

## DEPARTMENTAL CO-ORDINATION UNIT



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Dear Cathie

Thank you for your letter of 5 November 2015 seeking an update from the Department on the relevant action plans and policies in respect of post Special Education Needs provision. Progress is set out in the following sections.

### **Bamford Action Plan 2012-2015**

**Action No. 29: Investigate how information provision on transportation issues can be improved for people with learning disabilities.**

The Department revised its existing Travel Safe Guide in May 2014. The Guide provides information to help young people and people with learning disabilities travel safely. It was developed in partnership with a range of organisations including Autism Network NI, Mencap, the Now Project and Stepping Stones.

The Guide is available on the NI Direct website and in audio format. Around 1,900 copies of the Guide have been distributed to organisations representing those with learning difficulties, schools and individuals. Copies will soon be available in libraries across Northern Ireland. Statistics are not available for Transitions clients.

An evaluation of the Guide was undertaken in 2015. The evaluation concluded that the Travel Safe Guide meets its objective to help make journeys by bus or train easier for anyone with a learning disability. Users of the Guide found it helpful when making journeys and believed it made them more confident when using the transport system.

The Department also launched an Access Travel Wallet in April 2014 designed to carry information that could be shared with front line transport staff to make them aware of the specific needs of the holder.

It was identified as an initiative that could assist a range of groups to use public transport by giving them confidence to make a journey including those with a learning disability.

The travel wallet holds credit card sized plastic pockets that can be used to put words and pictures to describe where the traveller wishes to go (e.g. can you please let me know when we get to my stop). This can be done by the individual or a carer in advance of the journey.

During development, the Department worked with Royal National Institute for the Blind NI (RNIB); Action on Hearing Loss; Mencap; the Inclusive Mobility Transport Advisory Council and Translink to ensure that the Wallet met the needs of those who were the target user.

A communications strategy was put in place to ensure that people were aware of the initiative through promotion by NIDirect and through the sector. A distribution plan was drawn up focussing on disability organisations; special schools and those involved in delivering travel training. Information on how to obtain an Access Travel wallet was also posted on the Departmental and NIDirect websites.

As part of the process, Translink rolled out a training programme for their staff to identify and help people who decided to use the wallet when travelling.

An evaluation of the Access Travel Wallet in November 2015 concluded that it aided travel including for those with learning difficulties and others.

The Department will consider how the Travel Safe Guide and Access Travel Wallet can be developed further in the context of a new Accessible Transport Strategy.

The Translink website has been redesigned significantly enhancing the accessibility of travel information for all users. A new Journey Planner has been introduced for the website which is available as an app on Apple and Android platforms.

**Action No. 30: Examine options for improving the provision of travel training schemes.**

The Department has supported the Transport Buddy Service, a volunteer led travel training scheme (funded through the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities as a pilot scheme), delivered by Volunteer Now. An evaluation of the Buddy Scheme has been completed and no decision has been taken on the provision of travel training at this stage.

**Action No. 31: Review the training of staff to ensure that its content covers the needs of people with a learning disability.**

Internally the Department has reviewed the training of staff to ensure that its content covers the needs of people with a learning disability. This has been provided through an ongoing programme of Diversity Now training alongside a programme of Disability Awareness Training.

Translink provides an ongoing training programme to staff to deal with passengers with learning disabilities, with input from the NOW Project and Mencap. This is provided to front-line and back-office staff (nearly 2,200). The driver training course builds up a picture of the difficulties those with a disability face including those with learning difficulties. Additional training was provided to front-line staff to educate them about the Access Travel Wallet and how to provide assistance to users of this travel aid.

**Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) Survey Report on Transition Arrangements from Special Schools and Mainstream Learning Support Centres to Post-School Provision (2014)**

An evaluation of the Buddy Scheme has been completed and no decision has been taken on the provision of travel training at this stage.

**Northern Ireland Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014: Regional Sub Group Transition to Adulthood of Young People with Disabilities**

The Department has issued a revised Travel Safe Guide and Access Travel Wallet to aid independent travel. The Department continues to participate and support the Day Opportunities Implementation Groups at both regional and local levels.

**Disability Strategy**

The Department is currently consulting on a new Accessible Transport Strategy aimed at reducing the barriers to travel faced by older people or people with a disability. The Department will consider measures to improve everyone's transport options in the context of a new Strategy. This will include addressing the physical accessibility of the public transport network, enhancing the accessibility of travel information and aids to travel, enhancing the experience of those using transport and improving engagement with those representing older people and people with a disability.

The content of this letter is fully disclosable under FOI.

Yours sincerely

**[SIGNED]**

**ALAN DOHERTY**  
**Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer**