

Submitted to Disability Action Plan Consultation  
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## About You

Who can respond to this consultation?

1 What is your name?

Name:  
Ruth Sedgewick

2 Are you are responding as an:

Organisation

Other respondent type:

3 Name of your organisation (if relevant):

Name of organisation:  
RCSLT

4 Email address:

Email address:  
ruth.sedgewick@rcslt.org

## What do you think?

5 Do you broadly agree with the action measures that have been included in the draft Disability Action Plan?

Yes

Please tell us why?:

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Northern Ireland (RCSLT NI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Draft Disability Action Plan 2025–2030. We commend the Commission's commitment to promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people and encouraging their participation in public life.

6 Are there any actions not included that you feel should be included? If so, please outline these below:

Suggested actions to include.:

We believe it is essential to include an action around inclusive communication -

Effective communication is fundamental to ensuring equal access to services and participation in public life for individuals with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN). We know that the 2011 census reported almost 30,000 people in Northern Ireland were living with long-term SLCN (e.g., autism, learning disabilities) or acquired (e.g., stroke, brain injury), many of which can be hidden.

Furthermore, current data indicates that approximately 10% of the UK population experiences SLCN that affect daily functioning . This figure encompasses both children and adults and reflects the widespread nature of communication challenges across various settings.

Communication disabilities can profoundly affect a person's ability to access information, express their needs, and fully participate in society. To ensure that everyone can engage equitably with services, it is essential that public bodies, including the Northern Ireland Assembly, implement inclusive communication practices. With an estimated 10% of the population experiencing some form of communication need, it is vital that public services are equipped and responsive in supporting effective communication for all.

We recommend the explicit inclusion of the Five Good Communication Standards within the Action Plan. These standards, developed by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, provide a framework for best practices in supporting individuals with communication needs:

1. Standard 1: There is good information that tells people how best to communicate with the individual.
  2. Standard 2: Services demonstrate how they support individuals with communication needs to be involved in decisions about their care and support.
  3. Standard 3: Staff value and use competently the best approaches to communication with each individual they support.
  4. Standard 4: Services create opportunities, relationships, and environments that make individuals want to communicate.
  5. Standard 5: Individuals are supported to understand and express their needs in relation to their health and well-being.
- Their inclusion in the Action Plan would reinforce the Assembly's commitment to accessibility and inclusion.

Finally, we would urge the commission to consider adding mandatory Communication Accessibility Training. (CAUK - <https://communication-access.co.uk/>)

We advocate for mandatory communication accessibility training for all Assembly staff. Specifically, we recommend the adoption of the FREE Communication Access UK training program (1 hour online training), which equips staff with the skills to communicate effectively with individuals with a range of communication difficulties and differences. This training should be integrated into staff induction and ongoing professional development programs. By becoming a Communication Access Symbol accredited organization, the Assembly would demonstrate its commitment to inclusive communication, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their communication abilities, can engage fully with its services.

## Comments

7 Have you any other comments to add?

Any final comments to include.:

To ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives, we suggest:

- Regular audits of communication accessibility across Assembly services.
- Inclusion of individuals with SLCN in the co-design and evaluation of services.
- Public reporting on progress towards communication accessibility goals.

These measures will help track progress, identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability in implementing inclusive communication practices.

RCSLT NI supports the Draft Disability Action Plan's objectives and urges the Commission to incorporate the recommendations outlined above. We remain committed to collaborating with the Commission to enhance communication accessibility and inclusivity within the Assembly's operations.

For further information or to discuss our recommendations in more detail, please contact:  
[ruth.sedgewick@rcslt.org](mailto:ruth.sedgewick@rcslt.org)

Thank you.

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