



**The British
Psychological Society**

Northern Ireland Regional Office

British Psychological Society

Key Messages for Northern Ireland Elections 2016 and Beyond

About the British Psychological Society

The British Psychological Society, incorporated by Royal Charter, is the learned and professional body for psychology and psychologists in the United Kingdom. We are a registered charity with a total membership of over 53,000 members, of which over 2000 are resident in Ireland. The Northern Ireland Branch was formed in 1956.

The British Psychological Society believes there are a number of priorities for Northern Ireland which parties and individual candidates may share. To enhance evidence-based policy we would be pleased to discuss these and provide relevant information, evidence and drivers from a psychological perspective. These are summarised overleaf as they relate to specific departmental and cross-departmental objectives.

Health and mental health

- Parity of entitlement to treatment between mental and physical health.
- Improved access to psychological therapies, and choice therein, which is informed by the evidence base and outcomes monitoring with a concomitant reduction in prescribing and prescribing costs.
- As per NICE guidance, increased access to psychological interventions for those with long term physical health conditions (e.g. dementia, diabetes, heart and neurological diseases) to promote better adjustment and coping and reduce disability and disability costs.
- Access to psychological interventions for those who are experiencing conflict-related post-traumatic stress in the short, medium and longer term.

- Access to psychological services to address the transgenerational effects of the conflict on the mental health of infants and young children, as well as on parenting.
- Early psychological intervention with children and families at risk of co-occurring mental, behavioural and social conditions.
- Greater efforts to reduce rates of suicide and self-harm.
- Greater recognition of the psychological benefits of sports' participation for both mental and physical health.
- Increased efforts to tackle the stigma faced by those with mental health conditions.
- Appropriate levels of provision for children and young peoples' mental health services.
- Reduction in the use of anti-psychotic medication for those with dementia who do not actually need it.
- Early intervention to support the psycho-social needs of children and young people by providing access to psychological support in all schools and colleges.

Behaviour change and public health

Northern Ireland is facing an ever-growing public health challenge which threatens the sustainability of Northern Ireland's health and social care systems, population wellbeing, national productivity and efforts to achieve a genuine reduction in social inequalities. The key statistics from the Northern Ireland Health Survey underline this challenge:

- Rates of overweight and obesity in adults have risen from 56 per cent in 1997 to 61 per cent in 2013/14.
- 25 per cent of children are either overweight or obese.
- 1/5 of people have mental health problems and rates for those from the most deprived areas were double the rates for those from least deprived areas.
- Only 53 per cent of people are meeting the recommended weekly levels of physical activity.
- While smoking rates have fallen 4 per cent in the last decade, over 1/5 people still smoke

In order to address these growing public health challenges, the British Psychological Society calls for:

- Greater understanding and application of psychological interventions that can be brought to scale at relatively low cost and change behaviours to improve public

health, such as addressing obesity, smoking rates, physical inactivity and improving adherence to medication.

- Reduce the risk factors for non-communicable chronic conditions (chronic heart disease, obesity, diabetes, dementia) such as dietary intake, lack of physical activity and smoking cessation.
- The use of psychological theory and its applications to achieve better self-management for those with long-term conditions, better understanding of how to reduce missed appointments and improve compliance with medical treatment by promoting patient satisfaction with care.
- Other examples where psychological interventions can promote more positive behaviours include understanding school absenteeism, personal debt and energy conservation.

Education

- Greater focus is needed on implementing, and where necessary revising, early intervention and parenting support strategies to support the psycho-social and educational development of children and families.
- Greater recognition by schools of the prevalence of acquired brain injury in young children and adolescents and their support needs.
- Anti-bullying legislation which is psychologically informed with respect to policies and procedures.
- Mental health awareness training for all staff who work with children and young people, and improved sign-posting to support services.
- More commissioned places to support the training of applied psychologists to meet the workforce shortfall and especially in the statutory sectors.
- Support for the teaching of the psychology discipline in schools.

Justice

- Wider recognition and understanding of neuro-disabilities in children and young people across health, social, education and justice agencies. Reports show that 32 per cent of juvenile offenders have borderline intellectual disability range, 30 per cent of the youth prison population have clinically diagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and 14 per cent have possible intellectual disability.
- Earlier assessment and intervention of neuro-disabilities in children and young people before coming into contact with the criminal justice system.
- Screening for neuro-disabilities in children and young people at earlier stages within the criminal justice process.

- Adoption of neuro-disability assessments when developing offender management plans to ensure appropriate neuro-rehabilitation is provided.
- Reduction in medication in custody with the provision of psychological interventions, and better access to talking therapies on release from custody.

Research

- Greater support for psychology research, and use of psychological evidence, to inform responses to public policy challenges.

Economic and social development

- Greater recognition of the importance of workforce wellbeing to underpin effective organisations.

Psychologically literate workforce

Northern Ireland has the lowest numbers of Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered psychologist than any other part of the UK. Northern Ireland has fewer registered psychologists than Wales and almost 30 per cent less than Scotland and England. Greater effort should be made to ensure adequate provision and access to psychological expertise.

Further information

The British Psychological Society would be pleased to provide the relevant evidence base from the Society and elsewhere to support and expand upon the policy priorities identified above. The Society would also be pleased to identify lead academics and practitioners from across its membership to further advise on these priorities and how they may be addressed.

In the first instance the Northern Ireland Advisor, Anne Kerr, may be contacted at n.ireland@bps.org.uk or 02890 974129.