



Department for the Economy

**Draft Disability Action Plan
2022 - 2027**

Alternative formats

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Foreword

I am pleased to present the Department for the Economy's (DfE) Disability Action Plan, for the period 2022-2027.

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 submitted to the Equality Commission NI.



Mike Brennan
Permanent Secretary

17th August 2023

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 Department for the Economy was established in May 2016, and 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. As a Department our focus is on shaping economic development by developing and implementing agile policies and programmes which promote a competitive, sustainable and inclusive economy through investment in skills, economic infrastructure, research and innovation and business development.

2.2 The Department's [Vision for a 10x Economy](#) sets out a long-term ambition for Northern Ireland to be a ten times better economy with benefits and opportunities for all our people. The aim is for economic growth to mean something to all people and places in Northern Ireland, with a positive impact on wider societal and environmental wellbeing. The Vision will provide the strategic framework for the Department's activities over the next decade. Our policies and interventions will be focused on delivering an economy which is innovative, inclusive and sustainable.

2.3 The Department intends to adopt an integrated approach to all policy and strategic development so that the ambitions set out in the vision will be realised. Our strategic priorities will work synergistically to realise the aspirations of the 10X vision with all policies and initiatives across the Department adopting a 10X approach.

Programme for Government

2.4 Once a new Programme for Government Outcomes Framework is finalised, DfE will be the lead Department on the economy-focussed Outcomes and will have key contributions to make to various others. The Department will

contribute to any further progress to be made towards the development of a full Programme for Government as required in due course.

Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives

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

DfE Vision

Northern Ireland prospering through a decade of innovation which will deliver an economy that is ten times better than it is today, with benefits for all our people.

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

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

1. International and Economic relations Group;
2. Economic Strategy Group;
3. Management Services and Regulation Group;
4. Skills and Education Group; and
5. Energy Group.

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 A.

The Department has over 1,200 staff at various different grades as follows:

Grade 2 / Permanent Secretary	1
Grade 3 / Deputy Secretary	5
Grade 5	24
Grade 6	16
Grade 7	136
Deputy Principal	266
Staff Officer	239
Executive Officer 1	218
Executive Officer 2	139
Administrative Officer	153

Administrative Assistant	28
Total	1225

Our Partners

2.7 The Department's services are delivered in partnership with a range of other bodies and we will continue to work with our Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) to develop the partnership working approach and ensure alignment of ALB strategies with the overall Departmental / Ministerial strategy.

Our main delivery partners and a brief synopsis of what they do is outlined at Appendix B.

2.8 In order to achieve the vision, mission and strategic objectives outlined above, the department carries out a wide range of activities. Essential elements of its normal recurring business include:

- Leading on economic policy and strategy, working with delivery partners such as Invest NI on the programmes and projects that support business development and investment and job creation;
- Continuing to support Further Education Colleges in taking a pivotal role in generating a strong and vibrant economy through the development of world class professional and technical skills, increasingly at higher levels and by helping employers to innovate and by providing those with low or no qualifications, or who have other barriers to learning, with the skills and qualifications needed to find employment and become economically active;
- Supporting higher education institutions in their provision of higher level skills, effecting a positive contribution to the labour market in order to contribute to economic recovery and improved social well-being.

- Supporting higher education institutions to fulfil their key missions of research and knowledge exchange, in order to maximise their achievement of excellent research and its translation into economic and societal impact.
- Supporting economic recovery by continuing to deliver Apprenticeship programmes supporting youth employment and improving the NI skills base, by expanding provision, widening access and improving the economic relevance through working with employers to develop pathways, qualifications & curriculum;
- Supporting economic recovery by continuing to deliver and introduce reformed vocational education programmes, Youth Training and Youth Inclusion programmes providing access to vocational education training and employability skills aimed at reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training;
- Championing economic, social and personal development by providing relevant high quality learning, research and skills;
- Continuing to support the tourism sector in NI working with delivery partners Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to maximise visitor numbers and associated revenue spend for the benefit of the NI economy and to support job creation;
- Supporting cross-border and all island trade and innovation through the activities of InterTradeIreland;
- Continuing to support NI Screen to maximise screen industry expenditure in NI, and build the skills capacity and reputation of the local screen industry internationally;
- Setting the strategic direction for how the energy sector can contribute towards addressing climate change and supporting a green economic recovery;
- Providing regulatory services, including Health and Safety Executive NI, Trading Standards, Consumer Council and

Insolvency Service as well as labour market services including Labour Relations Agency, tribunals, employment law and redundancy payments;

- Continuing to deliver careers guidance and advice in line with strategic commitments;
- Maintain and enhance Northern Ireland's domestic and international air connectivity.

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, amongst 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 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 underrepresented 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.

4.3 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.

- 4.4 Wider access continues to be 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.
- 4.5 The ongoing FE capital investment programme to rationalise the FE college estate, by replacing buildings in very poor condition with modern, state of the art learning environments also encompasses and promotes accessibility for all. The needs of students and staff have been taken into account at design stage and key stakeholder engagement has been maintained throughout delivery in tandem with compliance with the necessary building control aspects.
- 4.6 The Health and Safety Team provides advice and assistance to staff with disabilities and their managers, including how to evacuate staff with mobility difficulties from premises, and how to assist staff with ongoing health conditions whilst they work. Their remit also extends to funding purchases of items, where required, to aid staff in their working environment. Examples of items funded through the “reasonable adjustments” budget include software for staff with learning difficulties or sight loss, and specialised orthopedic chairs. During the last 18 months this has included items for use while working at home.
- 4.7 The DfE New Ways of Working Team will work with Corporate Services and Premises Teams, to adjust the workplace to suit the needs of those with

disabilities, for example by providing workstations in fixed locations for those who require specialised chairs or software.

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).

5.2 DfE 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
- Chairperson and members of the Board of the Labour Relations Agency
- Members of the Fair Employment Tribunal and Industrial Tribunals
- All appointments to the Industrial Court (NI)

- Board of CITBNI - 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
- Board of Matrix
- Board of Northern Ireland Co-operation Overseas (NI-CO)
- Appointment of Certification Officer
- Board of Reinstatement Committee for Reserve Forces in Civil Employment
- Board of The Office of Communications (OFCOM)
- DfE Non-Executive Board Members

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.

5.4 The Department's Public Appointments Unit (PAU) will continue to incorporate new ways to attract applications from people with disabilities, people from ethnic minorities and younger people and includes a welcoming statement in all of its public appointment competition material encouraging applications from these underrepresented groups to apply. In practice, this means every competition is looked at afresh and a Diversity Plan incorporated into each Appointment Plan. The language used in setting

criteria, the number and type of criteria and the various methods of publicity are discussed and agreed by the selection panel.

5.5 Selection panels are reminded that when determining an applicant's merit, cognizance must be taken of non-traditional career-paths and lifestyles, to ensure individuals are not discriminated against either directly or indirectly.

The Department also operates the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, applicants with a disability who meet all of the essential criteria will not be subjected to any short-listing process and are guaranteed an interview.

5.6 PAU will continue to facilitate participation in the Strictly Boardroom's "Boardroom Apprentice" Programme, which seeks to ensure that there is a diverse and sustainable pool of capable board-ready candidates for public appointment which is more reflective of our society.

6. Action Measures

6.1 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.

6.2 Outlined below are the measures, which we propose to take over the period (2022-2027) 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 (2022-2027)

	Measures	Timescale	Performance Indicators/target
1	Review and report on progress made on the Disability Action Plan on an annual basis, and submit Annual Performance Report to the Equality Commission	Annually	Report issued by 31 August, annually
2	Continue to improve accessibility and usability of Department's webpage and other social media outlets.	Annually	<p>The Department adheres to the international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1., which aim to optimise websites to accommodate specific needs, such as for example, assistive technology, screen readers, and keyboard-only navigation. The Department complies with the guidelines by screening all documents for accessibility before they are published on the website site. Compliance with (WCAG 2.1) guidelines will be ensured by:</p> <p>Updating the economy-ni website Accessibility Statement annually, which relies on an accessibility audit.</p>

			<p>Performing accessibility checks on 100% of documents before publication on website.</p> <p>Ensuring all social media posts are accessible within the parameters of the social media channel including use of graphics and ALT text where possible.</p>
	Staff Awareness Raising		
3	Provide refresher Equality Screening training to staff and ongoing support	Biennially	<p>The information below has been included in the DAP.</p> <p>The Department's Equality Unit will offer refresher training sessions on equality screening to all departmental business areas during 2023-24 and will repeat the offer biennially.</p> <p>DfE will invite the Equality Commission to provide a presentation Senior Management Team by end of 2023.</p>

4	Induction training for all new entrants, including information on the disability duties.	Ongoing.	On-line induction package, which includes information on the department's Disability duties to be issued to all new entrants. The Disability duties are covered in all induction information.
5	The NI Civil Service provides staff with a Diversity Awareness Training package that 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.	Ongoing. Ongoing	All new recruits to the NICS to complete an on-line Diversity e-learning programme provided by the Centre for Applied Learning. All DfE staff are required to complete mandatory on-line refresher Diversity training on a 3-year rolling basis.
6	All staff are offered an online Disability Awareness Training Course, designed by the Centre for Applied Learning.	Ongoing	Line managers will encourage staff to avail of this training.

7	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.	Annually	NICS centrally issue disability-related articles throughout the year. Also, the Department will publish 1-2 internal articles each year to promote staff awareness of the DAP.
8	<p>In line with the Autism – Interim Strategy 2022-2023, DfE will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raise awareness of autism amongst all DfE staff; and 2. Help ensure that Autism Awareness Training is made available to frontline staff. 	<p>Ongoing (Every April)</p> <p>Dates to be agreed with National Autistic Society.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>DfE will ask the National Autistic Society to deliver half-day awareness sessions to its frontline staff. This will include Insolvency Service, Trading Standards Service, and Careers Service among others.</p>
9	Promote staff awareness of the Department's Disability Action Plan (DAP) 2022-2027	During 2023	Staff will be informed of the outcome of the consultation on the DAP and how it may be accessed within one month of the final document being agreed and published.

<p>10</p>	<p>Higher Education Division</p> <p>Continue to provide higher education Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to eligible individuals – providing additional student support funding to help students with extra essential course-related costs as a direct result of a disability to enter and progress through higher education.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Around 2,600 students are supported through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) annually, receiving in the region of £4m.</p> <p>Funding is provided to Northern Ireland universities and FE colleges to meet the administration costs of providing a Register of Support Providers to disabled students for the purposes of DSA. The Register of Support Providers is a unique service which provides one to one personal support to disabled students registered on recognised higher education courses at any of the colleges or universities. During academic year 2020/21 more than 1,300 students at universities and colleges in NI availed of one-to-one support through the Register of Support Providers.</p> <p>For academic year 2022/23, students eligible for DSA will be able to access £25,000 of additional support per</p>
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			<p>annum if required. The actual support provided will vary from student to student, in line with their own individual needs, but will generally be in the form of specialist equipment, one-to-one Non-medical Help, and help towards additional travel-related costs that they must incur in attending their course.</p> <p>The Department continues to monitor DSA uptake as well as the impact the funding has in supporting students through their studies.</p>
11	<p>Tertiary Education and Post 16 Reform Division</p> <p>Under representation of disadvantaged groups in Higher Education. This includes people with a disability who have greater difficulty in accessing and achieving higher education.</p>	Ongoing.	<p>The Department's vision is that any appropriately qualified individual in Northern Ireland should be able to gain access to higher education that is right for them, irrespective of their personal or social background or location of study.</p>

	<p>Identify, address, and create more equitable access to education (FE & HE), training and skills for those in under-represented groups.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Access and participation rates in higher education of target groups is the performance measure.</p> <p>The Skills Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Sub-Committee (SEDI) is a sub-committee of the NI Skills Council. Ongoing research is being sourced by SEDI to establish an accurate baseline on which we can prioritise and progress the future work of the Sub-Committee. This will provide a more structured and accurate approach in determining the most effective way to prioritise the assistance to under-represented groups.</p>
	<p>Monitoring of participation in HE by disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>The Department will continue to monitor activities and targets set by institutions to widen access and participation through annual Widening Access & Participation Plans (WAPPs). The research referred to above will assess the effectiveness of the current WAPP reporting process.</p>

12	<p>Higher Education Division</p> <p>Under representation of disadvantaged groups in Higher Education This includes people with a disability who greater difficulty in accessing and achieving further and higher education.</p>	Ongoing.	<p>Widening participation in higher education is a key priority for the Department. Our aim is to increase the participation of those groups which are currently under-represented in HE, in particular, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities.</p> <p>Leading on the delivery of Access to Success, an integrated Regional Strategy for Widening Participation in Higher Education Part of the funding provided to the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) each year consists of an allocation for widening access and improving provision for disabled students. The HEIs receive this allocation in recognition of the additional costs of recruiting and supporting students with disabilities. The amount received by each institution is related to the number of students it has in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance. (The Disabled</p>

			<p>Students' Allowance is an allowance to assist students who can show that they have a disability or medical condition that affects their ability to study). The amounts paid to the HEIs for the current academic year (August 2021 to July 2022) is as follows:</p> <table data-bbox="1402 537 1921 716"> <tr> <td>Queen's University</td> <td>£156,183</td> </tr> <tr> <td>University of Ulster</td> <td>£274,503</td> </tr> <tr> <td>St Mary's</td> <td>£ 22,727</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stranmillis</td> <td>£ 10,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Open University</td> <td>£ 33,130</td> </tr> </table> <p>Almost 2800 students with learning difficulties and / or disabilities were given additional support in college to enable them to participate in Further Education in 2020/21. The additional support delivered by colleges is facilitated by the Department through the Additional Support Fund which provides £4.5m across the sector for technical support (e.g. specialised enabling equipment, such as braille, Reading Edge equipment, IT adaptations, specialist software) and personal support (e.g. specialist tutors/advisers, such as hearing or visual impairment tutors, interpreters for students with a hearing impairment,</p>	Queen's University	£156,183	University of Ulster	£274,503	St Mary's	£ 22,727	Stranmillis	£ 10,000	Open University	£ 33,130
Queen's University	£156,183												
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			<p>support workers/classroom assistants and note-takers).</p> <p>Around 2,600 students are supported through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) annually, receiving in the region of £4m. Funding is provided to Northern Ireland universities and FE colleges to meet the administration costs of providing a Register of Support Providers to disabled students. The Register of Support Providers is a unique service which provides one to one personal support to disabled students registered on recognised higher education courses at any of the colleges or universities. From academic year 2022/23, all eligible full-time undergraduate, part-time undergraduate and postgraduate higher education students will be able to avail of up to £25,000 in DSA support annually. Additional support may be available towards approved travel expenses if required.</p> <p>The Department will monitor activities by institutions to widen access and participation and their progress towards increased access and participation rates of the target groups</p>
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			through their annual Widening Access & Participation Plans.
13	<p><i>Further Education Division</i></p> <p>Under-representation and barriers to access further education by people with disabilities.</p> <p>Annual monitoring of FE enrolments</p> <p>Targeted support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD)</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Annual funding - ongoing</p>	<p>Increasing FE enrolments of students with disabilities.</p> <p>DfE provides £4.5 million annual funding to FE colleges through the Additional Support Fund (ASF) to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD).</p> <p>£2.5 million is to help meet the cost of additional technical and personal support for SLDD and £2 million to help meet extra costs associated with offering discrete courses for those for whom mainstream provision is not suitable.</p>

	The ongoing FE capital investment programme to rationalise the FE college estate, by replacing buildings in very poor condition with modern, state of the art learning environments also encompasses and promotes accessibility for all.	Ongoing	The needs of students and staff are taken into account at design stage and key stakeholder engagement is to be maintained throughout delivery in tandem with compliance with the necessary building control aspects.
14	<i>Apprenticeships</i> Ensure guidance and advice on apprenticeships signposts Department for Communities support for people with disabilities applying for an apprenticeship. Produce promotional material to be more inclusive of under-represented groups, including people with disabilities.	Ongoing Ongoing	Increased number of people from under-represented groups, including those with disabilities, in apprenticeships. Monitoring and twice yearly publication of official apprenticeship statistics. Promotional activity/material is more inclusive and representative. Case studies of under-represented groups undertaking apprenticeships.

<p>15</p>	<p>Careers Service Under-representation of people with disabilities in the Northern Ireland workforce.</p> <p>The Careers Service is an all-age, all-ability service that provides impartial guidance on career planning to people in education, employment, training and to the unemployed with a focus on addressing the needs of young people and adults facing, or vulnerable to, social exclusion, including those with a disability.</p> <p>The Careers Service will maintain effective Partnership working arrangements with key stakeholders and organisations who act as advocates for young people with varying barriers, including those with a disability.</p> <p>This includes having Partnership Agreements in place with 100% of publicly funded post primary schools,</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Statistics on careers services provided to all clients (young people and adults) with a disability are collated / monitored each business year.</p> <p>Number of Partnership Agreements in place with post primary schools, HSC Trusts, Youth Justice Agency, Training Suppliers and FE Colleges. Target for school, Training Supplier and FE College PAs to be in place by the 31st of October each year.</p> <p>Number of Training Credits (TCs) issued by Careers Service for young people considering Skills for Life and Work.</p>
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	DfE Health and Safety Team will continue to fund reasonable adjustments.	Ongoing	Continued expenditure on specialised furniture, IT equipment and software.
16	<p><i>Skills for Life and Work</i></p> <p>Support for young people with a disability to undertake training at Entry Level and Level 1</p> <p>The Disability Support Service (DSS) Reform Project, which commenced in 2021 is likely to benefit people with a disability.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>DSS Reform project ongoing. To be completed before the current DSS contract ends in 2023.</p>	<p>All young persons on the programme with a disability will receive support.</p> <p>The current DSS contract supports participants on the Department's work-based-learning programmes and is delivered by specialist DSS contractors. The aim of the DSS Reform Project is to review and redesign the service to improve longer-term DSS provision.</p>
17	<p>Promoting positive attitudes towards people with disabilities</p> <p>DfE has established a Departmental Diversity Group. The Diversity Group membership is representative of job roles directly related to equality and</p>	<p>The Group meets approximately four times a year.</p>	<p>In addition to attending meetings, members of the Group will have the opportunity to contribute to the development of communications for</p>

	diversity, Trade Union Side plus volunteers who express an interest in diversity.		staff by researching material, offering ideas on topical issues, drafting publications etc.
18	<p>Encouraging participation by people with disabilities in public life</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>Specific action measures to increase representation of people with a disability onto Boards includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced notification to S75 groups including disability groups to give them time to circulate to their distribution lists and put on their websites.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working with the NICS Disability Champion to provide advance notification of competition launches and obtain his input and assistance with promotion and outreach.• The Boardroom Apprentice Scheme NI is overseen by TEO and this feeds in to DfE Boards of Partnership Organisations.• Welcoming statement in candidate information booklet says <i>“Women, young people, people with a disability and those from minority ethnic communities are currently under-represented on the Board and applications from members of these groups would be particularly welcome. Applicants with a disability who meet or exceed the pass-mark set for the criteria will be offered an interview. Their application will not be subjected to short-listing.”</i>• Online Applications accepted using Citizenspace platform.• Applications accepted in a number of formats which
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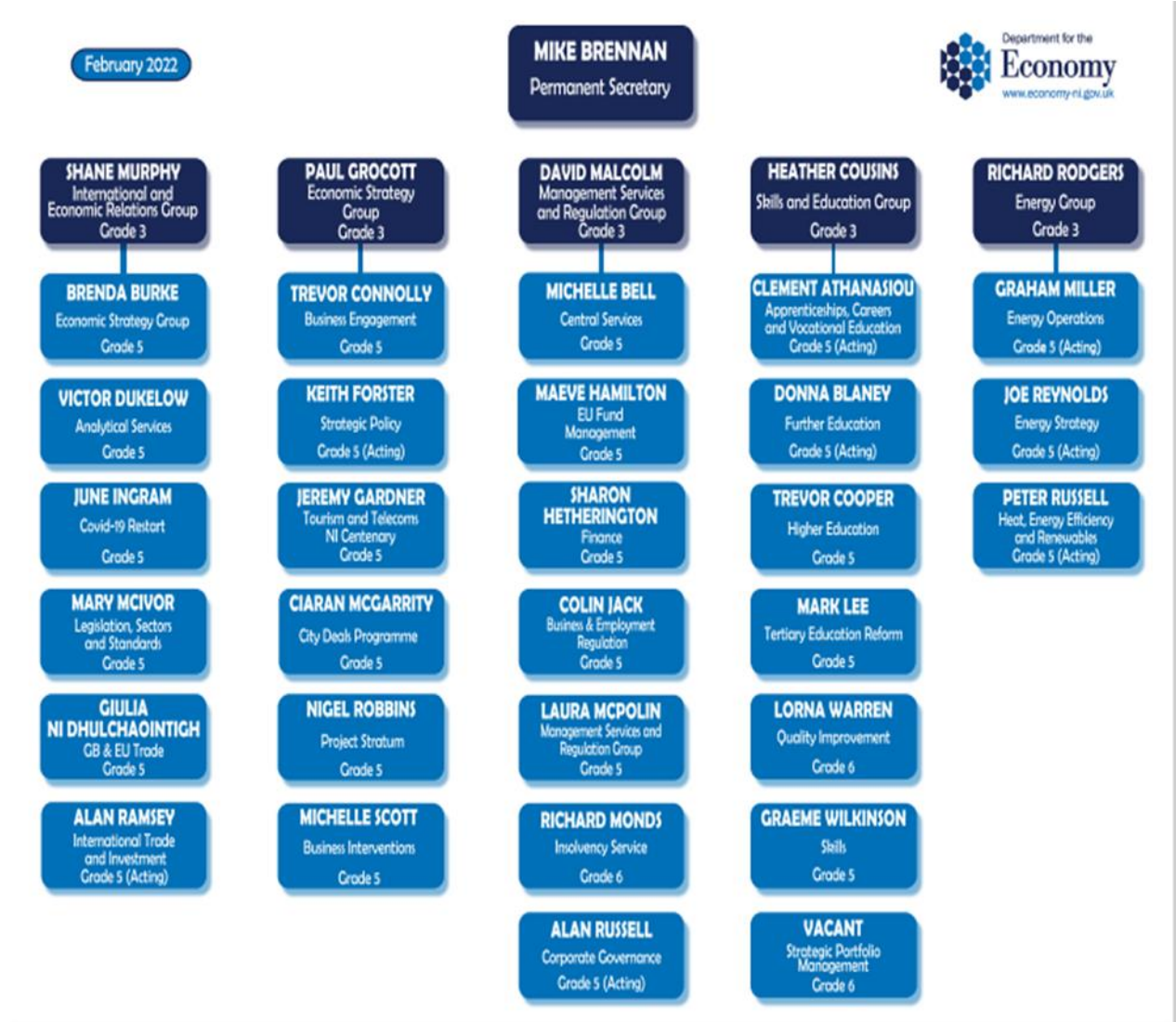
			<p>includes email, hand-written, postal or hand delivered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct contact with the equality officers in the local councils.• Payment for travel to and from interviews is available upon request.• Online interviews or face to face interviews are facilitated.• All requests for reasonable adjustments are considered for interviews.• Application forms are offered in alternative formats – for example Braille, large print, audio etc.• DfE uses consistent positive language to flag the diversity monitoring from within our application packs and ensure the form is accessible in the same ways referred to above for application forms.• Phone numbers and Text Relay contact details are provided throughout all competition material.• Ministers and Permanent Secretaries promote competitions at various events.
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops offered by CPANI (Commissioner for Public Appointments NI) to assist all citizens to familiarise and improve their skills and knowledge of the process. • The Department feeds in to TEO and CPANI initiatives on inclusion and diversity as and when required. <p>Also, the Department operates the Guaranteed Interview Scheme for public appointments.</p>
19	Increase the representation of women, people with disabilities and people from minority ethnic groups on the Departmental Board	Ongoing / Annually	<p>Appropriate appointment to Board</p> <p>Take on one Board Apprentice per year from an under-represented group.</p> <p>Six competitions were completed during the year 2022/23 and two reserve lists were used. In total, 32 appointments were made – 20 male (63%) and 12 females (37%). One appointee had applied under GIS. (3%).</p>

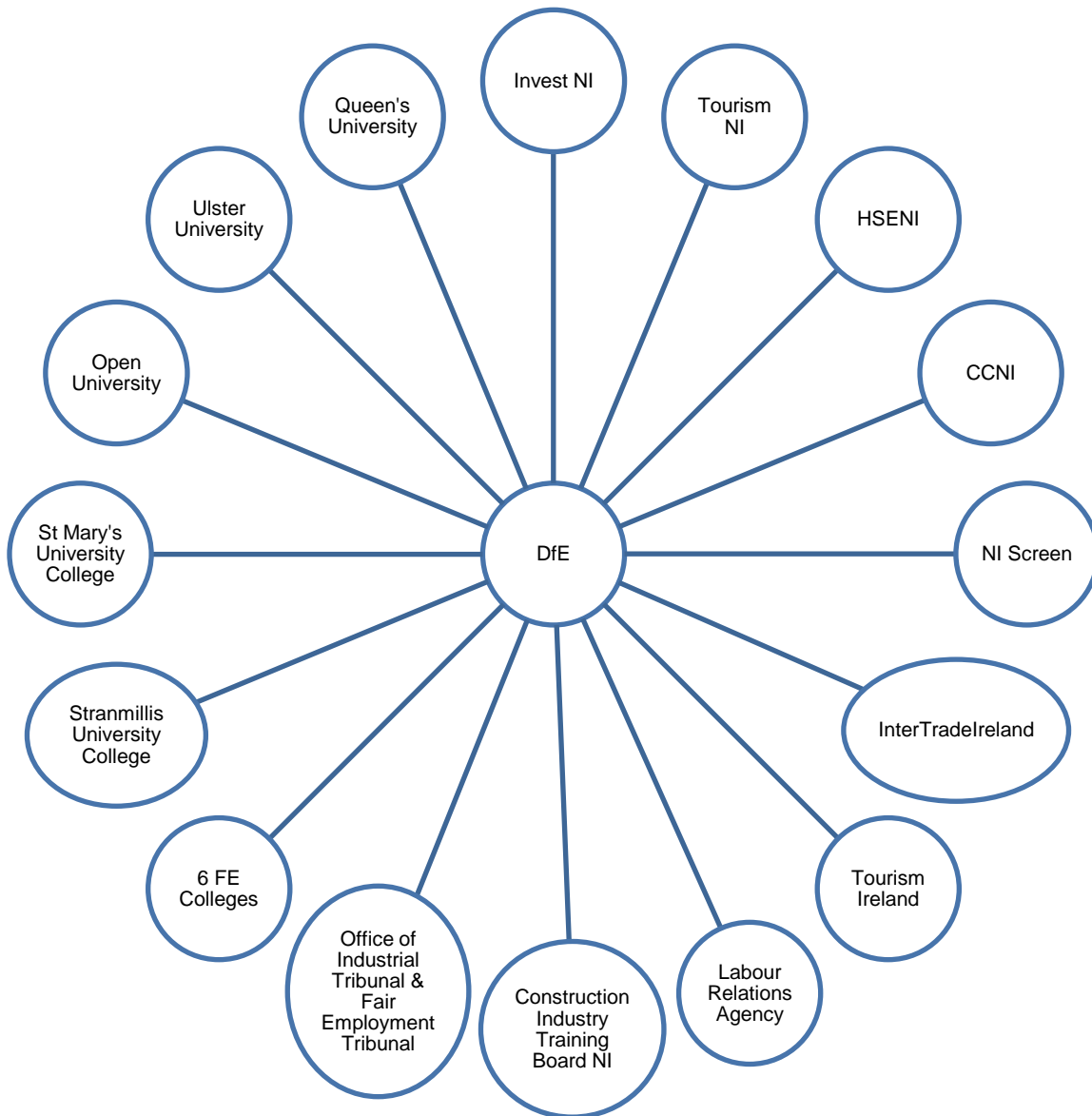
20	Line Managers, with advice from DfE Corporate Services as required, will agree take forward Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans. (PEEPs) with those who need them, in conjunction with the Premises Team / Officer in their building. Advice is available from the Health and Safety Team.	Ongoing.	
21	The Department will liaise with NICSHR to establish whether JAM Card (Just a Minute) training can be re-instated	2023	During 2019, 71% of staff completed this training, and DfE achieved the status of a 'JAM Friendly' organisation. The Department aims to extend the training to a greater percentage of staff.
22	DfE will continue to work towards the vision outlined in the Access to Success strategy for Widening Participation in higher education by students from disadvantaged backgrounds including students with learning difficulties and disabilities.	Ongoing	Widening Participation Branch target is to raise Higher Education awareness, aspiration, and educational attainment among the target students.
23	Through the Social Inclusion project of FE Means Success, DfE will identify the barriers that inhibit different groups of learners, including	Ongoing	Effective processes in place to provide learning support for SLDD which are consistent across the FE sector and applied in a manner that is compliant

	those with disabilities, from participating in FE provision and explore ways in which to overcome these barriers.		with legislation and in accordance with the colleges' commitments to equality and inclusion. Policy proposals developed, one of which was the development of an interim SLDD policy in 2020.
24	Communications. DfE will ensure that all publicity material is made accessible upon request 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.
25	The Department will meet the requirements of the international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, 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'.	Annually	Department's Information Management Unit (IMU) maintains the DfE website and undertakes periodic annual accessibility audits on our web content. Information seminars are also provided to staff to encourage awareness of and adherence to the requirements of WCAG.

Appendix A - Department for Economy organisational structure and key functions



APPENDIX B - DfE FAMILY OF BUSINESSES & BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF FUNCTIONS



Partnership Bodies	Role of the Body
Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs)	
Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI);	Grow the local economy by helping new and existing businesses to compete internationally, and by attracting new investment to Northern Ireland.
Northern Ireland Screen (NIS);	Accelerate the development of a dynamic and sustainable screen industry and culture in Northern Ireland.
Construction and Industry Training Board–Northern Ireland (CITB-NI);	Encourages the adequate training of those employed or intending to be employed in the construction industry and to improve the skills and productivity of the industry in Northern Ireland.
Tourism Northern Ireland (Tourism NI);	Responsible for the development of tourism and the marketing of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination to domestic tourists, from within Northern Ireland, and to visitors from the Republic of Ireland.
Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI)	Promotes and enforces health and safety at work standards in Northern Ireland.
Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI)	Provides free, independent support and advice for all consumers and businesses in Northern Ireland. They also have powers to investigate complaints about energy, water, transport and postal services and undertake research to understand local consumer issues.
Labour Relations Agency (LRA)	Promote the improvement of employment relations in Northern Ireland.
Stranmillis University College	Identify, educate, and place highly qualified education professionals in schools and related professional settings. It also offers pre-service and in-service courses, undergraduate and postgraduate.
Further Education (FE) colleges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC); - Northern Regional College (NRC); - Southern Regional College (SRC); - South West College (SWC); - South Eastern Regional College (SERC); 	<p>The FE colleges are the main providers of vocational and technical education and training in NI and play a central role in raising levels of literacy and numeracy and in up-skilling and re-skilling through a broad range of courses.</p> <p>The colleges offer programmes which include foundation degrees, higher national diplomas, skills qualifications and level 3 diploma and certificates in a wide range of areas. They take a partnership approach in linking with</p>

Partnership Bodies	Role of the Body
- North West Regional College (NWRC).	employers and stakeholders. The six individual colleges develop their own links in their geographical area right across Northern Ireland.
Autonomous Higher Education Institutions	
Ulster University	A university with a national and international reputation for excellence, innovation and regional engagement, making a major contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of Northern Ireland. Their core business activities are teaching and learning, widening access to education, research and innovation and technology and knowledge transfer.
Queen's University Belfast	It is one of the leading universities in the UK and Ireland with a distinguished heritage and history. It conducts leading edge education and research focused on the needs of society. They are globally connected and networked with strategic partnerships across the world.
St Mary's University College	Provides degree programmes in teacher education – with the option to learn through Irish as well as English – and in Liberal Arts.
The Open University	Creates higher educational opportunities with no barriers to entry. Provides flexible, innovative teaching and understands the needs of part-time students. Their innovative, award-winning distance teaching credentials have seen over 2 million students receive an education, otherwise denied to them at campus-based universities.
North/South Bodies	
InterTrade Ireland	Helps small businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland explore new cross-border markets, develop new products, processes and services and become investor ready.
Tourism Ireland	Responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday and business tourism destination.
Other Bodies	
Office of Industrial Tribunal and Fair Employment Tribunal (OITFET)	Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal are independent judicial bodies in Northern Ireland. The Industrial Tribunals, hear and determine claims to do with employment matters. The Fair

Partnership Bodies	Role of the Body
	Employment Tribunal hears and determines complaints of discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion.