Disability Action Plan 2022 - 2027

Alternative Formats

You can access and read this document on the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion website:

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/peopleandculture/employee-benefits/equality-diversity

This document can also be made available on request, in alternative formats and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English, please contact us to discuss your requirements.

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Foreword by the Vice-Chancellor

Ulster University is committed to creating a working and learning environment that is characterised by our values of inclusion; enhancing potential; collaboration and integrity. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is set out as one of the most critical priorities within our new organisational strategy and I aspire that Ulster University celebrates all people and provides opportunities for all communities.

To this end, I am pleased to present our Disability Action Plan 2022 – 2027, which sets out positive actions to help ensure that people living with a disability, visible or invisible, can engage fully in University life.

The Disability Action Plan is a demonstration of our commitment to fulfilling the statutory obligations as detailed under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties').

The actions have been informed by engagement with colleagues and students with disabilities; Disability Awareness surveys and through feedback from the Staff Disability Network and external partner organisations.

As Vice-Chancellor, I am committed to ensuring that the University complies with its statutory obligations; and furthermore, I am committed to making available the necessary resources to ensure the effective communication and successful implementation of this plan.

Ultimately, the success of this action plan will be determined by the extent to which it acts as a driver for change in bringing about real and lasting positive outcomes within the learning and working environment at Ulster University.

While the University's Senior Leadership Team will have oversight of annual monitoring and reporting to the Equality Commission, our Disability Action Plan is a

living document that is owned by all within the organisation, and the actions are designed to be flexible and responsive to changing priorities over the five-year period. These priorities will help create and sustain an inclusive culture that differentiates us as a place of learning and achievement, where we are all proud to work and study.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our Disability Action Plan, and I look forward to working with you all to ensure that we deliver on our commitments.

P. Bartholomew

Professor Paul Bartholomew

Vice-Chancellor Ulster University

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Introduction

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) 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".

Under Section 49A of the DDA 1995 (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), Ulster University 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 (University) life

These duties are referred to as 'the disability duties'.

Promoting positive attitudes can include taking steps to portray people with disabilities in a positive role, as well as taking steps to eliminate ignorance and prejudice towards people with disabilities.

Encouraging the participation of people with disabilities in public (University) life can include taking measures to involve people with disabilities in policy decision making, as well as encouraging participation in consultative forums and University bodies.

Why we have produced a Disability Action Plan

Section 49B says that public authorities (which includes Ulster University) must prepare a Disability Action Plan, setting out how it will implement the two positive duties (under Section 49A) and that it must send this Action Plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland ("the Equality Commission").

A Disability Action Plan covers people with all types of disabilities, for example: physical disabilities; learning disabilities; sensory disabilities; mental health disabilities, and other hidden disabilities.

The University's Disability Action Plan is presented under three headings:

1. Actions to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities
2. Actions to encourage people with disabilities to participate in University life
3. Actions to promote both positive duties

Much has been achieved during the lifespan of our previous action plans, with progress reported to the Equality Commission through our Section 75 Annual Progress Reports. Actions completed within the previous Disability Action Plans are now considered to be mainstreamed.

Implementation and Monitoring

The University has put in place internal arrangements to ensure that the disability duties are complied with, and that this disability action plan is effectively implemented. It will ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and provide all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.

The University will also consult with people with disabilities when implementing and reviewing the plan. This will enable the University to:

- identify and address any barriers people with disabilities may face during consultation with the University;

- identify opportunities for the University to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities; and

- monitor and review the effectiveness of measures taken, and the proposals outlined in the action plan.

Reporting on Progress

The University will submit an annual report to the Equality Commission on the implementation of this plan as well as carrying out a five yearly review of the plan.

Responsibility for developing, implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan:

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Ulster University - Functions and Public Life positions

Ulster University (legally known as the University of Ulster) was established by Royal Charter in 1984 and operates across four campuses: Coleraine, Jordanstown, Belfast and Magee. The governing body of the University is the Council.

The University's emerging corporate strategy, 'Sustainable Futures – People, Place and Partnerships', sets out the University's strategic priorities, with a heightened focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for both prospective and current staff and students.

The range of public life positions (as defined by the Equality Commission's guidance) over which Ulster University has responsibility for, or works closely alongside, are as follows:

- University Council;
- University Senate;
- Convocation;
- University Committees, working groups and consultative groups;
- Students' Union Council;
- Students' and Students' Union clubs, societies and sabbatical officers;
- Students' Union Board of Trustees;
- EDI Strategy Steering Group sub-group - Advancing Disability Equality;
- University Staff Disability Network; and the
- Alumni Association.

The University also responds to requests from outside bodies for representation on various committees/boards. In the past this has included:

- Health Trusts;
- Local Councils;
- Government Committees/Working Groups (e.g. Department for Communities - Expert Advisory Panels);
- Boards of Governors; and
- Editorial Boards

Disability Action Plan 2022 – 2027

1. Actions to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities					
	Rationale	Action	Performance indicator / target	Responsibility	Timescale
1.1	In the Staff Disability Awareness Surveys (2022), over one-third of respondents did not know the University's Disability Action Plan (DAP) existed; indicating the need for increased awareness, accessibility and visibility of the Disability Duties and the Disability Action Plan.	Enhance the profile and online accessibility of the Disability Action Plan on the University's website; and increase awareness through social media and through the University's internal communication channels.	Increased engagement and improved knowledge of the Disability Action Plan, evidenced through staff surveys, training evaluations and qualitative feedback.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer	2022 - 2027
1.2		Develop an online module, accessible on the LMS LEARN training platform for staff, in relation to the Disability Duties and the University's Disability Action Plan.	All staff complete module on the Disability Duties and the DAP.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer	2023
1.3	Research has suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted on people from Black, Asian and	Working collaboratively with colleagues in Employee Wellbeing and with external organisations, the BAME+ Staff and Student Network will facilitate a half-day 'Breaking the Silence' workshop aimed at raising awareness in relation to the impact	Increased awareness of mental health disabilities and knowledge of support services, evidenced through	James Uhomoibhi BAME+ Staff and Student Network	2023

		of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community and providing information and signposting to mental health support services internally and externally.	feedback following the workshop (s).	Geoff Gillan Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing	
	Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, particularly in terms of mental health.				

2. Actions to encourage people with disabilities to participate in University life

	Rationale	Action	Performance indicator / target	Responsibility	Timescale
2.1	Students with disabilities are underrepresented within the UK HEI student population, suggesting the need for universities to do more to encourage people with disabilities to apply to universities and to access additional financial support for their studies. Belfast Community Scholarships were launched in 2021:	Dependent on philanthropic donations being secured, offer Community Scholarships and Medical Education Scholarships each year of the lifecycle of the Disability Action Plan.	Additional funding available for students with disabilities entering Ulster University (UU) courses. Increase in the number of disabled students applying successfully for the scholarships.	Eddie Friel Director of Development and Alumni Relations	Annual

		https://www.ulster.ac.uk/scholarships/community-scholarships				
		The Medical Education Scholarships were launched in 2021: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/faculties/life-and-health-sciences/medicine/scholarships				
2.2a	People with disabilities apply for 60% more jobs than people without disabilities before finding employment (ECNI Annual Report	Provide short-term funded placement opportunities for people with disabilities in areas where there is under-representation.	Increase in the number of placement opportunities for people with disabilities.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer	2022 - 2027
2.2b	2020-21 Inequalities in Employment: Disability). The employment rate for disabled people here continues to be the lowest across all the UK regions (Breaking down barriers for disabled people in employment, Chief Commissioner - Equality Commission for NI, January 2023)	Ring-fence posts annually across Business Support Services and work with external partners, including NI Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE), to support the recruitment process.	Increase in the number of ring-fenced posts for people with disabilities.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer	2022 – 2027

	4.9% of staff at the University declared a disability in 2021.				
2.3	Research has found that despite legislation regards diversity in the workplace, people with disabilities still do not experience the same access to work opportunities as people without disabilities. A recent survey commissioned by Inclusive Boards found that employers are apprehensive about hiring a senior employee with disabilities.	Provide an opportunity for staff with disabilities to attend the Leadership Training Programme, hosted by Disability Rights UK in association with the Leadership Academy.	Staff participate in the programme, with a view to developing a tailored version of the programme that can be implemented at Ulster University.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer Marie Duffy Lead for Advancing Disability Equality sub-group.	2022 - 2027

| 2.4 | There has been a 19% increase in the number of Reasonable Adjustment Recommendations (RARs) for students over the past 5 academic years (2017/8 – 2021/22), which suggests that there is a significant reliance on RARs to remove barriers to learning for students with disabilities.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that helps give all students an equal opportunity to succeed. This approach offers flexibility in the ways students access material, engage with it and show what they know. | Explore further the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to maximise the teaching and learning experience for students with disabilities.

Ensure UDL is a strategic priority for Ulster University by developing a Strategy and Action Plan over the life cycle of the University's Disability Action Plan. | Working Group established within Year 1.

Written Strategy, Action Plan and evaluation methods endorsed by the Senior Leadership Team (Years 2 – 4), with the aim of increasing accessibility and usability for students with all levels of ability, to progress at Ulster University through inclusive curriculum design solutions. | Professor Odette Hutchinson Pro-Vice-Chancellor Academic Quality & Student Experience

Dr Roisín Curran Interim Head - Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice (CHERP)

Marie Duffy Lead for Advancing Disability Equality sub-group

Andy Jaffrey Head of Office for Digital Learning | 2022 - 2027 |

2.5	As a consequence of organisations pivoting workstreams online, there has been a significant increase in the number of staff requesting support, to promote and enhance the accessibility of online events for attendees. The University currently does not have practical guidance to support staff in planning their events online.	Develop and promote guidance for staff that supports the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and the requirements of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) to address potential barriers and to promote inclusive online events.	Guidance is implemented and training on elements of the guidance is rolled out to staff.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer Staff Disability Network	2022-2023
2.6	While 1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland have a disability, applications to public boards from people with a declared disability remains consistently low at 6%. (Source: Public	Promote and encourage applications for membership to Council and its committees within the University from people with a declared disability. Engage with all of the University's Section 75 consultees and specifically reach out to disability groups and networks to	Increase in the number of applications from those declaring a disability. Increased membership of people with disabilities on Council and other	Clare Jamison University Secretary	2022-2027

	Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland – published January 2022).	request the distribution of recruitment activity among their contacts, to help promote opportunities more widely.	public bodies within the University.		
2.7	While 1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland have a disability, applications to public boards from people with a declared disability remains consistently low at 6%. (Source: Public Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland – published January 2022).	Facilitate/host a 'Demystifying public appointments' online workshop delivered by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The workshop will provide information and insights into the public appointments process. Promotion of this event will be targeted firstly to members of the University's Staff Disability Network.	Increased awareness and confidence from people with disabilities in relation to the public appointments process, evidenced through feedback from the workshop.	Clare Jamison University Secretary Mark Latuske Deputy Director, People & Culture	2022
2.8	According to Workplace Today, making reasonable workplace adjustments can unlock a hidden talent pool. It can also help promote Ulster University as an inclusive place to work and learn.	As part of the on-boarding process, develop a tile signposting staff to the Reasonable Adjustments Protocol and to the Staff Disability Network on the University's new On-boarding Social Hub. Include signposting within the Social Hub that provides support and guidance for new disabled staff, or existing staff with a newly acquired disability, highlighting the Reasonable Adjustment Protocol and the Access to Work Programme.	The Staff Disability Network provides an opportunity for staff with disabilities and long-term conditions to be represented and participate in University life. Staff with disabilities receive support at the earliest possible opportunity to aid them to perform their duties and maintain work.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer Staff Disability Network	2022

| 2.9 | The University has a legal responsibility under SENDO legislation to provide reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities. The Student Wellbeing team administer these recommendations (RARs) to support students, but the current process of email distribution relies heavily on the student's course director to distribute the information to appropriate teaching staff. | Implement a change project to update the RAR distribution process within the Student Wellbeing CRM to feed into live SharePoint lists.

Develop an updated RAR form to streamline recommendations for clarity.

Develop School RAR Administration role within the process to allow to nominate staff within each school to have access to full School RAR list.

Ensure robust consultation with relevant academic, administrative and professional services staff.

Develop clear guidance and training on the new process as well as our responsibility to fulfil reasonable adjustment recommendations appropriately. | Improved RAR distribution process in SharePoint where all parties with appropriate access can access RARs for sharing/distribution to other appropriate staff within their school/department.

Better 'live' RAR information management in SharePoint.

Improved understanding and engagement with the RAR process | Professor Odette Hutchinson Pro-Vice-Chancellor Academic Quality & Student Experience

Elaine Hartin Chief Strategy & Finance Officer | 2022-2023 |

| 2.10 | Traditional accessibility barriers to print, audio, and visual media for students with disabilities can be much more easily overcome through web technologies.

There are physical barriers in accessing new buildings and facilities for staff, students and visitors at the University. | Establish an Internal Disability Advisory Forum, which is representative of the staff and student body, to engage with and to help inform decision making and project planning. | Enhanced engagement between staff, students and external stakeholders.

Improved digital and physical accessibility. | Damian McAlister
Chief People Officer

Michael Fitzpatrick
Director of Estates

Mark Taglietti
Director of Digital Services

David Longstaff
Ulster University Students Union | 2023

Meetings arranged as required throughout the lifetime of the Action Plan.

Review of membership carried out every two years (31 March 2025 and 31 March 2027). |

| 2.11 | There is potential to enhance disability inclusion in the learning environment by developing external networks and by engaging with global innovators, decision-makers and opinion leaders to identify, curate and share inclusive learning solutions. | To engage with the Department for Communities and host a Trust Inclusion Policy Co-Design Workshop at the University. | A new co-designed Disability Employment Policy for Northern Ireland. | Professor Mark Durkin – Executive Dean – Ulster University Business School

Dr Paul Joseph-Richard Ulster University Business School | 2023 - 2027 |

3. Actions to promote both positive duties

	Rationale	Action	Performance indicator / target	Responsibility	Timescale
3.1	Increase awareness of Ulster University thought leadership and academic expertise relating to disability	Proactive efforts to further enhance relationships across all Faculties to identify and showcase research or teaching that directly impacts on disability in society e.g. patient care, policy influence, attitudinal studies, participation, recovery/rehabilitation/diagnostics etc.	Enhanced focus on patient/societal outcomes and impact of relevant research. Social media and press coverage (including the use of internal communications) of civic impact in action.	Professor Liam Maguire Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research	2022 - 2027
3.2	British Sign Language (BSL) legislation is currently passing through Westminster and similar legislation is proposed for BSL and Irish Sign Language (ISL) in NI. A sign language act would require the government to ensure the use of British and Irish sign	Provide a series of awareness sessions in regard to d/Deaf culture, British and Irish Sign Language, and Sign Communication; and to develop an online awareness module through the LMS LEARN system to allow access to training on demand for staff.	Improved knowledge and understanding of d/Deaf culture and an increased awareness of sign language, evidenced through feedback from participants who attend the sessions. The action will also help staff to communicate	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer Marie Duffy Lead for Advancing Disability Equality Subgroup	2022 - 2027

				Staff Disability Network	
	language across public services. This action is included in preparation for the legislation and in response to a growing demand from staff to attend sign language training. The action will also help staff to communicate better with people with hearing loss and help promote an inclusive working and learning environment.		better with people with hearing loss and to promote an inclusive working and learning environment.		
3.3	People with disabilities apply for 60% more jobs than people without disabilities, before finding employment (ECNI Annual Report 2020-21 Inequalities in Employment: Disability).	Ulster University Business School (UUBS), along with the Employability and Careers section, will support the implementation of the GradEmployNI programme in partnership with Leonard Cheshire Charity. The programme consists of 12 online workshops on topics such as Human Resource Management, Future of work, Accounting and Finance, Leadership working in teams, technology at work, Future of work, innovation and entrepreneurship. Each learner will be coached by a named academic from the UUBS.	Successful matches of students with internship positions. Graduates will have increased their own personal awareness and knowledge of the recruitment process. Participants will have developed many skills to help them overcome barriers in the recruitment process. Participants will have attended at least 10 workshops as a group and will have had two	Professor Mark Durkin Executive Dean – Ulster University Business School Dr Paul Joseph-Richard Ulster University Business School Professor Odette Hutchinson Pro-Vice-Chancellor - Academic Quality & Student Experience	2022

| | | The programme involves Graduates attending a business bootcamp, which is aimed at empowering graduates with disabilities, with skills on how to manage the recruitment process with their individual circumstances and to ultimately succeed in securing a job opportunity, whether it is an internship, placement, part time job or a graduate role.

The programme aims to build overall confidence to help overcome barriers that people with disabilities often face when searching and applying for job opportunities. | one-to-one coaching sessions with an academic.

They will have gained insight, confidence and the skills required in the workplace. For example, research, report writing, creating presentations, handling project work and general administration. | Dr Stella So Employability and Careers | |
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| 3.4 | The completion rate of the mandatory online Disability Awareness training is 56% for current staff. | Refresh the online Disability Awareness training module on the University's new LMS LEARN system, to help make it more relevant, interactive and engaging.

Increased awareness of the Disability Awareness training through the enhanced functionality of the LMS LEARN system which can send automated reminders to staff, as well as promoting the training through regular communications on the University's social media and internal news channels. | Increase completion rate by at least 5% of current staff each year, in the lifecycle of the Disability Action Plan.

Increased awareness of disability issues and our shared roles in supporting colleagues and students with disabilities. | Damian McAlister Chief People Officer | 2022 - 2027 |

3.5	The Disability Action Plan is a living document, and the actions are designed to be flexible and responsive to changing priorities over the five-year period. These priorities will help create and sustain an inclusive culture that differentiates us as a place of learning and achievement, where we are all proud to work and study. (See also action 1.2)	Disseminate the Disability Action Plan to all staff, students and stakeholders, with regular communications and increased visibility and accessibility of the Plan on the University's website.	All staff and students have an increased understanding of the two disability duties, evidenced through surveys and training evaluations. Staff and students engage regularly to provide updates on actions, as well as proposals to include new actions.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer	Throughout the lifetime of the Action Plan.
3.6	Statutory reporting requirement.	Report progress of actions within the Disability Action Plan 2022 – 2027 to the University's Senior Leadership Team and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Steering Group every six months. Provide updates on actions to the Equality Commission through the University's Section 75 Annual Progress Report.	Increased engagement at a senior level within the University. Targets are met and actions reviewed if necessary. Increased awareness of disability inclusion across the University, evidenced through staff disability awareness surveys.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer	Throughout the lifetime of the Action Plan