



Association for Real Change (NI)

Response to the Department for the Economy  
APPRENTICESHIP LEVY EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

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Association for Real Change, Northern Ireland (ARC NI) is an umbrella body, representing 38 providers of learning disability services. Members include statutory, voluntary and private organisations, all of whom provide a range of services to the learning disability population. ARC NI welcomes the opportunity of responding to this consultation.

## **1. The Learning Disability Sector and Adult Social Care Sector**

There are over 100 regulated learning disability providers operating in Northern Ireland, with many more organisations providing unregulated provision to people with a learning disability, all of whom employ significant numbers of workforce.

The salaries in this sector represent the single largest overhead - over 80% of providers overall budget. Providers value their workforce and hence invest heavily in up skilling to ensure the delivery of high quality support and care to some of the most vulnerable individuals in Northern Ireland.

**Many ARC NI members will be required to pay the Apprenticeship Levy. This in addition to the introduction of auto-enrolment, National Living Wage (NLW) and holiday pay in 2016, presents an additional burden and places significant risk on an organisations' ability to deliver high quality services.**

The demographic changes within the population of Northern Ireland are well documented with an increasingly ageing population, presenting with long-term conditions and multiple diagnosis. The most recent health & social care review, led by Professor Bengoa, acknowledged the required and essential growth in the adult social care sector, to not least meet the needs of the population in NI but also to assist with a system reform, increasing the capacity of the adult social care sector to reduce the pressures in acute care.

That said there is a well documented challenge across the adult social care sector of recruiting and retaining workforce. This is due to a number of issues including low wages, the skill required to support the growing complex needs of people supported, and the cost of qualifications.

This presents a major concern given the need for an increased pipeline of individuals working within social care roles and urgently requires strategic cross-departmental support.

ARC NI considers the Apprenticeship scheme as an opportunity to address this.

## **2. The 'Getting Started' Project**

In response to the common challenge shared by ARC NI members, the 'Getting Started' Project was implemented for 1 year, funded by ARC NI and Ulster Garden Villages.

The purpose of the project was to introduce those further from the employment market to the adult social care sector, equipping them with the minimum required skills and offering a job interview with an employer who had live vacancies.

There were a range of partners engaged including 'Ingenus', one of the Departmental implementation bodies for 'Steps to Success'; Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) and a number of ARC NI members.

A 12 week programme was delivered, including an introduction to the adult social care sector delivered by NISCC, training delivered by ARC NI, and observational visits offered by provider organisations. A total of 73 long-term unemployed participants engaged in the project, with 53 individuals securing the European Care Certificate and 47 participants (64% of initial intake) attending interview. A total of 36 participants moved into employment, 29 (62% of those interviewed) of which were within the adult social care sector.

This project ceased in late November 2016 and an evaluation has occurred. It was agreed by all that major success was achieved in recruiting a new pipeline of workforce into the adult social care sector, and the model was considered a highly supportive toll to enable those furthest from the marketplace to move closer to employment. It was however acknowledged that the soft skills e.g. confidence and experience of participants was of a lesser degree than would be desired.

**The shared conclusion was that work placements would have presented the solution to address this. The charitable organisations that participated could not take on so many participants in a voluntary role due to resource ramifications, particularly at the time of significant financial constraints.**

### 3. The Apprenticeship Levy in NI

ARC NI acknowledges Northern Ireland will receive a Barnett consequential of apprenticeship expenditure and as a result, we accept that financial return within the NI economy is important and may prescribe the priorities for Apprenticeships and associated Frameworks.

In a recent independent evaluation commissioned by NISCC et al<sup>1</sup>, the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre states 5% of the total employment in Northern Ireland is offered by the adult social care sector, within which learning disability providers are included. This represents a greater proportion of total NI employment than sectors such as Finance, Transportation etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Ulster University Economic Policy Centre; 2016; *Assessing the Economic Value of the Adult Social Care Sector in Northern Ireland*; P8; NISCC, Bryson Care, Cedar, Inspire Wellbeing

The adult social care sector takes great pride in offering long-term employment opportunities, and makes a vital contribution to the NI economy producing £821m in Gross Value Added (GVA)<sup>2</sup>.

**ARC NI strongly urges the Department for the Economy to consider Social Care as a priority skills area.** As outlined above, with the ageing population Government's commitment to providing more care and support at home and not in institutions, alongside the limited public resources there will be more reliance placed on adult social care providers, including ARC NI members, to deliver services.

ARC NI believes by the Department for the Economy confirming social care as a priority skills area, the vision for health & social care, as outlined recently by the Minister of Health can be achieved.

**There is a current recruitment crisis in adult social care and ARC NI advocate the need for the NI Executive to act now to avert an adult social care crisis in the future.**

Level 2 apprenticeships could be used to access careers in adult social care, especially for those who are long term unemployed. This could develop on from ARC NI's innovative approach to the Getting Started project. ARC NI believes a Level 2 qualification could be used to great effect to attract and retain talent most removed from the workplace and as a consequence, reduce the benefit burden to the Assembly.

ARC NI also would advocate the need of learning disability providers to be able to access high quality apprenticeship programmes at Level 3 upwards as organisations cannot sustain being taxed for these, to then not receive them.

**ARC NI recommends that a framework for higher level apprenticeships be piloted in partnership with ARC NI and its members.**

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<sup>2</sup> Ulster University Economic Policy Centre; 2016; *Assessing the Economic Value of the Adult Social Care Sector in Northern Ireland*; P17; NISCC, Bryson Care, Cedar, Inspire Wellbeing