

## Overview

This audit of research in learning disabilities was commissioned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) as part of the independent review into Mental Health and Learning Disability. The project had four inter-related strands.

### **1. Creation of a Directory of Research Studies into Learning Disabilities undertaken in Northern Ireland.**

The Directory is prepared in Microsoft Access and is available free-of-charge on a CD-Rom from Room 12J10, School of Nursing, University of Ulster, Newtownabbey, N. Ireland BT37 0 QB . The Directory contains details of over 300 studies which are searchable by key-words, topics and authors. Each study is rated regarding the sample used and the research design employed.

### **2. A strategic review of learning disability and service provision in Northern Ireland.**

The main aim of this strand was to synthesize current international thinking in relation to the concept of learning disability; to identify the main influences on the development of modern, cost-beneficial services that will reduce existing inequalities and improve the quality of lives of people with this disability and of their family carers. Issues relating to staffing of services were also to be reviewed.

### **3. Reports on six specific topics**

The Learning Disability Committee had set up six Task Groups to prepare reports on topics of particular significance to the Review. These were: accommodation and support, day opportunities, children and families, physical health, mental health and ageing issues. The third strand of work involved a review of literature in these six areas drawing primarily on Northern Irish studies but also incorporating the insights from international research that would inform best practice in modern services.

### **4. Organisational arrangements in support of people with a learning disability.**

The fourth strand included a review of current organisational arrangements for learning disability services in these islands with particular emphasis on an analysis of the strategies used to promote greater partnership working among agencies, sectors and departments. This strand also involved a survey of over 30 respondents of their experiences of inter-agency working and suggestions for improvements.

## Project Steering Group

The work of the project team was overseen by a Steering Group chaired by Siobhan Bogues (Chair of the Learning Disability Committee for the NI Review). The members were: Lorna Masterson (UCHT); Pascal McKeown (Mencap) and Paul Roberts (Positive Futures).

## Critical reviewer

Dr Oliver Russell acted as a critical reviewer of initial draft reports. A psychiatrist and formerly Director of the Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol, he has been a senior policy adviser to the English Department of Health on Learning

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Disabilities. He is chair of Trustees for British Institute of Learning Disabilities and of the Learning Disability Advisory Committee for the National Assembly of Wales.

## **Format of the report**

The final report is presented as a series of self-contained chapters with references and appendices relating to each chapter listed at the end.

Each chapter begins with an overview and is subdivided into a number of sections. Throughout the chapters the main conclusions are highlighted in boxed form. The overviews and the boxed conclusions provide a quick summary of the contents of the report.

## **Acknowledgements**

Our thanks to the project steering group from their wise counsel, Dr Oliver Russell for his insightful suggestions and Damien O'Neill and Suzanne Abbot for their assistance with information gathering.

## **Disclaimer**

All the views and opinions in this document are those of the authors and should not be taken as representing those of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety or of the Project Steering group.