

## Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) Northern Ireland

### Deaf and Hard of Hearing People's Access to Democracy

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote new ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local, community and national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about RNID Northern Ireland's Deaf and Hard of Hearing People's Access to Democracy project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by RNID.

### Introduction

RNID is a national charity which aims to achieve a better quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing People's Access to Democracy project delivered two workshop days across four locations in Northern Ireland, followed by an opportunity to participate in panel sessions with politicians. It also produced a DVD with information on how to vote and systems of government in the UK and Europe.

### Objectives

The project aimed to:

- increase knowledge of local, devolved, national and European systems of government among deaf and hard of hearing people from Northern Ireland
- build their confidence in participating in those processes
- provide an opportunity for them to interact directly with their elected representatives.

### Funding

The project received a grant of £37,170, and ran from January to December 2006.

### How successful was the project?

The project involved assertiveness training, discussion forums, an opportunity to meet with politicians, and the production of a DVD. Four sessions of assertiveness training, followed by a 'meet your politicians' panel session, were held in Belfast, Omagh, Ballymena and Armagh.

At the beginning of the project, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to establish their current levels of awareness and understanding of the political and democratic process in Northern Ireland and beyond, their current engagement with political representatives, and their involvement in democratic activities. They were also asked to complete brief evaluation forms at the end of each project activity to assess the more physical nature of the events, and to ask for recommendations on improving event planning and management.

The DVD was completed in December 2007 and sent to 234 contacts with an evaluation form. A focus group of five deaf and hard of hearing people was also held. The evaluations indicated that people felt that they had learned about political life in Northern Ireland from the DVD. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents felt that they were more likely to vote after watching the DVD, although some explained that they had always voted.

The original project plan underestimated how long it would take to produce a DVD and the depth of work required – it had to be produced in both British and Irish sign language with full subtitles. The involvement of several high-profile politicians also meant having to negotiate diary time and convenient filming locations, which postponed filming.

The lengthy production time of the DVD also meant delays to the evaluation process. It was not completed in time to screen at the scheduled discussion forums. Since the start of the project, the wider political environment has also seen changes through the 2007 Assembly elections and the return to a devolved Assembly. It is unfortunate that prior to the election, the DVD was not available to provide information on the voting system in deaf and hard of hearing clubs. However, the DVD does not refer to current events, and

therefore ensures its potential use in future elections.

## Good practice

The following areas worked well within the project:

- Although a small number of contacts responded to the evaluation of the DVD, the focus group setting enabled more in-depth discussion and quality responses.
- Informal discussions between politicians and deaf and hard of hearing people meant that the individuals with hearing impairment were empowered and felt more confident in communicating their issues. Politicians also gained evidence to support their activities.
- An holistic approach comprising government, political parties and service providers ensured the needs of deaf and hard of hearing people were recognised and met.

## Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- Future projects should include a dedicated project manager, either on a part-time or full-time basis, with the sole focus of delivering the project.
- Timelines need to be realistic and flexible, to take into account the amount of preparation and promotion required prior to each event.
- Event planning needs to consider external events, such as

holiday times, and other activities in which participants may already be involved.

- There should be no longer than a 6 week interval between linked events, ideally there should only be 3–4 weeks.
- Adequate time needs to be planned for the making of any DVDs, as this is a lengthy and involved process. Arrangements should be made for any additional support services required well in advance, e.g. production company recording schedule, sign language provision, subtitling services, artwork, availability of participants, etc.
- To ensure longevity, DVDs should be scripted so as not to refer to current events.

## Further information

For further information about this project please contact:

Claire Lavery,  
Campaigns Coordinator  
RNID NI  
Wilton House  
5 College Square North  
Belfast BT1 6AR

Tel: 028 9023 9619  
[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of the Electoral Commission can be found at: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)