Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties

Annual Progress Report

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:	The Ulster University Equality Scheme webpage	
Signature: Damian McAlister, Chief People Officer		

This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission. It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and the Disability Action Plan.

This report reflects progress made between 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024

PART A

Introduction

This is Ulster University's 15th Annual Progress Report on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order (DDO) for submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI).

The Report is an opportunity to demonstrate how the University has fulfilled its legislative obligations and gone beyond compliance to achieve best practice in promoting equality of opportunity and good relations.

Part A of this report provides an overview of the work undertaken at Ulster University (UU) in fulfilment of its Equality Scheme obligations. An overview of the training provided is included in Appendix 1. Further examples and a sample of activities and civic contributions can then be found in Appendix 2.

Part B of the report relates to compliance with our legislative duties under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) (DDA) to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and to encourage their full participation in public life.

Appendix 1
Training programme (1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024).

Appendix 2
Sample of activities and civic contributions across the University, that have helped promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

PART A

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

1. In 2023-24, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

   Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

In 2023/24, responsibility for supporting the implementation of the University's statutory equality and good relations duties and equality scheme remained with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Unit, in the Office of the Chief People Officer.

The following key policy/service delivery developments were made during the reporting period to promote equality of opportunity and good relations:

- Regarding the University's Corporate Strategy, People, Place and Partnerships: Delivering Sustainable Futures for All strategy, The University appointed the first Dean of Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in May 2023 to provide strategic leadership and oversight in relation to the institution's focus on EDI. This is a wide-ranging role with leadership responsibility for the further development of, and delivery to, a new EDI Strategy for both staff and students. This work will be undertaken within the context of both the University's emerging Sustainable Futures Strategy and the established People and Culture and Learning and Teaching Strategies.

  The Dean will work with a range of interested parties across the organisation including staff, students (including the students union), and the wider community. Ulster University are supplementing existing resources to allow for enhanced capacity to meet the objectives laid out in our organisational strategy to promote diversity and inclusion. Our areas of focus will be 1. Gender and Sexual Orientation 2. Disability and Age and 3. Race and Religion, each will be supported by the Statutory and Compliance section, already in place.

- Staff from across the Chief People Officer portfolio (Employee Relations, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Office of the University Secretary) have come together to utilise and develop the monthly

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PART A

Policy Clinic to support managers across the University when developing new or reviewing existing policies. Numerous colleagues have availed of advice on our policy framework, policy governance, equality screening and mainstreaming, staff and stakeholder engagement and trade union consultation. Feedback in a recent review of the Policy Clinic was overall very positive, with colleagues praising the format, informal style and approach adopted. Please see questions 3-30 for further information on the Equality Screenings that were carried out using the forum of the policy clinic and accompanying framework for policy development to promote equal opportunities and good relations.

- We continue to offer our staff 'Family friendly' policies which can be accessed on our webpage.

- Ulster University continues to support its Work life Balance Policy, which offers their staff Hybrid & Flexible Working. This provides a menu of potential options for colleagues in offering them choices and flexibility in where and when they deliver their work. Additionally, staff can request part time working hours from the first day of employment. Further information on this can be found via the Hybrid & Flexible Working Framework.

  Under the Work Life Balance Policy Ulster University continues to offer career breaks and emergency special leave to staff members who request leave in connection with particularly difficult family circumstances.

- The University has a comprehensive policy and procedure for dealing with complaints of bullying and harassment in both the learning and the work environment. It also clearly articulates the University's commitment to creating and sustaining a welcoming inclusive and accessible learning and work environment for both staff and students.. The policy covers bullying or harassment on the grounds of characteristics protected by Section 75: Religious belief, political opinion, sex or gender identity, marital status, having or not having dependants, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnic origin, and age. The details and further information on our Anti-Harassment Advisors is detailed on our Bullying and Harassment webpage.

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-   The University completed the Fair Employment Monitoring Return (FETO) in June 2024. The monitored data was used to pre-populate information on the University's Equality Screening pro forma, to help inform the development of new and revised policies.

-   The Article 55 Review progressed during the reporting period.

-   The Gender Pay Analyses for 2023 has been completed. A Pay Gap Working Group has been established to develop a Strategic Framework Plan 2024- 2026 in consultation with the Trade Unions.

-   81% of staff had completed the EDI online training module by 31st March 2024. This represents a 13% increase from the previous reporting period. This increase is reflective of an increased focus at a senior level to this area, Ulster University have reaffirmed their commitment to focus on improvement in this area within the next reporting period.

Further detail on training activities can be found in **Appendix 1.**

There are a wide range of activities that have helped promote equality of opportunity and good relations occurring throughout the University. A sample of those activities and civic contributions that took place during this reporting period are included in **Appendix 2.**

PART B

2. Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/ measures** in 2023-24 (or append the plan with progress/examples identified).

The University is currently developing an equality scheme action plan to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The University has implemented Operational Plans for each Faculty and department, and as such this has encompassed the Equality Action Plan. All Operational Plans will now have EDI actions and commitments embedded within them, that will be monitored and reviewed annually. The EDI Unit will also have its own its Operational Plan, which is currently being finalised. This ensures that EDI initiatives are at the heart of each individual Operational Plan and subsequently each area within the University; it places a priority on meeting these requirements. This was set up in 2022/23 and several outcomes have been met within the reporting period 2023/24. For example, the establishment of The Race Equality Charter (REC) committee, and three new Schools now have received the Bronze Athena Swan Award.

3. Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*Tick one box only*)

☐ Yes

☒ No (Go to Q.4)

☐ Not applicable (Go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

3a. With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e., the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

3b. What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? (*Tick all that apply*)

☐ As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy (*please give details*):

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☐ As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise (*please give details*):

☐ As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact (*please give details*):

☐ As a result of changes to access to information and services (*please specify and give details*):

Other (*please specify and give details*):

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments <u>and</u> action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

4. Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*Tick one box only*)

☐ Yes, organisation wide

☐ Yes, some departments/jobs

☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment

☒ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been don

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

5. Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*Tick one box only*)

☐ Yes, organisation wide

☐ Yes, some departments/jobs

☒ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment

☐ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

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6. In the 2023-24 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? (*Tick all that apply*)

☐ Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan

☐ Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning

☐ Yes, in some departments/jobs

☒ No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan

☐ No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2020-21 report

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The University's new Corporate Strategy, *People, Place and Partnerships: Delivering Sustainable Futures for All*, seeks to place equality of opportunity and enhanced participation at the heart of the University's culture and operational activities. Regular equality updates were provided to the Senior Management Team within People and Culture and to the University's SLT.

Equality action plans/measures

7. Within the 2023-24 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:		Actions ongoing:		Actions to commence:	

Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

Due to resourcing matters, the EDI Operational Plan, which is linked directly to the University's People, Place and Partnerships Strategy, was not finalised during the reporting period. However, actions still continued to be progressed as detailed in this report. Progress on the EDI Operational Plan will be presented in the next Section 75 APR.

8. Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2023-24 reporting period (points not identified in an appended plan):

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The EDI Operational Plan was introduced in this reporting period (see 7).

9. In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2023-24 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

☒ Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality

☒ Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way

☒ Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities

☐ Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

10. Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: (*tick one box only*)

☐ All the time

☒ Sometimes

☐ Never

11. Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2023-24 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g., the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

UU recognises the importance of thorough and timely consultation during the development of new and revised policies.

During the reporting period, the University continued to operate a monthly Policy Clinic to support the policy development and equality screening of all new and revised policies. The Clinic brings together colleagues from Employee Relations, Governance and EDI with respective policy owners.

As part of the policy development and equality screening processes, Trade Union representatives are engaged with at the early stages.

For all public consultations, the details of policies screened are sent to over 150 groups and individuals on the University's Consultation Database. Consultation documents are made available on the University's website and are available in alternative formats, if requested. All respondents are informed of how their feedback has influenced the final policy.

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During the reporting period, the mechanism to update the consultee database was also improved and made more accessible through a Microsoft Form on the consultation webpage.

12. In the 2023-24 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently <u>used</u> by consultees**: (*tick all that apply*)

☐ Face to face meetings

☐ Focus groups

☒ Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing

☒ Questionnaires

☒ Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation

☐ Internet discussions

☐ Telephone consultations

Other (please specify):

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

Consultees have identified these as their preferred method of consulting.

Policy owners continue to consult internally with the University's four Staff Networks using MS Teams and email communications during equality screening. For example, during the development of the Athena Swan Silver Institutional Action Plan.

13. Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*Tick one box only*)

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

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14. Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*Tick one box only*)

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

Details of consultation exercises are available on the University's EDI webpage.

15. Please provide the number of policies screened during the year (as recorded in screening reports):

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16. Please provide the **number** of assessments that were consulted upon during 2023-24:

2	Policy consultations conducted with **screening** assessment presented.
0	Policy consultations conducted **with an equality impact assessment** (EQIA) presented.
0	Consultations for an **EQIA** alone.

17. Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

A policy consultation exercise was launched in **October 2023** with regards to the following policies that were screened between April to October 2023:

1. Building name change – Block BB to "Basil Blackshaw Building"
2. Building name change – Block BC to "Mary Ann McCracken Building"
3. Building name change – Block BD to "May Blood Building"
4. Building name change – Building MK Block to "Amelia Earhart Building"
5. Building name change – Building MS Block to "Kay McNulty Building"
6. Building name change – Teaching Block MU to "John & Pat Hume Building"

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7. Room name change - Teaching room Y205 to "Lindsay Gracey Clinical Teaching Suite"
8. Research Strategy 2023 – 2028
9. Special Lighting Policy
10. Whistleblowing Policy

A second policy consultation exercise was launched in **March 2024**, for the following 4 policies that were screened between November 2023 to March 2024:

1. Data Protection Policy
2. Digital Screen Equipment Procedure
3. First Aid at Work Procedure
4. Athena Swan Silver Institutional Action Plan

The consultation period closes in July 2024. Therefore, any feedback received that results in changes to the draft policies will be included in the next reporting period.

18. Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*Tick one box only*)

☐ Yes

☒ No concerns were raised

☐ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

19. Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*Tick one box only*)

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

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20. From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*Tick one box only*)

☐ Yes

☐ No, already taken place

☒ No, scheduled to take place at a later date

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details:

The EDI Unit will carry-out a re-monitoring exercise in the next reporting period.

This had been postponed from the previous year in anticipation of revised ECNI Monitoring Guidance and enhanced capabilities of the software used by the University, PeopleXD.

This is to ensure that the system is able to collect the new data fields (identified from both ECNI and HESA). The purpose of the exercise is to encourage staff to check/update their EO records, thereby improving the accuracy of the EO monitoring data held on the University's HR database.

21. In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? (*Tick one box only*)

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

22. Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2023-24 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

No adverse or differential impacts were anticipated or observed for the policies revised during this reporting period. However, positive impacts were anticipated for the following categories of people in regard to the following new policies:

Research Strategy 2023 – 2028

Racial Group, Men and Women Generally

Athena Swan Silver Institutional Action Plan

Racial Group, Men and Women generally, and Dependants

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Digital Screen Equipment Procedure

Disability

23. **Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:**
    - During the reporting period, the University submitted its annual FETO return. The updated EO data are used in the equality screening process and included in a standard template for policy owners. The EO data helps inform the development of new and revised policies.
    - EO data in relation to specific Staff categories were used in the equality screening of a number of policies during the reporting period including the Athena Swan Action Plan.

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

24. **Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2023-24, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme**.

Training

The Summary Equality Scheme was disseminated four times during the reporting period (April 2023, October 2023, November 2023 and March 2024), linked in the introductory section of the training schedule communications and in the Equality Screening of Policies consultations.

A targeted approach was taken to disseminate the training programme, along with information linking to the University's Equality Scheme, to the Senior Management Team in the Chief People Officer's portfolio; UU Students' Union officers; the Doctoral College; Staff Networks; Faculty Administration Offices and to Student Wellbeing Officers.

The University's Equality Scheme is located on a dedicated webpage on the EDI website. The webpage provides detailed guidance on how the University is complying with its statutory obligations under the two duties in the Section 75 equality legislation.

The content of the online Disability Awareness module continued to be refreshed during the reporting period. The overall completion rate has not yet been captured given the extent of the review and migration period between two learning platforms.

Focussed training

Staff from the EDI Unit provided one-to-one equality screening training to 'policy owners' as required (for each new and revised policy).

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Assessing access to information and services

Staff in the EDI Section attended ECNI training throughout the reporting period, including Section 75 Duties – a focus on screening, and the

Disability Duties and developing a Disability Action Plan. The University's EDI Unit engaged regularly with the Equality Commission for advice, signposting and to keep up to date with any developments or changes to practices.

Using post-training surveys and polls / chat bar functionality on MS Teams, positive feedback was received on all training sessions. The use of online platforms to deliver training in one virtual room, across a multi- campus institution, was a positive outcome for participants in terms of accessibility.

25. Please provide any examples of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

One-to-one equality screening training has worked well in that policy owners obtain the skills required to complete policy screening as and when required. This makes the training more relevant to them and equips policy owners with the confidence to complete other policy screening more independently and with less assistance.

As part of the ENGAGE Programme, which aims to support line managers realise their full potential at the University, the EDI Section continued to deliver a module providing the essential introductory toolkit to Equality at

UU. This is an opportunity to provide a high-level introduction to the Section 75 duties.

Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)

26. Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2023-24, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services:**

The University continues to use the website as its primary means of disseminating information. Silktide in association with Socitm have been running an [accessibility league for Universities](#), measuring features such as screen reader compatibility, text and image legibility and mobile accessibility in relation to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 (the legal standard required of all public sector websites by September 2020). The league table updates each month. At the end of the reporting period, [UU ranked first](#) overall in terms of website accessibility.

To enhance accessibility and in adherence to the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018, a significant review of online files has continued to take place across the University during the reporting

period. This continues to be work in progress, which is complemented with regular content accessibility training rolled out by the Web Development team.

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

27. How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2023-24?

Insert number here:

0

Section 3: Looking Forward

28. Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

The next review is scheduled in 2027.

29. Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(Please provide details)*

- Complete a re-monitoring exercise to improve accuracy of staff EO monitoring information. Due to the expanded scope of the updated Monitoring guidance from ECNI, as well as a pilot exercise relating specifically to the collection of ethnicity data from the NI Executive Office, amendments will need to be made to the University's system in advance of commencing the exercise.
- Review of the University's EDI Operational Plan, and associated Action Plan, in accordance with the new University Corporate Strategy.
- In line with Chapter 5 of the Equality Scheme, the organisation will continue to focus on staff training in the next reporting period; raising awareness of the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 via updated mandatory EDI and Disability Awareness training, and to provide those staff involved in the assessment of policies (screening and EQIA), with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively.

30. In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2023-24) reporting period? (*Please tick any that apply*)

☒ Employment

☒ Goods, facilities and services

☒ Legislative changes

☒ Organisational changes/ new functions

☐ Nothing specific, more of the same

PART B

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

3. The following table details the actions in the University's Disability Action Plan (DAP) 2022-2027, which sets out how the University will encourage positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and encourage their participation in University/Public life through a series of cross-functional and unique actions.

1. Actions to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities						
	Rationale	Action	Performance indicator / target	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress during the reporting period **01.04.23 – 31.03.24**
1.1	In the Staff Disability Awareness Surveys (2022), over one-third of respondents did not know the University's DAP existed; indicating the need for increased awareness, accessibility and visibility of the Disability Duties and the DAP.	Enhance the profile and online accessibility of the DAP 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 DAP, evidenced through staff surveys, training evaluations and qualitative feedback.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer	2022 - 2027	In December 2022, a dedicated webpage was launched to improve visibility and awareness of the University's new DAP. This includes a web-based text of the action plan to enhance accessibility. A comprehensive background to how the DAP was developed is also included on the webpage. This

					continues to be updated and maintained. An awareness session for staff was provided in November 2023, which included an overview of the Disability Duties and the DAP. The webpage is updated as needed and will continue to be in the future. This awareness of the University's DAP will be measured again in the 2025/2026 Staff Disability Awareness Survey.
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 DAP.	All staff complete module on the Disability Duties and the DAP.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer	2023	This action is ongoing. Due to staff resourcing this action will be ongoing and developed in the

						2024/2025 reporting period.
1.3	Research has suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted on people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, particularly in terms of mental health.	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 of the Covid-19 pandemic on the BAME community and providing information and signposting to mental health support services internally and externally.	Increased awareness of mental health disabilities and knowledge of support services, evidenced through feedback following the workshop (s).	James Uhomoibhi BAME+ Staff and Student Network Lead Geoff Gillan Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing	2023	This action is ongoing.

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2. Actions to encourage people with disabilities to participate in University life						
	Rationale	Action	Performance indicator / target	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress during the reporting period **01.04.23 – 31.03.24**
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. The Medical Education	Dependent on philanthropic donations being secured, offer Community Scholarships and Medical Education Scholarships each year of the lifecycle of the DAP.	Additional funding available for students with disabilities entering UU courses. Increase in the number of disabled students applying successfully for the scholarships.	Director of Development and Alumni Relations	Annual	Ulster University Community Scholarships were awarded to 30 students entering courses in AY2023-24. In January 2024, a further 28 scholarships were announced for students entering courses in AY2024-25. Feedback received from the winners of the Ulster University Community Scholarships included the following statement: "Receiving a Community Scholarship has relieved financial pressure on me. I have been able to care for my mum and my two children and have not had to worry about working more hours to make ends meet. The mentoring

	Scholarships were launched in 2021.					support has been invaluable to me over the last academic year. Thank you for providing this opportunity." (First Year Ulster University Community Scholarship Student)
2.2a	People with disabilities apply for 60% more jobs than people without disabilities before finding employment (ECNI Annual Report 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	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	In June 2023 the Graduate Boost Programme was completed – this involved 15-week internships for graduates, addressing the challenges for disabled graduates securing highly skilled employment in NI. The result of this was that 18 disabled graduates were placed with 12 employers in NI It had a 100% retention and completion rate with 72% entering employment on completion. The programme will continue in 23/24 Academic year.

	Commissioner - ECNI, January 2023) 4.9% of staff at the University declared a disability in 2021.					
2.2b		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	This action is ongoing.
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	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 UU.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer Marie Duffy Lead for Advancing Disability Equality sub-group.	2022 - 2027	The University were successful in securing funding for one further person to attend this course. In the previous reporting period, the Chair of the Staff Disability Network attended. The chair found the training programme

	as people without disabilities. A recent survey commissioned by Inclusive Boards found that employers are apprehensive about hiring a senior employee with disabilities.					to be extremely rewarding and immersive experience that focused on interactive peer learning and discussion.
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.	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 UU by developing a Strategy and Action Plan over the life cycle of the University's DAP.	Working Group established within Year 1. Written Strategy, Action Plan and evaluation methods endorsed by the SLT (Years 2 – 4), with the aim of increasing accessibility and usability for students with all levels of ability, to progress at UU 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)	2022 - 2027	Ulster is nearing completion of an Inter-university Adv HE (Higher Education) Collaborative Projectto support institutions in promoting Student Belonging. The project focused on establishing a Leadership Network for Wellbeing and Belonging and were challenged to co-create Institutional practices, resources, and guidance to support the embedding of wellbeing and belonging in the curriculum and the overall

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| | 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. | | | Marie Duffy Lead for Advancing Disability Equality sub-group

Andy Jaffrey Head of Office for Digital Learning | | student experience. Key outputs have included:
-　　A shared institutional understanding of Belonging
-　　12 student-led mini projects to support student belonging and wellbeing at Ulster.

A SharePoint site is being developed and plans are underway for a dissemination event in January 2025. The Learning Enhancement Directorate have initiated specific project workstreams underpinned by UDL:
1.　　Digital accessibility. This workstream aims to produce co- designed resources and professional learning to support staff in creating accessible digital content, aligned to the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations |

					(PSBAR), 2018. The project lead is also liaising with JISC on securing access to a newly released foundational digital accessibility module on behalf of the university with a view to this being made available to all staff with responsibilities for teaching and/or supporting learning. 2.　'Inclusive and Accessible Curriculum and Assessment'. This workstream aims to increase the implementation, understanding and need for inclusive and accessible teaching, learning and assessment practices, learning environments, professional development, school culture and leadership. The International Student and Staff Preparedness

| | | | | | Working Group aims to review how to best support our staff to enhance the international student experience. One of the outputs is a toolkit designed to help all UU staff who support the learning experiences of our international students and provides guidance around longitudinal inductions, cultural holidays, further reading and opportunities to hear the student voice. The group will be evaluating the current provision and providing recommendations for future enhancements for Academic Year 2024-25. |
| | | | | | The AFHEA-accredited First Steps to Teaching course at Ulster has been updated for 2024-25 with a renewed focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The UDL framework has been used to guide the pedagogical |

| | | | | | | design of new course activities and it is also used as a reflective tool to support participants new to teaching with practical ways to enact inclusive and anticipatory practices to support diverse learners.

20,436 unique users accessed alternative versions of content in Blackboard via Blackboard Ally.

These users downloaded 198,577 alternative document types.

This is broken down by:
Audio 1,711
BeeLine 2,858 Braille 1024
ePub 40,854
HTML 35,255
Immersive Reader 1,625
OCR PDF 959
Tagged PDF 114,391 |
| 2.5 | As a consequence of organisations | Develop and promote guidance | Guidance is implemented and | Damian McAlister | 2022-2023 | |

| | 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. | 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. | training on elements of the guidance is rolled out to staff. | Chief People Officer | | A comprehensive toolkit that supports the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and the requirements of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2), was developed for staff during the previous reporting period and delivered to the Senior Leadership Team. Plans are underway to roll out this training for UU Staff.

The following link will direct you to the University's website for guidelines on Accessibility standards: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/accessibility-standards

Since October 2023 the Web Development team have sent out a weekly newsletter to their Web Content Editors to advise on best practise and how to make content accessible. The team also |
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						make use of the Silktide platform in their everyday work and to educate the team on best practise for accessibility of web content. Ulster University have scored first and second place on the silktide Index for UK Universities for website accessibility and are used as a model of best practise.
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 Appointments: Annual Report for Northern Ireland – published January 2022).	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	Increase in the number of applications from those declaring a disability. Increased membership of people with disabilities on Council and other public bodies within the University.	Clare Jamison University Secretary	2022-2027	The Office of the University Secretary will be undertaking a recruitment exercise to Council in May/ June 2024 and will have an update for the next reporting period.

		networks to request the distribution of recruitment activity among their contacts, to help promote opportunities more widely.				
2.8	According to Workplace Today, making reasonable workplace adjustments can unlock a hidden talent pool. It can also help promote UU 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 disaAbility 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	The Staff disaAbility 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 disaAbility Network	2022	At this time the University is currently reviewing the RAP and when it has been agreed there will be a tile signposting this on the Staff Onboarding Social Hub. The Social Hub also provides a direct link to the Disability Network's SharePoint site. This contains a number of presentations, videos and guidance documents. These resources are available for all staff and not just those in the network. A RAP Focus Group was established in April 2023 as part of the review process to make sure it is

		RAP and the Access to Work Programme.				fit for purpose. The working group consists of different members of staff from the People & Culture Directorate. Recruitment will commence in the next reporting period to appoint an EDI Advisor to work alongside the Staff Networks and will help promote visibility to staff.
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	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	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	Professor Odette Hutchinson Pro-Vice-Chancellor Academic Quality & Student Experience Elaine Hartin Chief Strategy & Finance Officer	2022-2023	This Project is now in the security testing phase. The new RAR form development has been completed, tested and all fields are mapped from previous RAR form to the new RAR form for the transfer of existing student RARs. Ongoing testing is needed, and training documents will need to be developed. If testing is completed successful, a soft launch is planned for June 2025.

	student's course director to distribute the information to appropriate teaching staff.	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 RARs appropriately.	engagement with the RAR process.			
2.10	Traditional accessibility barriers to print, audio, and visual media for students with disabilities can be much more easily overcome	Establish an Internal Disability Advisory Forum, which is representative of the staff and student body, to engage with and to	Enhanced engagement between staff, students and external stakeholders.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer Michael Fitzpatrick	2023 Meetings arranged as required throughout the lifetime	In the Staff Disability Survey carried out in January 2023, people were asked to indicate if they had an interest in joining a new Disability Advisory. Forum

	through web technologies. There are physical barriers in accessing new buildings and facilities for staff, students and visitors at the University.	help inform decision making and project planning.	Improved digital and physical accessibility.	Director of Estates Mark Taglietti Director of Digital Services David Longstaff UU Students Union	of the Action Plan. Review of membership carried out every two years (31 March 2025 and 31 March 2027).	representative of the staff and student body. Establishing the above forum is underway with work being carried out around membership etc. In preparation for this the Ulster University Student's Union has increased their equality seats to nine to ensure all students including those with disabilities have a voice. In response to the action Digital Services have continued to enhance inclusivity, they are actively improving their website by reviewing content and navigation to ensure ease of use for all users. A key initiative includes replacing PDF guides with HTML format documents, which allows users to leverage custom browser settings, improve

| | | | | | readability, and make content easier to find and share. This transition also ensures compatibility with assistive technologies like screen readers, making the site more accessible to those with disabilities.

Additionally, we are trialling a webchat function to deliver faster, more accurate responses based on shorter search terms. This tool will offer broader suggestions, giving all users, particularly those with disabilities, greater access to rapid self-service options.

We have also added new apps to the Microsoft Office 365 platform, allowing staff to access essential systems, such as the Estates Service Desk (Planon), from home without requiring remote connection software. |
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						Finally, a review of the self- service portal is underway, aimed at increasing usage and incorporating publicly accessible forms to make it easier for all users to find, access, and share information. These efforts reflect the team's commitment to creating a more accessible and equitable digital environment, ensuring that all users, regardless of ability, can fully engage with our services.

	3. Actions to promote both positive duties					
	Rationale	Action	Performance indicator / target	Responsibility	Timescale	
3.1	Increase awareness of UU thought leadership	Proactive efforts to further enhance relationships	Enhanced focus on patient/societal outcomes and	Profess or Liam	2022 - 2027	The University's research into disability was the focus of

| | and academic expertise relating to disability. | 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. | impact of relevant research. Social media and press coverage (including the use of internal communications) of civic impact in action. | Maguire

Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research | | Research Hour in November 2023.

Research Hour is a monthly social media initiative which:
• Spotlights our research and provides opportunities to share its impact with engaged and new audiences
• Highlights the contributions of our researchers/staff
• Influences stakeholder audiences, i.e. policymakers, funders and more
• Highlights our excellence in Research in a thematic way and in a regular rhythm
• Showcases the breadth of our research and its impact on society |

						Research Hour: Disability Focus can be viewed here.
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 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.	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 better with people with hearing loss and to promote an inclusive working and learning environment.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer Marie Duffy Lead for Advancing Disability Equality Subgroup Staff disaAbility Network	2022 - 2027	The University arranged an Introduction to British Sign Language course that lasted for nine weeks. These were held from May – July 2023 with 12 members of staff completing the course. Hearing Loss awareness training was held by Employers for Disability NI in January 2024 with 19 members of staff attending. Through the Staff disAbility Network, funding was secured from the Department of the Communities to hold several learning sessions regarding Deaf Awareness. These will be due to commence in May 2024 and will be held across three Campuses.

	The action will also help staff to communicate better with people with hearing loss and help promote an inclusive working and learning environment.					An online module for LMS LEARN has been developed with people completed the module. The University is exploring options for the delivery of Irish Sign Language.
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).	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	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 one-to-one	Professor Mark Durkin Executive Dean - UUBS. Dr Paul Joseph-Richard UUBS. Professor Odette Hutchinson Pro-Vice-Chancellor - Academic Quality & Student Experience	2022	This programme was delivered in the previous reporting period. Students who have completed the programme continued to receive support throughout the 2023 - 2024 academic year.

| | | working in teams, technology at work, Future of work, innovation and entrepreneurship. Each learner will be coached by a named academic from the UUBS.

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. | 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 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

		The programme aims to build overall confidence to help overcome barriers that people with disabilities often face when searching and applying for job opportunities.				
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	Increase completion rate by at least 5% of current staff each year, in the lifecycle of the DAP. Increased awareness of disability issues and our shared roles in supporting colleagues and students with disabilities.	Damian McAlister Chief People Officer	2022 - 2027	During the reporting period, there was a significant training programme for staff on a wide range of disability matters (as detailed in Appendix 1). Content for Disability Awareness training on the LMS Learning system is under review and due to staff resourcing it will be reviewed in the next period.

		automated reminders to staff, as well as promoting the training through regular communications on the University's social media and internal news channels.				
3.5	The DAP 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 DAP 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.	A new dedicated webpage was developed to enhance visibility and accessibility to the DAP during the reporting period. The Plan was disseminated to all staff and students via a global email and an online presentation was delivered for staff in December 2022. Regular training on the Disability Duties and the DAP has provided an opportunity for people to inform potential new actions.

PART B

| 3.6 | Statutory reporting requirement. | Report progress of actions within the DAP 2022 – 2027 to the University's SLT and the EDI Steering Group every six months.

Provide updates on actions to the ECNI 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 | The Three-Year Effectiveness Review and the DAP were endorsed by the SLT and considered by the EDI Steering Group during the reporting period.

Annual updates on the action plan have been included in the University's Section 75 Annual Progress Report. This also involves regular engagement to SLT. |

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5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

During this period, the EDI Unit delivered an internal presentation to staff on the Disability Duties, to provide an opportunity for colleagues to give feedback and inform new actions. These actions included:

• Feedback from service users/ Action owners and colleagues

• Review Action Plan

PART B

- Review complaints and requests.

(b) Quantitative

The EDI Unit monitors changes to the staff and student disability profile on an annual basis.

The EDI Unit monitors changes to the staff and student disability profile on an annual basis.

The EDI Unit also has arranged a number of training sessions for University staff in relation to Disability Awareness, details of courses and numbers attended are listed in Appendix 1.

1. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan and/or any other changes?

No. The DAP 2022-2027 was launched in December 2022, following a 12-week public consultation exercise. The plan continues to be implemented during this reporting period. To date no additional steps have been added.

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation's annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

The new DAP has a 5-year cycle, and it was launched towards the end of the previous reporting period. Given the focus of EDI in the new Corporate Strategy, it is expected that new actions will be added to the DAP in consultation with Departments and Schools across the University. Completed actions will be removed. The EDI Section has approval to recruit and expand the team in the next reporting period, with a section to focus exclusively on Disability and Age.

End of Document.