Overview of UNCRPD Article 8 in Ireland

Awareness Raising

October 2020



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# Background to the UNCRPD Article review papers

During 2020 the National Disability Authority (NDA) developed a series of in-depth papers on individual United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) articles. These papers detail the main data available relevant to specific Articles and provides an overview of key policies, programmes, services, supports and data that exist in the Irish context. They are not a critique of what is currently in place but rather a record of what exists. Nevertheless, there are instances where certain gaps or concerns are highlighted, including those expressed by the NDA or other stakeholders.

These papers were primarily developed through desk research. However, the papers were also informed by the NDA’s own work, updates and discussions at Departmental Disability Consultative Committees, the National Disability Inclusion Strategy Steering Group, and other relevant committees. They were also informed by interactions with the Disability Stakeholders Group and with persons with disabilities, particularly through participation on a range of working and advisory groups across Government Departments on areas related to NDIS actions. Given their factual nature a more direct consultation process with persons with disabilities was not conducted. However, the NDA envisages continuing to conduct periodic consultations on specific articles of the UNCRPD and related matters which will seek the lived experience of persons with disabilities individually and through their representative bodies.

The purpose of the papers are multiple. They were developed initially to support the development of the State Party report to the UNCRPD Committee. In line with the NDA’s anticipated new statutory function under the UNCRPD, ~~t~~hey are also intended to be useful to support the development by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) of the State’s parallel report to the UNCRPD Committee. They will also be used internally as reference papers within the NDA. The NDA has published these documents on our website to make them available to a wider audience to support any work underway to develop shadow reports on implementation of UNCRPD in Ireland.

The NDA sought to ensure that the information is accurate as of October 2020 but recognises that the changing nature of policies, programmes, services, supports and data will require them to be updated periodically to reflect any changes. The papers are not intended to be exhaustive but seek to provide a broad overview of the main issues of relevance to each article.

In the first instance we reviewed nine articles listed below. Five are available at [www.nda.ie](http://www.nda.ie) and the remaining four will be published shortly. These were selected to reflect some of the main topics of concern to the stakeholders noted above and to include some of the cross-cutting issues such as children and women with disabilities. It is intended that the NDA will develop further papers during 2021 focusing more on civil and political Articles.

* Article 6, Women with Disabilities
* Article 7, Children with Disabilities
* Article 8, Awareness Raising
* Article 19, Living Independently
* Article 24, Education
* Article 25, Health
* Article 26, Work and employment
* Article 28, Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection
* Article 31, Statistics and Data Collection

# Introduction

This document describes the current Irish context in relation to the lens of Article 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). It includes:

* Insight and feedback from stakeholders with disabilities on disability awareness in Ireland,
* Data on national attitudes toward persons with disabilities,
* The experiences of discrimination of persons with disabilities,
* Legislation which prohibits discrimination and legislation which may sustain stigma and discrimination of persons with disabilities,
* National policies and strategies that include plans on raising disability awareness,
* Campaigns and initiatives which raise awareness about disability and the lives of person with disabilities,
* Information on the representation and portrayal of persons with disabilities in the media and associated broadcasting standards,
* Awareness raising about disability within the education system, and
* Information on disability awareness raising training and resources.

# Convention Text

1. States Parties undertake to adopt immediate, effective and appropriate measures:
2. To raise awareness throughout society, including at the family level, regarding persons with disabilities, and to foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities;
3. To combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities, including those based on sex and age, in all areas of life;
4. To promote awareness of the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities.
5. Measures to this end include:
6. Initiating and maintaining effective public awareness campaigns designed:
7. To nurture receptiveness to the rights of persons with disabilities;
8. To promote positive perceptions and greater social awareness towards persons with disabilities;
9. To promote recognition of the skills, merits and abilities of persons with disabilities, and of their contributions to the workplace and the labour market;
10. Fostering at all levels of the education system, including in all children from an early age, an attitude of respect for the rights of persons with disabilities;
11. Encouraging all organs of the media to portray persons with disabilities in a manner consistent with the purpose of the present Convention;
12. Promoting awareness-training programmes regarding persons with disabilities and the rights of persons with disabilities.

# Type of Right

The UNCRPD includes economic, social, cultural and civil and political rights. States which ratify the Convention commit themselves to immediate delivery of civil and political rights to people with disabilities, and to progressive realisation of social and economic rights. Article 8 is primarily an economic, social and cultural right and will be progressively realised.

# Perspectives of those with Disabilities on Disability Awareness

A number of consultation events were held by the National Disability Authority (NDA) in 2019 and 2020 to discuss the UNCRPD and Ireland’s National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-21 with representatives of the disability sector. Attendees raised the issue of disability awareness across a range of areas which are summarised below: [[1]](#footnote-1),[[2]](#footnote-2),[[3]](#footnote-3)

## General public awareness

Some stakeholders felt that there was still a lack of awareness in wider society about disability, and that all parts of society would benefit from awareness raising with regards to persons with disabilities, their needs and their rights. The value of any activity to increase visibility and awareness of persons with disabilities in improving public attitudes was also noted.

## Government departments

While it was acknowledged that general awareness of disability had improved in government departments, some stakeholders felt that awareness varied across departments and skills and awareness levels regarding disability rights was still low. It was also suggested that low and differing awareness levels were one of the reasons why stakeholders felt there is a lack of coherent joined up services for persons with disabilities.

## Inclusive communities

A number of stakeholders highlighted the importance of measures to build and improve positive attitudes to disability as enablers of effective independent living. There was a feeling that negative attitudes still persisted in some communities, and this could be a barrier to persons with disabilities feeling supported and integrated in the place in which they live. Awareness and education in communities about persons with disabilities were cited as key enablers of implementing Articles 19, 28, 29 and 30 in the areas of self-directed living, community inclusion, and effective participation.

## Education and training

Some stakeholders felt there was a lack of awareness in schools about disability. It was also noted that persons with disabilities can fall into the trap of undergoing ‘education and training’ for lengthy periods of time, and certainly to a greater extent than their non-disabled counterparts. There are perceived to be challenges in managing the transitions between training or work-experience and genuine employment, and some participants felt this was due to societal attitudes, whereby persons with disabilities were viewed against a ‘charitable’ rather than a rights-based model.

## Employment

A number of stakeholders felt that attitudes to persons with disabilities as employees were slowly improving, but that there was still a need to raise awareness levels, particularly in the areas of:

* Seeing people with disabilities as a valuable source of skills in the current labour market,
* Addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities in an employment context so they can be supported in the workplace, and
* Awareness of the supports that exist for employers to guide and assist them in this regard.

A number of stakeholders felt that there wasn’t enough awareness of supports available to employers. It was suggested that to achieve this required greater focus and sustained awareness raising activities for employers, but so too for persons with disabilities on their rights, in particular the requirement for employers to make allowances.

Some participants also felt it would be useful if employers and the State had an awareness that there may be additional costs associated with having a disability. These costs can mean that some people with disabilities experience poverty at a higher rate than their non-disabled counterparts, and poverty in turn can be a barrier to employment. Participants were looking forward to seeing the output of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection’s (DEASP’s) commissioned study on the cost of disability.

A number of stakeholders also felt that people with different disabilities might face more discrimination in the work-place than others, with specific references made to those with autism or mental health difficulties. Participants were also concerned that people with disabilities are being discriminated against at the recruitment stage for any job, due to inaccessible job advertisements or selection processes, or if jobs do not clearly indicate that the employer welcomes applicants with a disability.

## Health system

In one of the consultation events, a priority for some stakeholders was an awareness raising campaign for healthcare professionals.

## Mental health reform

In one consultation it was noted that the awareness building of the HSE Mental Health Engagement Office was working well and that health promotion was taking place around the country.

## Criminal justice system

Awareness raising and appropriate training for those working in the criminal justice system was noted by stakeholders as a priority in order to realize a range of articles in the UNCRPD (5, 12, 13, 15 and 26). Specific examples included the need to simplify language, inform how the Gardaí identify and question someone suspected of having a disability, and regarding allowances needed for time accessing legal aid.

## Housing

A number of stakeholders felt that current social housing issues experienced by persons with disabilities could be addressed by improved awareness of local authorities as to what housing considerations are relevant to persons with disabilities. It was felt that the authorities did not take an individual’s disability into account either when making an offer of social housing or when considering why an offer might be refused. It was felt that persons with disabilities may have many necessary reasons for turning down an offer of social housing, which could include its location, its accessibility, design and layout, or an absence of community services and access to public transport.

## Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed by the Irish President on 30 December 2015.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Act repeals the Lunacy Regulation (Ireland) Act 1871 which contravenes Article 12 of the UNCRPD, as it provides for blanket substitute decision-making for ‘lunatics’ and persons of ‘unsound mind’. The 2015 Act provides for an individual’s right of autonomy and self-determination to be respected through a presumption of capacity and supported decision-making. To date, a limited number of provisions of this Act have commenced. Stakeholders noted that barriers to implementation of the UNCRPD through the provisions made in this Act would be a lack of awareness in the general public about reliance on this outdated legislation, as well as an awareness and skills deficit in service providers. It was felt that a Code of Practice accompanied by a toolkit and information/training sessions for service providers could greatly assist in raising awareness and reducing skills deficits in this area.

# Attitudes towards Disability and Experiences of Persons with Disabilities

Negative attitudes towards people with disabilities or perceived negative attitudes can become a barrier to the inclusion of people with disabilities. Hence the need for awareness raising to foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, to combat stereotypes and prejudice, and promote their capabilities and contributions. Key to understanding whether progress has been made in society in examining on the one hand, public attitudes towards persons with disabilities, and on the other, experiences of discrimination by persons with disabilities. A number of national studies in Ireland have relevance here and are outlined below.

## NDA Public Attitudes to Disability Surveys

The NDA has conducted a series of national Public Attitudes to Disability Surveys at regular intervals since 2001 which has enabled monitoring of changes in attitudes to persons with disabilities over time in Ireland.[[5]](#footnote-5) Over time, the survey has generally shown an improvement in attitudes to disability between 2001 and 2006, a worsening of attitudes in 2011 (during a period of economic depression), and an improvement again by 2017, returning to or exceeding 2006 levels.

In the Public Attitudes to Disability Survey, respondents are asked about their level of comfort on a scale from 1 ‘very uncomfortable’ to 10 ‘very comfortable’ in a number of scenarios involving persons with a disability. Table 1 shows that in 2017 in general, mean scores were quite high, suggesting positive attitudes towards people with disabilities.[[6]](#footnote-6) Scores for having a neighbour with a disability were slightly higher than scores for working with someone with a disability – and these were both slightly higher than scores on comfort with their child sharing a classroom with a child with disabilities. Attitudes to working with people with disabilities had improved from previous years and attitudes towards having a neighbour with mental health difficulties had improved on the previous survey in 2011. As can be seen from the table, across all three questions people tended to express highest levels of comfort with persons with physical disabilities and vision and hearing disabilities, and the lowest levels of comfort with those with mental health difficulties.

Although scores are quite high and have shown improvement over time, these findings indicate there are still areas requiring progress. The next Public Attitudes to Disability Survey will take place in 2022.

Table 1. Levels of comfort with persons with disabilities in different scenarios (2017)

| Type of disability | Comfort having a neighbour with a disability | Comfort working with someone with a disability | Comfort with children with disabilities in the same class as their child[[7]](#footnote-7) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Physical disabilities | 9.3 | 8.9 | 8.7 |
| Vision and hearing disabilities | 9.3 | 8.8 | 8.6 |
| Intellectual disabilities | 9.1 | 8.5 | 8.1 |
| Autism | 9.1 | 8.4 | 8.1 |
| Mental health difficulties | 8.8 | 8.2 | 7.8 |

Source:

## National Disability Survey

In 2003, the NDA commissioned research to develop and pilot an appropriate research instrument to establish the prevalence and impact of disability in Ireland. This pilot study formed the basis for the government decision for the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to conduct a National Disability Survey (NDS). The NDS was the first ever detailed profile of persons with a disability in Ireland. The CSO used the 2006 Census to select the sample for the NDS.[[8]](#footnote-8) The NDS questionnaires were based on the social model of disability which defines disability as the outcome of the interaction between a person with an impairment and the environmental and attitudinal barriers s/he may face. One area explored by the NDS was how people with disabilities experienced negative attitudes towards them. A majority of respondents did not find that negative attitudes prevented them doing what they would want, however, younger people and those with mental health difficulties, speech issues, and intellectual or learning disabilities were more likely to report it as a problem.[[9]](#footnote-9)

## National Equality and Discrimination Surveys

Attitudes are linked with discrimination, therefore any improvements in attitudes are likely to be reflected in rates of discrimination. National surveys on experiences of discrimination have taken place as modules of Ireland’s Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) in 2004, 2010 and 2014, and part of the General Household Survey (GHS) in 2019. The sample sizes of the QNHS module surveys are larger than the 2019 survey and so may not be directly comparable across time.[[10]](#footnote-10) Nevertheless, it is of note that the gap in discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities compared to persons without disabilities had widened between 2010 and 2014, and was even wider in 2019 (see Table 2).[[11]](#footnote-11) Comparing the 2019 figures to the earlier figures suggests a possibility that the proportion of people feeling discriminated against in both groups had increased over time. This increase could be due to better awareness of what constitutes discrimination and therefore more reporting in the survey. Indeed, the CSO reported an increase in respondents’ awareness of their rights under Irish equality law over time.[[12]](#footnote-12) It could also be due to a true increase in the levels of discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities and therefore warrants monitoring over time.

Table 2. Proportion of persons with and without disabilities experiencing discrimination in previous two years (2010, 2014, 2019)

|  | Q4 2010 | Q3 2014 | Q1 2019[[13]](#footnote-13) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Persons with disabilities experiencing discrimination | 14.1% | 16.4% | 23.8% |
| Persons without disabilities experiencing discrimination | 11.5% | 11.1% | 16.1% |

Source:

## National Crime Statistics

Data on persons with disabilities as victims of crime offers another way to measure discrimination against persons with disabilities, as it is generally considered that persons with disabilities are at a greater risk of being victims of a crime[[14]](#footnote-14). Unfortunately, data published by the CSO on crime victims using data from the Ireland’s national police service, An Garda Síochána, is not disaggregated by disability status. Furthermore, at present there is no systematic data available on District or Circuit Court cases in which to examine the disability status of crime victims. However, a focus on data in An Garda Síochána’s recently published Diversity and Integration Strategy 2019-2021[[15]](#footnote-15) and the planned development of a Criminal Justice Operational Hub[[16]](#footnote-16) will hopefully ensure variables like a crime victim’s disability status will be routinely collected and reported on in the future.

# Legislation

Of relevance to Article 8 is the existence of legislation which perpetuates stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities. In Ireland, while we have legislation which prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities there are also some legislative changes required, as outlined in this section.

## The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018

The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education on nine grounds, including disability. [[17]](#footnote-17),[[18]](#footnote-18) Those selling goods or providing services are also required to provide reasonable accommodation to persons with disabilities to enable them to avail of same.

The number of complaints received by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) on disability grounds under the Equal Status Acts has fluctuated between 2016 and 2019. In 2016, there were 75 complaints on disability grounds, in 2017 there were 57, in 2018 there were 90 and in 2019 there were 73. However, while the numbers for 2016 and 2019 are similar, the proportion of complaints made on disability grounds did increase from 6.9% of all complaints in 2016 to 11.3% of all complaints in 2019. [[19]](#footnote-19),[[20]](#footnote-20)

Information on disability-related queries under the Equal Status Act is available from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC).[[21]](#footnote-21) In 2018, discrimination against persons with a disability accounted for the highest number of information queries to IHREC, with queries under the Equal Status Act accounting for one third (n=167) of all queries. [[22]](#footnote-22)

## Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015

The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 prohibit discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment in both employment and in access to employment on nine different grounds, including disability.[[23]](#footnote-23) In addition to prohibiting less favourable treatment, the Employment Equality Acts legally oblige employers to take reasonable steps to accommodate the needs of both employees and job applicants with disabilities, except where to do so would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer. There are specific exemptions for certain types of employment, including the Defence Forces, which precludes employment equality cases on the disability ground. The Employment Equality Acts also provide that it is an occupational requirement for employment in An Garda Síochána, prison service or any emergency service that persons employed therein, are fully competent and available to undertake, and fully capable of undertaking, the range of functions that they may be called upon to perform so that the operational capacity of An Garda Síochána or the service concerned may be preserved.

The NDA is aware that concerns have been raised about the need to amend the Employment Equality Acts in light of the Employment Equality Directive 2000/78/EC.[[24]](#footnote-24) By way of a review of decisions related to reasonable accommodation, the NDA has determined that the number of published cases concerning reasonable accommodation at the access stage is low and the number of persons with intellectual disabilities and autism taking cases under employment equality legislation is also low.[[25]](#footnote-25) The NDA has previously called for further research in this regard.

The number of complaints received by the WRC on disability grounds under the Employment Equality Acts has increased between 2017 and 2019. Numbers were similar in 2016 and 2017 (209 and 204 complaints on disability grounds, respectively), while they increased to 292 complaints in 2018 and 329 in 2019. However, the proportion of complaints made on disability grounds relative to all grounds for complaints made did fluctuate over time, from 22.5% of all complaints in 2016, 18.3% in 2017, 16.3% in 2018 and 19.0% in 2019.[[26]](#footnote-26),[[27]](#footnote-27),[[28]](#footnote-28)

As noted, discrimination against persons with a disability accounted for the highest number of information queries to IHREC in 2018. Queries under the Employment Equality Act accounted for 30% (n=106) of all queries.[[29]](#footnote-29)

## Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015

As previously mentioned, the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed by the President on 30 December 2015.[[30]](#footnote-30) The Act repeals the Lunacy Regulation (Ireland) Act 1871, which put in place the current Wards of Court system. The 1871 legislation contravenes Article 12 of the UNCRPD, as it provides for blanket substitute decision-making for ‘lunatics’ and persons of ‘unsound mind’. The 2015 Act provides for an individual’s right of autonomy and self-determination to be respected through a presumption of capacity and supported decision-making. The legislation establishes a Decision Support Service for all adults who have difficulties with decision-making capacity and it also abolishes the Ward of Court system. It provides for a 36 month period following commencement of the legislation, during which all Wards of Court are to be reviewed, their property returned to them, their capacity assessed and a new decision-making support arrangement (where relevant and necessary) put in place.

However, to date, only a limited number of provisions of this Act have commenced. The Director of the Decision Support Service has been put in place, and since 2017 has been working to establish the Decision Support Service, although it is not yet operational. Until all of the provisions of this Act are commenced, practices which serve to discriminate against certain groups of people with disabilities by undermining their autonomy and self-determination can perpetuate.

## Hate Crime Legislation

Gaps in legislation may have consequences for the discrimination and stigma felt by persons with disabilities, and in Ireland, hate crime and hate speech are of relevance. An Garda Síochána’s Diversity & Integration Strategy 2019-2021 provides a working definition of hate crime that includes disability: “Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person to, in whole or in part, be motivated by hostility or prejudice, based on actual or perceived age, disability, race, colour, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender.”[[31]](#footnote-31) At present there is no specific legislation in Ireland for hate crime, although this gap has been the subject of much debate. The Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE) are currently exploring strengthening hate-speech laws and considering the need for a specific offence of hate crime.[[32]](#footnote-32) Of note, is that participants in a recent study in Ireland questioned whether the association of disability and hate crime would promote the rights of persons with disabilities, or further stigmatise through reinforcing the view of them as vulnerable.[[33]](#footnote-33),[[34]](#footnote-34) This highlights the importance of consulting with persons with disabilities on decisions which will have an impact on them.

# Policies and Strategies

## National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021

Ireland’s National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021[[35]](#footnote-35) (NDIS) is a whole of Government strategy aimed to improve the lives of people with disabilities. It covers the themes of ‘Equality and Choice’, ‘Joined up Policies and Public Services’, ‘Education’, ‘Employment’, ‘Health and Well-Being’, “Person-centred Disability Services’, ‘Living in the Community’ and ‘Transport and Accessible Places”.

A number of actions in the original action plan have relevance to raising awareness and visibility of persons with disability. These are outlined below along with a summary of progress based on annual NDA assessments.[[36]](#footnote-36),[[37]](#footnote-37)[[38]](#footnote-38)

**Action 1.9:** We will run an accessible public information campaign and raise awareness among persons with disabilities about their options for supported decision-making under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act.

Although this legislation has not yet commenced, in 2019, the HSE held three high-profile, well-attended events on the Capacity Act to build awareness among health and social care professionals in advance of the commencement of the Act.

**Action 1.20:** We (All Government Departments and public bodies) will provide disability awareness training for all staff.

Some Departments have reported on disability awareness training for staff but actual numbers trained are not known, nor is the impact of this training.

**Action 2.32:** Departments and agencies will actively engage people with disabilities through consultative committees and /or other appropriate fora. The national steering group will elaborate on timeframes in relation to the actions in this Strategy. We will produce an annual report in relation to implementation of the Strategy. We will carry out a midterm review of the Strategy in consultation with disability interests.

Of the 17 government departments, just over half, nine, have Departmental Consultative Committees (DCCs) that meet regularly and include membership from the Disability Stakeholders Group (members consist of those with lived experience of disability and from disability organisations) as well as other stakeholders. The NDA has advised that additional DCCs should be formed, for example in the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Rural and Community Development. Annual reports and a midterm review have been published.

**Action 6.76:** We will foster disability awareness and competence in voluntary, sporting, cultural and other organisations. We will ensure that disability inclusion is fully integrated into funding programmes, monitored and linked to further funding.

There has been progress made in sporting through the Sport Inclusion Disability Charter (see page 43) and dedicated Sport Inclusion Disability Officers (who are tasked with increasing the participation of people with disabilities in sport, fitness and physical activity throughout the country).

The Open Youth Orchestra of Ireland funded under the Creative Ireland Programme in 2019 was a significant achievement being the EU's first national youth orchestra for disabled musicians.

Actions undertaken across the broader spectrum of cultural organisations are unclear.

**Action 6.89:** The National Disability Stakeholders Group, which includes a number of individuals appointed in their own personal capacity to bring their lived experience to the table, will continue to have a central role in monitoring the implementation of the new National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The NDIS steering group has oversight of this strategy and is comprised of officials from several government departments and members of the Disability Stakeholders Group.

**Action 6.90:** We will progress proposals of the Reference Group on mental health service users' involvement.

There is little information on progress on this action.

**Action 4.56:** We will raise awareness of and continue to support the Employer Disability Information (EDI) service.

See page 43 on the Employer Disability Information service.

**Action 8.112:** We will introduce Continuous Professional Development on Universal Design for architects to encourage application of National Disability Authority guidance such as Building for Everyone and Universal Design Guidelines for Homes in Ireland.

The NDA is working with the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) to develop case studies on good practice in implementing Universal Design practices for architects to form the basis of this Continuous Professional Development.

## Mid-term Review of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021

The NDIS steering group took part in a recent mid-term review of the strategy, the findings of which led to an updated version with the addition of new and modified actions.[[39]](#footnote-39) One of the key findings of the mid-term review was a need for more focus on awareness raising in a number of areas, as follows:

**Action 4.46 (Modified):** Raise awareness amongst persons with disabilities that further education and employment, post school leaving, are viable and potential alternatives.

There are efforts underway in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to consider career guidance for students with disabilities.

Work is being done between the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) to consider post-school transition arrangements between HSE funded services and education, and vice versa. A transition programme to access training and support rather than directly transferring to adult day services is being piloted in 2020 and will be monitored for a two year period.

**Action 115 (New):** We will implement an awareness and support programme for employers to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities in employment

Under the 2018/19 Disability Awareness Scheme (see page 22), in 2019, Rehab, NLN, WALK, AsIAm and Not so Different were awarded a grant to develop awareness raising materials on the employment of persons with disabilities which will be made available to employers. The module was launched in December 2020 and can be delivered through face-to-face training or online (see page 40 for more details).

**Action 117 (New):** We will implement the Employer Disability Initiative to support employers in the employment of people with disabilities [and] will identify a permanent location for employer awareness training materials to support employers when employing people with disabilities.

See Employer Disability Information Service on page 43.

**Action 121 (New):** We will develop programmes to promote the awareness within the general public of the lived experience of, and to support more positive attitudes towards people with disabilities.

It is not clear what progress has been made on this action yet by the DOJE.

**Action 122 (New):** We will ensure that all customer-facing staff in public transport companies receive disability awareness training and that such training is updated periodically.

It is not clear what progress has been made on this action by the National Transport Authority (NTA) or public transport operators.

**Action 126 (New):** We will support initiatives to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in cultural and heritage related activities and programmes.

It is not clear what progress has been made on this action by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

## National Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024

Ireland’s Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024 (CES) is a cross-government strategy aiming to address the barriers and challenges impacting on the employment of those with disabilities.[[40]](#footnote-40) A number of actions in this strategy relate to raising awareness around the potential of persons with disabilities[[41]](#footnote-41):

**Action 1.1:** Promote positive expectations. Provide key messages from point of diagnosis of disability to emphasise the person’s positive potential.

The HSE have advanced work to develop key messages for young people with disabilities aged 16-25. These messages will emphasise their positive potential and will be delivered by HSE and related staff.[[42]](#footnote-42)

**Actions 1.2a and 1.2b:** Raise awareness and expectations. Raise awareness of training and employment options among school-goers, via parents, schools, occupational guidance officers and guidance counsellors. Raise the expectations that education and employment are real options post school. HSE to liaise with special and mainstream schools to provide information in regard to the supports service provided for young people with disabilities.

The HSE have developed a process which profiles the needs of school leavers and people leaving Rehabilitative Training who require a HSE funded day service. Those with potential to progress to vocational training or employment are provided with contact details for guidance services to advance these options. However, there is not equal access to guidance services nationally.[[43]](#footnote-43)

**Action 6.1:** Promotion of employer awareness. Raise awareness among employers of the benefits of employing (and retaining in employment), people with disabilities. Enlist their participation in actions to promote the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities in open labour market employment.

As noted, under the 2018/19 Disability Awareness Funding Scheme (see page 22 below), in 2019, Rehab, NLN, WALK, AsIAm and Not so Different were awarded a grant from the NDA to develop awareness raising materials on the employment of persons with disabilities which is targeted to employers. The module was launched in December 2020 and can be delivered through face-to-face training or online (see page 40 for more details).

**Action 6.9:** Increase employers’ awareness of DSP[[44]](#footnote-44) employers’ supports and other relevant guidance by disseminating information to the business community about these supports.

Progress on this action is unclear.

**Action 6.17:** Enterprise Ireland will review how to ensure employers are aware of needs and potential of employees with disabilities.

EI and IDA Ireland plan to run an information session for client companies and internal staff to raise awareness on employing people with autism and other neurodiverse conditions.

A Phase Two Action Plan of the CES, covering the period 2019-2021, was published in December 2019.[[45]](#footnote-45) Some of the main actions relevant here include:

**Action 2.7:** Create a strategy that promotes and supports entrepreneurship and self-employment for people with a disability – this includes an awareness campaign which utilizes success stories of self-employed and entrepreneur role models with a variety of disabilities.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) are in the process of developing a Disability Inclusion Strategy to support entrepreneurship. EI and IDA Ireland also plan to run two information sessions for client companies and internal staff to raise awareness on 1) employing people with autism and other neurodiverse conditions and 2) innovation, inclusive design and showcasing entrepreneurs with disabilities. EI will present at Business Start-Up for People with Disabilities webinars in conjunction with Dublin Regional Enterprise Plan to raise awareness on supports available.

**Action 6.12:** Fund and oversee the development and delivery of employer awareness raising materials.

See Action 6.1.

**Action 6.13:** Developing a multi-faceted programme, similar to SeeChange[[46]](#footnote-46), to promote awareness among employers and other key stakeholders of the opportunities represented by employees with disabilities.

The Open Doors Initiative have been funded to implement an employer information service that will occupy the space that the EDI pilot service previously occupied. The service will have an initial 12 month operation and will include a website and phone service for employers.

## An Garda Síochána Diversity and Integration Strategy 2019–2021

One of the intended outcomes from An Garda Síochána’s Diversity and Integration Strategy 2019-2021 is “Continued exploration, in cooperation with affected communities, of increased intercultural awareness, disability awareness and individual vulnerability awareness” as part of “Strategic Priority 1 – Protecting the Community. Protect the safety, wellbeing and rights of all, particularly minority and marginalised communities and vulnerable individuals”.[[47]](#footnote-47) The implementation of this strategy will be monitored by a Garda National Diversity Steering Group, which will include representatives from diverse stakeholder groups. It will be reviewed quarterly and evaluated at the end of 2021.[[48]](#footnote-48)

## National Television and Radio Broadcaster Strategy - RTÉ Strategy 2018-2022

Diversity and Inclusion are a central component of Ireland’s national television and radio broadcaster’s (RTÉ’s) 2018 to 2022 Strategy.[[49]](#footnote-49) In this strategy, the national broadcaster aims to reflect Ireland’s diversity on and off air, and this includes representation of those with disabilities. Actions to promote diversity and inclusion include:

* Investment in staff training,
* Measuring diversity on air, and
* Engaging with and listening to minority audiences.

The progress in implementing this strategy will be routinely monitored against a range of indicators to demonstrate its impact on Irish society.

## Cara Sport Inclusion Ireland 2019-21 Strategy

Cara is a national not-for-profit pan-disability organisation working with a range of organisations to ensure people with disabilities have equal access to, and awareness of participation opportunities in sport and physical activity of their choice. In their 2019-2021 strategic plan one of their main goals is to “Represent the needs of people with disabilities in relation to their experiences in sport and physical activity, while also developing their awareness of the benefits and opportunities to participate.”[[50]](#footnote-50) This goal will be realised through promotional and educational resources available to people with disabilities in relation to participation in sport and physical activity.

# Awareness Raising Campaigns and Initiatives

A range of campaigns, initiatives and events to raise awareness on disability have taken place in Ireland over recent times. Some of the activities outlined below have specifically sought to raise awareness about disability, while others raise awareness of disability in a more indirect manner.

## National Disability Awareness Raising Grant Scheme (2015-2019)

Between 2015 and 2017, the DOJE provided funding for a Disability Awareness Raising Grant Scheme. The NDA managed the applications and evaluated element of the scheme over this time, and in 2018 became responsible for the scheme overall.[[51]](#footnote-51) Those receiving funding were required to conduct evaluations of their programme but the findings from these evaluations are not available at present.[[52]](#footnote-52)

In 2015, the following organisations were funded to engage in activities to raise awareness and improve public attitudes towards persons with disabilities:

* EmployAbility Clare (employment support service for those with disability, injury, health condition or illness)
* Headway Ireland and Epilepsy Ireland (brain injury and epilepsy services and supports)
* DESSA (disability equality specialist support agency)
* AsIAm.ie (autism charity and advocacy organisation)
* Aspire (Asperger syndrome association of Ireland)
* Irish Deaf Society (promoting rights and equality of deaf people)

In 2016, the scheme received proposals on raising awareness and promoting positive attitudes to persons with disabilities in the areas of: delivering mainstream services and information, community activities, employment, sporting activities, social activities, media, education and local business. The following organisations received funding:

* Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Ireland (supports and awareness raising for those with spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus)
* Arthritis Ireland (health and research charity for those living with arthritis)
* KARE (support to people with intellectual disability and their families)
* Headway Ireland and Epilepsy Ireland
* CARA Sport Inclusion Ireland

In 2017, the scheme received proposals to support the promotion of disability awareness in mainstream sport, physical activity and recreation. The following organisations received funding:

* Irish Society for Autism (service for those with autism)
* Donegal Sports Partnership (coordinates and supports development of physical activity/sports in County Donegal)
* Athletic Association of Ireland (national athletics body)
* Laois Sports Partnership (coordinates and supports development of physical activity/sports in County Laois)
* Irish Martial Arts Commission (national martial arts body)
* Swim Ireland (national body for swimming, water polo, diving, synchronised swimming).

In 2018 and 2019, funding was provided for the development of disability awareness training for employers. Five partners (Rehab, WALK, NLN, AsIAm and Not So Different) have developed an “Inclusive Recruitment and Retention Practices” training module. Please see page 40 for more details on this training.

## Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission’s ‘All Human, All Equal Campaign’ (2019-2020)

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) held an 'All Human, All Equal' campaign in 2019 and 2020 to influence public attitudes towards people with disabilities. There were two phases of the campaign which ran across cinema, radio and online over summer 2019 and Christmas and New Year 2019/2020. The campaign featured 13 interviews with people from across Irish society sharing their personal perspectives on everyday life and some of the barriers they have encountered when living with autism, an intellectual disability or complex needs, being visually-impaired or blind, hard of hearing or deaf, and having a physical disability or being affected by mental ill-health.[[53]](#footnote-53)

A REDC evaluation of this campaign using a nationally representative sample of people found it was well received and had a positive impact on attitudes in a number of areas: [[54]](#footnote-54)

* Those who saw the campaign were more welcoming of disabled people to have an increased role in public and professional life,
* Those aware of the campaign were significantly more likely to reflect on their own behaviour when interacting with someone with a disability, and
* Two thirds of 18-34 year old respondents claimed the campaign would make them reflect on their own behaviour in relation to persons with disabilities in the future.
* The survey also found that:
* 87% of respondents said the campaign made them realise more needs to be done to raise awareness for those with disabilities, and
* 91% of respondents thought it was great to hear directly from people with disabilities.

## HSE’s Little Things Campaign (2014-2019)

Little Things was a positive mental health campaign created by the HSE’s National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) and Communications Division along with 32 partner organisations. The aim of the campaign was to change attitudes and behaviour in relation to mental health, raise awareness that everyone may experience fluctuations in mental health and inform people of evidence-based ways people could help themselves and others. The campaign took place through TV and radio advertisements of people talking about what they’ve done to help themselves through difficult times and a dedicated website of downloadable/printable resources.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Between late 2014 and early 2018:[[56]](#footnote-56)

* Over 600,000 people had visited the dedicated website yourmentalhealth.ie,
* The website had over 1.6 million page views,
* Approximately 60,000 people liked the Facebook page,
* The Twitter account acquired over 8,000 followers, and
* There was a 30% increase in calls to the Samaritan’s helpline which had been included in campaign materials.

It is unclear if there has been an evaluation on the impact of the campaign on attitudes, behaviour and awareness about mental health in the general population.

## NDA’s Mental Health Campaign (2007-2008)

In 2007/2008 the NDA ran a campaign to challenge stigmatising attitudes and stereotypes regarding mental illness. This campaign was a response to findings from the NDA’s first attitudes survey which showed negative views of people with mental health issues.[[57]](#footnote-57) This campaign entailed advertisements covering TV, radio and bus shelter posters which featured people who have experienced mental health problems, including a sports figure, a journalist, a chess player and a business person. A survey on the first phase of the campaign found that it had a positive influence on public attitudes to those with mental illness.[[58]](#footnote-58)

## See Change’s Annual Green Ribbon Campaign (2013 and ongoing)

See Change is an organisation in Ireland working to change peoples’ minds about mental health problems in Ireland. Its core objective is to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems. Each year See Change roll out a month long national Green Ribbon Campaign to encourage people in Ireland to end mental health stigma.[[59]](#footnote-59) Hundreds of thousands of green ribbons are distributed nationwide free of charge as a visual symbol to end the stigma surrounding mental health difficulties. People can wear the green ribbons, download a pack of posters and resources from the See Change website to support the campaign,[[60]](#footnote-60) or support the campaign online using the hashtags #GreenRibbonIRL #EndTheStigma. In 2018, the campaign saw almost 80,000 people reached in a Twitter pre-campaign and 94,000 on Facebook – both of which were notably higher than the 2017 campaign.[[61]](#footnote-61) Over 1,000 people ordered green ribbons, resulting in over 500,000 ribbons being disseminated nationwide. Forty-two buildings in 15 counties lit up green in support of Green Ribbon 2018. In an evaluation of their impact[[62]](#footnote-62), See Change found that almost 8 in 10 people they asked felt more comfortable in having a conversation about mental health with someone they know because of the Green Ribbon campaign. They also found that 71% of people they asked said they had heard more family and friends talking about mental health since the Green Ribbon campaign and 68% had heard more colleagues in work talking about mental health since the campaign (these figures were higher than for 2017).

## See Change’s “Look Beyond Exhibition” (2017-2018)

In 2017 See Change launched a photovoice research exhibition entitled ‘Look Beyond’ which subsequently went on a national tour to 14 different locations.[[63]](#footnote-63) Photovoice is a research and advocacy methodology which uses photography as a way of giving voice to people who often feel unheard and unseen in society. The exhibition was the output of a photovoice research project which featured 16 people speaking about their lived experience of life with mental health difficulties.[[64]](#footnote-64) No information is available on the reach or impact of this exhibition.

## Cara’s “I’m in Too” Movement (2018 and ongoing)

Cara, Sport Inclusion Ireland, runs the “I’m in Too” initiative to showcase the impact sport and physical activity has on those with disabilities. Their website has videos and written pieces showing individual stories of those with disabilities.[[65]](#footnote-65) No information is available on the reach or impact of this initiative.

## Dublin City Council Make Way Dublin Campaign (2017)

In June 2017, the Lord Mayor of Dublin at the time, Brendan Carr, released a hoax statement asking whether persons with disabilities should be allowed to use cycle lanes due to the obstructions they face navigating pavements.[[66]](#footnote-66) The purpose of this statement was to raise awareness of the physical obstacles people with disabilities have to face when moving around the city and was made as part of an awareness raising campaign by Dublin City Council. The Council’s campaign featured adverts showing for example, a climbing wall in place of a badly parked car or a barbed wire fence in place of an overgrown hedge.[[67]](#footnote-67) These adverts were displayed on Dublin Bus shelters and buses and outdoor billboards across the city. Data on the impact of the campaign does not appear to be available.

## National “Make Way Day” (2017 and ongoing)

Since 2017, the Disability Federation of Ireland has held a national ‘Make Way Day’ as a means of raising awareness of the access needs of people with disabilities.[[68]](#footnote-68) This is held in partnership with voluntary bodies and local government. The purpose of the day is to draw attention to physical obstacles in public places which hinder the ability of persons with disabilities to get around. On the Make Way Day, low adhesive stickers are placed on these obstacles, such as vehicles on footpaths, illegally parked bikes and bins left on paths, as a way of raising awareness. Photos and videos are shared on social media using #MakeWayDay and #MakeWayDayTOWN. In 2017, the campaign and campaign video went viral and in 2018, one million people saw and shared posts about the campaign and it appeared on RTÉ news bulletins throughout the day.[[69]](#footnote-69) It is unclear if this campaign has ever been evaluated, but it would be interesting to explore its impact on the attitudes and behaviours of the public.

## HSE National Sharing Day for Disability Service Providers (2019)

The Quality Improvement Team in the National Disability Operations Office held their inaugural National Sharing day for providers of disability services on the 25th September 2019. The theme of the Sharing Day was “supporting people to live lives of their choosing” and the event was attended by 280 service providers and service users. The day focussed on showcasing and sharing the learning from examples of good practice around the country where persons using disability services:

* Are living in their own home in the community,
* Are exercising choice and control in their everyday lives,
* Are participating in social and civic life,
* Have meaningful personal relationships,
* Have opportunities for person development and fulfilment of aspirations,
* Have a job or other valued social roles,
* Are enjoying a good quality of life and well-being,
* Are achieving best possible health, and
* Are safe, secure and free from abuse.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Fifty-six attendees completed feedback forms on the event and 89% of these felt the content of the day had met their expectations.[[71]](#footnote-71) The need for this kind of sharing was highlighted in commentary from attendees: “Some pockets of excellence happening in services that is valuable to know” and “Lots of initiatives in disabilities that need to be shared, great to see so many service users present”. And in relation to the lives of persons with disabilities: “We should have higher expectations of what people with disabilities can achieve”, and “Everyone is entitled to have dreams and to strive to have them filled.” Arrangements are currently being made for the second National Sharing day for providers of disability services in Q4 2020.

## Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection Local Initiatives

There are local DEASP initiatives to bring employers, educators and school leavers with disabilities together to identify local employment opportunities and showcase abilities of individuals with disabilities. For example, during 2019, a joint initiative took place between the local Intreo service (employment support) and EmployAbility service in Tralee, Co. Kerry called ‘The Kerry Progressive Pathways Fair’. It saw 37 agencies attend an awareness raising event covering all post-school options available in the Cork and Kerry region. Almost 600 people attended the event, which included people managing stands and presentations on themes such as Specialisterne[[72]](#footnote-72), Supports to Employers, and Assistive Technology. The majority of attendees included people with disabilities and their families and teachers. The NDA believes that this model of activity could usefully be considered in other locations.

## NDA Annual Conference (2009 and ongoing)

Since 2009, the NDA has held an annual national conference to share learning from Ireland and abroad on disability policy and practice with policy makers, practitioners, people with disabilities and their families, representative bodies and researchers. The number of attendees has been approximately 110-140 each year. In 2020, 30 people gave feedback on the conference, all of whom said they were satisfied with it. Regarding reasons why, comments referred to the conference being ‘informative’, ‘interesting’ and one person referred to the “Involvement of people with disabilities in a very real way.”

The following themes have been covered to date:

* 2009 - Promoting independent and community living for people with intellectual disabilities
* 2010 - Promoting independent living and community participation for people with disabilities: a whole systems approach
* 2011 - People with disabilities participating fully and safely in the community
* 2012 - Achieving inclusive communities
* 2013 - Supporting transitions for people with disabilities
* 2014 - Employing people with disabilities
* 2015 - Planning and leadership for inclusive mainstream public services for people with disabilities
* 2016 - Ordinary homes, ordinary places: Planning, designing and building supportive communities for people with disabilities
* 2017 - Making my own way: Supporting self-directed life in the community
* 2018 - Achieving better outcomes for persons with a disability
* 2019 - UNCRPD: Past lessons and future aspirations.

The theme for 2020 is Facilitating the effective and equal participation of persons with disabilities in the Irish criminal justice system (Article 13 UNCRPD) and will take place virtually on 21st October 2020.

## The Universal Design Grand Challenge (UDGC) (2014 and ongoing)

Since 2014, the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) in the NDA has hosted an annual Universal Design Grand Challenge (UDGC) to promote Universal Design (UD) in education in Ireland.[[73]](#footnote-73) UD is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. The challenge is sponsored by Enterprise Ireland and is a student competition that promotes and awards excellence in student projects that feature solutions that work for everyone. The UDGC invites third level students in their final two years of study, post-graduates and recent graduates to enter their best student project. The three competition categories are: 1) Build Environment, 2) Information and Communication, and 3) Products and Services. Finalists pitch their designs at an awards ceremony and winners receive a cash prize and trophy. One winning design receives funding for a commercial feasibility study. Winning designs in 2019 included: [[74]](#footnote-74)

* Universal design of a residential apartment housing for an ageing population,
* A mobility device which enables people to get from a sitting to standing position,
* A wrist-worn medical device intended to improve diagnosis of intermittent atrial fibrillation (AF), and
* A device which ensures collection of an appropriate urine sample for testing.

## Dublin Airport Autism ‘Important Flyer’ Programme (2017 and ongoing)

Since 2017, Dublin Airport has operated the Autism ‘Important Flyer’ programme, where a wristband or lanyard is provided to passengers with autism travelling through Dublin Airport. These can be shown to staff at security, immigration, or areas where they may encounter noise or queues, and special assistance will be provided.[[75]](#footnote-75) It is unclear what the uptake of this programme has been since it was introduced.

## Dublin Bus’ ‘Freedom of the City’ Campaign (2019)

At the end of 2019, Dublin Bus launched a ‘Freedom of the City’ advertising campaign to raise awareness for their Travel Assistance Scheme.[[76]](#footnote-76) This scheme was established in 2008 and the purpose is to provide assistance to those with disabilities to enable them to travel around the city on public transport on their own. The campaign entailed posters and a video of the impact of the scheme on the independence of those with disabilities, and also showcased the work of one of the key staff members.[[77]](#footnote-77)

## The “Just a Minute” JAM Card (2019 and ongoing)

In 2019, the Just a Minute (JAM) Card was launched in the Republic of Ireland to enable people with a communication barrier, including for example, a learning difficulty or autism, to tell others that they need may need a little extra time in what they’re doing.[[78]](#footnote-78) This could be when using public transport or in any customer facing context. The NTA, Dublin Bus, Go Ahead, Irish Rail, Transdev (LUAS), Bus Éireann and Local Link will be JAM Card friendly.[[79]](#footnote-79) People can use the JAM Card or the JAM app to show one of three messages:

1. Please be patient, I have autism
2. Please be patient, I have a learning disability/difficulty
3. Please be patient, I have a condition.[[80]](#footnote-80)

As of 2019, the JAM Card or app was used by over 35,000 people in the UK and Northern Ireland. It is unclear what the uptake has been in the Republic of Ireland since it was introduced.

## Irish Ferries Sunflower Lanyard Scheme (2020 and ongoing)

In March 2020, Irish Ferries introduced The Sunflower Lanyard scheme[[81]](#footnote-81) for passengers with hidden disabilities such as autism, chronic pain, dementia, mental illness and learning difficulties to get any support they might need. The initiative aims to offer customers a sense of independence and confidence to travel freely with Irish Ferries. Staff members have undergone training to “recognise, understand, respect, and react to the needs of those wearing the discreet lanyard”.[[82]](#footnote-82) As this scheme was launched just prior to the restrictions put in place in Ireland to control the spread of COVID-19, it is unlikely to have had any impact beyond staff training as yet.

## National “In This Together Campaign” (2020)

In April 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Irish government, as part of Healthy Ireland, launched the “In This Together” campaign.[[83]](#footnote-83) The campaign was a response to the impact of life during the pandemic on the nation’s mental health. The campaign consists of:

* A website with tips on minding your mental health, coping at home, healthy eating, staying active, tips for playing, tips for students impacted by the uncertainty and subsequent cancellation of final schools exams, tips for cocooning, information on community help and local county council activities,
* Tips and ideas being made available on national and local government websites, social media, TV, radio and newspapers, and
* Adverts on transport routes (e.g. bus stops, motorway electronic messaging boards).

Information on the reach and/or impact of the campaign is not yet available.

## National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities

Ireland’s National Advocacy Service (NAS) provides a free and confidential advocacy service to adults with a disability, working to protect the rights and choices of people with disabilities. NAS advertises their services widely and in 2018, held over 200 events to raise awareness of their service for persons with disabilities.[[84]](#footnote-84)

## Disability, Chronic Illness and Mental Health Bodies

Aside from explicit awareness raising campaigns, disability umbrella bodies and specific disability, chronic illness and mental health organisations in Ireland continuously raise awareness through various activities including for example, policy submissions to government and media articles.

## NDA’s Centre for Excellence in Universal Design Training and Awareness Raising in Universal Design

One of the roles of CEUD is to promote awareness and adoption of UD. Some of the ways in which this is achieved is through liaison with relevant academic, certifying and professional bodies to promote UD courses, through workshops and seminars, as well as sponsorship of UD award categories in mainstream design award programmes in architecture, products and ICT.

# Awareness Raising in Schools

## The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework in Ireland is named Aistear, the Irish word for journey, in order to represent the lifelong journey of learning. One of the themes of this curriculum is ‘Identity and Belonging’.[[85]](#footnote-85) This theme is explored in toddlers and young children by using resources and play to reflect their families, genders, abilities, backgrounds and cultures (including persons with disabilities), to help them think about themselves and who they are, and to support them to empathise with others and see things from other perspectives. An example of play to encourage children to experience sensory impairment is Blindman’s Buff, where they are also wearing ear muffs, to help empathise with people who have physical disabilities.

## Primary School Curriculum

Disability is explored in the primary curriculum under the theme of Social, Personal and Health Education.[[86]](#footnote-86) In the strand of ‘Taking Care of My Body, Knowing about My Body’, one of the learnings is for children to recognise some physical disabilities and how they can affect people’s lives. This relates to children in fifth and sixth class (aged 10/11 to 12/13).

A sample lesson plan for children in fourth to sixth class (aged 9/10 to 12/13) under the ‘Relating to Others’ strand of the curriculum is to show the class a photograph including a person with a disability, have them think of all the questions they want to ask about the photo, and then the children reflect on the questions asked.[[87]](#footnote-87) The purpose of this plan is for children to explore what they discovered about disability and some of the attitudes that can often be portrayed about disability in the media.

## Junior Cycle Curriculum

In Ireland, the first three years of secondary education is referred to as the Junior Cycle and covers ages 12 to 14. The Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education short course covers areas such as ‘Minding myself and others’, ‘My rights and the rights of others’, and Mental health and mental illness’.[[88]](#footnote-88)

## Senior Cycle Curriculum

In Ireland, the final two years of secondary education is referred to as the Senior Cycle. The age of students in Senior Cycle can range from starting at age 15 to finishing aged 19. Under the Social, Personal and Health Education syllabus, one of the main areas of learning is Mental Health.[[89]](#footnote-89) This includes developing students’ capacity to empathise with others, clarifying personal understanding of and attitudes to mental ill-health and mental illness and considering the care of those with mental ill-health and mental illness in the community.

## National Council for Special Education’s Inclusive Education Framework

The NCSE is a statutory body established in 2003 which was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. It’s functions, as set out in the EPSEN Act, 2004, include the coordination of the provision of education supports to children with special education needs, planning for the integration of the education for students with special educational needs in mainstream education settings and allocating supports for students with disabilities in mainstream and special school settings in accordance with national policies. It also contributes to the dissemination of information about national and international best practice in special and inclusive education to key stakeholders, including parents, teachers and others. The NCSE Inclusive Education Framework provides guidance to schools on what constitutes good practice for including pupils with special educational needs and is designed to provide clear signposts to schools on their journey towards inclusion.[[90]](#footnote-90) Under Theme 5 of this framework, ‘Pupil and Staff Well-being”, one of the indicators for good practice is if “Diversity awareness is integrated into all aspects of pupil and staff learning, communication and behaviour to foster an understanding of and facilitate the removal of barriers to inclusion.”[[91]](#footnote-91) It is not mandatory for schools to engage with this process and it is not clear how many schools have participated to date.

## National Council for Special Education Resources on Post-School Options for School Leavers with Disabilities

The NCSE have also published guidance on post-school options for those with disabilities, including further education and training[[92]](#footnote-92) and higher education[[93]](#footnote-93) which may go some way to helping raise expectations and awareness regarding the abilities of persons with disabilities.

## NDA’s “Someone Like Me” Primary School Art Competition (2016 and ongoing)

“Someone Like Me” is a primary school art competition organised by the NDA as a way of developing children’s understanding of disability and to help celebrate the aspects that make them and their classmates unique.[[94]](#footnote-94) The competition has been running since 2016 and is open to over 3,000 primary schools nationwide. In its first year, there were around 1,900 entries to the competition, and this increased to around 2,400 in 2018 and over 2,500 in 2019. In 2019, entries ranged from posters and collages to large sculptural installations and multimedia pieces. The winning entry for 2019 was a superhero pop-up book telling the story of Fionn and his journey to America for a life-changing operation. A prize giving ceremony is held on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December each year.

# Representation and Portrayal of Persons with Disabilities in the Media

## Broadcasting Authority of Ireland Standards and Guidelines

### Code of Programme Standards

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) is the broadcasting regulator in Ireland and it has a Code of Programme Standards to promote responsible broadcasting.[[95]](#footnote-95) Principle 5 of the standards is “Respect for Persons and Groups in Society” and under this, broadcasting should not stigmatise, support or condone discrimination, or incite hatred against persons/groups in society, including specifically, those with a disability. In addition, under Principle 3, “Protection from Harm” broadcasters are required to take due care when covering self-harm or suicide.”

Under the Broadcasting Act 2009, viewers and listeners to Irish radio and television services can complain about broadcasting content which they believe is not in keeping with broadcasting codes and rules. A review of broadcast complaint decisions published since 2013 under the revised Code of Programme Standards found two complaints pertaining to persons with disabilities and none specific to coverage of self-harm or suicide.[[96]](#footnote-96) One of these complaints was upheld, which found that a radio programme had enabled a caller who used offensive language to refer to children with special needs to stay on air for too long.

## Broadcasting Commission of Ireland and NDA Research on Representation and Portrayal of People with Disabilities in Irish Broadcasting

In 2007 the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI)[[97]](#footnote-97) and the NDA embarked on their first research collaboration to gauge how people with disabilities were being represented and portrayed in Irish broadcasting.[[98]](#footnote-98) For the purpose of this research, “representation” referred to the extent to which people with disabilities were present in the programmes, whereas “portrayal” referred to the nature of the representation (i.e. how individual or groups with disabilities were represented).

The aim of this collaboration was to carry out research that would inform broadcasters, policy makers and the public (including people with disabilities) and would be used in the development of voluntary guidelines on the fair and accurate representation of people with disabilities in broadcast media. The research involved three separate projects on the representation and portrayal of people with disabilities in broadcasting:

1. A review of legislation, policy and practice in other jurisdictions,
2. A survey of Irish people’s attitudes to the representation of people with disabilities in Ireland, and
3. A content and discourse analysis of Irish broadcasting.

With regards to the survey on public attitudes, 1,013 interviews were undertaken in respondents’ homes in 2007 with a representative sample of males and females aged 18 and over living in the Republic of Ireland. The key findings from this survey were as follows:

* People with any form of disability were more widely recalled from television programming than from radio programming. However, half of the overall sample could not recall any person with a disability on television and nearly 80% could not recall such a person on radio. Those who themselves had a disability were more likely to claim such recall from TV or radio. The most frequent disability recalled on television was physical disability (25%).
* Talk shows accounted for nearly half of the radio programmes where people with disabilities were recalled, ahead of news and current affairs. The types of TV programmes where they were recalled were more varied, with news, drama, soap operas, current affairs and special interest shows for those with disabilities the most prevalent.
* Most of the participants said that the inclusion of more people with disabilities on TV would have no impact on their likelihood to view – with 1 in 4 feeling that it would make them more likely to view. Attitudes were very similar in relation to including more people with disabilities on radio.
* Those favourable to more inclusion believed that this might help them learn more about disabilities, hear a different point of view and be generally more supportive of the rights of those with disabilities.
* A minority (7% for TV and 5% for radio) would be less likely to view or listen in such circumstances. They attributed their resistance to the sadness they felt about the person with a disability and/or a general feeling of discomfort.
* 1 in 10 respondents thought that people with disabilities were generally talked about in a negative way on TV or radio.
* More than half of the respondents thought that TV coverage was generally positive but this fell to 4 in 10 for radio.

With regards to the study undertaking content and discourse analysis of Irish broadcasting, two parallel approaches were used to examine the representation of people with disabilities in Irish broadcast media:

* Content analysis was undertaken of 408 hours of programming from 804 programmes on Irish television and radio stations from February to July 2007. The sample was drawn from prime-time television broadcasting (6-10pm), and from weekday and Sunday radio broadcasting, including national and local radio.
* Discourse analysis was conducted of programmes identified as featuring a person with a disability or referring to disability.

Key findings from this research strand were as follows:

* Of all radio and television programmes analysed, 20% made some reference to disability, either by featuring a person with a disability or including a spoken reference to disability. 10% of all television programmes featured a person with a disability compared to 6.5% of all radio programmes.
* People with disabilities accounted for 1% of all individuals on television and 1.8% of all individuals on radio.
* Only 5 of the 804 programmes examined (less than 1%) were recorded as disability-focused (i.e. programmes that were entirely and explicitly on and about the subject of disability).
* People with disabilities are more likely to be obviously present in drama, comedy and lifestyle programming and are less evident in news, sports and music programming.
* Two-thirds of the people with disabilities in the programme sample were regarded as playing “minor or incidental” roles.
* Of all disabilities represented in the programme sample, depression was the most commonly represented form of disability, followed by representations of autism and addiction.
* In occupational terms, people with disabilities appearing in programming were most likely to be represented as students or as individual experiencing unemployment as a direct result of their disability.
* Programming acquired from outside Ireland was significantly more likely to feature people with disabilities and references to disability than domestically produced programming. This is because drama and comedy, which appeared to feature a relatively high proportion of people with disabilities and references to disabilities, dominated the imported programming broadcast on Irish television.
* In 80% of the appearances of a person with a disability in the programme sample, disability was represented as central to the individual’s identity.
* Of the 88 people with disabilities identified as appearing in the programme sample, 73 were represented in a stereotypical fashion (e.g. as “pitiable” and “pathetic” or “sinister” and “aggressive”).
* Despite this, the majority of programmes adopted a neutral attitude towards people with disabilities, neither showing a discriminatory attitude towards them nor likely to create prejudice towards people with disabilities as a group.
* People with disabilities generally occupied a secondary position within the “hierarchy” of the show on which they featured. Virtually none of the people with disabilities noted in the sample were presented in positions of authority, i.e. as experts or presenters.
* Only 1 person was recorded as a programme presenter – a person with Down’s syndrome who presented a music radio show. None of the people with disabilities identified within the sample was an “expert” or “elected representative”.
* There were very few apparent examples of people with disabilities as makers of programmes. Only 2 examples of disability-focused programming were captured in the sample, both of which were on community radio services.

## Broadcasting Authority of Ireland Media Research Funding Scheme

In 2019, the BAI awarded funding of €56,318.80 to two applicants researching diversity under its Media Research Funding Scheme 2019.[[99]](#footnote-99) The scheme aims to support research initiatives that will facilitate the BAI in promoting public debate and informing regulatory policy to shape a vibrant, dynamic media landscape that meets the needs of viewers and listeners in Ireland. The following projects were funded:

1. **Broadcasting difference: Diversity in public broadcasting**: This research project will evaluate the diversity of people (programme staff and guests) and content (diversity themes and viewpoints) across a selection of RTÉ’s radio, television, and online output over a three-month period. The research will focus on five categories of diversity: age, gender, sexual identity, ethnic/cultural identity, and disability. The project is a collaboration between Dublin City University and RTÉ. The research will be led by Dr Eileen Culloty from DCU’s Institute for Future Media and Journalism and the project was awarded €23,020 in funding.
2. **Auditing gender and diversity change in Irish media sectors**: This research project will examine how gender and diversity policies are promoted and implemented by broadcasters, training bodies and production companies; and what tools and measures can be used to further implement broader diversity initiatives. The project is a collaboration between Maynooth University, Mary Immaculate College Limerick and University College Dublin. The research will be led by Dr Anne O’Brien from Maynooth University and the project was awarded funding of €33,298.80.

## Headline – Responsible Reporting and Representation of Mental Illness and Suicide in Media

Headline is Ireland’s national programme for responsible reporting, and representation of mental illness and suicide.[[100]](#footnote-100) Their objective is to work as collaboratively as possible with Irish media professionals across print, broadcast, and online platforms to reduce the effects of suicide contagion, the stigma attached to mental ill health and to improve representations of mental health challenges in the media. Headline offers guidance to anyone actively producing content on these issues, conducts research, and provides resources for journalists and broadcasters and workshops for students on reporting on mental health and suicide-related issues.

Headline host the Mental Health Media Awards which celebrate media stories that break down stereotypes, engage audiences and enhance the public’s understanding of mental health issues.[[101]](#footnote-101) The awards were established in the early 2000s and relaunched in 2019. The winners in 2019 were as follows:

* **Mental Health Content – Online Award: A Lust for Life’s podcast Where There’s a Will’** about the mental health system in Ireland.[[102]](#footnote-102)
* **Local Print and Online Award: Emma Connolly** of The Southern Star for her report, **‘What is happening to our young people?**’ which focuses on the mental health of the young people of West Cork.[[103]](#footnote-103)
* **Current Affairs Programming Award: Liveline** with Katie Hannonforan RTÉ Radio 1 episodeon societal attitudes to suicide.
* **The Headline Special Recognition Award: ‘Why I advocate for mental health among minorities’** by Blessing Dada featured on SpunOut.ie.[[104]](#footnote-104)
* **Mental Health Content – Special Interest: Paul Fennessey**’spiece, ‘**A one-time world champion Irish prodigy’s descent into hell and back’** featuring Irish racewalking prodigy Kate Veale.[[105]](#footnote-105)
* **One-Off Documentary: Edvinas Maciulevicius and Liam McGrath**’**s** RTÉdocumentary My Other Life: Ireland’s Young and Their Mental Health.
* **Headline Student Journalist Award: Jesse Melia**, for his production Hand in Hand, which tells the story of one person who lives with both mental health and addiction issues, and details Ireland’s wider problem with dual diagnosis treatment.
* **The National Print or Online Journalism Award: June Shannon** for herarticle in the Irish Times, ‘**Pregnancy is when mental health can be most at risk’**.[[106]](#footnote-106)
* **The Voice Media Award:** Joint winners **TheJournal.ie** and Newstalk for Lunchtime Live for demonstrating excellence in reportage and inclusion of those living with mental ill health.
* **The Headline Impact Award**: Blindboy Boatclub for reaching diverse audiences, engaging difficult demographics and producing accessible quality content with The Blindboy Podcast*.*

## Broadcasting of the Special Olympics and Paralympics

Broadcasting events like the Special Olympics and the Paralympics are ways in which the achievements of persons with disabilities can be made visible to a national audience. The national broadcaster, RTÉ has in the past covered the Special Olympics and the Paralympics, although to varying degrees. In 2003, RTÉ covered the opening and closing ceremonies of the Special Olympics World Summer Games live, and events were covered by radio and highlights programmes. The Games were held in Ireland that year. Since then, there has been limited coverage on TV and radio of the Special Olympics.[[107]](#footnote-107) RTÉ covered the Summer Paralympic Games in 2004, 2008 and 2012 via highlights shows, and the hours spent on the games increased each time. Eir Sport (Setanta at the time) is an Irish sports subscription channel, and it broadcast the 2012 games live. In 2016, RTÉ showed live coverage and highlights of the Games. It would be preferable if the national broadcaster afforded as much prominence to broadcasting the Special Olympics as they do to the Paralympics in order to showcase the efforts and achievement of all the Olympians with disabilities.

# Awareness Training and Resources

## Training for Public Sector Staff

As noted under the NDIS, all government departments and public bodies have committed to providing disability awareness training for staff. While some departments have reported on staff training, actual numbers trained are not commonly reported, nor is the impact of this training.

Information on the training of public sector staff in Intreo Centres in Ireland was reported on through a parliamentary question in 2019. Intreo Centres in Ireland provide support for people in reaching their employment ambitions, including those with a disability or illness. Up to October 2019, 60 Case Officers had been trained in providing specialised support to people with disabilities and 390 Intreo staff members had attended Disability Awareness training courses.[[108]](#footnote-108)

## Disability Awareness Support Scheme for Private Sector Employers

The Disability Awareness Support Scheme, administered by the DEASP, provides funding so that private sector employers can buy in disability awareness training for staff who work with a colleague who has a disability. The purpose of the training is to deliver clear and accurate information about disability and to address questions or concerns that employers and employees may have about working with persons with disabilities. There is no pre-approved list of Disability Awareness Support Scheme training providers.[[109]](#footnote-109) However, the NDA has developed guidelines for purchasers of Disability Equality Training to assist organisations with the development of their Disability Equality Training programme.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Table 3 illustrates the expenditure and total applications granted under the Disability Awareness Support Scheme between 2012 and 2019. Data on the number of employees who have received this training has not been reported. As can be seen by Table 3, the uptake of this grant has been low. This has been noted by the Department and it intends to commence a focused policy review of the scheme.[[111]](#footnote-111)

Table 3. Expenditure and total applications granted under the Disability Awareness Support Scheme, 2012-2019[[112]](#footnote-112)

| Year | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 (up to April 2019) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Expenditure € | 2,430 | 834 | 3,760 | 12,967 | 9,270 | 62,275 | 20,214 | 1,418 |
| Number of Applications granted | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 11 | 5 | 1 |

Source:

Concerns have been raised that the scheme is advertised only for staff who work with a colleague who has a disability. The NDA is of the view that such training is beneficial for all staff whether they have a colleague who has disclosed a disability or not.[[113]](#footnote-113) The supports are also only available to private sector employers.

## Disability Awareness Training for Employers

As noted earlier, in 2018/19, the NDA’s Disability Awareness Raising Grant Scheme funded the development of disability awareness training for employers. Five partners (Rehab, WALK, NLN, AsIAm and Not So Different) have developed an “Inclusive Recruitment and Retention Practices” training module. This training module can be delivered face-to-face or online and has ISL, subtitles and a voice over built in. The module was developed based on employer needs (as per the Employers’ Attitude to Employing People with Disabilities survey[[114]](#footnote-114)) and can be implemented regardless of size of the organisation, or whether it is public or private. The training covers the different types of disability (focused on function rather than disability type). An evaluation of the pilot training programme received largely positive feedback.[[115]](#footnote-115) After completing the training, participants rated most strongly that they were now aware of “good practices in inclusive induction and on-boarding” and “how to provide support to employees in work”. The area they rated lowest was their awareness of supports and grants available to companies (although this was still rated quite highly). One participant commented that the training: “Increases disability awareness and is a great tool to evaluate inclusive recruitment and retention practices.” The training material will be hosted in a single location and can be downloaded onto any compatible public or private sector learning management system. This training was launched in December 2020 and can be delivered through face-to-face training or online at <https://asiam.mykademy.com/inclusive-recruitment-and-retention-practices>.

## NDA Disability Awareness E-Learning Module

The NDA hosts a general disability awareness e-learning module on its website.[[116]](#footnote-116) The module was launched in 2011 and is available in both English and Irish. Over 11,000 people have undertaken this training and it tends to be more in demand from the private sector than the public sector. This training has been used by organisations in different ways – one local authority used it for Transition Year students, the Law Society required law students complete the module, and the HSE used the module on their internal staff training site for a number of years. There are plans to update the module during 2021.

## Sport Ireland Disability Awareness Training

In Sport Ireland’s 2017 Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities, they committed to providing disability awareness training in sport and physical activity for all Board members and staff.[[117]](#footnote-117) In 2018, Sport Ireland facilitated Disability Awareness training for 1,569 people.[[118]](#footnote-118)

## Cara Sport Inclusion Disability Awareness and Inclusion Training

Cara Sport Inclusion Ireland, runs training workshops on Disability Awareness[[119]](#footnote-119) and Disability Inclusion.[[120]](#footnote-120) Their Disability Awareness workshop builds awareness around people with disabilities participating in community sport and physical activity. Their Disability Inclusion workshop provides participants with knowledge, skills and ideas on how to adapt and modify activity sessions to make them more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. Information on uptake of these workshops does not appear to be publicly available.

## Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) Disability Equality Training

Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) is the national development and resource organisation for arts and disability. They provide specifically tailored training for the needs of arts organisations which want to include artists and audiences with disabilities in what they do. Their training is generally delivered by persons with direct experience of disability and is designed to be different to traditional disability awareness training which may focus on impairment/conditions and instead is aligned with the social model of disability.[[121]](#footnote-121) Between 2007 and 2020 it is estimate that ADI facilitated 36 Disability Equality Training sessions, the majority of these included attendees from a range of different arts and cultural organisations.[[122]](#footnote-122)

## An Garda Síochána Garda Diversity Officers Training

In 2019, An Garda Síochána reconfigured the role of Ethnic Liaison Officers into Garda Diversity Officers (whose remit now includes disability) and committed to providing these new Garda Diversity Officers with appropriate training including disability awareness training.[[123]](#footnote-123) It is not known whether this training has commenced.

## National Federation of Voluntary Bodies’ Informing Families Guidelines, Training and Resources

In 2007, Ireland’s National Federation of Voluntary Bodies (FedVol), an umbrella group of voluntary intellectual disability service providers in Ireland, developed evidence-based “Best Practice Guidelines for Informing Families of their Child's Disability”.[[124]](#footnote-124) These were based on a comprehensive research and consultation programme. FedVol worked with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that the guidelines are cross-disability in nature, covering physical, sensory, intellectual disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders. The guidelines provide support to professionals on the communication skills required to sensitively provide the diagnosis of a child's disability to the family, whether that happens at birth, in utero, or evolves over the first weeks, months or years of a child's life.

A 2 hour training course was designed on ‘Best practice guidelines for informing families of their child's disability’. An evaluation of this training was undertaken with over 200 medical students, nursing students and junior hospital doctors. The evaluationfound participants had increased levels of knowledge andconfidence in communicating a diagnosis of disability after taking part in the training.[[125]](#footnote-125) This training was subsequently developed as an e-learning module which is available for anyone to take.[[126]](#footnote-126) There does not appear to be publicly available data on the uptake of this module.

The Informing Families project also offers printable information for families in 7 languages[[127]](#footnote-127), a DVD showcasing positive and negative disclosure practices[[128]](#footnote-128), and a printable one-page poster summarising best practice recommendations for informing families of their child's disability.[[129]](#footnote-129)

## Employer Disability Information Service

The Employer Disability Information (EDI) service was piloted between 2017 and 2019. It was funded by the NDA and managed by a consortium of employer bodies (ISME, IBEC, Chambers Ireland) to deliver peer-to-peer advice and support for employers regarding employing persons with disabilities. The service was developed as previous research had highlighted the importance of this type of support to employers in mitigating their lack of awareness or fears regarding disability. Information gathered through two employer surveys conducted during the lifetime of this pilot indicated that employers valued the service, and in particular the delivery of advice and support from a business perspective.[[130]](#footnote-130)

## Open Doors Initiative

The Open Doors Initiative provides employment opportunities to some marginalised members of society in Ireland including people with a disability.[[131]](#footnote-131) It was launched in September 2018 by 14 founding companies and over 40 companies have now signed up to the initiative. Companies who join the initiative can access a number of supports to assist them in employing and working with people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers and youth from disadvantaged areas including a toolkit which helps to raise awareness about inclusive employment. As mentioned earlier the Open Doors Initiative have been funded to implement an employer information service that will occupy the space that the EDI pilot service previously occupied.

## Sport Inclusion Disability Charter

In 2018 Sport Ireland and Cara launched the Sport Inclusion Disability Charter.[[132]](#footnote-132) In 2019, 247 organisations, clubs and centres signed up to the charter. The charter, which is one of the key actions in the National Sports Policy 2018-2027[[133]](#footnote-133), and the Sport Ireland Policy on the Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities[[134]](#footnote-134), is a mechanism for ensuring that sporting organisations adopt a set of guiding principles aimed at reducing the disparity in sports participation rates between people with and without a disability. By signing up to the charter, organisations receive resources, templates and information on training and events all specific to including and promoting the participation of person with disabilities in sports. It would be useful to hear about what activities or accommodations clubs and organisations that have signed the charter have made.

## NDA’s Autism Guidance for Local Authority Housing Officers, Justice Professionals and Line Managers/HR Professionals

In 2018 the NDA produced three guidance documents to raise awareness about autism with a selection of key groups. Different groups were targeted in each document and each resource had specific goals:

1. to assist those working in the civil and criminal justice system on how to communicate with and support people who have autism[[135]](#footnote-135)
2. to assist those working in the housing-related areas of local authorities to understand autism in order to best support people who may be applying for housing, and in considering their housing needs[[136]](#footnote-136)
3. to assist those who are working as line managers, or in a HR role, to better understand autism and to effectively recruit, work with and support staff with autism in the workplace.[[137]](#footnote-137)

These guidance documents were all sent to autism agencies. The guidance for justice professionals was made available on the Garda portal and sent to the Courts Service, Probation Service, the Law Society and the Bar Council. The guidance for local authority housing officers was circulated to all the relevant local authority officials via the local government management agency.

## NDA’s Ask Me Guidelines for Effective Consultation with People with Disabilities

In 2002, the NDA launched a publication entitled “Ask Me – Guidelines for Effective Consultation with People with Disabilities.”[[138]](#footnote-138) These guidelines provided advice to organisations on undertaking consultations with people with disabilities. They sought to raise awareness of the importance of such consultation and overall to facilitate inclusion of people with disabilities in the planning, evaluation and decision-making processes about the products and services they use.

# Conclusion

This document provides a general overview of information on the Irish context in relation to Article 8 of the UNCRPD. It intends to be comprehensive, but may not be exhaustive as it would not be possible to accurately showcase the range of ways various organisations and individuals in Ireland raise awareness of the lives of persons with disabilities. The existence of statutory bodies such as the NDA, IHREC, NCSE, bodies such as NAS, Cara Sport Inclusion Ireland, Arts & Disability Ireland, and disability representative groups and charities means that disability is kept visible at a national level in Ireland by many stakeholders.

It is particularly valuable that national data has been periodically collected in Ireland on public attitudes to disability and discrimination faced by those with disabilities. These data have shown that public attitudes towards persons with disabilities are generally quite positive and have also improved over time. However, there is still room for improvement, particularly as attitudes may differ depending on disability type and context. For example, in the most recent survey of 2017, the least positive attitudes were towards those with mental health problems and in regards to children sharing classrooms with those with disabilities. Of some concern is that the proportions of all people with and without disabilities experiencing perceived discrimination appear to have increased over time, and the gap between those with and without disabilities has also widened to the detriment of persons with disabilities. It is possible that some of these changes may be due to better awareness of what constitutes discrimination, but it could also be due to a true increase in the levels of discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities. The 2006 National Disability Survey provided a wealth of information on the lives and experiences of a large proportion of persons with disability in Ireland for the first time. Given the changes to the Irish economy and society since that time and the recent ratification of the UNCRPD, another large scale survey of persons with disabilities would be timely.

Data on the portrayal and representation of persons with disabilities in TV and radio broadcasting in Ireland is also available. The 2007 research collaboration between the BCI and the NDA provided a wealth of information about how people with disabilities were being portrayed and represented in Irish broadcasting at that time. The study found that half of respondents could not recall any person with a disability on TV and almost four fifths could not recall such a person on radio. Most felt inclusion of persons with disabilities would not impact on their likelihood to watch a TV programme, one quarter felt they’d be more inclined to watch, while a small minority (5-7%) would be less likely to watch due to their own sadness or discomfort. Analysis of programmes found that one fifth of the sample analysed had some reference to people with disability. Only 1% of all individuals in the TV programming and 1.8% in radio programming had a disability and they generally were secondary figures. The majority of those with disabilities in the programme sample were represented in a stereotypical way, however most programmes were not rated as showing a discriminatory or prejudiced attitude towards persons with disabilities. From this study it is clear that the representation and portrayal of persons with disabilities in Irish broadcasting at the time warranted improving. The different prominence afforded to the Special Olympics and the Paralympics by the national broadcaster RTÉ in recent times suggests that there are still areas requiring progress. Fortunately, under the BAI’s 2019 Media Research Funding Scheme, there is new research underway examining the diversity of people and content in Irish broadcasting and diversity policies in the broadcasting sector. This is timely and will enable an examination of how the landscape has changed since 2007.

Due to a lack of reliable national data in Ireland on crime statistics or court trials, it is not possible to examine whether persons with disability are more at risk of being victims of crime. However, under the Gardaí’s current Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and with the development of a Criminal Justice Operational Hub underway, it is expected this issue with crime data will improve in due course.

In Ireland there are structures in place to protect persons with disability from discrimination. Under the Equal Status and Employment Equality Acts, they are protected from discrimination in accessing goods, services, accommodation, education and employment. A broadcasting code of standards prohibits any TV or radio programmes being broadcast which stigmatise, support or condone discrimination of those with a disability. In addition, viewers or listeners can make an official complaint to the broadcasting regulator in the event they feel these standards have been breached. However, there are also structural gaps which may not adequately protect persons with disabilities. This includes the lack of hate crime legislation in Ireland and the delay in fully enacting the Assisted Decision Making Act 2015. Fortunately, there are activities currently underway to progress both of these issues.

Raising awareness on disability and promoting empathy for those with a disability is included in the Irish mainstream national curricula from preschool to secondary school. Of note is that early childhood and primary curricula refer to persons with disabilities broadly, while junior and senior cycle appear to focus mainly on those with mental health issues. The activities outlined in the curricula seek to help children and young people understand and relate to those with disabilities including mental health issues. These are a positive foundation for children and young people, but it unclear whether the education system takes the next step by also focussing on the abilities and rights of persons with disabilities.

The current national disability-specific policies, the NDIS and the CES are cross-cutting policies spanning multiple government departments. These strategies cover awareness raising across a range of areas, for example, in the general public, for persons with disabilities in regards to having positive expectations for themselves, for employers, for participation in sports and in relation to training of public sector staff. Of particular relevance to Article 8 is forthcoming work from the DOJE, which will be developing programmes to promote awareness within the general public of the lived experience of people with disabilities. It is particularly positive to see other national bodies like An Garda Síochána and RTÉ commit to raising awareness on disability in their current strategies.

A range of campaigns, initiatives and events to raise awareness on disability have taken place in Ireland over recent times, with some events taking place periodically. Some of these activities have specifically sought to raise awareness about disability (e.g. campaigns such as National Make Way Day and the HSE’s National Sharing Day for Disability Service Providers). Other activities such as the NDA’s national conference, CEUD’s UDGC and policy submissions by representative bodies have also been outlined as they raise awareness of disability, only in a more indirect manner. The initiatives outlined have aimed to raise awareness in a range of areas - on the lived experience of persons with disabilities, their abilities, the obstacles they face, their individual needs, on best practices, opportunities and supports for persons with disabilities, on looking after mental health, and on universal design of products and the environment. It is notable that the Irish government have funded a range of local disability awareness raising initiatives since 2015 through the Disability Awareness Raising Grant Scheme. It is hoped that the evaluations of these initiatives will become available later in 2020 for review as they will include important learning for future awareness raising activities.

Initiatives have varied in the extent to which they report on the impact of their awareness raising efforts. Campaigns often use their reach via media and social media and the numbers of activities which have taken place as main metrics of success. While these are important metrics, it is crucial that organisations ask whether their campaigns have made any meaningful changes to awareness of and attitudes towards persons with disabilities. A good example here is the evaluation of IHREC’s “All Human, All Equal” campaign, which used a nationally representative sample to explore the public’s perspective on their campaign and the impact of the campaign on attitudes. The NDA advises future awareness raising campaigns ensure they report on the impact of their campaign, as well as the activities and reach of their campaign.

Under the NDIS, public sector bodies in Ireland have recently committed to ensuring their staff receive disability awareness training. Private sector bodies can avail of government funding to access disability awareness training if they have an employee with a disability. It is notable that since 2011, over 11,000 public and private sector staff have availed of NDA online disability awareness training. Disability awareness raising for employers has improved over recent years with the EDI pilot, Open Door Initiative and the newly developed training course for employers on “Inclusive Recruitment and Retention Practices”. As well as general awareness raising, training and resources are available for a range of specific areas including for participation of persons with disabilities in sport and in the arts, for law enforcement, for medical professionals and for a range of other public-facing staff. Data on the numbers of people who have received training in various disability awareness training courses is not always easily accessible and there does not appear to be public reporting on the effectiveness of training. Best practice is advised here, that training programmes collect and report on the numbers undertaking training as well as evaluating to some extent the impact of their training on the knowledge, attitudes and/or behaviour of participants in relation to persons with disabilities.

In 2019 and 2020, the NDA held a number of consultation events with representatives from the disability sector to discuss the UNCRPD and the NDIS. Stakeholders felt that progress in awareness raising has been made in Ireland, with improvement of general disability awareness in government departments, in attitudes to persons with disabilities as employees and specifically in the awareness building of the HSE Mental Health Engagement Office. It was also noted that there was still work to be done. Stakeholders felt that all of society would benefit from awareness raising with regards to persons with disabilities in order to improve public attitudes. Specific groups who require or would benefit from more awareness raising were mentioned: all government departments, schools, employers, health professionals, those working in the criminal justice system, and those working in local authority housing. It was also noted suggested that persons with disabilities would benefit from being more aware of the supports that exist for employers which could assist them as employees.

Stakeholders in the disability sector provided a range of examples where it was felt that a lack of awareness was still acting as a barrier for persons with disabilities. Some participants felt that the cost of disability can end up being a barrier to employment, and that it would be useful if employers and the State were more aware of this. A lack of consistent awareness across government was cited as a reason for a lack of coherent joined up services for persons with disabilities. Issues in education/training and transitions to employment were linked to societal attitudes, whereby persons with disabilities were viewed against a ‘charitable’ rather than a rights-based model. In relation to capacity and decision making, stakeholders felt that a lack of public awareness on the reliance on outdated legislation, as well as an awareness and skills deficit in service providers will act as a barrier to implementing the UNCRPD through the provisions made in the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. Finally, some stakeholders felt that negative attitudes still persisted in some communities, and this could be a barrier to persons with disabilities feeling supported and integrated in the place in which they live. Increased awareness in communities about persons with disabilities were cited as key enablers of self-directed living, community inclusion, and effective participation.

It is clear from the available data that there is a lot of positive activity in Ireland with regard to awareness raising about persons with disabilities. However, it is also clear from the perspectives of persons with disabilities that there are still areas warranting improvement. It is imperative in Ireland that into the future, more consideration is given to the data collected on awareness raising campaigns and training so that their impact on societal attitudes, and accordingly, the lived experience of persons with disabilities, can be meaningfully explored.

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