

Office of the Mental Health Champion



2023/24

Annual Report

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Mental Health Champion: 2023/24 Annual Report

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Mental Health Champion: 2023/24 Annual Report

Foreword and introduction

Professor Siobhán O’Neill has been Northern Ireland’s substantive Mental Health Champion since 8 September 2021. The Terms of Reference for the Mental Health Champion’s role dictates that the Champion will provide their annual report to the Minister of Health within three months of the end of the reporting year: and the Minister will update the Executive in respect of progress against key performance indicators for the role. This annual report covers core business activity during the 2023/24 financial year. This period is referred to throughout the report as “the reporting period”.

The overarching aim of the Office of the Mental Health Champion is to advise and assist in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing through all policies and services. The role was created in 2020 with the full support of the NI Executive who were, and remain, committed to improving the mental health of everyone throughout Northern Ireland in all aspects of life. There is a desire to weave a mental health promoting ethos into all policies and services, which have been advised and assisted by the Champion. As a signal of the collaborative will for the role to succeed, funding for the role continues to be provided on a cross-departmental basis.

Summary of purpose

The purpose of the Mental Health Champion is to further the mental health agenda across all platforms and fora; to promote emotional health and wellbeing, access to evidence-based support and services; and to promote recovery. A copy of the Terms of Reference for the Mental Health Champion’s role is available at [Annex A](#).

The Mental Health Champion takes part in the public debate around psychological wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention, and champions these issues to improve the experience of people suffering from mental ill health and those who have experience of mental ill health.

The Mental Health Champion is a public advocate and consensus builder; a government advocate; advisor and challenger; and a network hub for all mental health matters in Northern Ireland.

Throughout her tenure as Mental Health Champion, Professor O’Neill will continue to engage with people with lived experience and other stakeholders and will continue to be a focal point for the discussion around wellbeing, mental health and suicide.

Governance statement

The Terms of Reference for the Mental Health Champion’s role authorises the Champion to retain the freedom to make independent decisions on the strategic direction of their work area as set out in the annual business plan. A governance and accountability framework is in place to set out the way in which the Champion and the Department of Health will work together to ensure effective governance arrangements are in place and that independence is fulfilled. The Office of the Mental Health Champion follows and utilises the host organisation’s governance processes and systems for the purposes of IT, finance, HR, risk management, procurement and estates. As such, the management team within the Office of the Mental Health Champion applies the principles of good practice in Corporate Governance and continues to further strengthen its governance arrangements by

undertaking continuous self-assessment of its compliance with Corporate Governance best practice.

The Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health, as Principal Accounting Officer of the Department, is accountable for issuing funding to the Office of the Mental Health Champion. In order to underpin the independence of the Champion's role, the Principal Accounting Officer has designated the Senior Policy and Research Officer within the Office of the Mental Health Champion as Senior Accountable Officer for all expenditure incurred by the Champion's Office. The Senior Accountable Officer is formally accountable for all aspects of governance, decision-making and financial management with the Office of the Mental Health Champion. The Senior Accountable Officer remains available to the Principal Accounting Officer and the Minister of Health to provide advice, guidance and a rationale with regards to the stewardship of the Office of the Mental Health Champion.

The Senior Accountable Officer is content that all expenditure utilised throughout the reporting period was reasonable and proper and in line with the stated objectives of the Mental Health Champion.

Hosting

The Office of the Mental Health Champion was hosted, at arm's length, by the Department of Health for the duration of the reporting period.

Independence

Professor O'Neill is seconded from Ulster University to fulfil the role of Mental Health Champion four days each week. Professor O'Neill's academic standing and her role within Ulster University, along with the Terms of Reference for the Mental Health Champion role, help ensure the independence of the Mental Health Champion role. The Senior Accountable Officer within the Office of the Mental Health Champion underpins the independence of the Champion's role.

Organisational structure and support

In addition to the Champion, the Office of the Mental Health Champion currently comprises:

- 1 x Senior Policy and Research Officer
(this position is Head of Branch & Senior Accountable Officer (G7));
- 1 x Policy and Research Officer (DP);
- 1 x Communication Officer (DP);
- 1 x Temporary Research Officer and
- 1 x Administrative Officer.

Cost/finances

In April 2020, the NI Executive agreed cross Departmental funding of up to £500k per year for the Office of the Mental Health Champion. All Departments currently contribute £55k per annum which provides a total budget of £495k.

An analysis of each component of the Mental Health Champion expenditure for 2023/24 is provided below under the section titled "2023/24 Budget summary".

Gifts register

The Office of the Mental Health Champion maintains a Gifts Register detailing any gifts that are received by the Champion and/or staff in the normal course of business. All gifts with a monetary value of £20 or over were either refused in advance or returned to the sender during the reporting period.

Business plan for 2024/25

A summary of the Business Plan for the Mental Health Champion for the 2024/25 financial year is as shown in Annex B.

Risk management

Risk management is an organisation-wide responsibility and internal processes exist to identify, track, mitigate and (where necessary) escalate risks to ensure minimal impact on business activity. A Risk Register for the Office of the Mental Health Champion is maintained, reviewed and updated regularly throughout the year and is shared annually with the Department of Health for oversight.

Performance and achievements during the reporting period

The reporting requirements for the Mental Health Champion are set out in the Terms of Reference for the role. These include the following outcomes:

- Presence in the public arena with public awareness of the Mental Health Champion and the role;
- Enhanced visibility across Government: presence across the public sector arena with awareness of the Mental Health Champion and the role;
- Influence in decision making and interaction with policy makers;
- A voice for those normally voiceless across the public sector;
- Advocate for awareness of psychological wellbeing, mental health and suicide in the public and independent sector;
- The promotion of increased mental resilience across the population of Northern Ireland; and
- Contribution to an improvement in mental health services.

Presence in the public arena with public awareness of the Mental Health Champion

The Mental Health Champion participated in 352 external meetings during the reporting period. This included:

Meetings with	Number
People with lived experience	53
Political representatives	19
Government/policy teams	87
Professional groups	55
Community and Voluntary sector groups	44
Communications teams	62
Academics	32
Total	352

As the Mental Health Champion takes part in public debate about psychological wellbeing, mental health and suicide as well as being a champion for those with lived experience of mental ill health, increasing public awareness about the role is essential, so the public can understand all aspects of the work being completed by the Mental Health Champion to improve mental health in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the reporting period, the Mental Health Champion was actively present in the public arena, through engagements including, visits to charities and schools, and regularly speaking at events hosted by statutory and non-statutory organisations. The Mental Health

Champion participated in frequent television and radio interviews addressing topics relevant to mental health in civic society. Professor O'Neill took part in several documentaries including BBC's Spotlight investigative report into domestic abuse and suicide, as well as UTV's View from Stormont on the mental health impact of the cost-of-living crisis rise. Professor O'Neill regularly appeared on radio and television shows to raise public awareness on topics such as suicide prevention, the Mental Health Strategy and underinvestment in mental health services, drug and alcohol related deaths, problems with access children and young people's mental health services, mental health waiting list issues, eating disorders, and improving children and young people's wellbeing in Education.

In June 2023, Mental Health Champion's Research Officer, Dr. Nicole Bond, wrote a blog for the International Public Policy Observatory on 'The Importance of Emotional Resilience for Young People in Northern Ireland'. This evidence-based piece set out the current context and challenges facing children and young people's mental health and highlights the Mental Health Champion's priorities and solutions to improve mental health and wellbeing.

This was an exciting year for the Mental Health Champion as following the success of the 'Generation Hope: Youth Suicide Prevention Conference' of the previous year, the Mental Health Champion held two large public engagement events, which had been organisational goals. The first goal was to hold a large-scale event with exhibitors from several mental health organisations. In October 2023, for World Mental Health Day, the office organised and hosted the 'NI Mental Health Expo' this was the largest event the Mental Health Champion's office has ever organised with an aim of shining a light on the work happening across in Mental Health Services in NI. Feedback gathered following the event showed that both the 250 attendees and the 15 exhibitors received the event extremely well. Throughout the day attendees interacted with statutory and community/voluntary mental health groups about the services they provide, and at intervals there were keynote speakers and panels exploring the work currently ongoing in services here that are making a difference. The Mental Health Champion was also delighted to launch the Fundamental Facts of Mental Health in Northern Ireland report with our collaborators, Mental Health Foundation, at the Expo.

The second organisational goal was to hold an event in Derry/Londonderry, which we were able to do in January 2024 with the 'Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention in Northern Ireland Conference' held in the Guildhall, Derry/Londonderry. The aim of this conference was to discuss the interventions that are effective in helping people who are suicidal and hear from the services who support people to find a life worth living, bringing together a range of speakers from across frontline services in the statutory and community sector. The conference also included a keynote presentation from Professor Rory O'Connor, renowned suicide prevention expert and author of the book "When It Is Darkest: Why People Die by Suicide and What We Can Do to Prevent It" as well as a panel on community interventions and another on statutory services. Again, this event was received warmly with many of the 130 attendees expressing their thanks for an event to be held outside of Belfast and on a topic that many were deeply passionate about.

Enhanced visibility across Government

During the reporting period, the Mental Health Champion has sought to enhance awareness of mental health issues throughout the public sector, with a focus on the five key themes identified in the Terms of Reference for the MHC role:

1. Prevention and early intervention
2. Suicide prevention
3. Children and young people
4. Alcohol and drugs
5. Service improvement.

The Mental Health Champion has provided guidance and expertise to government Departments and organisations regarding each of the key themes when required, and when specifically requested.

In addition, the Champion is a member of, or has contributed to the following government advisory groups in order to meet senior departmental officials and to influence policy:

- PeacePlus Programme Monitoring Committee;
- PeacePlus Steering Committee 1;
- Mental Health Strategic Reform Board;
- Promoting MH through Public Awareness, Early Intervention and Prevention Steering Group;
- Regional Mental Health Outcomes Framework Steering Group;
- Towards Zero Suicide Board;
- Project Life 2 Steering Group (Professor O’Neil chairs the Protect Life 2 Achieving Evidence and Best Practice Steering Group);
- Criminal Justice Healthcare Oversight Group;
- ICS Strategic Outcomes Framework (MH & Emotional Wellbeing Focus Group);
- DfE Advisory Group to Oversee the FE Policy Review of Student Support;
- DE’s Joint Restraint and Seclusion Working Group and Reference Group;
- DoH’s Digital Health Forum; and
- Age NI’s Good Vibrations Programme Advisory Committee.

Influence in decision making and interaction with policy makers

The Mental Health Champion is available to provide advice and guidance to the NI Executive and political representatives and to participate in discussion with all NICS Departments and Ministers in order to raise the profile of Mental Health and Wellbeing in Northern Ireland. During the reporting period, the Champion had various meetings (19 in total) with Political Representatives including a meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland where the Champion provided briefing on the current mental health context within Northern Ireland and discussed other matters of relevance to raise awareness of mental health issues. NI Assembly Committees did not sit for the majority of the reporting period meaning that there was no opportunity to provide formal evidence to individual Committees, however the Champion did attend and contribute to a number of All Party Groups (APG) during the reporting period. The Champion and her staff provided evidence to the APG on Mental Health in relation to its ongoing Inquiry into Mental Health Education & Early Intervention in Schools. The Mental Health Champion also met directly with a large number of Officials and policy makers (87 in total) from a number of NI Government Departments to discuss a wide range of areas that impact on mental health, wellbeing, resilience and suicide prevention which also included meeting with key Departments to discuss the outcome of the Inquest into the deaths of Mr and Mrs Cawdery in 2017. In addition, the Mental Health Champion met with a number of organisations with a view to influencing policies in relation to mental health issues. This included meeting with several RoI organisations, including Mental Health Reform, to explore possibilities of cross-border collaboration and to identify potential funding opportunities. The Champion also provided written input to:

- The Department of Health’s consultation on the Protect life 2 Action Plan;
- The Department of Justice’s consultation on the external action Plan for Women in in contact or at risk of contact with the criminal justice system;
- The Department of Justice’s consultation on the external action Plan for Girls in in contact or at risk of contact with the criminal justice system;
- The Department of Health’s consultation on expanding access to naloxone;
- The Department of Health’s consultation on Equality Impact Assessment of the 2023-24 Budget Outcome;

- The Department of Education's consultation on Relationships and Sexuality Education;
- NI Prison Service's Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Policy;
- The Department of Education's consultation on Statutory Guidance on the Use of Reasonable Force / Restrictive Practices in Educational Settings in Northern Ireland;
- The Department of Justice's Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy;
- Children's Online Activities, Harm and Safety in Northern Ireland: SBNI Professionals' Written Submissions;
- Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services Consultation;
- A Strategic Framework to Prevent the Harm caused by Obesity, and Improve Diets and Levels of Physical Activity in Northern Ireland;
- The Executive Office's consultation on Ending Violence against Women and Girls; and
- The Executive Office's consultation on Free Period Products.

A voice for those normally voiceless across the public sector

The Mental Health Champion seeks to be a voice for those normally voiceless across the public sector by representing this proportion of our population at policy level and through discussions with politicians and policy makers to ensure that this group is considered at all times. As highlighted in previous reports, the Mental Health Champion is unable to provide medical advice, and is unable to support individuals who are seeking access to services, or have complaints about services. Where a member of the public contacts the Office of the Mental Health Champion regarding a personal issue, advice and signposting is offered with due regard to the specific circumstances that have been raised by the individual.

During the reporting period, the Mental Health Champion met with around 100 statutory and charity and voluntary organisations and individuals regarding a wide range of issues. This included discussions on specific Serious Adverse Incidents where learning from individual cases could be implemented in order to improve mental health services throughout the province. In addition, the Champion met with a number of individuals who have been bereaved by suicide and/or homicide by patients with mental ill health in order to ensure learning is derived from these tragic incidents and avoidable deaths.

Advocate for awareness of psychological wellbeing, mental health and suicide in the public and independent sector

To raise awareness of psychological wellbeing, mental health and suicide in the public and independent sector, the Office of the Mental Health Champion undertook a programme of work, focusing on hearing the views of children and young people. This engagement work was led by the Research Officer and overseen by the Mental Health Champion. The purpose of this programme of work was to capture information about the attitudes, priorities and needs of the NI population regarding Mental Health. The Office of the Mental Health Champion worked in partnership with external organisations to participate in existing lines of research. These areas of work included:

Non testing year study

The centre for research in educational underachievement based at Stranmillis University College recently launched a study, funded by Nuffield Trust, which focused on this non-testing year cohort of students. These students entered grammar schools in NI during the pandemic year when transfer tests were cancelled. The research team led by Dr Noel Purdy advised that the project initially had two stages. The first is a quantitative piece focused on the difference in characteristics and academic performance of the non-transfer test cohort using a series of administrative datasets. The second has a qualitative focus to include an online questionnaire delivered to the students and their parents to explore how they feel they fit into the school, if they feel different from their peers or if they feel the school was the right

choice for them. This stage will also include case studies with selected students and teachers. The Nuffield trust funded the quantitative phase of this study while the Mental Health Champion's Office funded the qualitative aspects of this study from the 2023/24 budget. A findings report from the research team was provided to the MHC office in the first quarter of 2024 and will be launched officially in the following reporting period. Initial reports from the quantitative section of this study can also be downloaded [here](#).

NI Kids Life and Times Survey and Young Life and Times Survey

ARK is a research collaboration between Ulster University and Queens University based in the school of Applied Social and Policy Science [Governance | ARK - Access Research Knowledge](#). They aim to provide open access survey data that reflect the views and opinions of people in NI across a range of social and policy areas and conduct the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, the NI Kids Life and Times Survey and Young Life and Times Survey annually. Each year potential funders can add modules to the survey to ask this target group, questions relevant to their research area or policy interest. The Mental Health Champion Office funded a module within KLT and YLT to gathering information on the key concerns impacting young people's mental health and wellbeing. This would then inform the Mental Health Champion's guidance to Government Departments, and also priority actions in relation to the implementation of the Framework for Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education, the Mental Health Strategy and services developed as a result of Peace Plus and other funding opportunities. KLT and YLT data is weighted and representative of the NI population. Participating in the 2023 KLT and YLT surveys offered the Mental Health Champion Office the opportunity to gather high quality data from a large representative sample, using an existing established resource. The survey findings will be published on the ARK website and in a peer reviewed paper. Further publications will be considered by the Mental Health Champion following analysis of the dataset.

The findings of each of the three studies above are available on the Mental Health Champion website and via social media channels. The report <https://www.mentalhealthchampion-ni.org.uk/publications/factors-affecting-mental-health-and-wellbeing-children-and-young-people-northern> was launched at an ARK seminar in August 2023.

Children and Young People Engagement events

In addition, and in support of the research referred to above, the Office of the Mental Health Champion participated in a number of engagement events with children and young people, hosted by youth centres within the Charity and Voluntary sector and arranged through Youth Work Alliance. Participating youth members included cross-community representation, newcomer children, care experienced young people, young people with mental health concerns and/or diagnosis, young people with additional health needs, young people with additional learning needs. These events took the form of informal focus groups, facilitated by the research officer, where participants were asked to consider the main concerns for wellbeing across five domains: home, school, community, online and friendship groups. Within each, participants were asked to consider what supports were available to them, which of these were useful or not useful and why. Participants were also asked to consider what they think is needed within a mental health and wellbeing service for young people, and what should be prioritised within policy. Contributions to the discussion were recorded by participants on flip-chart paper and summarised after the event by the Research Officer. Focus groups were conducted in line with NICCY's guidelines: [Participation with Children and Young People: advice to public bodies - Niccy](#).

A report summarising all children and young people engagement events is available on the Mental Health Champion website: [Key Issues Impacting Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing in Northern Ireland - Engagement Report 2023 | Mental Health Champion Northern Ireland \(mentalhealthchampion-ni.org.uk\)](#).

Fundamental Facts of Mental Health in Northern Ireland

The Mental Health Foundation produced a fundamental facts document for each region of the UK in the year 2016. This document has been used as reference document in NI since that publication, however the data sources contained within have been updated in the time since publication, thus the static document is outdated. With this in mind, the MHC office partnered with the Mental Health Foundation to create an updated version of this publication, which launched on World Mental Health Day. The report highlighted the importance of tackling social inequalities to reduce the rates of poor mental health in NI. The report collates the most up-to-date and accurate data on mental health in NI and includes data on the risk factors: early adversity, trauma, poverty and education. It also identifies groups at higher risk, including carers, people, with disabilities and health conditions, and LGBTQIA+ people. Going forward the report will act as a live document updated annually to reflect new information or data published on mental health in Northern Ireland: <https://www.mentalhealthchampion-ni.org.uk/publications/mental-health-northern-ireland-fundamental-facts-2023>.

Northern Ireland Life and Times Study 2023

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) is one of the surveys conducted under the ARK research group which has run since 1998. A random selection of households in NI are invited to participate in the survey each year. Each year potential funders are able to add in modules to ask this target group, questions relevant to their research area, policy or social interest areas. The Mental Health Champion's office funded a module within the 2021 NILT survey which was useful in guiding the work and business plan for the office. A module was added to the NILT 2023 survey by the Mental Health Champion's office which focused on asking the population if they had contacted a health professional about a mental health concern, queries what supports were offered and if this support was beneficial to them and their mental health. Data collection has completed, and the funders dataset has been made available to the MHC office during the reporting period. The module findings will launch at an ARK Seminar mid-May 2024.

The promotion of increased mental resilience across the population of Northern Ireland

The Mental Health Champion continued to support the implementation of the Department of Health's 10-year Mental Health strategy throughout the reporting period. The Mental Health Champion participated in Mental Health Strategic Reform Board meetings and met with Department of Health Officials in order to inform the prioritisation of elements of the Mental Health Strategy for the 2023/24 fiscal year in the absence of an agreed budget, or a reduced budget. As a member of the Department of Education's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Programme Board, the Mental Health Champion continued to provide information on how best to allocate funding in an extremely challenging environment to gain best value for money and to target the young people in most need of support.

From January to March 2024, the Mental Health Champion reran the previous year's successful campaign 'We're Better, When We Talk' which helped to solidify public awareness about the importance of talking about our feelings and emotions to support our mental wellbeing as part of the 'Five Steps to Wellbeing'. Rerunning this campaign was considered to be good value for money given how highly it was received by stakeholders in the previous year and given that the content continued to be extremely relevant for the reporting year. The campaign performed very well given its smaller budget, with the Out of Home elements (6 sheets and A3 posters) gaining overexposure through run-on and over-posting, resulting in a value add of £5,744. This time the campaign utilised catch-up TV advertising running across ITV X and Channel 4 On Demand achieving 160,051 impressions. Facebook assets continued to perform very strongly with overall impressions of 1,682,540 low CPC of £0.49, well below the industry average of £0.86.

Contribution to an improvement in mental health services

During the reporting period, the Mental Health Champion supported specific service improvements within HSC Trusts and visited various facilities delivering mental health services in order to hear the views of service providers and to establish how services are currently being delivered in practice. The Mental Health Champion continued to participate in regular meetings with the NI Mental Health Policy group, and the Royal College of Psychiatrists (including sub-faculties), and the NI Branch of the British Psychological Society, to discuss policy priorities.

In addition, the Mental Health Champion participated in 55 meetings with professional groups and bodies and over 30 meetings with academia.

2023/24 Budget summary

The Mental Health Champion budget for the reporting period totalled £495k and comprised two components: salaries and operational expenditure. At the start of the reporting period the Mental Health Champion budget was forecasted to spend £398k on salaries and £97k on operational expenditure. Actual spend for the reporting period was as follows:

Components	Actual (£'000)
Salaries	367
Operational expenditure	127
Total	494

An analysis of each component is provided below.

Salaries

The Office of the Mental Health Champion was fully staffed by five permanent personnel for the entire reporting period. In addition, the Mental Health Champion and the Senior Accounting Officer decided to extend the provision of a Research Officer for the duration of the reporting period given the added value that the position brought to the previous reporting period. This additional post continues to enhance the office's internal and external research capability to assist the Mental Health Champion with research activities, increase the volume of publications and augment the current capabilities within the Office of the Mental Health Champion. This position will continue to be kept under review.

The Mental Health Champion is seconded from the Ulster University which invoices the Department of Health on a regular basis under the terms of a Secondment Agreement.

Salary costs during the reporting period were not as high as initially forecasted due to the delay of public sector pay increases.

Operational expenditure

The operational expenditure was allocated during business planning and was spent as demonstrated in the respective columns below:

	£
Comms activity *	77,687
MHC Events **	28,146
Participation in external research ***	17,549
Equipment and communication costs	3,148
Professional fees	250
Hospitality	298
Totals	127,078

** The Office of the Mental Health Champion extended the “We’re Better When We Talk” comms campaign during the reporting period and undertook some preparatory work for our anticipated 2024/25 campaign.*

*** The Office of the Mental Health Champion hosted two large events during the reporting period as detailed above.*

**** The Office of the Mental Health Champion participated research projects as detailed above.*

Underspend

During the reporting period, there was an underspend of circa £1,000 on the budget allocated to the Mental Health Champion. This represents approximately 0.2% of the overall budget.

Forward look to 2024/25

Business planning is an ongoing activity within the Office of the Mental Health Champion and business planning will include the requirements as set out in the Terms of Reference for the Mental Health Champion role. The following are some of the additional planned activities that have been identified at the start of the 2024/25 financial year:

- Continued employment of a dedicated resource to conduct independent, in-house research to inform policy (position to be reviewed on an ongoing basis);
- 2024/25 communications activities;
- Participating in a joint survey of mental health services;
- Promotion and involvement in awareness days;
- Participation in external research activities (to include the NI Life and Times Survey and updating the Fundamental Facts document with most recent information);
- Site visits to statutory and voluntary & community service providers;
- A round of introductory meetings with NI Ministers and relevant UKG Ministers; and
- Providing/presenting evidence at relevant NI Assembly Committees.

The Mental Health Champion will continue to be available to the NI Executive, individual Ministers, departmental officials, the community and voluntary sector and individual members of the public in order to fulfil the obligations within the Terms of Reference for the Mental Health Champion role.

Within the 2024/25 business plan, the Office of the Mental Health Champion has renewed its commitment to remain agile and take steps to address social determinants of poor mental health as and when these are identified.

The Business Plan for the Mental Health Champion for the 2024/25 financial year is as shown in [Annex B](#).

Acknowledgements

Professor O’Neill would like to acknowledge the role of the NI Executive in the creation of the Mental Health Champion role and thank them, along with Departmental Permanent Secretaries, for their continued support and the funding commitments from their respective Departments.

In addition, Professor O’Neill would like to sincerely thank all those who volunteered to assist at the MHC hosted events this year in Derry/Londonderry and Belfast.

Terms of Reference for the Mental Health Champion's Role***Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland******Terms of Reference*****1. Background**

1.1 *In April 2020, the Minister of Health, Robin Swann MLA, secured cross-departmental support through the NI Executive to formally establish the role of a Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland (the Champion).*

1.2 *Mental ill health affects a large number of people every year and is an issue that is key to all Departments. It therefore requires coherent and co-ordinated working to ensure mental ill health effects are addressed.*

1.3 *The Champion's role is fully supported by the NI Executive, which is committed to improving the mental health of everyone throughout all aspects of life. There is a desire to weave a mental health friendly ethos into all policies and services, which have been advised and assisted by the Champion. As a signal of the collaborative will for the role to succeed, funding for the role has been secured on a cross-departmental basis.*

2. Statement of Purpose

2.1 *The overall purpose of the Mental Health Champion is to:*

- *Further the mental health agenda across Northern Ireland;*
- *Promote emotional health and wellbeing;*
- *Access evidence based support and services; and*
- *Promote recovery.*

2.2 *To deliver against this purpose, the Mental Health Champion will:*

- (a) *Take part in the public debate around psychological wellbeing, mental health and suicide and will champion these issues to improve the experience of people experiencing mental ill health or who have experience of mental ill health;*
- (b) *Have a person-centred focus, understand the experience of people with lived experience and be a voice for those otherwise voiceless;*
- (c) *Take part in policy development across the whole of Government in areas around psychological wellbeing, mental health and suicide. The Champion will also challenge decisions where it is appropriate to do so; and*
- (d) *Engage with people with lived experience and others, acting as a focal point for the discussion around wellbeing, mental health and suicide.*

3. Role

3.1 *The role of the Mental Health Champion is to:*

- (a) *Help to integrate a mental health friendly ethos across all policies and services developed and delivered by the NI Executive. This includes enhancing the level of collaborative working across Government in relation to psychological wellbeing, mental health, suicide and recovery. The role is also to be a voice for people with lived experience; those who are often not heard in the public debate.*
- (b) *Champion and enhance mental health in all aspects of public life. This includes proactively seeking to increase the visibility of the role across Government Departments in this work.*

3.2 In particular, the Mental Health Champion will be:

- **A public advocate for mental health**
The Champion will be a public advocate for mental health, communicating the collective voices of people with lived experience, their families and carers, and communities impacted by mental health inequalities.
- **A Government advocate to help and support government Departments and officials**
The Champion will support the day-to-day functions of Government and act as a positive conduit between Government and service delivery.
- **A consensus builder to integrate mental health and wellbeing across Government**
The Champion will work across Government and the independent sector, to help the integration of mental health considerations into all policies.
- **An adviser to senior stakeholders and a constructive challenger of decisions and policies**
The Champion will work together with Government and others to further mental health and to be a positive voice. The Champion will also provide constructive challenge and a critical voice in the public debate.
- **A network hub for the development of positive mental health across Northern Ireland**
The Champion will promote, through a network hub, meaningful contact between people with a role in progressing mental health in Northern Ireland. This will include accessing leaders across the UK and internationally in wider strategic developments.

3.3 *While the Champion is not a decision maker with respect to government policy, they will endeavour to influence policy direction, where practicable. In order to be able to influence the policy direction, the Champion will be included in policy drafts for mental health related issues and will have early access to policy documents. This is on the understanding that such documents are still policy in development, should not be shared, commented on in public or used in any research where there is a possibility it will be published ahead of any policy papers.*

3.4 *The Champion will have a key role in influencing and enhancing the implementation of the Department of Health's Mental Health Strategy 2021-31.*

4. Co-Production

4.1 Co-production is essential in the development of mental health policy.

4.2 Co-production means:

- *Involving those who need to be involved in the process, and ensuring that all have an equal voice. It also means recognising that different people have different strengths and ensuring that the outcome is what is best for those who are directly impacted.*
- *Considering the reality of difficulties for those who suffer from mental ill health or have been affected directly or indirectly by mental ill health and deaths related to mental health. Importantly, it is about ensuring the focus is on bringing the best out of people and focusing on positive messages such as recovery.*

4.3 *The Champion will therefore have regular contact with all who have an interest in mental health. This includes persons with lived experience, professionals, Government Departments and agencies, academics and others. The Champion will also engage widely across the public and private sector stakeholder groups.*

5. Key Objectives and Reporting Requirements

5.1 *Key objectives of the Mental Health Champion are:*

- To participate in the public debate around mental resilience, suicide, mental health and recovery.*
- To participate in policy development across Government, helping Departments and officials when developing mental health policy and policies that can help to promote psychological wellbeing, resilience and good mental health*
- To promote mental health across all society.*
- To encourage Government to think about mental wellbeing, resilience, mental health and recovery and to help integrate the ideas of mental resilience and mental health in all public policy making.*
- To create a focal point for mental wellbeing and mental health discussions and to speak out for those who have lived experience.*
- To challenge decisions where mental wellbeing, suicide prevention, good mental health and recovery are not considered, and where such consideration would be beneficial for society as a whole.*
- To build an evidence base to aid decision making and influence policy, by conducting or procuring bespoke regional research on issues relevant to mental health policy.*

5.2 *The Champion will prepare an Annual Business Plan, which will set out their key objectives and outcomes to be delivered during the year. The Champion will also*

produce an Annual Report for the Minister of Health and the Executive, which will outline their work in the previous year and outcomes achieved against the Business Plan.

5.3 Outcomes on which the Mental Health Champion is expected to report, include:

- Presence in the public arena with public awareness of the Mental Health Champion and the role;
- Enhanced visibility across Government: presence across the public sector arena with awareness of the Mental Health Champion and the role;
- Influence in decision making and interaction with policy makers;
- A voice for those normally voiceless across the public sector;
- Advocate for awareness of psychological wellbeing, mental health and suicide in the public and independent sector.
- The promotion of increased mental resilience across the population of Northern Ireland; and
- Contribution to an improvement in mental health services.

5.4 These outcomes are considered to be key performance indicators for the role. This list is not exhaustive but it gives an indication of key work areas.

5.5 Progress will also be considered at regular governance meetings during the year with Department of Health officials. This will provide an opportunity to identify issues and solutions to enable progress against key outcomes.

6. Appointment Arrangements

6.1 The Mental Health Champion's tenure is for three years, with the potential for one extension of up to three years. The appointment process follows the principles of the Public Appointments process and the appointment decision is made by the Minister for Health.

6.2 The Terms and Conditions of appointment for the Mental Health Champion are contained in a separate Secondment Agreement between the Department of Health and Ulster University.

7. Hosting and Organisational Structure

7.1 For the 2023/24 financial year, the Mental Health Champion and her office will be hosted, at arm's length, by the Department making use of and in compliance with all departmental IT, Finance, HR and office services.

7.2 This arrangement will be reviewed on an annual basis.

7.3 The Champion will be supported by the following staff:

- 1 x Senior Research / Policy Support Officer (Grade 7);
- 1 x Research / Policy Support Officer (Deputy Principal);
- 1 x Communications / Media Support Officer (Deputy Principal); and
- 1 x Administrative Support Officer (AO).

8. Finance

8.1 The annual budget for the Champion's office has been agreed as up to £500k, which is to cover staffing costs, office overheads and other programme expenditure.

8.2 The Champion will develop an annual budget plan for the office to accompany the Annual Business Plan. Expenditure should be authorised and incurred within the NICS delegated budgetary limits, and must adhere to general accounting rules and public procurement principles. The Champion will monitor expenditure against the budget profile and will provide monthly returns to the Sponsor Branch in the Department of Health.

9. Governance and Reporting

9.1 The Mental Health Champion will work within the strategic scope of their role as detailed in these Terms of Reference and any subsequent amendments approved by the NI Executive.

9.2 The Champion retains the freedom to make independent decisions on the strategic direction of their work area as set out in the Annual Business Plan.

9.3 The Champion's office will follow and utilise the hosting organisation's governance processes and systems for the purposes of IT, finance, HR, risk management, procurement and estates. These areas will be covered in regular accountability meetings with the Department in a similar manner to those conducted for other Departmental ALBs.

9.4 The Champion will share their Annual Business Plan with the Sponsor Branch in the Department of Health no later than the start of the financial year to which it relates. The Champion will provide their Annual Report to the Minister of Health within three months of the end of the reporting year, who will update the Executive in respect of progress against key performance indicators for the role.

9.5 With regards to the wider governance and accountability arrangements associated with managing public resources and safeguarding public funding, including HR, finance, information governance and risk management, the Champion will report to the Deputy Secretary, Social Services Policy Group in the Department of Health.

2024/25 Business Plan (summarised)

Objectives/Goals	Tasks	Activities
<p>1. Presence in the public arena with public awareness of the Mental Health Champion and the role</p>	<p>1.1 Update and continue to develop the MHC Comms Strategy</p> <p>1.2 Targeted stakeholder engagement aligned to highlight, promote and implement elements of the MHC's role</p> <p>1.3 Ad hoc involvement in relevant media messaging</p>	<p>1.1.1 To include the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2024/25 Comms Campaign (detail and content to be considered in conjunction with our Comms Partner and partner agencies); • Promotion and involvement in awareness days (to include World Mental Health Day and Suicide Prevention Day) in conjunction, where practicable with other Organisations and Government Agencies; • Updating content on the MHC website; • Preparation and submission of media pieces to support campaigns and awareness events; and • Budget permitting, organise and run a conference(s) on topics associated with our strategic direction for 2024/25; <p>1.2.1 Strategic meetings with key stakeholders;</p> <p>1.2.2 Conduct site visits with statutory service providers;</p> <p>1.2.3 Conduct site visits with charity and voluntary service providers; and</p> <p>1.2.4 Participation in the 2024/25 Health Survey.</p> <p>1.3.1 Social media and public messaging around mental health and wellbeing.</p>
<p>2. Enhanced visibility across Government: presence across the public sector arena</p>	<p>2.1 Publication of an Annual report for 2023/24</p> <p>2.2 Prevention and early intervention</p>	<p>2.1.1 Submit an Annual Report on the 2023/24 performance of the MH Champion's office.</p> <p>2.2.1 Provide mental health and wellbeing guidance and</p>

<p>with awareness of the Mental Health Champion and the role</p>	<p>2.3 Suicide prevention</p> <p>2.4 Children and young people</p> <p>2.5 Alcohol and drugs</p>	<p>expertise to government departments and organisations regarding prevention and early intervention when required.</p> <p>2.2.2 Continued membership and participation in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criminal Justice Healthcare Oversight Group - Mental Health Strategic Reform Board - PEACEPLUS Programme Management Committee - Age NI Good Vibrations Programme Advisory Committee <p>2.3.1 Provide mental health and wellbeing guidance and expertise to government departments and organisations regarding suicide prevention when required.</p> <p>2.3.2 Continued membership and participation in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protect Life 2 steering group - Protect Life 2 Research and Development Subgroup - Towards Zero Suicide - MHC’s Cross Departmental Coordination Action Group <p>2.4.1 Provide guidance and expertise to government departments and organisations regarding children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing when required.</p> <p>2.4.2 Continued membership and participation in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DE Reference Group for the Review of Restraint and Seclusion in Educational Settings - DfE Advisory Group to Oversee the FE Policy Review of Student Support. <p>2.4.3 High level monitoring of the Still Waiting Action Plan.</p> <p>2.4.4 Continue to engage with key stakeholders.</p> <p>2.5.1 Provide mental health and wellbeing guidance and expertise to government departments and organisations</p>
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		regarding alcohol and drugs when required.
3. Influence in decision making and interaction with policy makers	<p>3.1 Participate in discussion with all NICS Departments and Ministers</p> <p>3.2 Provide advice and guidance to the NI Executive and/or political representatives</p> <p>3.3 Raise the profile of Mental Health and Wellbeing</p>	<p>3.1.1 Respond to relevant consultations for all NICS Departments that require MHC input;</p> <p>3.1.2 Offer to meet with newly appointed;</p> <p>3.1.3 Attend NI Assembly Committees as and when invited;</p> <p>3.1.4 Meet with NICS Officials as requested/required.</p> <p>3.1.5 Support the implementation of strategies and policies that will impact on Mental Health.</p> <p>3.1.6 Conduct/procure policy and research work.</p> <p>3.2.1 Conduct a series of meetings with MH spokespeople from the main Political Parties in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>3.2.2 Participate in relevant Executive Groups.</p> <p>3.2.3 Continued participation in All Party Group meetings.</p> <p>3.2.4 Meet with political representatives on an ad hoc basis as and when required</p> <p>3.3.1 Meet with relevant stakeholder groups.</p>
4. A voice for those normally voiceless across the public sector	<p>4.1 Identify and meet with individuals and groups who are underrepresented in public debates</p> <p>4.2 Meet with individual members of the public and Mental Health charities and organisations</p> <p>4.3 Identify and take steps to raise awareness of social isolation and other social determinants that lead to poor mental health</p>	<p>4.1.1 Engage with those who are underrepresented to ensure their views are considered/included</p> <p>4.2.1 Meet with members of the public as required.</p> <p>4.2.2 Meet with Mental Health charities and organisations as required.</p> <p>4.2.3 Conduct site visits with community and voluntary MH organisations.</p> <p>4.3.1 Remain agile and take steps to address social determinants of poor mental health as and when these are identified</p>
5. Advocate for awareness of psychological	<p>5.1 Participate in regional discussions and surveys regarding psychological wellbeing, mental health and suicide</p>	<p>5.1.1 Extend the working arrangements of MHC's temporary Research Officer in order to continue stay abreast of developments and to carryout research into areas</p>

wellbeing, mental health and suicide in the public and independent sector		<p>impacting on Mental Health.</p> <p>5.1.2 Participate in regional and all island research projects relevant to the MHC Key Themes.</p>
6. The promotion of increased mental resilience across the population of Northern Ireland	<p>6.1 Support the ongoing implementation of the Protect Life 2 Strategy and the Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework the aligned funding requirements</p> <p>6.2 Participate in regional discussions that present opportunities to influence practices which may impact on resilience</p>	<p>6.1.1 Support the ongoing review of the PL2 Strategy's actions.</p> <p>6.1.2 Provide advice, guidance and feedback through the PL2 Steering Group.</p> <p>6.1.3 Lobby for funding to be made available where there is a risk that work on the PL2 Strategy may not progress as planned.</p> <p>6.1.4 Continued membership and participation in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protect Life 2 steering group - Protect Life 2 Research and Development Subgroup <p>6.1.5 Support the ongoing implementation of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework.</p> <p>6.1.6 Provide advice, guidance and feedback on observed performance to the Departments of Health & Education (and relevant ALBs).</p> <p>6.1.7 Lobby for funding to be made available where there is a risk that work on the Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework may not progress as planned.</p> <p>6.2.1 Involvement in public discussions on topics with a MH impact.</p> <p>6.2.2 Participate in regional discussions regarding resilience in our children and young people.</p>
7. Contribution to an improvement in mental health services	<p>7.1 Support and provide guidance with the implementation plan for the MH strategy</p> <p>7.2 Participate in regional discussions regarding current and future mental health services</p>	<p>7.1.1 Support the ongoing implementation of the Mental Health Strategy.</p> <p>7.1.2 Provide advice, guidance and feedback on observed performance to the Department of Health.</p> <p>7.1.3 Lobby for funding to be made available where there is a risk that work on the Mental Health Strategy may not progress as planned.</p>

		<p>7.1.4 Continued membership and participation in the Mental Health Strategic Reform Board.</p> <p>7.2.1 Continued membership and participation in the Executive Working Group on Mental Wellbeing Resilience and Suicide Prevention, if reconstituted within the reporting period.</p> <p>7.2.2 Participate in the 2024/25 NI Life & Times survey.</p> <p>7.2.3 Work with HSC Trusts to promote and improve MH services and advocate to Trusts for Services for particular high risk groups.</p> <p>7.2.4 Promote awareness and access to available sources of funding for MH services.</p>
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