



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**  
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**Modernising Learning Disabilities  
Nursing Review  
Strengthening the Commitment**

**Northern Ireland Action Plan**

**March 2014**



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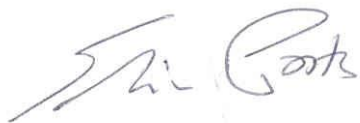
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## **A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER**

Ensuring that we deliver the best possible care to people with a learning disability is a key priority for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). There is no doubt that we have made many significant improvements in how we deliver services to people with a learning disability, but more needs to be done in achieving our progressive and sustainable vision for learning disability.

To achieve the high quality, modernised and community based services, competent and skilled registered nurses – learning disability are a core ingredient for success. This action plan provides a road map to guide the delivery of learning disability nursing throughout Northern Ireland, ensuring that this small, specialist and very precious resource is used to the best effect within our health and social care system. We know that the learning disabled population in Northern Ireland are increasing year on year and that more children, born with a learning disability, are surviving into adulthood and old age. That in itself is a good thing, but as a consequence, it brings a range of physical and psychological health complexities, highlighting the need for highly skilled nursing across the lifespan.

I commend this Action Plan to all who have responsibility for the delivery of learning disability nursing in Northern Ireland.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Edwin Poots', is positioned above the printed name and title.

Edwin Poots MLA

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

## **FOREWORD FROM THE CHIEF NURSING OFFICER**

We are all acutely aware of the pace of change in today's HSC system. Within Northern Ireland we are currently working hard to implement the principles and requirements of Transforming your Care (DHSSPS 2011) which demands a wide ranging shift in the delivery of care, the commissioning of services, the regulation process and the culture of all organisations and agencies involved in the delivery of Health and Social Care to our local population.

As a consequence, health and social care services, professional groups and individual practitioners across Northern Ireland will be required to review current ways of working and adapt, modify and adjust accordingly.

When I consider the above, alongside the very significant current and emerging demographic changes within the population of people with learning disability, the high prevalence of physical and mental health needs and the high number of recent UK inquiries and reviews that have identified significant service and system failures, I believe it is very timely that we are taking forward an action plan to ensure that learning disabilities nursing in Northern Ireland is the best that it can be.

The following action plan reminds us all of the crucial and key role that registered nurses - learning disabilities have to play, now and in the future, in ensuring that people with learning disabilities receive safe and high quality care across all sectors involved in care delivery. The ultimate aim is to set a clear direction of travel for registered nurses - learning disabilities in Northern Ireland, one that is sustainable and one that has quality, safety and inclusion at its heart.

I therefore urge all relevant stakeholders across all agencies to actively contribute during the implementation of this action plan and by doing so; achieve even higher levels of excellence in the delivery of learning disabilities nursing in Northern Ireland.

This action plan has been influenced by many and I would like to express my thanks to all. However, a particular thank you to NIPEC for the leadership and coordination they have provided in developing this document.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlotte McArdle". The script is cursive and fluid.

Charlotte McArdle  
Chief Nursing Office

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In February 2011 the four Chief Nursing Officers from the United Kingdom commissioned a UK wide project that aimed to reflect upon, review and shape the future of the learning disabilities nursing profession. The project, which follows directly from recommendations of the existing four country policy 'Modernising Nursing Careers' (2006), was led by Ros Moore, CNO Scotland, and aims to maximise the contribution of the learning disabilities nursing profession across the UK to improve the experience of people with a learning disability and to improve outcomes for people with a learning disability and their families and carer's. This work fully acknowledges and recognises the multi-professional and multi-agency context within which registered nurses - learning disability work.

The UK Modernising Learning Disabilities Nursing Review, titled "Strengthening the Commitment" aims to ensure that people with learning disabilities of all ages, today and tomorrow, will have access to the expert learning disabilities nursing they need, want and deserve. That requires a renewed focus on learning disabilities nursing as a service and strategic consideration in building and developing the workforce. The review has set the direction of travel for registered nurses-learning disabilities across the United Kingdom, to ensure they can meet current and future demand and that the workforce is ready and able to maximise its role throughout the entire health and social care system.

Following the launch of the review in Edinburgh on 25 April 2012, a UK Steering Group was established (June 2012), in which each of the four countries is represented. Through the Group it was agreed that each of the four countries should produce its own Action Plan to take forward the recommendations of the Report *Strengthening the Commitment*, for local implementation.

This action plan has been developed by Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council (NIPEC), on behalf of and in partnership with the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). This action plan reflects the expert opinion of key stakeholders within Northern Ireland who either work or have an interest in learning disabilities nursing policy, practice and education and has been further refined and enhanced following a 3 month period of consultation. It has been produced in response to and should be read in conjunction with *Strengthening the Commitment, the UK Modernising Learning Disabilities Nursing Review*, which can be accessed at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0039/00391946.pdf>

Currently, Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland is in a process of transforming the commissioning and delivery of services in order to better meet the needs of the population it serves. Therefore this action plan has taken into account the recommendations of a number of strategic direction policy documents namely:

- Equal Lives DHSSPS (2005); Guidelines on Caring For People with a Learning Disability in General Hospital Settings, GAIN (2010)
- Quality 20/20 (DHSSPS 2011)
- Transforming Your Care, DHSSPS (2011)
- The Learning Disability Service Framework, DHSSPS (2012)
- Fit and Well: Changing Lives: A Public Health Strategy for N. Ireland: Consultation document (DHSSPS 2012)
- The Bamford Action Plan 2012 - 2015 (DHSSPS 2013)

Registered nurses-learning disabilities play a key role in supporting people with a learning disability to achieve and maintain optimum health and well being. They deliver care within a context of numerous professional, economic, practice; social and policy drivers which are reflected within the following action plan.

This action plan aims to support and develop learning disabilities nursing in the context of an evolving learning disability service agenda. The action plan will be implemented and monitored by a regional implementation group who will report to the office of the Chief Nursing Officer on an annual basis.



## STRENGTHENING CAPACITY

This section of the action plan addresses some of the key considerations underpinning efforts to strengthen capacity through developing the learning disabilities nursing workforce in relation to location and employment; strategic workforce planning; new ways of working; new roles and career choices.

### Recommendations from National Report: Strengthening the Commitment

1. *The four UK health departments and the independent/voluntary sector should establish a national collaborative to enable better understanding of, and planning for, a high-quality and sustainable registered learning disabilities nursing workforce across all sectors.*
2. *Systems to collect workforce data are required in each country, with links across the UK, for workforce planning for future provision of learning disabilities nursing. These should be able to capture information on service provision, educational and research requirements and should cover the independent/voluntary sector.*
3. *The development of new, specialist and advanced role opportunities should be considered in light of workforce planning, service development and education provision. In particular, this should focus on the roles of non-medical prescribing, psychological therapies and tele-health and in specific settings such as the criminal justice system, mental health services (particularly dementia) and autism services.*
4. *Each of the four countries should consider aligning their existing post-registration career frameworks for learning disabilities nursing to clearly articulate the knowledge and skills required by learning disabilities nurses at all levels and across all settings. These developments could be utilised across sectors (with appropriate adaptation) to give a coherent career framework.*

### The following actions will be taken in Northern Ireland to support these national recommendations

**A Northern Ireland Learning Disabilities Nursing Collaborative will be established which will:**

- Produce a workforce review/plan for registered nurses - learning disabilities in Northern Ireland that will consider all sectors and locations where these nurses work and will include nursing support staff.

As part of this work, a data set, identifying the location of employment of registered nurses - learning disabilities in N. Ireland will be developed and will help inform decision making in a number of different contexts and levels such as:

- succession planning
- appropriate staffing levels/skill mix
- pre-registration nursing programme recruitment

- Identify the need for and support the development of extended specialist and advanced roles for registered nurses - learning disabilities, to ensure an expert skills base is available and responsive to the current and emerging needs of people with learning disabilities.

As a consequence of the Transforming Your Care agenda, it will be a priority to examine the community nursing infrastructure to assess the level and type of nursing support available to people with a learning disability in a range of community settings.

Other priority areas in this regard include: acute liaison, challenging behaviour, mental health, epilepsy, forensic care, crisis support, psychological and physical health needs/interventions.

- Contribute to and provide a learning disabilities nursing perspective to the regional Career Pathway Project, being facilitated by NIPEC and in doing so, assist health and social care service providers and learning disabilities nurses to identify/consider/pursue the range of career progression pathways that are available to them.
- Examine the potential for and the impact of, the transferability of the skills and competencies of registered nurses - learning disabilities throughout the health and social care system. This has particular relevance for acute liaison, mental health, CAMHS, prison settings and in dementia services.

This work will include a separate examination of the roles undertaken by Registered nurses - learning disabilities in social care settings such as supported living environments.

**Lead: N.I. Learning Disabilities Nursing Regional Collaborative**

**Time Scale: Prioritisation of actions and timeframes to be agreed by the NI Collaborative**

## STRENGTHENING CAPABILITY

This section outlines key considerations underpinning efforts to ensure a competent and flexible registered nurse-learning disabilities workforce for the future by maximising their contribution: working with people of all ages; addressing health needs and providing specialist services.

### Recommendations from National Report: Strengthening the Commitment

5. *Commissioners and service planners should have a clear vision for how they ensure the knowledge and skills of learning disabilities nurses are provided to the right people, in the right places, and at the right time in a way that reflects the values - and rights - based focus of learning disabilities nurses' work.*
6. *Commissioners and providers of health and social care should ensure the skills, knowledge and expertise of learning disabilities nurses are available across the lifespan. This should be enabled through effective collaborative working across health and social care structures.*
7. *Commissioners and providers of health and social care should ensure that learning disabilities nurses are able to collaborate effectively with general health services, including mental health services, to address the barriers that exist for people with learning disabilities to improving their health. This should include proactive health improvement, prevention, whole-family and public health approaches.*
8. *Commissioners and service providers should ensure that specialist learning disabilities services for complex and intensive needs (including assessment and treatment services across all sectors) employ sufficient numbers of appropriately prepared and supported registered learning disabilities nurses. This highlights the need to support and develop the availability of specialist and advanced clinical skills and knowledge of learning disabilities nurses in all settings.*

### The following actions will be taken in Northern Ireland to support these national recommendations

**A Northern Ireland Learning Disabilities Nursing Collaborative will be established which will:**

- As roles and locations of employment expand, develop a specific and targeted suite of competencies that clearly articulate the knowledge, values and skills required by registered nurses - learning disabilities in specific aspects of care.
- Ensure that the specific nursing skills and competencies of registered nurses - learning disabilities workforce are utilised appropriately and to best effect across the range of settings within which they work. It is particularly important that the nursing expertise of these Registrants is fully maximised and that an increasing emphasis is given to preventative and proactive health improvement approaches as core day to day nursing practice. This is relevant across the lifespan but is particularly necessary during early years and adolescence.
- Ensure that registered nurses - learning disabilities who work in in-patient and/or assessment and treatment services, with those with the most intensive and complex needs, are equipped with the appropriate staffing levels, skills and competence to ensure the highest possible standard of patient safety and experience in these "high risk". The NI Collaborative will give particular focus to:
  - Introducing patient-centred service improvement practices and cultures that ensure that positive therapeutic relationships and effective communication with people with learning disabilities and carers are at the heart of nursing practice.

- A targeted drive to ensure that registered nurses - learning disabilities are adequately prepared, equipped and supported in a) the management of violence and aggression, b) current risk assessment and management processes and c) effective responses to safeguarding incidents (children and adult).
- Contributing to the achievement of a workplace culture that supports the reporting of incidents and concerns, learning from things that go wrong and contributing to the implementation of action plans arising from incidents.
- The development of beacon wards/centres of nursing excellence in such settings.

**Lead: N.I. Learning Disabilities Nursing Regional Collaborative**

**Prioritisation of actions and timeframes to be agreed by the NI Collaborative**

## STRENGTHENING QUALITY

This section addresses some of the key considerations underpinning quality in relation to demonstrating quality outcomes; quality improvement; preparing and developing registered nurses-learning Disability; maximising recruitment and retention; developing the workforce and accessing supervision.

### Recommendations from National Report: Strengthening the Commitment

9. *Learning disability nurses, their managers and leaders should develop and apply outcomes-focused measurement frameworks to evidence their contribution to improving person-centred health outcomes and demonstrating value for money. This may require a specific piece of work to scope current frameworks.*
10. *Learning disabilities nurses should strengthen their involvement and links to transformational work, productivity improvement and practice development.*
11. *Those who commission, develop or deliver education should ensure that all learning disabilities nursing education programmes reflect the key values, content and approaches recommended in this report. They should also ensure that nurses in other fields of practice develop the core knowledge and skills necessary to work safely and appropriately with people with learning disabilities who are using general health services.*
12. *Updated, strategic plans for pre and post registration learning disabilities nursing programmes are necessary for each country of the UK to support flexibility and ensure an efficient and sustainable model of delivery for the long term. This highlights the need for appropriate numbers of places on pre-registration learning disabilities nursing programmes to meet future workforce requirements.*
13. *Education providers and services must work in partnership to ensure that educational and developmental opportunities for non registered staff are developed and strengthened and their benefits are evidenced through appraisal systems, and that educational and development opportunities are available for registered learning disabilities nurses to support their ongoing development, reflecting the needs of people with learning disabilities.*
14. *Services should provide systems to ensure that learning disabilities nurses have access to regular and effective clinical supervision and that this impact is monitored and evaluated on a regular basis.*

### The following actions will be taken in Northern Ireland to support these national recommendations

**A Northern Ireland Learning Disabilities Nursing Collaborative will be established which will:**

- Develop and agree a process of measuring and demonstrating the outcomes of nursing practice.
- Link with the Regional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) project to consider the introduction of relevant KPIs within settings where registered nurses - learning disabilities work.
- Ensure that key themes and issues identified via patient experience measures (locally and regionally) inform, improve and develop the practice of registered nurses - learning disabilities.
- Collaborate and link with HSC Trusts, other employers of registered nurses - learning disabilities and education providers, to ensure that registered nurses - learning disabilities are enabled to access post- registration education and training that is reflective of current

and emerging strategic policy, demographic changes and professional developments.

- Collaborate and link with HSC Trusts, other employers of registered nurses - learning disabilities and education providers, to ensure that pre-registration students of learning disabilities nursing have access to effective and appropriate practice learning and mentorship.
- Collaborate and link with HSC Trusts, other employers of registered nurses - learning disabilities and education providers, to ensure that newly qualified registered nurses - learning disabilities have access to effective preceptorship.
- Support and advice upon the provision of robust professional governance and accountability structures for learning disabilities nursing within all HSC Trusts and those who work in the independent and voluntary sector.
- Ensure that all registered nurses - learning disabilities actively participate in and have access to, professional advice and professional nursing supervision from a suitable registered nurse - learning disabilities who practise in the field of learning disabilities nursing.
- Encourage, support and enhance the educational and developmental opportunities which should be available for non-registered nursing support staff.

**Lead: N.I. Learning Disabilities Nursing Regional Collaborative**

**Prioritisation of actions and timeframes to be agreed by the NI Collaborative**

## STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION

This section addresses some of the key considerations underpinning modernising the Registered Nurse-Learning Disabilities workforce in relation to; leadership and management; promoting the profession and research and evidence.

### Recommendations from National Report: Strengthening the Commitment

15. *Leadership in learning disabilities nursing needs to be strengthened in practice, education and research settings with robust, visible leadership at all levels, including strategic and national levels. Services must ensure all learning disabilities nurses in clinical practice have access to a dedicated professional lead for learning disabilities nursing. In addition to existing leadership and development programmes, a UK-wide cross-sector project to nurture and develop aspiring leaders in learning disabilities nursing will be led by the four UK health departments.*
16. *Learning disabilities nurses need mechanisms to share best practice and develop the evidence base to continue to advance as a profession. Services must support learning disabilities nurses to participate in appropriate networks. A UK academic network for learning disabilities nursing will be created to support this drive.*
17. *Learning disabilities nursing research should be extended to ensure practice now and in the future is evidence based and the impact of interventions can be demonstrated. Services and education providers must ensure that all existing and future schemes for clinical-academic careers have appropriate representation of learning disabilities nursing.*

### The following actions will be taken in Northern Ireland to support these national recommendations

**A Northern Ireland Learning Disabilities Nursing Collaborative will be established which will:**

- Enhance professional leadership capacity and potential within registered nurses - learning disabilities in Northern Ireland.
- Explore and commission, models and approaches to leadership and practice development, to support the development of current and aspiring clinical leaders of learning disability nursing in Northern Ireland across all sectors.
- Ensure that Northern Ireland is represented on the national initiative to enhance leadership potential in final year learning disabilities nursing students and to take steps to build on this locally.
- Take steps to ensure that Northern Ireland is represented at the national UK academic network and that there is local involvement on and contribution to relevant national initiatives.
- In collaboration with the Royal College of Nursing, establish a Regional Professional Development Network for learning disabilities nurses to include HSC Trusts, the education sector and the independent/voluntary sector.
- Encourage and support registered Nurses - learning disabilities to access and take up nursing research activity including awards, scholarships and publications. Such activity should be encouraged in the aspects of clinical practice, policy and strategic direction and regional level concerns.

**Lead: N.I. Learning Disabilities Nursing Regional Collaborative**

**Prioritisation of actions and timeframes to be agreed by the NI Collaborative**

## **CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

The development of this Northern Ireland Action Plan to take forward the recommendations within the National UK Strengthening the Commitment Review, has involved wide engagement with a range of key stakeholders in the local Northern Ireland context.

This engagement has informed the range of key actions that will have the greatest positive impact for people with learning disabilities, their families and carer's who receive services from learning disabilities nurses.

Registered nurses - learning disabilities now have the opportunity to ensure that the services and nursing care they deliver is the best that it can possibly be.

It is important to stress that while the actions are central to the modernisation of learning disabilities nursing in Northern Ireland, readers should engage with the full UK report, which outlines in more detail the rationale behind the actions that have been prioritised for Northern Ireland. The full UK report also has many key messages that can and should be considered in addition to the actions in this document.

**To lead, drive, support, monitor and deliver this action plan the DHSSPS will:**

- **Establish a N.I. Learning Disabilities Nursing Regional Collaborative by May 2014 to support delivery of the actions. The group should have representation from service user groups; the independent sector; all five of the health and social care organisations; educational providers, NIPEC; the Health and Social Care Board, Public Health Agency and take into account other stakeholders as necessary.**
- **Require that the Regional Collaborative reports on progress to the Office of the Chief Nursing Officer on an annual basis.**
- **At the end of a 3 year period, DHSSPS will formally review progress on the recommendations and consider the need for further developments.**



## REFERENCES

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