

Independent Living

Position Paper



An “Introduction to Independent Living” sets out the background and development of the independent living movement and its location in the increasing demand for disability rights. It outlines the UK Governments Independent Living Strategy which aims to give disabled people the support they need to exercise the greatest possible choice and control over all aspects of their lives by 2025.

But what does that mean for disabled people in Northern Ireland?

In Great Britain disability rights and equality is delivered in part through the Office of Disability Issues and Equality 2025. The Office of Disability Issues exists to **“act as a champion of disabled people within Government. We work with all departments to help them better understand and meet the needs and aspirations of disabled people.”**

Equality 2025 is a network of disabled people which advises the Westminster Government on how to achieve disability equality. It was set up in December 2006 in response to the Government report on Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People. The current priorities of Equality 2025, which has reserved 1 place (out of 19) for a disabled person from Northern Ireland are:

- Independent Living & Family Support
- Early years, education, disabled children and young people and transitions
- Employment & Benefits
- Rights, justice and citizenship

In Northern Ireland the Disability Unit in the OFMDFM is responsible for developing anti-discrimination policy on disability and preparing legislation associated with the DDA 1995. It established a Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Disability in November 2004 which it is hoped will report to the Northern Ireland Executive in late 2009. However, a perusal of the OFMDFM website gives no indication that its Disability Branch has any relationship with Office of Disability Issues, Equality 2025 or any of the devolved administrations.

Other Northern Ireland Departments have developed disability policies and strategies RELATING TO their specific functions e.g. health and social care, employment, education and so on.

Regardless of whether or not you believe that Office of Disability Issues and Equality 2025 are delivering positive change for disabled people they at least present a broad approach to disability equality and rights. This appears not to be the case in Northern Ireland where OFMDFM's Disability Branch currently deals solely with the outworkings of the DDA.

The report of the PSI Working Group on Disability will contain recommendations on all of priorities established by Equality 2025. It will begin to tackle the key ideas of personalised budgets and maximising individual choice and control. But do our current structures, systems and processes actually give the breadth and depth of approach to disability equality that the hundreds of thousands of disabled people in Northern Ireland need?

Given that many elements of the Independent Living Strategy are based on UK Government structures do we need devolved Government in Northern Ireland to publish its own strategy?

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