



## **Department for the Economy**

### **Disability Action Plan 2016 -2021**

## Alternative formats

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## **Foreword**

I am pleased to present the Department for the Economy's (DfE) first Disability Action Plan, for the period 2016-2021.

DfE was established in May 2016, and combines a majority of the functions of the former Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). DfE's Disability Action Plan (2016-2021) is intended to provide unbroken continuity with the respective five year Action Plans for the former DETI and DEL, both of which finished in 2015.

Publication of the DfE Disability Action Plan has been delayed due to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the absence of Ministers. While we are already some way into the five year period covered by the Action Plan, we have decided to avoid further delay and to publish the Action Plan in order to maintain transparency in our current and future activities relating to our disability duties.

This plan sets out what the Department will do to fulfill our obligations in respect of our disability duties under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

The Department is committed to fully implementing our disability duties and will allocate the necessary resources to ensure that this Plan can be effectively implemented. The plan will be communicated to all staff together with the provision of all necessary guidance and training. Also, we will monitor our progress through an annual report, which will be published on our website and will also be provided to the Equality Commission NI.

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**Noel Lavery**  
**Permanent Secretary**

**June 2019**

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), DfE 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 collectively referred to as the ‘disability duties’.

1.2 Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Department for the Economy 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.

The first point of contact for enquiries about this Plan is:

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## 2. About the Department

- 2.1 The NI Executive gave a commitment in the Stormont House Agreement to reduce the number of government departments from twelve to nine. As a result, DfE was established in May 2016. DfE combines the functions of the former Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department for Employment and Learning, with the exception of the Employment Service which is now part of the Department for Communities. In addition, responsibility for NI Screen was transferred from the former Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).
- 2.2 A Programme for Government (PfG) 2016-2021 has still not been finalised due to the absence of the Executive. In the interim the Executive Office have produced a one year Outcomes Delivery Plan (ODP) for 2018 – 2019. DfE's key work as set out in the Department's annual Business Plan aligns to the ODP.

A vision, mission and strategic objectives have been developed for the Department and are set out below:

### DfE Vision

A globally competitive economy that works for everyone.

### DfE Mission

To develop and implement agile policies and programmes which promote a competitive, sustainable and inclusive economy through investment in:

- skills
- economic infrastructure
- research and innovation
- business development

### Strategic Objectives

- Accelerate innovation and research.
- Enhance education, skills and employability.
- Drive inclusive, sustainable growth.
- Succeed in global markets.
- Build the best economic infrastructure.
- Deliver a regulatory environment that optimises economic opportunities for business and commerce, while also protecting consumers and workers.
- Ensure the Department has effective governance, including programme and project management arrangements, and manages its resources, both financial and staff.

### Structure of DfE

2.3 To deliver the mission and strategic objectives the Department has been structured into 5 business areas as follows:

1. Strategic policy;
2. Skills and Business Development;
3. Infrastructure and Regulation;
4. Higher Education and Investment; and
5. Renewable Heat Incentive Taskforce.

Each business area is headed by a Deputy Secretary supported by a number of Directors with responsibility for specific areas of activity. A link to an organisation chart showing the structure and key areas of work is included at Appendix 1.

### Sponsored Bodies

- 2.4 A number of organisations assist the Department in carrying out its work in accordance with its policy agenda. The organisations receive funding from, and contribute to the work of the Department by attracting new businesses, developing business capacity and capability, up skilling those preparing for work or already in work, promoting tourism, ensuring the safety of our workplaces and setting and monitoring various governance standards for our workplaces. A list of these organisations is shown at Appendix 2.

### **3. Staff awareness raising**

- 3.1 DfE established a Departmental Diversity Group in 2016 which meets quarterly to discuss key diversity issues, including disability, and acts as a focal point for diversity practices and activities within the Department. The Diversity Group produces an annual Action Plan encompassing a broad range of diversity-related activities, including the establishment of Diversity Calendar identifying key local/national/international events which the Group intends to promote as a means of raising awareness. These events include, for example: International Autism Day; World Sight Day and World Blindness Month; and International Day for People with Disabilities, among others

3.2 Membership of the DfE Diversity Group is representative of job roles directly related to equality and diversity, Trade Union Side plus volunteers who express an interest in diversity. Meetings of the Group are also attended by DfEs Diversity Champion and Racial Equality Champion who, along with other senior officials from the Policy Champions Network, consider how the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) can advance awareness, knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity issues.

3.3 The Policy Champions Network is a group of senior civil servants, whose role is to build capability in policy making across the NICS. Every department, including DfE, 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 Section 75 groups, and communicating best practice.

#### **4. Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people**

4.1 The Department's policies serve to promote positive attitudes toward people with disabilities, for example by encouraging their greater participation in society, through training, education and appointment to public bodies.

4.2 In the capacity of Managing Authority for the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme (NIESF) 2014-2020, the Department allocated a significant amount of available funding towards people with particular disadvantage, including those with disabilities; Thematic Objective 9 of the ESF programme was allocated 30% of available funding (around €154 million) to support two groups of disadvantaged participants - people with a disability and people aged 16 and over who are not in training, education or employment. This was partly influenced by a recognition that projects

for people with disabilities often involve greater costs, relative to costs of supporting other projects.

- 4.3 The Department is also committed to widening the participation in higher education (HE). Widening participation in higher education facilitates and increases participation of those groups which are currently under represented in HE, in particular students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities. This is actively promoted through a range of initiatives, including: a widening access premium paid to HE institutions in respect of students with disabilities; capital funding to universities to improve access for disabled students; and, a wide range of student support measures (e.g., maintenance grants, loans and allowances, Disabled Students Allowances) to assist students with disabilities to attend university or college.
- 4.4 Wider access will be further encouraged by the Department's policy on sign language, which includes development of a range of sign language courses for interpreters and tutors, in conjunction with Belfast Metropolitan College, Queen's University and the Ulster University. This provision will continue to promote wider access to higher education for deaf and hard of hearing people through an increase in the numbers of trained sign language interpreters.
- 4.5 Wider access is also being promoted within further education (FE). The Department provides £4.5 million, per year, to FE colleges through the Additional Support Fund (ASF) to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD). Of this funding, £2.5 million per annum is provided to help meet the cost of additional technical and personal support for SLDD and the remaining £2 million is used to help meet the extra costs associated with offering discrete courses for those for whom mainstream provision is not suitable.

## **5. Encourage the participation of people with disabilities in public life**

5.1 The key measures currently undertaken and those planned by the Department to encourage the participation of people with a disability in public life are as follows:

### Public Appointments

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, published by the Commissioner for Public Appointments (Northern Ireland) and follow the guidance provided by the Central Appointments Unit.

5.2 The Department for the Economy has responsibility for appointments to a range of public life positions, as follows:

- Members of the Board of Governors of St Mary's University College
- Chairperson and members of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College
- Governing Bodies of Further Education Colleges
- Board of the Labour Relations Agency
- Members of the Fair Employment Tribunal and Industrial Tribunals
- All appointments to the Industrial Court (NI)
- Board of CITB - Construction SkillsNI

- Chairperson and Board members of InvestNI
- Chairperson and Board members of NI Screen
- Chairperson and Board members of Tourism Northern Ireland
- Chairperson and Board members of Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
- Chairperson and Board members of Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland

5.3 The Department will continue to take a number of steps to promote diversity among applicants. These include using social media to publicise recruitment competitions, engaging with stakeholder and diversity bodies, and streamlining the application process. Officials will continue to liaise internally and with colleagues across other Departments with a view to increasing diversity and to identify new ways to broaden interest in public appointments.

## **6. Action Measures**

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.

Outlined below are the measures which we propose to take over the period (2016-2021) of the action plan, together with associated performance indicators:

**Measures to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and encourage the participation of people with disabilities in public life (2016-2021)**

	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Performance Indicators/target</b>
<b>1</b>	<p><b><i>Awareness-raising and training</i></b></p> <p>Induction training for all new entrants, including information on the disability duties.</p>	<p>On-line induction package, which includes information on the department's Disability duties to be issued to all new entrants</p> <p>Ongoing - from October 2016.</p>	<p>The Disability duties are covered in all induction information.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p>The NI Civil Service has a Diversity Awareness Training package which 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 disabilities and on current disability equality legislation.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>All new recruits to the NICS to complete an on-line Diversity e-learning programme provided by the Centre for Applied Learning.</p> <p>All DfE staff are required to complete mandatory on-line refresher Diversity training on a 3-year rolling basis.</p>

<b>3</b>	An online Disability Awareness Training Course, designed by the Centre for Applied Learning is available.	Ongoing	Line managers will encourage staff to avail of this training.
<b>4</b>	DfE, 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.	Ongoing	Articles in the Department's intranet to increase staff awareness of the Disability Action Plan
<b>5</b>	In line with the Autism Strategy 2013-2020, DfE will: (1) Raise awareness of autism amongst all DfE staff; and  (2) Help ensure that Autism Awareness Training is made available to frontline staff.	Ongoing (Every April)  Dates to be agreed with National Autistic Society.	. Autism Factsheet to be distributed to all DfE staff as part of participation in World Autism Awareness Day. The factsheet is also distributed to DfE NDPBs.  DfE will ask the National Autistic Society to deliver ½ day awareness sessions to its frontline staff. This will include Insolvency Service, Trading Standards Service, and Careers

			Service etc.
6	<p><b><i>Promoting positive attitudes towards people with disabilities</i></b></p> <p>DfE has established a Departmental Diversity Group. The Diversity Group membership is representative of job roles directly related to equality and diversity, Trade Union Side plus volunteers who express an interest in diversity.</p>	The Group meets approximately 4 times a year.	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.
7	<p><b><i>Encouraging participation by people with disabilities in public life</i></b></p> <p>DfE, as part of the cross-departmental Public Appointment Forum (PAF) will continue to work towards meeting the challenge set by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, Northern Ireland (CPANI), to improve diversity on boards and to open up the appointments system to under-represented groups such as people with disabilities.</p>	Ongoing.	<p>The CPANI Code of Practice now requires every competition 'Appointment Plan' to have a diversity section. DfE currently provides a menu of actions/initiatives for sponsor branches and selection panels to consider when drawing up the diversity section specific to each competition.</p> <p>The Department operates the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, which guarantees an interview to people with</p>

			disabilities who meet minimum selection criteria. The number of applications for public appointments from individuals who declare a disability is being monitored on an ongoing basis.
<b>8</b>	Line Managers, with advice from Corporate Services as required, will take forward Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans. (PEEPs).	Ongoing.	NICSHR will seek to raise Line Managers' awareness of their responsibility to complete PEEPs as required.
<b>9</b>	Line Managers, with advice from Corporate Services as required, will take forward Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans. (PEEPs).	Ongoing.	NICSHR will seek to raise Line Managers' awareness of their responsibility to complete PEEPs as required.
<b>10</b>	DfE will implement the Access to Success strategy for Widening Participation in higher education by students from disadvantaged backgrounds including students with learning difficulties and disabilities.	By 2020	Widening Participation Branch target is to raise Higher Education awareness, aspiration, and educational attainment among the target students.
<b>11</b>	DfE will assist projects that aim to improve the employability of people with a disability through support provided under the NI European	By 2020	The Department's ESF Managing authority will provide funding to projects under the NI ESF Programme Priority 2, 'Social Inclusion in the

	Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2014-2020.		workforce', which aims to assist 13,000 participants with a disability over the duration of the Programme.
<b>12</b>	Through the Social Inclusion project of FE Means Success, DfE will identify the barriers that inhibit different groups of learners, including those with disabilities, from participating in FE provision and explore ways in which to overcome these barriers.	Policy proposals developed, one of which is the development of a specific SLDD policy by 2020.	Increase the number of applications to further education from individuals with a disability.
<b>13</b>	The Department will work with all higher education institutions to develop a route of exceptional application to higher education for disabled persons	By 2020	Increase the number of applications to higher education from individuals with a disability.
<b>14</b>	<b>Communications</b>  DfE will ensure that all publicity material is made accessible in other formats to customers with a disability	Ongoing.	Communications Branch to promote positive images of people with a disability and ensure that marketing materials are accessible in other formats upon request.

Signed by:

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**Noel Lavery**  
**Permanent Secretary**

**February 2019**

## Appendix 1

### **Department for Economy organisational structure and key functions**

available at :

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/department-economy-organisational-structure-and-key-functions>

DfE Sponsored Bodies

