

Office of the Mental Health Champion



2022/23

Annual Report

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Mental Health Champion: 2022/23 Annual Report

Contents

Section title	Page
Foreword and introduction	5
Summary of purpose	5
Governance statement	5
Performance and achievements during the reporting period	7
2022/23 Budget summary	13
Forward look to 2023/24	14
Acknowledgements	14
Annex A: Terms of Reference for the Mental Health Champion's Role	15
Annex B: 2023/24 Business Plan	20

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Mental Health Champion: 2022/23 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. In the absence of an NI Executive the annual report will be provided to the Permanent Secretary for the Department of Health. This annual report covers core business activity during the 2022/23 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 with the full support of the NI Executive who were 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 (when in post) 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 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 appointment of a Senior Accountable Officer within the Office of the Mental Health Champion during the reporting period has underpinned 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 2022/23 is provided below under the section titled "2022/23 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 2023/24

A summary of the Business Plan for the Mental Health Champion for the 2023/24 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 408* external meetings during the reporting period. This included:

Meetings with	Number
People with lived experience	57
Political representatives	23
Government/policy teams	94
Professional groups	70
Community and Voluntary sector groups	69
Communications teams	52
Academics	43
Total	408

** This is a reduction on the 2021/22 figure of 596 external meetings. The majority of meetings during the 2021/22 reporting period took place virtually. The reintroduction of face to face meetings in the last reporting period resulted in longer meetings and less available time due to traveling.*

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 role and 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. 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 an inpatient death at a mental health facility in NI, as well as UTV's Up Close programs on the rise in drug deaths in Belfast, where the Mental Health Champion spoke about the need for dual diagnosis services. Professor O'Neill regularly appeared on radio and television shows to raise public awareness on topics such as suicide statistics in NI, the Mental Health Strategy funding, children and young people's mental health, eating disorders, and antidepressant prescribing rates to name a few. The Mental Health Champion also participated in interviews by UTV and BBC Radio Ulster's Talkback about letters she sent to MLAs to call for mitigations to be put in place to lessen the impact of the cost-of-living to mental health in NI.

In June 2022, the Mental Health Champion wrote a two-part platform piece in the Irish News based on her evidence to the Independent Review of Education, called 'Towards a new definition of excellence'. The Champion wrote in detail about why the Independent Review of Education is an unprecedented opportunity for NI to improve the mental health and emotional intelligence of the population through schools. The piece was intended to help raise public awareness of the independent review as well as what is currently happening to support children and young people's mental health in schools.

During the reporting period the Office of the Mental Health Champion ran two public awareness campaigns; the first campaign followed on from the #PlugTheGap lobbying campaign that the Mental Health Champion led in 2021/2022. The original campaign was a letter to MLAs, supported by all the key mental health groups in Northern Ireland, calling for the full funding of the Mental Health Strategy to be secured. The campaign expanded on this messaging on the lead up to the 2022 Assembly Election by creating animated videos that highlighted to the public why it was essential for political parties to secure the Strategy's funding in full, to combat against the high cost of poor mental health to the NI economy (£3.4 billion). The videos were used as adverts across the main social media platforms and several written pieces by the Mental Health Champion were published in the Irish News, Belfast Telegraph and Newsletter to increase the public's knowledge. The campaign, along with a series of correspondence and meetings with the five main Northern Ireland political parties, helped to ensure that commitments to fund the Mental Health Strategy were included in respective party manifestoes.

The second campaign called 'We're Better When We Talk' was a large multi-channel advertising campaign from January to March 2023, which helped to raise public awareness about the importance of talking about our feelings and emotions to support our mental wellbeing. This was based on one of the 5 Steps to Well-Being, Connect, the evidence for which is outlined in the New Economics Foundation's report "[Five Ways to Wellbeing](#)". The campaign performed exceedingly well; there was over 27 million impressions, 17,003 click throughs to the Mental Health Champion's website and the campaign CPT (cost per thousand individuals reached) was £5.80. Social media was a key platform overperforming with public engagement, the average CPT was £1.00 compared the platform benchmark averages of £10. The television advertisement was seen at least once by 74% of the target audience and outdoor elements like the drinks coasters and washroom posters supplied to local business proved particularly popular with the Mental Health Champion's Office receiving a number of positive emails about these elements. This campaign also included an interview with U105 which gave the Mental Health Champion a chance to publicly speak about the campaign and ensure people are aware of the work that is going on to reform mental health services and improve the provision of wellbeing interventions within the education system.

This was also an exciting year for the Mental Health Champion's Office as our website launched in October 2022 for World Mental Health Day. The website has become, and continues to be, a vital tool to raise the public's knowledge of the Mental Health Champion and the role. It's been backdated with the work and campaigns the Mental Health Champion has led on and has given the Office a platform to provide much more detailed information and signposting that wasn't possible solely through the use of social media channels. The 'We're Better When We Talk' campaign was also able to use the website as a landing page to drive the traffic towards and once on the page the public were able to find out more about the Mental Health Champion role and the work currently being undertaken.

This reporting period also saw the Mental Health Champion host two public engagement events for the first time ever. In May 2022, the Mental Health Champion hosted a joint event with ARK to launch the findings of 'Attitudes to mental health and suicide in Northern Ireland' from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2021. This event was attended by around 100 attendees including members of the general public, representations from statutory and community/voluntary mental health services and senior policy makers. The event was livestreamed through the Mental Health Champion's Twitter page and was also recorded by ARK and published on their YouTube channel.

The Mental Health Champion then hosted their first ever large-scale public event, 'Generation Hope: Youth Suicide Prevention Conference'. Originally planned for September 2022, the conference was rescheduled to February 2023 due to the passing of Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The Conference hosted speakers from across the UK and Ireland at an all-day conference to discuss evidence-based suicide prevention interventions and strategies. It included sessions on the media and suicide, and postvention with keynotes, panel discussions, breakout sessions and plenty of Q&A time for attendees chaired by the BBC's Tara Mills. Around 220 guests attended the rescheduled event with 200 registered to attend the online livestream. The feedback forms reflected that the event was a success with attendees really enjoying the day and the speakers who participated. Both events hosted by the Mental Health Champion were free to attend and registration was open to everyone.

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 five key themes:

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, or 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;
- Mental Health Strategic Reform Board;
- Promoting MH through Public Awareness, Early Intervention and Prevention Steering Group;

- Regional Mental Health Outcomes Framework Steering Group;
- Wellbeing Framework Project Board;
- 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;
- The Inter-Departmental Working Group: NICCY ‘Still Waiting’;
- ICS Strategic Outcomes Framework (MH & Emotional Wellbeing Focus Group);
- Restraint and Seclusion Reference Group;
- Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework Programme Board;
- DfE Advisory Group to Oversee the FE Policy Review of Student Support;
- 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, when sitting, and political representatives and to participate in discussion with all NICS Departments and Ministers, when in post, in order to raise the profile of Mental Health and Wellbeing in Northern Ireland. During the reporting period, the Champion had various meetings (23 in total) with Political Representatives including a meeting with the Minister 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 during 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 assisted the Chair of the APG on Mental Health in preparing terms of reference for an Inquiry into Mental Health Education & Early Intervention in Schools. The Champion also prepared evidence for this Inquiry. In addition, the Mental Health Champion met with a number of organisations with a view to influencing policies in relation to mental health issues. The Champion provided written input to:

- The Department of Health’s consultation on the reform of Adult Social Care;
- The Department of Health’s consultation on Minimum Unit Pricing;
- The Probation Board’s consultation on the Draft Corporate plan (2023-26);
- The Public Health Agency’s consultation on postvention;
- The Department of Education’s consultation on the Draft Corporate Plan (2023-2028);
- The Department for the Economy’s consultation on Miscarriage Leave;
- The Department of Justice’s consultation on the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility;
- The Department of Justice’s consultation on the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy;
- The Department of Health’s consultation on Support for Care Leavers;
- The Department of Health’s consultation on Transitional Adoption Support Services;
- The Department of Health’s consultation on the Proposed Closure of Muckamore Abbey Hospital; and
- The Department for Communities’ consultation on the Debt Respite Scheme.

A voice for those normally voiceless across the public sector

During the reporting period, the Mental Health Champion met with over 125 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.

It should be noted that 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.

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 2022/23 budget. A findings report from the research team is to be published in Quarter Four of 2023. 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 are able to add in modules 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 will be made available on the Mental Health Champion website and via social media channels when available.

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. The children and young people 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/ not useful and why. Participants were also asked to consider what they think is needed within a MH 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 summaries after the event by the research officer. Focus groups were conducted in line with NICCY: [Participation with Children and Young People: advice to public bodies - Niccy](#).

A report summarising all children and young people engagement events will be produced by end of 2023 and will be made available on the Mental Health Champion website.

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. During the reporting period, the Mental Health Champion continued to lobby for funding to be made available for the strategy by launching a social media and print campaign called #PlugTheGap in the run up to the 2022 General Election to highlight the cost effectiveness of the Mental Health Strategy in relation to the NI economy. This also included, but was not limited to, meeting with various local political representatives, meeting with the Permanent Secretary for the Department of Health and writing to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

In addition, 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 has provided 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. The Mental Health Champion has also publicly advocated for the protection of youth services and early intervention programmes within Schools to the DE Permanent Secretary and the CEO of the Education Authority, and has highlighted the need for the continuation of therapeutic interventions in schools such as those delivered via the Healthy Happy Minds programme (with consideration to the need for workforce planning).

The Mental Health Champion uses the evidence based, "*Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing*" approach to promote wellbeing and resilience across the population. These form the framework for her media work, podcasts and webinars on this topic. During the reporting period, the Mental Health Champion led a prominent multimedia campaign promoting a 'Connect' from the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing. The campaign was called 'We're Better When

We Talk’ and promoted the importance of speaking about feeling and emotions to support mental wellbeing. This campaign was aimed at promoting talking or ‘connecting’ as an important tool increase mental resilience for the general public. This campaign generated over 27 million impressions. 17,003 click throughs to the Mental Health Champion’s website and the campaign CPT (cost per thousand individuals reached) was £5.80.

Contribution to an improvement in mental health services

During the reporting period, the Mental Health Champion supported specific service improvements within HSC Trusts. The Mental Health Champion also visited facilities delivering mental health services in Craigavon Area Hospital and in Knockbracken Healthcare Park, in order to hear the views of service providers and to establish how services are currently being delivered in practice. The Mental Health Champion also has 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.

2022/23 Budget summary

The Mental Health Champion budget for the reporting period totalled £506k* and comprised two components: salaries and operational expenditure. At the start of the reporting period the Mental Health Champion budget was forecasted to spend £283k on salaries and £212k on operational expenditure. Actual spend for the reporting period was as follows:

Components	Actual (£'000)
Salaries	322
Operational expenditure	184
Total	506

* The 2022/23 was made up of the normal £495k budget and an accrual of £11k from last year’s budget.

An analysis of each component is provided below.

Salaries

The Office of the Mental Health Champion was staffed by four personnel for the entire reporting period, the Mental Health Champion; a Senior Policy and Research Officer; a Policy and Research Officer; and a Communication Officer. The Administrative Officer position was vacant for the majority of the reporting period until the vacancy was filled substantively in February 2023. During business planning for the 2022/23 financial year it was decided to allocate a portion of the operational expenditure to enhancing the office’s 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. The temporary Researcher post was subsequently filled in September 2022 and is currently being 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.

Operational expenditure

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

	£
Equipment and communication costs	1,449
Development of MHC website	990
Comms activity *	127,670
Participation in external research **	45,666
Staff training and conferences	895
Professional fees	5,547
Hospitality	139
Totals	182,356

* The Office of the Mental Health Champion oversaw a large comms campaign during the reporting period and hosted a youth suicide conference.

** The Office of the Mental Health Champion participated in three external research projects, KLT, YLT and a non-testing study.

Underspend

During the reporting period, there was an underspend of circa £1,500 on the budget allocated to the Mental Health Champion. This represents under 0.5% of the overall budget.

Forward look to 2023/24

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 2023/24 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);
- Promotion and involvement in awareness days;
- 2023/24 communications activities;
- Site visits to statutory and voluntary & community service providers; and
- A round of meetings with individual political parties, NI Ministers (when in post) and relevant UKG Ministers.

The Mental Health Champion will continue to be available to the NI Executive (when sitting), individual Ministers (when in post), 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 2023/24 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 2023/24 financial year is as shown in Annex B.

Acknowledgements

Professor O'Neill would like to acknowledge the role of the former 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.

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 2022/23 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.

2023/24 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 Develop the existing 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"> • 2023 Comms Campaign (detail and content to be considered in conjunction with our Comms Partner); • Organise and run a conference(s) / expo on topics associated with our comms strategy; • Promotion and involvement in awareness days (to include World Mental Health Day and Suicide Prevention Day); • Updating content on the MHC website; • Preparation and submission of media pieces. <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</p> <p>1.2.4 Participation in the 2023/24 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 with awareness of the Mental Health Champion and the role</p>	<p>2.1 Publication of an Annual report for 2022/23</p> <p>2.2 Prevention and early intervention</p> <p>2.3 Suicide prevention</p> <p>2.4 Children and young people</p> <p>2.5 Alcohol and drugs</p>	<p>2.1.1 Submit an Annual Report on the 2022/23 performance of the MH Champion’s office</p> <p>2.2.1 Provide mental health and wellbeing guidance and 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

		<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 <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 - The independent review of education - 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 regarding alcohol and drugs when required</p>
<p>3. Influence in decision making and interaction with policy makers</p>	<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 Ministers if appointed within this financial year. Offer to meet with relevant Permanent Secretaries and H.O.C.S in the absence of Ministers</p> <p>3.1.3 Attend NI Assembly Committees if and when they are resumed 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 (<u>if and when reformed</u>)</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 wellbeing, mental health and suicide in the public and independent sector	<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 impacting on Mental Health</p> <p>5.1.2 Participate in regional and all island research projects relevant to the MHC Key Themes</p>

<p>6. The promotion of increased mental resilience across the population of Northern Ireland</p>	<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 implementation of the PL2 Strategy</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</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>
<p>7. Contribution to an improvement in mental health services</p>	<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</p>

		<p>Suicide Prevention, <u>if reconstituted within the reporting period</u></p> <p>7.2.2 Participate in the 2023/24 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> <p>7.2.5 Continue working with Service User Consultants (through PCC <u>if the forum is still available</u>)</p>
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