



The Regulation and
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Authority

press release

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Review of Sensory Support Services Highlights Need for Increased Service User Engagement

Today, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) published its report on a review of sensory support services in Northern Ireland. The review was conducted by a team of independent experts from across the UK, working in the field of visual or hearing loss.

This review examined the impact and effectiveness of the Quality Standards for Social Work and Rehabilitation in Sensory Support Services, published by DHSSPS in 2007. Engagement with service users was an integral part of this review. We engaged with over 200 people whose views, opinions and experiences of health and social care trusts' sensory support services were shared with the review team.

Glenn Houston, RQIA Chief Executive, said: **“Since the publication of these standards in 2007, significant progress has been made by the HSC Board and HSC trusts in addressing the rights and needs of those with sensory support needs.”**

In Northern Ireland there are some 300,000 people with a visual impairment or hearing loss, and around 19,000 registered sensory support service users. The services provided by health and social care trusts in this area, centre on rehabilitation and social work support. They also include the provision of information and equipment to assist the daily living of those with a sensory impairment.

Mr Houston continued: **“In our review we noted that trusts across Northern Ireland were at different stages in the delivery of sensory support services. We also highlighted the need to ensure that the information provided to service users is relevant, meets their needs and is made accessible through the provision of alternative formats. We recommend that HSC trusts continue to work together to further develop common strategies, policies and staff training for sensory support services. We also believe that the involvement of service users is crucial in the future development of sensory support services.”**

The review team particularly noted a lack of provision of services for people who are deafblind. There needs to be a deafblind strategy developed across all trusts. They also recommended that the current sensory support quality standards should be reviewed, to take account of emerging developments and the changing context within which within these services are delivered.

Glenn Houston concluded: **“Effective and timely referral to sensory support services can make a real difference for service users and their carers. We commend the enthusiasm and motivation of sensory support staff throughout the trusts, who have demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the range of issues facing those with a sensory impairment.”**

The review team has made a range of recommendations for DHSSPS, the HSC Board and for trusts around Northern Ireland to improve services for those with a sensory support need. RQIA would also encourage these organisations to continue to build on the significant improvements made in sensory support services in recent years.

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For further information:

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Editors' Notes**The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)**

RQIA, established in April 2005, is the independent health and social care regulatory body for Northern Ireland. In its work RQIA encourages continuous improvement in the quality and availability of health and social care services through its programmes of inspection and review.

This review of sensory support services was carried out as part of RQIA's Three Year Review Programme, 2009-12, which is available at: http://www.rqia.org.uk/cms_resources/RQIA%20Three%20Year%20Review%20Programme%202009-12.pdf.

The Review of Sensory Support Services in Northern Ireland will be available at http://www.rqia.org.uk/publications/rqia_review_reports.cfm from Tuesday 20 December 2011.