



**Robin Swann, Chairperson
Committee for Employment and Learning**

22 January 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Committee Inquiry into post Special Educational Need Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland.

The Committee for Employment and Learning is undertaking an inquiry into post Special Educational Need (SEN) Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland.

The purpose of the Inquiry is to address the concerns raised by the Committee and advocates for those individuals with learning disabilities and their families that once they leave full time education where they have had long-term support they find themselves with very little help or options for what they do next.

The Committee will critically examine post SEN provision in Northern Ireland including consideration of the current policies, programmes and opportunities available in Northern Ireland for those with learning disabilities leaving education with particular focus on those with moderate and severe learning disabilities as per the SEN categorisation.

The Committee will make recommendations, where appropriate, on how policies, procedures and practises can be improved in order to maximise opportunities to support the transition from education for those with learning disabilities and to alleviate the worry and concern of their families.

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At its meeting on 15 January 2014, the Committee finalised the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry and agreed that I write to you requesting that you provide a written submission to the Inquiry. The Terms of Reference are attached at Annex A.

Further details on the inquiry can be found at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Committees/Employment-and-Learning/Inquiries/>

Your organisation is invited to provide a written submission to the Committee for Employment and Learning by e-mail to cel@niassembly.gov.uk or by post to the Committee Clerk, Room 375, Parliament Buildings, Ballymiscaw, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3XX.

Full guidance on how the written submission should be structured is at Annex C however you should be particularly mindful of the following:

- The submission should be made available in electronic form and in a Word Document format.
- Submissions should respond to each of the terms of reference in turn and clearly specify which of the terms they are responding to. You do not need to respond on all the terms of reference if they are not pertinent to the points that you wish to make.
- Background information should be kept to a minimum - a maximum of one page for information on your organisation or your experience of this field.

The closing date for written submissions is 21 March 2014.

If you require any further information please contact the Committee Clerk, Cathie White, on 028 9052 1448.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Swann MLA
Chairperson

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Annex A

Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into post Special Educational Need Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities.

1. To examine the current range of choice and opportunities available for those with Learning Disabilities¹ on leaving full time schooling.
2. To seek the views of young people, family carers and groups representing children and young people with learning disabilities what services they would like to see in place and how the current situation meets their needs.
3. To research best practice in post school provision for those with learning disabilities.
4. To examine if the quantum and quality of post school provision for those with Learning Disabilities is meeting the demand and develop recommendations to address barriers to participation and delivery of high quality provision.
5. Given the complex and interrelated needs of individuals in this group to identify the barriers to co-ordination across departments – regionally and locally – and make recommendations for improvement.
6. To report the Committee's findings and recommendations to the Assembly.

In reaching its recommendations the Committee will:

- a. Request that the Department details the range of provision it provides across all FE provision, vocational provision and employment support. What is the duration of courses and the number of hours per week (and what happens when it ends)?
- b. Assess the quality of current provision by looking at evaluations carried out.
- c. Assess whether DEL is living up to its commitments under the Bamford Report.
- d. Examine what approaches are working and what the barriers are.

¹ Internationally this term refers to people with dyslexia etc but this review is primarily focused on those with moderate and severe learning difficulties as per the SEN categorisation at annex B.

- e. Examine the provision by FE colleges for those that are below level 2 and who have safety, supervision and holistic care needs and the options available to such individuals from Health and Social Care Trusts or new District Councils.
- f. Assess whether the definition of further education for this student population needs to be broadened: for example: to include physical activity, social and communication skills.

Annex B

Definitions of learning difficulty

A learning disability affects the way a person learns new things in any area of life, not just at school. Find out how a learning disability can affect someone, and where you can find support.

A learning disability affects the way a person understands information and how they communicate. Around 1.5m people in the UK have one. This means they can have difficulty:

- understanding new or complex information
- learning new skills
- coping independently

It is thought that up to 350,000 people have severe learning disabilities. This figure is increasing.

Mild, moderate or severe learning disability

A learning disability can be mild, moderate or severe. Some people with a mild learning disability can talk easily and look after themselves, but take a bit longer than usual to learn new skills. Others may not be able to communicate at all and have more than one disability (see [Profound and multiple learning disability](#), below).

A learning disability is not the same as a learning difficulty or mental illness. Consultant paediatrician Dr Martin Ward Platt says: "It can be very confusing," he says, pointing out that the term "learning difficulties" is used by some people to cover the whole range of learning disabilities.

"It is easy to give the impression, by using a term like 'learning difficulties', that a child has less of a disability than they really do," says Dr Ward Platt.

Some children with learning disabilities grow up to be quite independent, while others need help with everyday tasks, such as washing or getting dressed, for their whole lives. It depends on their abilities.

Children and young people with a learning disability may also have special educational needs. Find out more about [education](#) and how you can [request a statement](#).

Definitions of learning difficulty

All these definitions include recognition of the need for further help with self-help skills and personal care.

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Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD)

Pupils with severe learning difficulties have significant intellectual or cognitive impairments. This has a major effect on their ability to participate in the school curriculum without support. They may also have associated difficulties in mobility and coordination, communication and perception and the acquisition of self-help skills. Pupils with SLD will need support in all areas of the curriculum. They may also require teaching of self-help, independence and social skills. Some pupils may use sign and symbols but most will be able to hold simple conversations and gain some literacy skills. Their attainments may be within the upper P scale range (P4-P8) for much of their school careers (that is below level 1 of the National Curriculum).

Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD)

Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties have severe and complex learning needs, in addition they have other significant difficulties, such as physical disabilities or a sensory impairment. Pupils require a high level of adult support, both for their learning needs and also for personal care. They are likely to need sensory stimulation and a curriculum broken down into very small steps. Some pupils communicate by gesture, eye pointing or symbols, others by very simple language. Their attainments are likely to remain in the early P scale range (P1-P4) throughout their school careers (that is below level 1 of the National Curriculum).

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Pupils with ASD cover the full range of ability and the severity of their impairment varies widely. Some pupils may also have learning disabilities or other difficulties, making identification difficult.

ASD recognises there are a number of sub-groups within the spectrum of autism.

Pupils with ASD find it difficult to:

- understand and use non-verbal and verbal communication
- understand social behaviour, which affects their ability to interact with children and adults
- think and behave flexibly, which may be shown in restricted, obsessional or repetitive activities.

Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

Children and young people with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD) have conditions that co-exist. These conditions overlap and interlock creating a complex profile. The co-occurring and compounding nature of complex learning difficulties requires a personalised learning pathway that recognises children and young people's unique and changing learning patterns. Children and young people with CLDD present with a range of issues and combination of layered needs – e.g. mental health, relationships, behavioural, physical, medical, sensory, communication and cognitive. They need informed specific support and strategies which may include

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transdisciplinary input to engage effectively in the learning process and to participate actively in classroom activities and the wider community.

Their attainments may be inconsistent, presenting an atypical or uneven profile. In the school setting, learners may be working at any educational level, including the National Curriculum and P scales. This definition could also be applicable to learners in Early Years and post-school settings.

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Annex C

Guide to Submitting Written Evidence to Assembly Committees

1. All organisations and individuals are welcome to submit evidence.
2. Written evidence should give a brief introduction to the persons or organisations submitting it (perhaps stating their area of expertise, etc.). It should also set out any factual information they have to offer from which the committee might be able to draw conclusions (or which could be put to witnesses for their reactions). It is also helpful to include any recommendations for action by the government departments and/or others that you or your organisation would like the committee to consider for inclusion in its report.
3. Written evidence should be in the form of a brief, self-contained memorandum with numbered paragraphs but without page numbers, and should be prefaced with a 1-2 page summary plus, if appropriate, a table of contents. Colour printing should be avoided.
4. Submissions should be structured so that each of the issues/ concerns specified in the terms of reference are addressed in turn.
5. If possible, written evidence should be emailed to the committee as a 'word document'. If this is not possible please send fifteen copies of the material submitted. If this would cause delay or difficulty, a single copy will suffice. Memoranda should be stapled rather than bound so that further copies can easily be made.
6. Witnesses should be aware that if they decide to publish the evidence that they provide to the committee, the publication would not be covered by Assembly privilege in relation to the law of defamation. Witnesses who nevertheless decide to publish their evidence should provide the committee with advance notice of their intentions.
7. The committee must give permission for written evidence submitted by witnesses to be made available to the press/public at evidence sessions. Unless indicated otherwise it will be assumed that those submitting written evidence have no objections to it being made public by the committee. If witnesses give oral evidence, copies of their written evidence may be made available to the press and public at the hearing and treated as being in the public domain thereafter. Written evidence submitted by those not giving oral evidence will usually be made public by the committee at the end of the inquiry, by publication or other means.
8. Those submitting written evidence should indicate if they wish to be considered to give oral evidence to the committee.

9. All communications should be sent to the Committee Clerk,

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