



**Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation**

**Five-Year Disability Action Plan**

**2024-29**

\*This document is available upon request in accessible formats such as Braille, large print, disc, audio cassette  
And in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English

1.1	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Utility Regulator is required, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and</li> <li>• encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties').</li> </ul> <p>Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Utility Regulator is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a <b>Disability Action Plan</b> showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions.</p>
1.2	<p>As the Chief Executive and Board, we are committed to effectively implementing the disability duties and this disability action plan. We will allocate all necessary resources (in terms of people, time, and money) in order to effectively implement this plan and build appropriate objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans.</p> <p>We will also put internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with, and this disability action plan effectively implemented. We will ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and to providing all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan.</p>
	<p>We are committed to consulting with people with disabilities in the implementation and any subsequent review of this plan. Responsibility for implementing, reviewing, and evaluating this disability action plan will lie with:</p> <p>Name: John French  Title: Chief Executive</p>

	<p>Address: Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation  Queens House  14 Queen Street  Belfast  BT1 6ED</p> <p>Telephone number: 028 9031 1575  Email: john.french@uregni.gov.uk</p> <p>If you require this plan in an alternative format (such as in large print, in Braille, on audio cassette, easy read or on computer disc) and/or language, please contact us (028 90311575 or <a href="mailto:info@urengi.gov.uk">info@urengi.gov.uk</a>) to discuss your requirements.</p>
1.3	<p>We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual progress report on the implementation of this plan to the Equality Commission and carrying out a five-year review of this plan, or plans submitted to the Equality Commission over the five-year review period.</p> <p>A copy of this plan, our annual progress to the Equality Commission and our five-year review of this plan will be made available on our website <a href="http://www.uregni.gov.uk">www.uregni.gov.uk</a></p>
1.4	<p><b>Functions</b>  Statutory Duties and Background</p> <p>Our predecessor organisation was first established in 1992, following privatisation of the Northern Ireland electricity industry, and our role extended in 1996 to cover gas The Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (“Utility Regulator”) was established in April 2007, when it replaced the Northern Ireland Authority for Energy Regulation by also becoming the economic and customer service regulator for Northern Ireland’s water and sewerage industries.</p>

We are a non-ministerial government department. While not a policy-making department, our role is to ensure that the utility industries in Northern Ireland are regulated and developed within the strategic policy parameters set by Ministers. The need for us to work closely, and collaborate, with a range of stakeholders across the energy and water sectors is paramount. We also work closely with other parts of government, including those involved in the management of the environment.

### Principal Activities

We exercise a broad range of functions in line with our statutory duties set out in the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 as amended by Article 3 of the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. Our principal statutory objectives are:

#### *Water and Sewerage Sector:*

- To protect the interests of consumers in relation to the supply of water by water undertakers and the provision of sewerage services by sewerage undertakers, wherever appropriate by facilitating effective competition between persons engaged in, or in commercial activities connected with, the supply of water and the provision of sewerage services;
- To secure that the functions of a water undertaker and of a sewerage undertaker are properly carried out as respects every area of Northern Ireland; and
- To secure that companies holding appointments as relevant undertakers are able (in particular, by securing reasonable returns on their capital) to finance the proper carrying out of the functions of such undertakers.

#### *Electricity Industry:*

To protect the interests of consumers of electricity supplied by authorised suppliers, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition between persons engaged in, or in commercial activities connected with, the generation, transmission, or supply of electricity.

*Gas Industry:*

To promote the development and maintenance of an efficient, economic, and co-ordinated gas industry in Northern Ireland.

We set our strategic direction through our Corporate Strategy. A new corporate strategy is being developed from 2024 and we will be consulting publicly on our draft strategy. Our annual business plan, called our Forward Work Programme (FWP), sets out those projects that we will undertake, and we also consult on this publicly. The FWP is published by 31 March each year.

1.5

**Public Life Positions**

We are governed by a Board (“the Authority”), appointed by the Department of Finance (DoF). Our Board is made up of a non-executive Chair, five non-executive members and the Chief Executive.

The Board is responsible for the overall strategic direction of the organisation and ensuring that it meets its legal obligations. Board members details can be viewed below.

The Department of Finance (DoF) re-appointed Dr Bill Emery as Chair of the Authority a further five-year term until 30 June 2024.

The Utility Regulator appointed John French as its Chief Executive and he took up post on 2 November 2020.

The non-executive members of the Board who commenced appointment for a period of three years or five years effective and re-appointed for a further term are set out in the following table:

Name	Date of first appointment	Date of expiry of appointment
Bill Emery	1 July 2012	30 June 2024
Teresa Perchard	1 September 2013	1 September 2024
Jonathan Carlton	1 November 2015	31 October 2025
Alex Wiseman	1 November 2015	31 October 2025
Claire Williams	1 May 2019	30 April 2026
David de Casseres	1 May 2019	30 April 2026
John French (Executive member)	2 November 2020	

2.

### **Previous Measures**

Outlined below are the key measures, which the Utility Regulator has already taken to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and encourage the participation of such people in public life.

- Promoting the services of the Utility Regulator and consulting with groups representing those with disabilities (voluntary and community sector groups), other public authorities and mainstream political parties
- Consulting with groups representing those with disabilities on how the Utility Regulator consults and engages with them and how improvements can be made.
- Publishing accessible consultation documents
- Ensuring access requirements are made available for members of the public with disabilities to take part in public consultation.

- Fully complying with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and associated Codes of Practice
- Ensuring services and premises are fully accessible.
- Providing alternative formats for publications on request
- Offering employment opportunities based on experience, rather than minimum academic qualifications.
- Advertising positions widely (including organisational website) and including a welcome/positive action statement.
- Providing reasonable adjustments for applicants, and employees
- Promoting disability awareness through a formal training programme attended by all staff and Board members.
- Providing awareness training for staff members participating in recruitment & selection processes
- Discussing issues relating to Section 75 and disability discrimination with recognised trade union through joint negotiation and consultation arrangements
- Designating harassment advisors as part of discipline and grievance policies
- Designing a corporate style guide in respect of fonts etc for all corporate publications and letters which was issued to all staff.
- Installing emergency evacuation chairs and training staff in their use
- Providing deaf awareness guidance to all staff and to new staff on induction

3.	<b>Action Measures</b> Outlined below are the measures which the Utility Regulator proposes to take over the period (2024-29) of this disability action plan, together with performance indicators or targets.



Measures	Timescale	Owner	Performance Indicators/target
<p>We will continue to develop and provide staff (and Board) awareness workshops with on-going equality training. Specific training and awareness raising on disability equality legislation and disability awareness and etiquette will commence at induction stage and be continuous thereafter. Training will be provided to all staff including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership i.e., senior management and Board members</li> <li>• Members of recruitment and selection panels</li> <li>• Personnel staff</li> <li>• Managers and supervisors</li> <li>• Front line staff</li> </ul>	<p>On-going and first dedicated session 2024/25</p>	<p>HR, Board, all staff</p>	<p>All staff developed in disability and equality awareness – at induction and at least one dedicated session every 3 years. All panel members trained and evaluation complete.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> All staff training in disability and equality awareness rolled out as mandatory training for staff and tailored for Board members by 2025. Training feedback at least 90% positive/effective response rate.</p>

<p>We will provide equality screening training for key staff and the Equality Commission Screening Video will form part of our staff induction and will be available on the staff Intranet. Staff responsible for developing and screening policies will be made aware of the positive scope that UR polices can make to improve the level of disabled peoples' participation in public life.</p>	<p>Rolled out to all staff 2024 and on-going in onboarding</p>	<p>HR</p>	<p>Key staff who are responsible for developing or drafting policy are adequately trained and competent in the screening process outlined in the Utility Regulator's Equality Scheme (s75) to understand the disability duties.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> All staff trained at induction. Policies screened include consideration of positive impacts for people with disabilities.</p>
<p>Establishment and support for an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion cross functional working group to ensure compliance and buy in across the organisation. Activities reported to the Remuneration Committee quarterly. The aims of the group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate the benefits a more diverse</li> </ul>	<p>On-going and quarterly</p>	<p>All staff and EDI Group</p>	<p>Raising wider staff awareness of activities of EDI Group. Retention of Diversity Chartermark. Appointment of Diversity Champions, including disability, to promote positive attitudes to people with disabilities, and explore ways we can increase awareness of the DDA and disability duties, understanding of barriers faced by disabled people, disability etiquette and language, challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about disability, understanding of the social model of disability etc.</p>

<p>workforce can have on our organisation as a whole.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make our staff and future staff feel more valued, building a culture of acceptance and positivity around being more inclusive of different perspectives and characteristics.</li> <li>• Aim to increase employee retention and engagement.</li> <li>• Increase the scope for a creativity by an encouraging a mix of different people, perspectives, and characteristics within the organisation.</li> </ul>			<p><b>Outcome:</b> At least two positive disability activities to raise awareness and promote positive attitudes to people with disabilities per year this might include engaging with external groups, organising an event, development, or volunteering opportunity. At least one Disability Champion appointed. Increase disabled people’s representation in the group or invite a participant from outside UR as a “critical friend.”</p>
<p>Establish and maintain RNIB ‘Visibly better standard employer’ accreditation and work with other disability groups to develop awareness.</p>	<p>2024 and ongoing</p>	<p>HR and EDI Disability Champions</p>	<p>Promote and offer all staff eLearning training from RNID.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> At least one disability group a year to deliver an awareness activity.</p>

<p>We will continue to engage with Staff Representatives through the NIPSA Joint Negotiation and Consultation Committee (JNCC) on equal pay reviews.</p>	<p>On-going as part of annual pay award agreements</p>	<p>HR, Senior Management, TUS, RemCom</p>	<p>Equal pay reviews will be carried out as part of salary negotiation with JNCC, which will include analysis of equal pay based on those with or without disabilities.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Analysis on equal pay on basis of disability carried out by NISRA</p>
<p>We will keep under review internal and external communications processes and consider areas for improvement in accessibility for people with disabilities.</p>	<p>On-going at induction and neuro-diversity themed training delivered in 2025 and 2027.</p>	<p>HR and Communications Team</p>	<p>FWP project to review our Communications Strategy during 2023-24, with particular regard to positive measures to improve the level of disabled peoples' participation in public life. Including raising awareness of disability Personal Support Plans (PSP).</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Review complete, updates applied where possible for improvement in accessibility for people with disabilities. Promote awareness of disability PSPs for all types of disabilities and include in induction pack. Offer existing and new staff opportunity to review or set up a PSP. Increase in use of PSPs.</p>
<p>We will provide training to all front-facing staff on disability etiquette and relevant legislation dealing with disability and the provision of goods and services. This training will</p>	<p>By 2026 and on-going</p>	<p>HR and Managers</p>	<p>All staff involved with public consultations or dealing with calls from public will be provided with training. Jam card training delivered for all staff.</p> <p>We will offer PSPs for staff with neuro-diverse conditions, agree and share that with relevant people set out in agreements.</p>

<p>give focus to customers dealing with mental ill health concerns and JAM training.</p> <p>We will continue to provide neuro-diversity training for all staff and managers.</p>			<p><b>Outcome:</b> All staff trained in neuro-diversity themed training delivered 2026 and 2028.</p>
<p>We will review our consultation procedures which will include consideration of how we consult with all kinds of consumers with particular regard to people with disabilities.</p>	2024 on-going annually	Communications Team	<p>Continued positive feedback on areas such as engagement, communications, and corporate strategy priorities. Our Stakeholder Engagement Survey took place in 2023 and will be reviewed annually.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Review complete, updates applied where possible for improvement in accessibility for people with disabilities.</p>
<p>We will continue to maintain our website to ensure conformity with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and continue to engage with RNID.</p>	2024 on-going annually	Communications Team	<p>New website and intranet launched in 2020.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Review complete, evidence that this continues to meet accessibility guidelines.</p>
<p>We will keep under review the accessibility of our communications and information including criteria in procurement contracts.</p>	2024 on-going annually	Communications Team	<p>FWP project to review our Communications Strategy during 2023-24.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Review complete, updates applied where possible for improvement in accessibility for people with disabilities.</p>

<p>We will review of accessibility of Organisational Communications Strategy. We will produce accessible corporate documents which will be available and up to date via the Intranet.</p>	<p>2024 on-going</p>	<p>Communications Team</p>	<p>FWP project to review our Communications Strategy during 2023-24.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Review complete, updates applied where possible for improvement in accessibility for people with disabilities.</p>
<p>When carrying out an annual monitoring review of “personal details” profile of staff members, we will include a statement inviting staff who may have acquired a disability, to discuss the issue and any attendant matters confidentially with our Human Resources Department.</p>	<p>To be carried out in 2024 and on-going annually</p>	<p>HR</p>	<p>Exercise to fresh monitoring information on disability to ensure our statistical profile is up to date and reflective of current staff.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Organisation wide monitoring survey complete in 2024, % of staff with disabilities, increased, updated, and refreshed annually.</p>
<p>We will continue upon request, to provide publications from the Office in alternative formats, such as audiotape and Braille.</p>	<p>On-going</p>	<p>HR</p>	<p><b>Outcome:</b> Positive feedback from consultees.</p>
<p>We will provide text service and sign language</p>	<p>On-going</p>	<p>HR</p>	<p><b>Outcome:</b> Positive feedback from consultees.</p>

interpreters where required for our public meetings and consultation exercises.			
We will continue to place positive action measures in recruitment & selection activities such as welcoming statements for people with disabilities and promoting our commitments such as displaying, we are a Disability Confident employer, and Charters.	On-going	HR	<b>Outcome:</b> Recruitment results increased number of staff with disabilities (monitoring carried out in 2024 and compared each year).
Evac-chairs are installed for the building and training was provided for staff across the building. UR will maintain training of at least 8 staff.	On-going	HR, Facilities Staff	<b>Outcome:</b> 8 staff trained and aware of evac-chairs.
We will continue to liaise with Autism Adult Service as required and maintain staff/manger training in neurodiversity. We will engage with staff to agree and produce Personal	Ongoing	HR and Managers	Support for staff and line managers ongoing. <b>Outcome:</b> Support for other staff as required, an increased use of PSPs.

Support Plans and share these with appropriate people.			
We will continue our commitments under the Mental Health Charter. We will promote an open and inclusive culture in the Utility Regulator which displays respect for those with mental illness.	October Annual World Mental Health Day and on-going	All staff, EDI Group and disability Champions	Mental health awareness will be promoted in line with World Mental Health Day and at least two activities or training throughout year. <b>Outcome:</b> At least one activity per year related to the Mental Health Charter, including “Every Customer Counts” commitment.
Although reasonable adjustments (RA) are a statutory requirement; We will actively encourage staff to request reasonable adjustment requests for mental health illness and seek specialist medical advice to support staff.	In response to individual cases.	HR and Managers	<b>Outcome:</b> Evidence of engagement with staff.
We will promote the services of the Welfare Support Services and EAP Inspire and work with relevant health agencies to provide appropriate information about the prevalence of mental ill	On-going	HR and Managers	Provision of current information leaflets, display of posters and articles posted on the intranet. Promotion of current local and national initiatives.  <b>Outcome:</b> Evidence of increased take up and use of EAP and WSS by staff.



health in Northern Ireland, how this impacts on the workplace and the benefits of creating a mentally healthy, resilient workplace.			
Mental health training will be provided for all staff and mandatory training for managers.	2024 and on-going	All staff and Managers	All staff and managers will receive appropriate training such as Mindful Manager, First Aid and Resilience training delivered in.  <b>Outcome:</b> At least at least 6 staff are trained and accredited in Mental Health First aid and refresher training every 3 years.
Although reasonable adjustments (RA) are a statutory requirement; we will proactively promote RA in our recruitment & selection processes packs and providing training on RA duties to all employees involved in recruitment and selection.	On-going	HR and panels	Staff sitting on selection panels aware of RA duty.  <b>Outcome:</b> Evidence of additional support be provided to disabled candidates, e.g., sign language interpreters, note takers, additional time.




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**CHAIR**




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**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**