

Response submitted by

Association for Real Change, Northern Ireland (ARC NI)

FEBRUARY 2022

Comments on a Draft Second Action Plan (2022/23 to 2024/25) 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. These organisations offer a range of services and supports. These include but are not limited to:

- Living options for example, care homes, supported living etc.
- Meaningful day activities including day services, accredited training, volunteering opportunities and supported employment in a range of enterprises; and
- Family support and short breaks.

Having a learning disability is a lifelong condition and as such results in individuals requiring health and social care support throughout their lives.

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.

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.'

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. Current Action

ARC NI was asked for feedback in advance of the development of a second action plan. A response submitted in August 2021 confirmed the following priority areas, as raised by learning disability providers:

1. ARC NI recommends that the first Action Plan is reviewed, and specifically through the lens of Brexit and COVID-19;
2. ARC NI recommends the second action plan address the lack of parity demonstrated towards non-statutory providers;
3. ARC NI recommends the second action plan specifically targets parity of terms and conditions for social care workforce;
4. ARC NI recommends system dynamic modelling is commissioned to consider the future workforce requirements of the learning disability community.

Since providing this feedback in August 2021, several developments have occurred.

Firstly, in October 2021, the Department of Health facilitated the first meeting of the Social Care Fair Work Forum which ARC NI welcomes being a part of. The next meeting is scheduled to occur in March 2022.

In December, the UK Government announced that for a minimum of 12 months, social care would be added to the shortage occupational list, enabling workers to be eligible for a health care visa. As inclusion on the list requires a minimum annual salary of £20,480, ARC NI welcomed the financial support provided by the Department of Health NI, to uplift the lowest paid in care homes and home care.

In January 2022, the Department of Health convened the first meeting of the Project Group, established to undertake a full Programme of Care, multi-disciplinary workforce review across all sectors that have responsibility for the provision of care/support for learning disability services.

It also published a proposal to reform Adult Social Care, with a dedicated chapter on 'Valuing the workforce'.

ARC NI welcomes the alignment of these to the Draft Second Action Plan (2022/23 to 2024/25) for the Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy 2026.

3. Feedback on Proposed Action (in the Second Action Plan)

Objective 1

Theme 1 (Attracting, recruiting and training)

We are concerned that within Action 2.1 the timeframe for two of the four outputs is March 2025. Social care providers are experiencing a workforce crisis now. ARC NI would challenge this timeframe and advocate the need to bring it forward.

We are concerned that within Action 2.3 social care is not referenced. Many ARC NI members are paying significant money through the apprenticeship levy and getting nothing

in return. ARC NI would challenge the exclusion or omission of social care and advocate its inclusion.

We are concerned that within Action 2.4 social care is not referenced, and hence ARC NI is assuming its exclusion. Social care providers employ a range of individuals and professions. ARC NI would challenge the exclusion or omission of social care and advocate its inclusion.

We are concerned that within Action 2.7 the Social Care Fair Work Forum is not being given the prioritised commitment it requires. At the first meeting, all stakeholders described the workforce crisis facing social care providers now and collectively advocated the need for frequent meetings. To have a meeting every six months is not in our view, urgent action.

Theme 2 (Sufficient availability of high quality training and development) & 3 (Effective Workforce Planning)

We are concerned that within Action 2.8 the timescales for commissioning of workforce reviews is December 2022, given that the learning disability sector has already commenced its full Programme of Care multi-disciplinary review. We would anticipate that the work of this review would result in a very similar action plan with very clearly defined objectives, outputs and timeframes. ARC NI would advocate the need for this to be urgently and properly resourced given the cross-sectoral input that is required.

We are concerned that within Action 2.13 the current crisis as experienced within social care will be further exacerbated by legislation. ARC NI would advocate that the needs and experience of the non-statutory sector must be at the heart of, and equally valued within, all discussions exploring legislative options.

We are concerned that within Action 2.14 the financial support to support the lowest paid workers in all social care activity has yet to be fulfilled, the result of which is an inequitable playing field when planning and securing effective workforce. This also impacts on providers accessing EU staff through the shortage occupational list. Financial support provided by the Department of Health has yet to reach providers of Supported Living and those of Day Care/Opportunities. Providers of day activities a lack of annual uplifts for several recurring years. ARC NI would advocate the urgent need to ensure all services and support offered through social care has been provided with the financial support to address the lowest paid.

Objective 2 & 3

ARC NI would advocate that social care, and in particular the non-statutory sector, needs to be considered and equally included in all of the overarching initiatives detailed in the action plan.

ARC NI continues to advocate that our social care workforce is in crisis, and we need to act with urgency.