

Response submitted by

Association for Real Change, Northern Ireland (ARC NI)

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Development of Second Action Plan (2021-23) for the Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy 2026

ARC NI supports 48 cross-sector learning disability providers who employ over 20,000 people working in social care and supporting people with a learning disability in all aspects of their lives. ARC NI welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Health policy leads on the behalf of the membership.

1. Equal Lives: Review of Policy and Services (2005) – Staffing enabling change

In 2005, chapter 11 of the Equal Lives report stated:

The biggest single contributor to quality services is the competence of the staff, both paid and unpaid, who are employed in them. Throughout the Equal Lives Review we have heard how people's lives have been enhanced by the relationships they have formed and the support they have received from the staff with whom they have come in contact.

Since the last review of policy in 1995 there have been considerable changes that impact on developing a competent workforce in health and social care services:

- the volume and range of services has expanded creating a need for an extension to the workforce within and beyond health and social services
- an increase in the input of Direct Support Workers and an expanded range of roles that they undertake
- an increase in the numbers of Direct Support Workers employed on a part-time basis
- new or increasing demands arising from the changing demography and complex needs of people with a learning disability including:
 - addressing issues associated with working with an ageing population
 - increasing numbers of people with both an Autistic Spectrum Disorder and a learning disability
 - growth in number of children and adults who have complex physical health care needs.

The availability and retention of an appropriate range of qualified and competent staff will be crucial to the successful implementation of the Equal Lives Review.

In 2021 this context continues to be relevant to the learning disability community and those providers operating within it, but the workforce crisis is greater than ever.

2. First Action Plan 2018-20

ARC NI met with the Department of Health on multiple occasions to share their challenges with workforce at the time the first action plan was being drafted. At an ARC NI Recruitment & Retention conference in May 2018, the Department of Health presented the work being progressed on the Workforce Strategy and the commitment to action improvements for both health and social care to support both statutory and non-statutory employers (a whole hsc sector).

In ARC NI's view, put bluntly, the first Action Plan did not address **Social Care** workforce challenges, **prioritising the identification of statutory needs**.

This Action Plan did not consider the planning required because of **Brexit**, specifically that social care staff are not categorised as professional and the impact this may have on long standing vacancies experienced by providers.

During the **pandemic** reviews to capture lessons learnt were completed. Regional recruitment drives were implemented, roles and responsibilities of staff were diversified, and workforce's resilience was tested, all of which can inform and shape thoughts on required future action.

Moving forward, ARC NI strongly feels that reflection to include lessons learnt will be important in the development of the second Action Plan.

ARC NI recommends that the first Action Plan is reviewed, and specifically through the lens of Brexit and COVID-19.

3. Second Action Plan 2021-23

To value non-statutory providers

In 2017, Power to People reported '*The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) estimates that 75% of the workforce is employed by the independent sector with the remaining 25% employed by the HSC Trusts.*'

The pandemic highlighted and emphasised the complexities and inequalities experienced by providers of health and social care. For example, theme 1 action 1 within the first action plan was an opportunity to promote and recruit to the whole sector. Whilst progress was stalled due to the pandemic, there was a regional recruitment drive in response to the pandemic, the outcome of which was that the statutory sector filtered and prioritised the majority, if not all, new recruits to statutory vacancies.

Guidance throughout the pandemic provided for HSC Staff in reality spoke largely to Health & Social Care Trust services and/or staff. Also, the financial recognition announced by Minister Swann is allegedly proving so difficult to administer that, even at this point, agreement has not been reached as to how this payment is going to be made to the non-statutory sector. These are only two recent examples of how the non-statutory sector is treated.

This historical lack of parity between statutory and non-statutory sectors needs to be recognised and robustly addressed through a positive discrimination approach within future action plans.

ARC NI recommends the second action plan address the lack of parity demonstrated towards non-statutory providers.

To value social care workforce

The first Action Plan is heavily weighted towards clinical staff, their structures, support, training, and retention etc. with very little in relation to non-clinical workforce. Social Care staff play a critical role in delivering high quality services and support to some of the most complex individuals. Social care contributes to reducing the need for acute services. Social Care staff should be seen as professionals.

ARC NI welcomes the work led by the Social Care Council in progressing social care workforce registration and in developing career pathways with training and standards in place. None of this work however is listed within the first action plan.

Power to People also states that *'In the public sector, wages (and conditions) for care work are fairer, whilst in the private and voluntary sector, pay is often at minimum wage rates and service conditions have been eroded. Given that the majority of paid care work is now provided in the private and voluntary sector, there is clearly an imbalance. It also makes the divide between social care (largely provided by the independent sector) and health care (largely provided in the public sector) uneven in ways which can undermine career development and stability.'*

In 2015, ARC NI initiated many discussions with the Department regarding the impact of the introduction of a National Minimum Wage in services that had been baselined since 2008 with no uplifts provided. Furthermore in 2016 ARC NI collated evidence of the real risk for social care providers of back pay liability resulting from the introduction of a National Minimum Wage. Year on year, the non-statutory sector needs to argue for a fair rate of uplift and whether this is secured depends on service type. This creates further divisions within the social care sector and impacts on financial stability and the ability of employers to demonstrate their valuing of their workforce.

ARC NI welcomes the establishment, by the Department of the Social Care Fair Work Forum.

ARC NI recommends the second action plan specifically targets parity of terms and conditions for social care workforce.

To value the learning disability workforce

With specific reference to the workforce supporting people with a learning disability, ARC NI members wish to raise the following concerns.

Firstly, until such times as the proposed learning disability model is agreed to and signed off, it is not possible to accurately determine the shape and size of the workforce required to deliver on this model, nor is it possible to identify the qualifications or ongoing training required. This impacts on strategic planning.

There is also no investment in post-registration continued professional practice. For example, the Masters in Advanced Professional Practice excludes learning disability.

Planning for sufficient numbers and quality of community-based workforce is of critical importance to ensure people with a learning disability can live full and happy lives in the community.

ARC NI recommends system dynamic modelling is commissioned to consider the future workforce requirements of the learning disability community.