-learning/accessing-parliament-buildings/> .

b. **Physical works**

Following on from previous physical access works, in September 2017 the Commission completed a programme of work to further improve access in Parliament Buildings especially for the floors that are open to the public. This work involved relocating the existing shop and café, constructing an access ramp from the entrance lobby to the ground floor and the automation of corridor doors in the basement, ground and first floors. The south lift was upgraded to fire evacuation standard to facilitate the evacuation of persons with a disability in the event of a fire.

c. **Signage and Maintenance of Access Items used by the public.**

The Commission continues to maintain the quality of access items/facilities used by the public. This has included maintenance of the Assembly quiet room, changing places facility, tactile ‘tour map’ of Parliament Buildings, iPad with subtitled version of the Assembly tour, Braille signage and other signage in Parliament Buildings including pictorial signage images.

3.3.3 Examples from Learning and Development

a. **Staff learning activities**

The Learning & Development (L&D) team facilitated a range of learning activities relevant to promoting positive attitudes towards people with a disability. Please see Table 2. In addition to formal

training, information/awareness sessions are also delivered to staff. Please see Table 3. Statistics and feedback from participants are compiled on a regular basis and learning materials quality-proofed.

Table 2: Relevant Staff Training 2013-2018		
Year	Course Title	Numbers
2012/13	Dignity at Work	370
2013/14	Start to Sign	17
2014/15	Equality Screening Training	18
	Alcohol and drugs (Facts and effects)	34
	Fire Warden and Searchers Training	8
2015/16	Section 75 (e-learning Module)	245
2016/17	Autism Awareness Masterclass	23
	Visual Awareness Masterclass	11
	Deaf Awareness Masterclass	27
	Harassment Contact Officers training	3
	Strategies for managing change	11
	Mental Health First Aiders	1
	Engaging with people with communication difficulties	19
	Dementia Awareness	14
	Living life to the full	34
	Mental Health Masterclass	18
	British Sign Language Level 1	10
	British Sign Language Level 2	2
2017/18	First Aid/defibrillator training	7
	Investigator training	17
	British Sign Language Level 2	8

Table 3: Relevant staff information/awareness sessions 2013-2018		
Year	Session Title	Numbers
2014-15	Why Weight	19
2015-16	Dealing with Bereavement	16
	Mood matters	10
	Breast and Cervical Cancer Awareness	14

Table 3: Relevant staff information/awareness sessions 2013-2018		
Year	Session Title	Numbers
	Bowel Cancer Awareness	17
	Prostate Cancer Awareness	15
2017-18	Competency Based Interviewing Masterclass	67
	Shift work Masterclasses for Ushering staff	54
	Health checks by Action Cancer (Big Bus)	26
	Parenting NI Masterclass	17
	Carer Awareness Masterclass	11
	Mental Health Awareness	11
	Building Confidence Masterclass	8
	Dementia Awareness Masterclass	11
	Mental Health Awareness Masterclass	8
	Mindfulness Masterclass	18
	Meditation Masterclass	24
	Suicide Awareness	22
	Drink, Work & Me Masterclass	253

b. Staff feedback

All training delivered within the Secretariat is established with desired course objectives. Staff are then required to undertake an evaluation of each training using an on-line evaluation system after completion of the event. This on-line facility has been developed to seek the views of staff in relation to training objectives being met. Staff taking part in 'Start to Sign' reported an increased knowledge, awareness and recognition of Deaf and Hard of Hearing issues and staff attending the mental health masterclasses indicated that the sessions were worthwhile but that further training was required. This further training has been sourced in specific areas.

c. **Staff Wellbeing Survey**

A staff wellbeing survey was conducted with all Assembly staff in 2015/16 and resulted in defining future training needs as part of the Assembly's People Service Plan for 2016/17.

3.3.4 **Examples from Communications (including the Assembly website)**

a. **Website**

As a minimum, the Northern Ireland Assembly website continues to meet level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 and, where possible, we strive to meet AAA standards to keep our content accessible to people with disabilities. These requirements are checked regularly and, when required, changes are made to the website or mitigations are put in place. The website also includes an accessibility section that is reviewed regularly.

The Web Manager has regular discussions with other legislatures who are working on website redevelopment, strategies and/or initiatives with particular regard to digital accessibility.

b. **Digital First**

The Commission published its Digital First Strategy in 2015 and the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for this Strategy was carried out from July 2015 to October 2016. The aim of the Digital First Strategy is to use digital platforms and channels to create and provide rich content for external and internal stakeholders enabling

them to participate, interact and engage with the Assembly, ensuring that our work is accessible to all and communicated widely. We continue to provide information in alternative formats (Braille, easy read, audio, large print etc.) including hard copy, when requested, for those people who are not able to access content online or who have difficulty accessing information via their PC, Tablet or Smartphone.

3.3.5 Examples from Research and Information Service (RaISe)

a. **Research**

RaISe provides papers and other materials to MLAs, Committees of the Assembly and the Secretariat when tasked. RaISe also undertakes proactive work that would be of direct interest to the business of the Assembly. In December 2016, RaISe published an article on its 'Research Matters' blog pages to highlight the International Day of Persons with Disability². This referred to the Assembly's charity of the year, the Cedar Foundation, which provides services to disabled people.

The article also summarised research undertaken by RaISe in relation to disability. Since the publication of the article, one additional research paper has been published relating to disability: 'Mental Health in Northern Ireland: Overview, Strategies, Policies, Care Pathways, CAMHS and Barriers to Accessing Services'³.

² <http://www.assemblyresearchmatters.org/2016/12/02/international-day-of-persons-with-disability/>.

³ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2016-2021/2017/health/0817.pdf>.

In addition to published research, RaISe has also provided research to individual Members on disability matters. While not published due to confidentiality, this research provides support to assist Members in relation to constituents with disabilities.

b. Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

RaISe jointly delivers KESS with the Queen’s University of Belfast, Ulster University and The Open University. It was the first of its kind in the United Kingdom, formally partnering a legislative arm of government – the Assembly - with academia. Aiming to promote evidence-led policy and law-making, KESS provides a forum in which academics present their research findings in a straightforward format, on issues that are relevant to governance in Northern Ireland. Seminars held during the period covering issues related to disability are highlighted in Table 4.

In addition, KESS provided sign language interpreters, when requested, for 5 out of a total of 77 seminars held during the reporting period.

Table 4: Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)		
Seminar Title	Date	Web Link
Addressing the over-representation of looked after children with mental health needs and/or disabilities in Northern Ireland.	20 Feb 2014	https://kess.org.uk/2014/02/20/addressing-representation-looked-children-mental-health-needs-andor-disabilities-northern-ireland/
People with Intellectual Disabilities: Promoting Health, Addressing Inequality.	26 Nov 2014	https://kess.org.uk/2014/11/26/people-intellectual-disabilities-promoting-health-addressing-inequality/

Table 4: Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)		
Seminar Title	Date	Web Link
Provision of health & social care diverse needs.	25 May 2016	https://kess.org.uk/2016/05/25/adults-intellectual-disabilities-id-transitioning-older-years/
Mental Health: Treatments & Interventions.	8 Mar 2017	https://kess.org.uk/2017/03/08/examining-difference-residential-facilities-support-people-intellectual-disabilities-challenging-behaviour-andor-mental-health-problems-live-community/
Preventative Health: New Developments.	10 May 2017	https://kess.org.uk/2017/05/10/diabetes-education-adults-learning-disabilities-addressing-inequalities/

3.3.6 Examples from Education Service

a. Having a Voice

The Education Service conducts focus groups on behalf of Committees. RaSe has developed a framework for selecting a broad cross-section of the youth population. The framework will continue to ensure that children who attend special schools are invited to participate in every focus group. Over the last 5 years, the Education Service assisted Committees in consulting with young people on relevant legislation and inquiry issues, for example, the Shared Education Bill, the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill, the Road Traffic Bill, the School Inspections Inquiry and the Inquiry into the Together Building a United Community Strategy (TBUC).

b. **Youth Congress**

Approximately 90 young people took part in the annual sitting of the Northern Ireland Youth Congress in the Assembly Chamber on 25 November 2015. Participants came from across Northern Ireland and included young people with a range of special educational needs (ADHD, Asperger's syndrome, autism). Young people from Mencap also participated in the debate. Approximately 200 young people from all over Northern Ireland attended Parliament Buildings for the second sitting of the Northern Ireland Youth Congress on 22 February 2018. The agenda for debate included mental health and age discrimination. Young people with special needs participated in the event.

c. **Delivery of projects**

The Education Service ran an Erasmus + 'Connections' programme from March 2015 to January 2016 to encourage young people to get involved in politics and the work of the Assembly. The young people chose to research and consult peers on the issue of mental health services for young people. During the planning process of this project a number of steps were taken to promote equality of opportunity for all. Prior to the application process in March 2015, Education Officers met with groups to inform them of the opportunity and to discuss any barriers they considered might exist. Advice was also sought from the ECNI. The project was advertised widely to stakeholders including schools, colleges, alternative education providers, umbrella groups and individual youth groups and charities. A variety of methods was used including mailshots, emails and Twitter. Four young

people, out of a total of 32 participants, registered as having a disability.

d. Raising Awareness

At the start of every academic year, the Education Service writes to all schools, inviting them to participate in the Education Programme in Parliament Buildings. Alternatively, the service offers to deliver a programme in schools as part of its outreach service. As part of the booking process, there will be a discussion of the particular needs of young people with disabilities and the programme delivered will be tailored to their needs. The Education Service has a continued engagement with special schools, several of which make repeat bookings to visit the Assembly. Services are advertised to every special school in Northern Ireland and uptake of these services is set out in Table 5.

Dates	Special Needs Schools	Participant Numbers
1/7/12 – 30/06/13	2 schools	47 participants
1/7/13 – 30/06/14	4 schools	74 participants
1/7/14 – 30/06/15	5 schools	64 participants
1/7/15 – 30/06/16	5 schools	60 participants
1/7/16 – 30/06/17	7 schools	131 participants

3.3.7 Examples from Engagement and Outreach

a. Assembly Community Connect (ACC)

ACC works to enhance connections between the Assembly and the community through education and outreach. It provides free training, information and support for the local community. It is open to all individuals that wish to engage with the Assembly, its

processes and structures. Since 2013, ACC has delivered over 30 bespoke training events for groups representing those with disabilities including Tor Bank School, the NOW Project, Stronger Together, Disability Sport, Special Olympics, Action Mental Health (AMH), MENCAP, Guide Dogs for the Blind and Cedar Foundation.

A variety of events also took place to build the capacity of service users and providers. Events included 'Dine in the Dark' for Guide Dogs for the Blind, a 'Reading Rooms' event with Stronger Together, MLA visits to projects representing those with disabilities and 'Statements to the House' events where clients of charities tell their story to Committee Chairs and MLAs. All events had a learning element that was tailored to the abilities of the attendees.

b. **Exploring the concept of a Parliament for People with Disabilities**

From June to September 2017, the Engagement and Outreach Service consulted with disability charities, including Disability Action, MENCAP, Autism NI, the Cedar Foundation and the ECNI, about how to encourage greater participation by those with a disability. The concept of a Disability Parliament was discussed during those meetings and it is anticipated that any preparatory work for such a parliament would initially be taken forward the groups themselves, similar to Pensioners Parliament run by Age Sector Platform or the BEM Parliament run by NICEM.

c. **Assembly Charity of the Year**

The Commission's Charity of the Year for 2015/16 was Positive Futures. Some £3,215 was raised for the Charity through events that included a pop up shop and quizzes. Positive Futures were able to increase awareness of the challenges faced by people with a disability through an art exhibition and the closing event - Statements to the House - allowed their clients to tell their story to Committee Chairs and MLAs. For 2016/17, the Charity of the Year was the Cedar Foundation with over £12,000 raised for the Charity. In September 2017, Parliament Buildings hosted an audio visual exhibition which told the story of a number of Cedar Foundation clients.

3.3.8 Examples from Assembly Committees

a. **Committee Gallery Rules**

In January 2016, rules for visitors to Committee Galleries were amended to enable building users with a disability to use electrical devices, if required.

b. **Monitoring of reasonable adjustments**

The monitoring of reasonable adjustments that are made for witnesses giving evidence to Committees is completed on a quarterly basis and any organisational learning from monitoring is shared as required.

3.3.9 Examples from Human Resources (HR)

a. **Monitoring – Annual Disability Audit**

As staff could become disabled at any point during the course of their employment, HR monitor the number of staff who consider that they have a disability on an annual basis with a questionnaire used to collect statistical data anonymously. Table 6 shows the number of staff who have submitted returns each year as part of the Annual Disability Audit.

Year	Staff Numbers (at 1 April)	Staff Numbers declaring a disability	% of staff declaring a disability
2013	385	10	2.6
2014	376	10	2.7
2015	375	12	3.2
2016	340	9	2.6
2017	342	6	1.8

b. **Managing Disability in the Workplace**

In December 2013, guidance for Managing Disability in the Workplace was introduced. As the Annual Disability Audit is anonymous, it does not identify staff who may require adjustments in the course of their employment as a result of disability. The guidance was developed to enable staff to seek additional support. It provides information on disabilities, reasonable adjustments and how to request a reasonable adjustment in the workplace.

c. **Guaranteed Interview Scheme**

The Commission operates a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) for applicants with disabilities who meet the minimum criteria for the role they have applied for as part of its commitment to the employment of people with disabilities. The GIS has been developed for applicants with disabilities or those with a long term impairment or health condition, that is expected to last for at least 12 months and which means that they cannot meet all of the shortlisting criteria. In these instances, provided that they have demonstrated in their application form that they meet the essential criteria for the post, the applicant will be offered a guaranteed interview. When an applicant declares that they have a disability, reasonable adjustments will be made to the recruitment procedure, in consultation with the applicant, to ensure no-one is disadvantaged because of their disability. The option of receiving application packs in alternative formats is available.

d. **Managing Attendance policy**

The Managing Attendance policy was revised in July 2013 to include coverage of how sick absence caused by an underlying medical condition which is defined as a disability will be managed.

e. **Mental Health Charter**

In October 2016, the Assembly signed up to the Mental Health Charter ('the Charter') developed by the ECNI. The Charter, jointly produced by the ECNI, Action Mental Health, Disability Action, Mindwise, Mental Health Foundation and Niamh, provides a framework for working towards mentally healthy workplaces. By

signing up to the Charter, the Commission is committing to promoting good mental health which will be beneficial to our organisation, employees and the whole community in Northern Ireland. This is a voluntary commitment to develop best practice in managing mental health issues in the workplace. To promote good mental health, a number of events to raise awareness during the week of World Mental Health Day (10 October 2017) were held. In October 2017, a number of staff were trained as Mental Health First Aiders.

A draft Mental Health Policy and Line Manager's Guide – Supporting Staff with Mental Ill Health was issued to Trade Union Side and staff for formal consultation. The aim of this policy is to create a workplace environment that promotes good mental health and wellbeing for all staff and provides support and/or assistance to staff suffering or affected by mental ill health. The objectives of the policy are to:

- To develop an organisational culture which supports positive mental health;
- To give staff information on and increase their awareness of maintaining and improving their mental health;
- To reduce discrimination and stigma by increasing awareness and understanding;
- To address factors that may negatively affect mental health; and
- To provide guidance to line managers to support staff with mental ill health.

f. **Assembly Staff Survey 2014**

In November and December 2014 a Staff Survey was conducted with Assembly Secretariat staff. The survey found that 90.2% of staff said they were familiar with and know how to access the Assembly Secretariat's equal opportunities policies. The proportion of staff who said that they believe that the Assembly Secretariat offers appropriate support to staff with disabilities increased by 8.7% to 57.3% (from 48.6% in 2012 and 35.1% in 2010).

4. WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE

- 4.1 A number of action measures and planned outcomes have yet to be implemented for the 2016-2021 DAP. Some partially achieved action measures require further implementation while other measures are continuous, such as the provision of staff training, engagement with groups representing those with disabilities and the maintenance of awards, which are assessed annually.

5. HOW TO BUILD ON SUCCESS

- 5.1 The Commission is committed to building on the success achieved through its past and current DAPs in order to continue improving accessibility to its services. Substantial steps have been made in increasing staff knowledge and awareness of disability issues and a programme of training will ensure that staff continue to be made aware of disability legislation, including the Disability Duties and disability issues generally.

5.2 The Commission will continue to implement and monitor its 2016-2021 DAP and report to the ECNI on its implementation. The current DAP is not exhaustive and further activities can be added at any time in order to be proactive and responsive to the identification of issues.

6. HOW TO MEET THE CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

6.1 In order to promote awareness and understanding of difficulties faced by people with a disability, and to ensure their voice is heard, there needs to be continued engagement and interaction with the sector. A number of measures are already detailed in the 2016-201 DAP but it is recognised that pre-engagement prior to formal consultation with groups, and directly with people with disabilities, is vital to informing the Commission's policies. Additional policies, where relevant, will be issued to the External Disability Advisory Group (and through this group to user groups) in order to develop policies in partnership and/or get the views of those who are most likely to be impacted by the policy implementation i.e. those people with a disability.

6.2 The Commission remains committed to effectively implementing the Disability Duties through the 2016-2021 DAP. It will regularly monitor, review and reporting on progress. Should issues arise which may hinder the implementation of the DAP, these will be considered by the SMG and/or the Commission to facilitate early action.

6.3 The Commission will continue to ensure that services and information remains accessible to both staff and customers with a disability and are improved, where possible. If situations arise where new actions need to be taken due to, for example, the identification of barriers or the development of new services or practices, these actions will be undertaken, recorded as additional actions in the DAP and reviewed in line with the DAP commitments.

6.4 The Commission will ensure that staff continue to be made aware of disability legislation, including the Disability Duties and other disability issues generally, through a programme of learning and development. This will ensure that staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to deliver excellent customer service to all building users. Future learning and development activities will be both proactive and responsive to the needs of staff in terms of disability awareness.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The Commission has made considerable progress during the 2013 – 2018 review period and remains committed to the fulfilment of the two Disability Duties.

7.2 The Disability Duties have been mainstreamed across the Assembly Secretariat. The current financial and political climate means that it remains a challenge to sustain progress in ensuring that our services are as effective and efficient as possible in meeting the needs of people with disabilities. We will therefore

continue to work with our staff and stakeholders to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

Annex 1

Louder Than Words Chartermark

Standard 1

- Train staff to communicate with Customers. Deaf Awareness Training to be given to all frontline staff, Health & Safety/internal trainers and to be incorporated in induction courses. Peripheral staff to have basic deaf awareness briefings.
- Staff Accessing Further Information. Staff working with deaf colleagues to have basic work based sign course and line managers of deaf staff to have received deaf awareness training Staff working with text phones to be trained in their use.

Standard 2

- Have Clear and Visible Deaf Awareness Polices. Equal Opportunities Policies to include deaf/disabled staff.
- Communication and Support Provision.
- Accessibility of Policies and Communication.
- Communication of Polices Any customer charters / policies to include deaf/disabled staff. Availability of policy. Customer charters and internal policies must be easily available and in plain English.

Standard 3

- Provide clear information about products and services. Information must be easy to read and conform to plain English guidelines.
- Web Based Information Website/intranet needs to be accessible and any video clips or audio components to have a text alternative.
- Training, videos/promotional videos, and materials. 100% of new videos to be subtitled. 100% of new videos aimed at deaf and disabled people to have sign language insert.

Standard 4

- Use appropriate equipment and maintain it correctly. Deaf and hard of hearing staff must be assessed for equipment and provided with it as necessary.
- Text phones and Text. Relay Text phone must not be on answerphone. 80% of customers must be satisfied with the equipment provided, e.g. text phones and induction loops.
- Loop system. Induction loops must be provided in 25% of meeting rooms, 50% of customer counter points and at main reception points. Induction loops must be tested every 3 months and text phone at least every six months. Loop signs must be displayed wherever a loop sign is installed. Text phone numbers must be advertised on headed paper and on leaflets.

Standard 5

- Create a good listening environment.
- Signage must be clear, visible and well lit. 80% of customers must be satisfied that background noise levels are low, that signage is clear and lighting levels good enough for lip-reading. Visual alternatives must be provided for any audible announcements.

Standard 6

- Produce and follow clear health and safety procedures.
- Evacuation plans must be clear, visible and easy to read. 100% of deaf staff that cannot hear the fire alarm must have a vibrating pager. Flashing lights to be installed in remote areas where customers are left on their own.
- Health and safety officers aware of issues around evacuation of deaf staff. Lifts to be equipped with either an amplified telephone or a notice advising of evacuation procedures.

Standard 7

- Meet requests for communication support whenever possible. 100% of key staff must be able to book communication support. 100% of the communication support you use must be registered with CACDP or SASLI (for Scotland). Organisations must offer a range of communication support including

interpreters, lip speakers, note takers and speech to text or palantype. 100% of deaf and hard of hearing staff to be assessed for communication support as appropriate.

- Different forms of Language Service Professionals (LSP's). 80% of customers must be satisfied with the communication support provided.

Standard 8

- Be comfortable and familiar with the service Text Relay provides. Staff must know how to use Text Relay Service. Text Relay service should be included in customer materials.

Standard 9

- Consult customers and staff. Customers and staff should be surveyed on an annual basis to check satisfaction with services offered. An Action Plan should be drawn up to ensure that concerns raised are dealt with.

Standard 10

- Be open about your employment practices.
- Job description in plain English.
- Recruitment and selection. Communication support must be available for 100% of interviews for deaf and hard of hearing candidates (as required). Internal job and promotion opportunities must be accessible to deaf and hard of hearing staff.
- Training and development. Line managers and teams of deaf and hard of hearing staff must have face-to-face deaf awareness training. Communication support must be offered to deaf and hard of hearing staff for all training courses. Deaf staff must be satisfied with any communication support provided for training courses.
- Appraisal and promotion.
- Reasonable adjustments. 100% of deaf and hard of hearing staff should have Access to Work (or equivalent) assessment. At least 60% of staff should be satisfied with communication between them and their line manager.

Annex 2

Access Award (National Autistic Society) Standards

Standard 1. Train staff to communicate with customers

- Training its staff in autism awareness is the first step to an organisation being truly autism aware and meeting the needs of all people.

Standard 2. Have clear and visible disability policies

- It is important that an organisation's policies do not discriminate in any way against people with disabilities in particular autism. They must address the needs of people with autism to ensure that they have the same access to information and to employment as other people.

Standard 3. Provide clear information about your products and services.

- Any materials that an organisation produces about its products and services need to be accessible to all persons. This includes brochures, leaflets, forms, fact sheets and videos. Some people may find it easier for information to be provided in plain English, online or through pictures, etc.

Standard 4. Create a good listening environment

- At reception, customer service points and meeting rooms, steps must be taken to reduce background noise where possible. It would be beneficial if a quiet room could be provided in the event that someone needs a quiet moment prior to attending a meeting or event.

Standard 5. Produce and follow clear health and safety procedures

- Fire, smoke and lift alarms must be accessible to all persons. Guidance should be provided in advance.

Standard 6. Meet request for communication support whenever possible.

- Communication support needs to be provided both for customers and staff.

Standard 7. Be comfortable and familiar with the services which NAS and Autism NI provide.

Standard 8. Consult customers and staff.

- To ensure that an organisation is providing the best service to all customers, service users, staff and job applicants, it is important that it regularly consults with them. This can be done either by running focus groups or by sending questionnaires. The areas consulted on should include quality of autism awareness, ease of accessing information and quality of any communication support provided.

Standard 9. Be open about your employment practices.

- Job opportunities should be accessible to people with autism. Care should be taken to ensure that job description and application forms are in plain English and without jargon or acronyms. All internal vacancies should be clearly displayed on notice boards and Intranets. Interviews for people with disabilities must be provided with the appropriate communication support as requested. Well before the interview, it should be established whether the candidate requires special assistance, and if so, what type.

Standard 10. Has consideration been given to sensory issues

- Policies, procedures, local protocol & guidelines, planning and practise take into account the nature of sensory differences in people with autism.

Annex 3

The Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat

