



OFFICE OF THE SOCIAL FUND  
COMMISSIONER  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

Office of the Social Fund Commissioner  
Scottish Amicable Building  
11 Donegall Square South  
Belfast  
BT1 5JE

### **Translations and other formats**

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in large – print, disk, audio cassette or Braille format, or any other queries, please contact:

The Office Manager  
The Office of the Social Fund Commissioner  
Scottish Amicable Building  
11 Donegall Square South  
Belfast  
BT1 5JE

Telephone: 028 90247202

Fax: 028 90230921

E-mail: [sfc@osfcni.org.uk](mailto:sfc@osfcni.org.uk)

Textphone: 028 90897540

This paper is also available to download from the OSFC's website – [www.osfcni.org.uk](http://www.osfcni.org.uk).

## **Foreword**

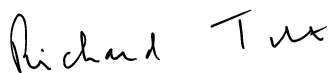
The Office of the Social Fund Commissioner (OSFC) for Northern Ireland is committed to complying with the duties imposed on it by sections 49A and 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. In accordance with the legislation the OSFC has now drawn up a Disability Action Plan that details how the organisation will fulfil its duties and obligations over the coming five years.

As Commissioner and Office Manager of the OSFC, we are personally committed to complying with the statutory duties and will provide effective leadership to ensure that as an organisation we comply with our obligations. To this end we will ensure that:

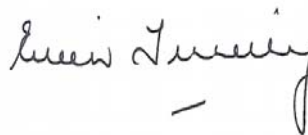
- the Department for Social Development (DSD), who is the OSFC's sponsoring department, are informed of the resources in terms of people, time and money needed to meet the disability duties;
- the OSFC allocates the necessary resources to ensure that the Disability Action Plan can be implemented effectively and on time;
- the disability duties are communicated to the OSFC's staff and that all necessary training and guidance is provided;
- there are appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and the OSFC's Disability Action Plan effectively implemented.

We consider that the OSFC's Disability Action Plan sets challenging but achievable objectives and we are confident that our actions over the next five years will greatly enhance the work of the organisation.

Yours sincerely



Sir Richard Tilt  
Social Fund Commissioner



Eileen Tinnelly  
Office Manager

## **1. Purpose of the Disability Action Plan**

1.1. Under section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, public authorities when carrying out their functions must have due regard to the need to:

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

1.2. Under section 49B of the Act, public authorities are also under the duty to submit to the Equality Commission plans, known as disability action plans, showing how they propose to fulfil the disability duties in relation to their functions.

## **2. Definition of Disability**

2.1. Under the Act a disability is defined as:

“A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities”.

2.2. A full explanation of the meaning of disability under the Act can be found in Appendix 3.

2.3. When implementing the disability duties the OSFC will not use any definition of disabled that is narrower than the Act. The OSFC will also consider the full diversity of disabled people in terms of type of impairment and in other terms such as race, age, gender, sexual orientation and religious belief.

## **3. About the OSFC**

3.1. The Office of the Social Fund Commissioner (OSFC) for Northern Ireland is an independent statutory body, established in 1988. The duties and powers of the OSFC are defined by the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.

3.2. The OSFC is headed by the Social Fund Commissioner who is appointed by the Department for Social Development (DSD). The Commissioner is also the Social Fund Commissioner for Great Britain (GB), heading the Independent Review Service (IRS), based in Birmingham.

3.3. The OSFC staff comprises of the Office Manager, seven Inspectors and two support staff<sup>1</sup>. Staff are recruited by open competition from the

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<sup>1</sup> The OSFC Organisational Chart is detailed at Appendix 2

Northern Ireland Civil Service NICS and appointed by the Commissioner. Appointed staff are seconded from the NICS for a minimum of three years.

3.4. The OSFC's commitment to equality is shown in the business values that underpin the work of the organisation. These values state that the OSFC will be:

- Accessible
- Respectful
- Prompt
- Responsive
- Confidential; and
- Impartial

3.5. The main role of the OSFC is to carry out independent reviews for applicants who are dissatisfied with the decision made by the Social Security Agency (SSA) on their applications to the discretionary part of the Social Fund. This part of the Fund provides one off payments to help customers meet a broad range of expenses in times of particular difficulty. The OSFC customer base consists of some of the most vulnerable people in society, including people with mental and physical disabilities.

3.6. The OSFC also:

- provides information to the public, their advisers and staff of the Social Security Agency (SSA) about the social fund, the role of the OSFC and the right of applicants to seek an independent review
- provides advice and guidance to the Social Security Agency (SSA) about operational performance.
- when appropriate contributes to research to help improve the operation of the social fund.

3.7. The OSFC is not responsible for:

- the development of benefit policy in respect of the Social Fund. This is a matter for the Social Security Policy and Legislation Division of the Department for Social Development (DSD).
- human resource issues relating to OSFC staff such as recruitment, promotion, managing attendance, conduct/discipline, performance management pay and equal opportunities, procurement of goods and services and accommodation/health and safety. These are matters for the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) who determine these policies for the whole of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and DSD who is the OSFC's sponsoring department. The OSFC will contribute such assistance as may be required by DFP or DSD to enable them to meet their statutory duties in respect of these human resource related policies.

#### **4. Public Appointments**

- 4.1. The OSFC does not have responsibility for any public appointments at present. Should this situation change the OSFC will amend its Disability Action Plan accordingly.

#### **5. Previous Measures**

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

Staff from OSFC have attended a wide variety of training events on disability related issues. These include:

- training events and awareness sessions provided by the Department for Social Development on the Disability Discrimination Act and on general equality issues.
- a workshop on the equality legislation and diversity at the offices of the OSFC's sister organisation, the Independent Review Service, in Birmingham.
- awareness sessions held at the OSFC's offices by various groups, such as Parents Professionals and Autism, Asthma UK and Help the Aged.
- Disability Awareness and Customer Service training provided by Disability Action.

Attendance at these events has ensured that OSFC staff are aware of the legislative requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. It has also ensured that they have an understanding of barriers facing disabled people, including attitudinal, and of language and etiquette.

##### **Encourage the participation of disabled people in public life**

The OSFC has not taken any previous measures to encourage the participation of disabled people in public life. This is primarily due to the fact that the OSFC does not have responsibility for any public appointments.

#### **6. Organisational Arrangements**

- 6.1. Overall responsibility for the effective implementation of the Disability Action Plan lies with the Commissioner.
- 6.2. Day to day responsibility for driving forward the implementation of the Disability Action Plan and the point of contact within the OSFC will be:

The Office Manager  
Office of the Social Fund Commissioner  
Scottish Amicable Building  
11 Donegal Square South  
Belfast  
BT1 5JE

Tel: 028 90247202  
Textphone: 028 90897540  
Fax:028 90230921  
E-mail: [sfc@osfcni.org.uk](mailto:sfc@osfcni.org.uk)

6.3. Objectives and targets relating to the Disability Action Plan will be integrated into the OSFC's corporate planning process, which sets out the aims and objectives of the organisation. Staff who are directly involved in this work will include the implementation of the Disability Action Plan in their personal work performance plans, which are subject to appraisal in the annual performance review. In addition, a commitment to the statutory duties will be included in all job descriptions.

6.4. Progress on meeting the objectives of the Disability Action Plan will be monitored and reported upon to the Commissioner on a regular basis. This will also form part of the Commissioner's annual report on the work of the OSFC to the Minister for Social Development.

## **7. Consultation**

7.1. The OSFC recognises the importance of consulting with disabled people in the drafting, implementation, monitoring and review of its disability action plan. This consultation will be carried out in accordance with the seven Guiding Principles on consultation, as set out in the Equality Commission's Guide to Statutory Duties.

7.2. In particular the OSFC will ensure that information on the draft and final disability action plan, as well as other information relating to the disability duties, will be available on request in alternative formats, such as Braille, on computer disk, on audio cassette and large print.

7.3. Consideration will be given as to the most appropriate method for consulting with disabled people whether this be face to face meetings, small group meetings, focus groups, discussion papers or internet discussions. Consideration will also be given how best to communicate with disabled children and young people and those with learning disabilities.

7.4. The OSFC will aim to ensure full participation by disabled people in any meetings that are held. The OSFC will consider the time of day, the suitability of the venue and in particular whether it can be accessed by disabled people, how the meeting is run, the use of appropriate language

and whether a signer is necessary. The OSFC will recognise and in good faith meet access related costs and any costs associated with communication and collaboration with disabled people.

7.5. The OSFC's Disability Action Plan will include a statement outlining the way in which it consulted on its draft plan. In particular it will detail how disabled people were consulted in regards the development of the Disability Action Plan and specify any changes made to the plan as a result of the consultation process.

- **OSFC consulted on its draft Disability Action Plan in accordance with the seven Guiding Principles on consultation, as set out in the Equality Commission's Guide to Statutory Duties. Before issuing the Action Plan for full consultation, OSFC met with Disability Action to seek its views on the initial draft.**
- **Following this meeting amendments were made to the draft Action Plan and this, along with a questionnaire, was issued to all organisations listed at Appendix 2 of the OSFC's Equality Scheme, and to other interested organisations. The documents were also placed on the OSFC website.**
- **A period of consultation of 6 weeks was provided with a closing date of 22 June 2007. The OSFC was unable to provide the recommended 8 week consultation period given the closing date for the submission of the Action Plan to the Equality Commission was 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007. However OSFC may amend the Action Plan if further responses are received after the closing date.**
- **A total of 158 questionnaires and draft Disability Action Plans were issued during the consultation period.**
- **The OSFC also invited all customers with a disability who received a decision during the consultation period to take part in the consultation exercise. 137 invitations were issued and 2 questionnaires with Disability Action Plans were requested by customers. None of these were returned.**
- **All potential consultees were advised that information would be provided in alternative formats on request. The OSFC highlighted the fact that it was happy to receive comments in any appropriate format and meetings would be arranged at a convenient time and place.**

- **The OSFC received 6 responses to this consultation. The points raised by these consultees and the OSFC's responses are detailed in Appendix 4. Having taken account of the responses, the OSFC redrafted its Action Plan. The revised Action Plan is held at Appendix 2.**
- **The OSFC responded to all consultees who replied to the consultation on the Disability Action Plan and issued a revised Action Plan for their consideration and further comment. OSFC may amend the Action Plan if further comments are received.**
- **The OSFC would like to thank all those consultees who responded to the consultation document.**

7.6. In this statement the OSFC will also specify its arrangements for consulting with disabled people in the implementation, monitoring and review of its Disability Action Plan.

- **The OSFC consulted with 137 customers with a disability during consultation on the Action Plan but received no responses. We will therefore consider if there are better ways to consult with disabled people on the implementation, monitoring and review of the Action Plan. The Action Plan will be published on OSFC's website which will enable groups who represent disabled people to comment on the Action Plan. The OSFC may amend the Action Plan in light of any comments received.**

## **8. Section 75**

8.1 In order to meet its Section 75 obligations the OSFC will also consult on the draft disability action plan with the consultees listed in its Equality Scheme<sup>2</sup>. This consultation process will adhere to the Equality Commissions guidance on consultation.

## **9. Publication**

9.1. Following submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland the OSFC's Disability Action Plan will be available on request from the Office Manager.

9.2. The availability of the Disability Action Plan will be highlighted on the OSFC's website and in its published material. The OSFC will also

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<sup>2</sup> Ref OSFC 's approved Equality Scheme, Appendix 2

highlight the Disability Action Plan through mail shots and meeting directly with disability organisations and representative groups.

## **10. Progress reporting**

10.1. The OSFC will conduct an annual review of its progress in relation to the implementation of the Disability Action Plan and forward a report to the Equality Commission. A copy of the report will be made available on the OSFC'S website at [www.osfcni.org.uk](http://www.osfcni.org.uk). The report will contain a summary of:

- the steps it has taken to fulfil its disability action plan;
- the degree to which the public authority has implemented these measures within the timescale as stated in the plan;
- the degree to which the public authority has met performance indicators and/or targets;
- the degree to which the measures taken by the public authority have been effective.

10.2. It will form part of the OSFC's annual report to the Equality Commission on the implementation of its Section 75 duties.

## **11. Five Year Review**

11.1. The OSFC will conduct a thorough review of its disability action plan within five years. When carrying out the review the OSFC will assess:

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

11.2. A report of this review will be forwarded to the Equality Commission. A copy of the report will also be placed on the OSFC website at [www.osfcni.org.uk](http://www.osfcni.org.uk). In this report the OSFC will:

- state how it has actively engaged with disabled people during the implementation and review of its disability action plan;
- indicate the results of this engagement.



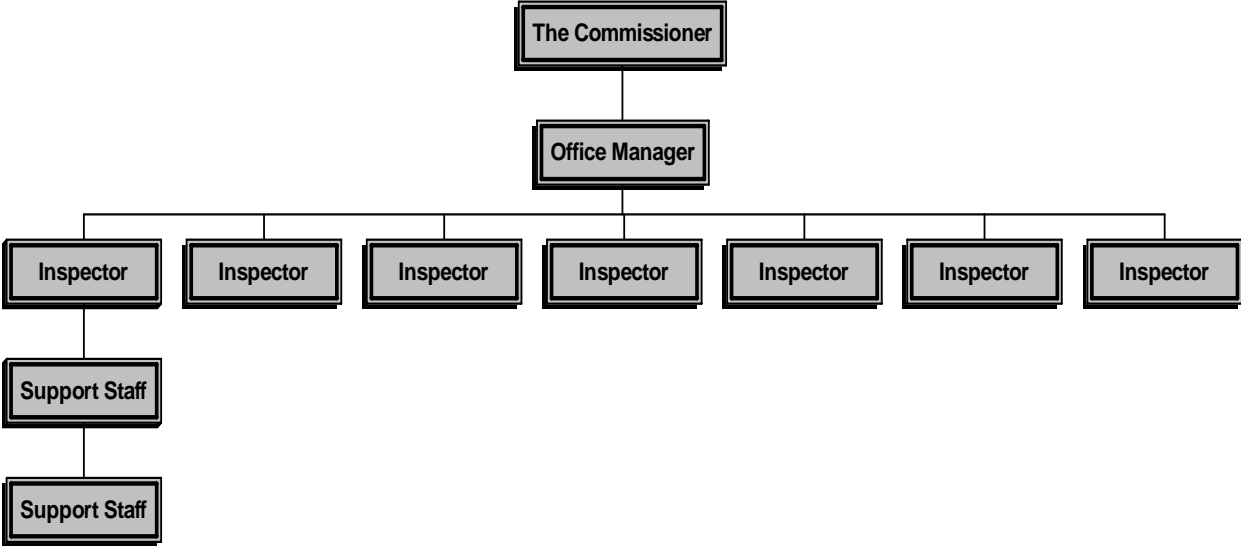
## DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

Specific Action	Expected Outcome	Lead Responsibility	Timescale	Performance Indicator/Target
<b>TRAINING</b>				
Provide specialist training for all staff directly involved in the implementation of the Disability Action Plan	Increases staff awareness and understanding of their responsibilities. Promote positive attitudes.	Office Manager Equality Officer	By end of December 2007	All staff are aware of disability duties
Provide training for all staff relating to disability duties and disability awareness	Staff better informed of the needs of disabled people.	Office Manager Equality Officer	By end of December 2008	Staff trained to appropriate levels
Arrange refresher training/awareness sessions as required	Encourages staff to think more about improving services for people with disabilities.	Office Manager Equality Officer	Ongoing	Statutory duties met

Specific Action	Expected Outcome	Lead Responsibility	Timescale	Performance Indicator/Target
<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>				
Integrate disability duties into business plans	Places disability duties at the centre of OSFC policy and decision making process.	Office Manager Equality Officer	By end of May 2007	All business/ performance plans and induction packs have disability duties included  Record in Management Team minutes.
Communicate disability duties to all staff	Increases staff awareness and understanding of their responsibilities.	Office Manager Equality Officer	By end of May 2007	
Integrate disability duties into personal performance plans	Promotes positive attitudes.	Office Manager Equality Officer	By end of May 2007	
Include disability duties in induction pack for new staff	Staff better informed of the needs of people with disabilities.	Office Manager Equality Officer	By end of May 2007	
Communicate progress on meeting the disability duties to all staff on a quarterly basis	Maintains staff awareness of their responsibilities	Office Manager Equality Officer	Ongoing	

Specific Action	Expected Outcome	Lead Responsibility	Timescale	Performance Indicator/Target
<b>SERVICE DELIVERY</b>				
Carry out a screening exercise to assess the significance of disability duties for OSFC policies	Mainstreams disability duties into the work of the OSFC.	Office Manager Equality Officer	By end of April 2008	Complete screening exercise
Review and monitor complaint/feedback mechanism	Ensures appropriate mechanisms are in place whereby concerns can be raised and appropriate remedial action taken if required.	Office Manager Equality Officer	By end of April 2008	Procedures in place to allow complaints to be made. Any complaints received are handled as required
Review internal & external communication	Provides opportunities to portray disabled people in a positive role	Office Manager Equality Officer	By end of 2008	Communication methods meet the set standard

Specific Action	Expected Outcome	Lead Responsibility	Timescale	Performance Indicator/Target
<p><b>SPONSORING DEPARTMENT</b></p> <p>Assist DSD as required in meeting their disability duties in respect of human resource related policies</p> <p>Work with DSD whenever possible to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people</p>	<p>Influence DSD to encourage disabled people to participate in public life.</p> <p>Assist OSFC to reach a wider audience in the promotion of positive attitudes towards disabled people</p>	<p>Office Manager Equality Officer</p> <p>Office Manager Equality Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>OSFC's views/opinions acknowledged by DSD</p>
<p><b>REPORTS &amp; PLANS</b></p> <p>Prepare annual report to the Equality Commission</p> <p>Review Disability Action Plan</p>	<p>Enable OSFC to regularly review progress against targets</p> <p>Ensure OSFC fulfils its statutory duties on an ongoing basis</p>	<p>Office Manager Equality Officer</p> <p>Office Manager Equality Officer</p>	<p>Annually</p> <p>Within 5 years</p>	<p>Annual report completed on time</p> <p>Disability Action Plan reviewed</p>



### **Meaning of Disability under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)**

The Disability Discrimination Act defines disability as:

“A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities”.

#### **Nature of Impairment**

The definition covers physical and mental impairments.

- **physical impairments:** this includes, for instance, a weakening of a part of the body (eyes, ears, limbs, internal organs etc) caused through illness, by accident or from birth.
- **mental impairments:** this includes mental ill health and what is commonly known as a learning disability

#### **Substantial**

For an effect to be substantial it does not have to be severe but it must be more than minor or trivial. Examples of an impairment having a ‘substantial adverse effect’ might include one or more of the following:

- persistent inability to remember the names of familiar people such as family or friends;
- difficulty in going up or down stairs or steps;
- inability to use one or more forms of public transport;
- inability to handle a knife and fork at the same time;
- inability to ask specific questions to clarify instructions;
- inability to write a cheque without assistance;

#### **Long-term adverse affect**

The effect has to have lasted, or be likely to last, overall for at least twelve months and the effect must be a detrimental one. A person with a life expectancy of less than 12 months covered if the effect is likely to last the whole of that time.

#### **A normal day-to-day activity**

This is something which is carried out by most people on a regular basis, and must involve one of the following broad categories:

- mobility - moving from place to place
- manual dexterity - for example, use of the hands
- physical co-ordination

- continence
- the ability to lift, carry or move ordinary objects
- speech, hearing or eyesight
- memory, or ability to concentrate, learn or understand
- being able to recognise the risk of physical danger

If the effects of the disability are reduced by medication or other treatment then the relevant effects are those that would be present if there was no medication or treatment taking place. There is an exception to this rule for people who wear spectacles or contact lenses, then the relevant effects are those that remain while the spectacles or contact lenses are being used.

Special provisions cover particular conditions, which might otherwise not be considered as disabilities. These are provisions covering

- **recurring/fluctuating conditions**
- **conditions which progressively deteriorate**
- **severe disfigurements**
- **people with cancer, HIV infections or multiple sclerosis**

### **Past disabilities**

The definition covers people who have had a disability in the past. If a person once had a disability which is covered by the Act, they are still protected if they have recovered. This applies even if they recovered before the Act came into force.

### **Impairments which are excluded**

The following conditions are not to be treated as impairments for the purposes of the Act

- addiction to or dependency on alcohol, nicotine or any other substance (unless the addiction resulted from the substance being medically prescribed)
- seasonal allergic rhinitis (e.g. hay fever) except where it aggravates the effect of another condition
- tendency to set fires.
- tendency to steal.
- tendency to physical or sexual abuse of others.
- exhibitionism
- voyeurism

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## Disability Action Plan Responses

A summary of comments received as a result of the consultation on the Disability Action and the responses of the OSFC.

### **Disability Action (DA)**

DA presented a detailed response which highlighted a number of issues.

#### **Resources**

DA was confused by OSFC's statement on making DSD aware of necessary resources and the allocation of necessary resources. It advised a stronger statement regarding the commitment of necessary resources to fulfilling the two statutory duties.

*The OSFC has amended and strengthened its statement regarding the commitment of necessary resources.*

#### **Internal Arrangements**

DA asked for the word "appropriate" to be removed from the comment on internal arrangements, questioning who deems arrangements appropriate or inappropriate and if such decisions are subject to consultation.

*The OSFC explained that it is our intention to carry out a screening exercise to assess the significance of the disability duties for OSFC policies. The OSFC also intends to review and monitor its complaints and feedback mechanism, screen any new policies and monitor current policies in relation to the categories identified under Section 75, including disabled people. These are just some of the measures that the OSFC deems appropriate.*

#### **Encourage Participation in Public Life**

DA pointed out that while the OSFC does not have responsibility for making public appointments, its duty is to encourage not appoint. DA also advised on a number of actions the OSFC could do in relation to this duty such as the dissemination of information, mentoring schemes, sub-committees etc.

*The OSFC recognises its duty to encourage the participation of disabled people in public life. It also pointed out that OSFC has no remit in appointing people to positions in public life and has no influence on how such selections are made. This is a matter for DSD. The OSFC also pointed out that as part of its consultation on its Disability Action Plan, all applicants with a disability were invited to take part in the consultation exercise.*

## **Training**

DA stated that OSFC's heavy reliance on training events relate to and have been devised to fulfil OSFC's duties in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and that the previous measures do not proactively promote the two new duties.

*The OSFC pointed out that staff had indeed attended a number of training events, not only in fulfilment of its duties, but also to raise staff awareness. The OSFC believes that training is the first step in making staff aware of the barriers facing disabled people and in helping to promote positive attitudes.*

## **Contact Details**

DA noted that the contact details did not include a textphone number.

*The OSFC explained that while it had included the textphone number in its 'Translations and other formats' information, it had omitted to include it in its contact details. This has now been amended.*

## **Terminology**

DA advised that the correct terminology for people with an intellectual disability is learning 'disability', not 'difficulty'.

*The OSFC has amended the Action Plan accordingly.*

## **Accessibility**

DA asked the OSFC to provide it with details of the level of accessibility of its website and whether or not it meets European standards. DA also advised that monitoring reports be put on the website.

*The OSFC advised that there is an ongoing review of its website which will address and implement any necessary changes regarding accessibility issues. It will also conform to European standards of accessibility. The OSFC committed to providing DA with details on conformity and advised that all monitoring reports will be published on OSFC's website.*

## **Specific Points raised on Disability Action Plan**

- DA requested that the tasks on providing training and communication must be itemised.

*The OSFC advised that it is committed to identifying training needs and commissioning relevant training, which will be ongoing. It also noted that page 6 of the Action Plan showed the training OSFC staff have received to date.*

- DA requested that the timescales to carry out a screening exercise to assess the significance of disability duties for OSFC policies, review complaint/feedback mechanisms and review internal and external communication be made shorter. DA advised this should be completed by December 2008.

*The OSFC advised that it will carry out its screening exercise of current policies by April 2008. An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is to be carried out on internal and external communication in 2008/2009 and OSFC will use the EQIA to help inform its policy on such matters.*

- DA recommended the establishing of a baseline for current activity and specified timetabled action should be added.

*The OSFC noted the recommendation and is working towards a specified timetable*

- DA commented that the vast majority of tasks in the Action Plan cannot be measured and recommended the establishment of outcome driven measures which are SMART driven.

*The OSFC noted these comments and has amended the Action Plan accordingly.*

## **Redrafting**

DA recognised the OSFC's efforts to prepare the Action Plan but believed that it required significant redrafting.

*The OSFC noted these comments and has amended the Action Plan accordingly.*

## **Mencap**

Mencap provided a generic response to OSFC's draft Disability Action Plan.

## **Equality of Access**

Mencap highlighted the fact that people with a learning disability do not enjoy equal access to, or benefit from, public services. It also highlighted the particular difficulties experienced by people with a learning disability.

*The OSFC has noted these comments and acknowledges the particular difficulties experienced by people with a learning disability. The OSFC pointed out that an access audit has recently been carried out on its premises, there is an ongoing review of its website to ensure it conforms to European standards of accessibility and that staff from the OSFC are committed to meeting*

*disabled applicants at venues which suit the applicant, either as part of any consultative process or as part of the OSFC's core business..*

### **Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People**

Mencap believes that the Disability Action Plan should state how OSFC will:

- promote understanding of disability, including learning disability
- raise awareness of the contribution, skills and ability of disabled people, including people with a learning disability
- challenge the stereotypes and prejudice which may be held by others about disabled people, including people with a learning disability

Mencap suggests that the Disability Action Plan includes the following actions:

- a public awareness campaign to promote greater understanding and greater recognition of the contribution and skills of disabled people and to encourage positive attitudes.
- activities targeted at disabled people, including people with a learning disability, to build confidence, such as the portrayal of positive role models to highlight the contribution they can and do make,
- staff training - designed with and delivered by disabled people, including people with a learning disability
- inclusion of positive portrayals of disabled people, including people with a learning disability, within all publicity materials, newsletters, annual reports, public documents etc
- activities targeted at other groups involved with the public body, such as children and young people, to encourage respect from an early age for the skills, contribution and rights of disabled people.

The OSFC pointed out that its Action Plan is aimed at all disabled people, including those with a learning disability. Staff from the OSFC have received disability awareness training from Disability Action to help promote understanding of disability, raise awareness of the contribution, skills and ability of disabled people and challenge the stereotypes and prejudice which may be held about disabled people. The OSFC also advised that future publicity materials etc will include positive portrayals of disabled people.

### **Encouraging Participation in Public Life**

Mencap believes that the Disability Action Plan should state how the public body will ensure equal access to:

- information
- services

- work placement and employment opportunities
- consultation opportunities
- appointments to public life positions
- research/information collation about use and uptake of services, identification of future need

*The OSFC recognises its duty to encourage the participation of disabled people in public life. It also pointed out that OSFC has no remit in appointing people to positions in public life and has no influence on how such selections are made. This is a matter for DSD. The OSFC also pointed out that as part of its consultation on its Disability Action Plan, all applicants with a disability were invited to take part in the consultation exercise. It also pointed that OSFC is working with DSD to collect data in respect of Section 75 groups, including disabled people, to inform current and future policy decisions.*

### **Current situation, Targets and Outcomes**

Mencap believes that the Disability Action Plan should identify the current situation, the measures or actions that will be undertaken, as well as the targets and outcomes which are to be delivered through the Action Plan.

*The OSFC referred Mencap to page 6 ('Previous Measures') and to Appendix 1 of the Action Plan.*

### **Belfast Education and Library Board**

#### **Tasks and Impacts**

BELB noted that the Tasks and Impacts OSFC had identified appeared appropriate, as did the timetable. It was suggested that perhaps OSFC should also examine the link between Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

*The OSFC pointed out that this would be beyond its remit and suggested BELB write to DLA Branch about this.*

#### **Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Disabled People**

BELB suggested that the greatest difference OSFC could make in promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people would be to employ disabled people.

*The OSFC pointed out that human resource issues relating to staff recruitment were matters for the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and DSD who is the OSFC's sponsoring department. The OSFC will*

*contribute such assistance as may be required by DFP or DSD to enable them to meet their statutory duties in respect of these human resource related policies.*

## **VINE Advice**

### **Tasks and Impacts**

VINE commented that the need to perhaps make staff more aware of those who have a mental illness, and to be more proactive, be included on the Action Plan. VINE also suggested that talks from disabled people as part staff induction and on going staff training should be considered.

*The OSFC pointed out that staff had attended a number of training events, not only in fulfilment of its duties, but also to raise staff awareness. Disability Action had been involved in delivering some of this training. The OSFC also advised that it will continually review its provision of training in respect of disability issues and will source training to suit staff needs. Consideration will also be given to receiving talks from disabled people when appropriate.*

VINE agreed with the OSFC's assessment of the Tasks and impacts it had identified and also commented that the level of communication from the OSFC was very high.

## **The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)**

RNID provided a generic response to the OSFC's draft Disability Action Plan.

### **Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Deaf People**

The RNID suggested that employers should receive deaf awareness training and offer job shadowing and work placements.

*The OSFC advised that it is committed to identifying training needs and commissioning relevant training, which will be ongoing.*

RNID stated that employees should know how to communicate with deaf people or how to use communication support.

*The OSFC pointed out that the vast majority of work it carries out is via written communication. However there is also a textphone/minicom which deaf people have access to and staff have been trained in its use.*

### **Encouraging Participation in Public Life**

RNID advised that deaf people could be involved as board members or volunteers, or that they could be members of advisory or special interest groups. It also suggested recruitment of deaf people to the workplace.

*OSFC pointed out that it has no remit in appointing people to positions in public life and has no influence on how such selections are made. This is a matter for DSD. It also pointed out that human resource issues relating to staff recruitment were matters for the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and DSD who is the OSFC's sponsoring department. The OSFC will contribute such assistance as may be required by DFP or DSD to enable them to meet their statutory duties in respect of these human resource related policies.*

### **Involving Deaf People**

RNID suggested that if a service is being reviewed, deaf people are represented on the steering group. It also recommended that:

- plain English and British Sign Language (BSL) or Irish Sign Language (ISL) is used, or that sign language is offered
- different means of contact are used such as telephone, textphone, RNID Typetalk, fax, email, SMS, face to face and postal address
- training in communicating with deaf people is undertaken
- how to book and use communication support is understood.

*The OSFC advised that it aims to ensure full participation by disabled people in any meetings that are held, including whether a signer is needed. It also advised that it currently uses many of the suggested means of communication. The OSFC also repeated that that it is committed to identifying training needs and commissioning relevant training, which will be ongoing.*

### **Dove House Resource Centre**

This organisation's response related to the provision of training by OSFC and was not related to the Disability Action Plan.