



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Post Special Educational Needs  
Provision in Education, Employment and  
Training for those with Learning Disabilities:  
Stakeholder Event

4 February 2015

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Employment and Learning

Inquiry into Post Special Educational Needs Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities: Stakeholder Event

4 February 2015

**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)  
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Sydney Anderson  
Mr Phil Flanagan  
Mr William Irwin  
Mr Fra McCann  
Ms Bronwyn McGahan  
Mr Pat Ramsey

**Witnesses:**

Ms Karen Lennon	Colleges Northern Ireland
Mr Mark O'Hara	Department for Employment and Learning
Mr Aidan Murray	Health and Social Care Board
Ms Jenny Ruddy	Mencap
Councillor Donna Anderson	Mid and East Antrim District Council
Ms Edyth Dunlop	Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment
Mr Tom O'Sullivan	Parkanaur College
Ms Geraldine Brereton	Social Security Agency
Ms Lesley Waugh	Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Mr Jasper McKinney OBE	Southern Regional College

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Buchanan):** I thank you for your efforts in the round-table discussions. Each table will now have five minutes to report, after which there will be an opportunity for people from the other tables to add their input. We will start with table 1. We ask that those providing feedback give their name and organisation. You have five minutes in which to report, and it will then be open to anyone else to have input to the discussion.

**Ms Karen Lennon (Colleges Northern Ireland):** Thanks Tom. I am the policy and PR manager for Colleges Northern Ireland, which is the representative body for the six regional further education colleges. At our table, we had a good mix from the FE colleges, the health trusts, Parkanaur College — a specialist college — and the Department of Employment and Learning. We had a good debate.

I will split my feedback into two parts. First, I will give an overview of the issues discussed and, secondly, a flavour of some of the recommendations that we came up with.

The first issue that we identified is the lack of consistency across Northern Ireland at pre-transition level across trusts and providers — the range of different partners. There could be some improvement

in that area. A second issue that we discussed is access to schools. For young people with special educational needs (SEN), we find that access to special schools is fairly easy to facilitate. We can get into talking about what the provision is in special schools post-16, post-19, and so on. However, access to mainstream schools is an issue, and that is where some of our young people come from. We need to get into those schools to let them know what options are available.

A third issue is managing expectations, in particular the expectations of parents of young people with special educational needs. You may have parents who want their young person to go on to a career in childcare. That is what they see their child going into in the future. For a career in childcare, however, you require a level 3 minimum. We may know that the maximum that the young person will achieve is a level 1. Therefore, we need to manage parental expectations to help find the right course or provision for their young person in order to achieve the best in their life in the long term. In the light of that, we need to manage parents' expectations to make sure that we do not have young people going around and around the system at the same level. It is about letting parents know what level their young person can realistically achieve.

In looking at schools, another area is vocational education and the entitlement framework work. At the moment, FE colleges do a lot of work with schools across Northern Ireland by providing vocational education to young people at levels 1 and 2. However, we are not funded for the more basic provision at entry level 1 and level 2 for young people in schools with special educational needs. That is perhaps a bit of a barrier for those young people. A fifth area that we discussed is work placements for young people. If they are at a training provider or an FE college, and, for example, find a work placement in their second year for three or four weeks, there is an issue with funding. The young people do not have the supported-work person with them when on work placement, so sometimes their work placement fails as a result. There is not the funding there for the training provider to mentor them and provide the supported work to help them through that. That is where there is a gap in funding at the moment.

A final point that we discussed is the recognition of the role to date of providers, whether they be from the FE, voluntary and community, or social economy sector, in improving the lives of the young people and meeting the ambitions that were set out in the Bamford report.

*(The Chairperson [Mr Swann] in the Chair)* The second part of our feedback is on recommendations. We recognise that one size does not fit all. Young people with special educational needs are on a vast spectrum, and we need to look at them all as individuals. The first of our recommendations is to do with transition. Discussions around transition at the post-16 and post-19 stages need to start much earlier. Sometimes it happens a few months before the young person leaves school. It needs to happen much earlier — at 14 years old as a minimum. The second area that we discussed is areas of good practice. There is some good practice in different training providers, colleges and some of the health trusts, although it is not happening right across the board. Areas of good practice need to be recognised so that they can be rolled out right across Northern Ireland. That involves real partnership-working. Nor can we rely on just one Department to help young people with special educational needs. There needs to be a cross-departmental approach taken.

Our third recommendation is for a mixed approach to post-19 provision. For young people, five days a week in a FE college or a training centre is not always the best option. Quite often, the best option is the mixed approach, where young people perhaps spend two days in a college, two days in a centre and one day out on work placement. We recommend that mixed approach and the flexibility behind that. A fourth recommendation concerns how we look at the outcomes for young people who have finished their full-time education or training after the age of 19. What information is needed to make informed decisions about the next steps for them? There needs to be a rounded discussion so that the parent is really well informed of what is available.

I think that that is everything. I am looking around the table in case there is an important point that I missed, but there is not, so that concludes the round-up of our points.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Thank you very much, Karen. Folks, I apologise for missing the start. I open the subject up to the rest of the tables to discuss.

If no one wishes to comment, we shall move on to table 2, which discussed increased opportunities to work.

**Ms Edyth Dunlop (Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment):** I am from the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE), which is an umbrella body that represents

organisations providing vocational training and employment to people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups, using the model of supported employment.

We, too, had a mix at table 2 of representatives from the health sector, FE colleges, and the community and voluntary sector. The main issue for us is the current choice and availability of work for those with learning disabilities, and whether it is adequate. We made some observations and also looked at some recommendations.

Our first point on the availability of services is that there is an inconsistent approach to delivering services across Northern Ireland. There is a bit of a patchwork approach taken. There are some very good models available across Northern Ireland as well, but we are concerned that there will not be opportunities for people to access in every area. A related issue is short-term funding. A lot of the provision comes through the community and voluntary sector, and that is mainly short-term funding or European social fund (ESF) funding, which means that the ongoing support is not necessarily there. We acknowledge that there is provision through DEL, which has a number of programmes. We talked about examples such as Workable, Access to Work and job introduction schemes. We also acknowledged that some of the programmes, such as Workable, operate a time limit of, for example, 16 hours, which you need to be able to meet to access the scheme. The community and voluntary sector deliver a number of those programmes, but they also deliver their own programmes.

One of our recommendations is for a standardised and quality-assured approach across Northern Ireland. We recommend a mapping of all the services, showing not only location and provision but the entrance criteria. Some of the programmes that are delivered through the ESF may take referrals only from Health and Social Care, so, if people are not engaged with Health and Social Care, they cannot necessarily access a programme. The mapping exercise needs to look at good practice across Northern Ireland. Our group talked about models in the rest of Europe, but I believe that there are also a lot of very good models here, which people from Europe come to see. We therefore need to look at what is happening in Northern Ireland as well. We need to map across strategies, and there are a lot in the Department for Employment and Learning. However, there are others in FE and the Department of Education, and we need to see how they impact on one another.

We linked information and communication to the mapping exercise, and it became apparent that not everybody in the group was aware of all the programmes out there to help people, so we felt that information, and how we communicate it, is key.

A number of websites are available. Some trusts have training and employment provision on their websites. For example, we at NIUSE have a directions to employment website that covers the border counties and outlines the different employment opportunities.

We spoke about transition planning, from leaving school to go into FE and then moving into training, employment and adult life. There is an opportunity there, because we have the transition planning process in statute in the Department for Employment and Learning, which states that a plan has to be developed for every young person from the age of 14. Again, the group highlighted the fact that it is not consistently delivered across Northern Ireland in each school. It depends on each school and area. We also had concerns over who helps individuals in mainstream education with their transition plan. Young people who are not known or are without a statement of educational need will not necessarily get a transition plan. Who is supporting them with their career guidance? Often, it is found only when somebody goes into FE or employment that there are issues that could have been addressed much earlier.

That transition plan is an opportunity that is already there at the age of 14. We just need to make it better. There is no statutory responsibility to involve the community and voluntary sector or other partners in the plan, although there is to include the Careers Service. We need a much more joined-up approach and to involve more partners. We have concerns about the Careers Service. It used to have a special needs careers officers, but it no longer does. There is a review of careers guidance under way at the moment, and perhaps that is something that we need to take on board.

A transition planning programme, the title of which I cannot recall, is being delivered in schools. We talked about research and evidence that suggests a different approach being taken. It is a teacher-pupil relationship when you are delivering work skills, when external organisations could really provide that, as well as more realistic work opportunities.

We had the example at our table of the Rail Track model from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. You may be aware of it. It takes people from the transition stage into FE, employment or social firms. It covers all available options.

We looked at models of good practice. We agreed that, to take people into employment, one of the better-recognised models is the supported employment model. It was initially developed for people with significant disabilities but has gone across to all areas of disabilities. The model is around a person-centred approach. To take somebody through it, we need a person to be individualised, for support for that individual to be available in order to create a good job match with an employer and for ongoing support to be provided. There are models throughout Northern Ireland, and we also looked at examples from elsewhere, but the supported employment model has been recognised across the UK as a model to help people into work.

We also talked about career paths, particularly for those coming from FE, and said that we need realistic pathways. We need to look at the curriculum and at what the qualifications are. We said that people are leaving school with perhaps level 1 or level 2 qualifications but that, when they go into FE, they do not have the qualifications or the skills needed to move on. Therefore, we need realistic opportunities and to be able to manage the expectations. We mentioned families having expectations, but we need that from the individual's perspective as well.

We talked about social firms and social enterprises. Yes, they are a good mechanism to get people into work and provide realistic work opportunities, but we define a "social firm" as a business that is set up and employs people from its disadvantaged area. If that is what we are doing, it should be a real job, but a lot of people are using it more for training and throughput of people. We need to be careful about what exactly social firms and a social enterprises are. From our discussions, it seems that a lot of them are used for training and not necessarily as productive businesses that, in the end, are making a profit.

We need to have a mix of day opportunities. An individual's life may not just be about work; he or she may look at the social side as well. We need to look at other areas. We need to do work with employers to raise their awareness about employing people with disabilities.

A big issue for the table was transport, particularly in rural areas. We need more of a transport strategy. We heard a prime example of a person who lives across the river in an area. Rural transport goes only so far there, so another rural transport system had to be used to get to the required place, because the person can work only in that area. Therefore, transport is a big issue. We need to invest in independent travel training as well so that individuals can travel themselves. It is a question of where the funding comes from for that.

We talked about social security benefits. It is a barrier for people with disabilities to get into employment, particularly in and around the whole 16-hour rule for people who are coming off benefits. It is not only about the impact on their benefits and what they are entitled to but about passporting benefits as well, such as Supporting People funding, transport and things like that.

That is me finished. I am sorry for perhaps taking up a wee bit more time.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Does anybody have anything that they want to add on increased opportunities to work?

**Ms Geraldine Brereton (Social Security Agency):** The benefits system was referred to, and, as some of you may be aware, welfare reform will introduce universal credit, which will change the 16-hour rule. That should make it easier for people who want to work some hours rather than full hours. They will not have to go on and off benefits in the way in which they currently do. With the introduction of universal credit, the issue around the 16-hour rule will hopefully be resolved.

**Ms Dunlop:** *[Inaudible.]*

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Does anybody else want to comment on that subject? If not, I will move on to table 3, which discussed access to community leisure facilities.

**Ms Lesley Waugh (Southern Health and Social Care Trust):** I am a locality head for children's disability services in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. Our group was made up of a mix of people. We had some Health and Social Care staff from across different disciplines and some from

the voluntary sector, from NOW and from Destined in Derry. Our question was about whether people with a learning disability can engage with the community and gain skills of interaction, and so on, and whether local community facilities such as leisure centres should be used better. Unfortunately, in among the mix at the table, we did not have anybody from any of the councils or from the leisure centre sector. However, we tried to answer the questions that were put to us.

Much of the discussion covered what other people have already reported back. We tried, at the very beginning, to look at why other reviews, papers and strategies that have come out have not worked or been implemented. We definitely did not have a clear answer to that but we felt that, if the disability strategy, which is a cross-departmental strategy, were implemented, it could help move the whole agenda forward. We tried to find other examples of initiatives, strategies and policies that have worked fairly well and that could be used as a template for moving forward with this agenda.

We talked a bit about neighbourhood renewal and about autism services. In both, a regional process was laid down. It created a framework and a structure at a high level and more locally as well, whereby the various Departments and agencies had to come together across the statutory sector and the community and voluntary sector to draw up a very clear action plan. People were performance-managed against that plan and were accountable for it. We felt that, if something similar could be put in place for leisure facilities, it might help move forward the bit about people falling off the end of the table. We thought that that might be a way of taking forward the issue. That is one of our recommendations.

We also looked at models of good practice, and there were lots of examples of that, particularly from the folk in the voluntary and community sectors, who had some very nice examples of things that worked very well. We felt that that could fit into a process. We looked regionally to see what else is out there and what is working. We looked at family support services and the family support hubs, and we asked whether those are an example of a mechanism whereby you can bring people together at a community level right across the sectors who are able to respond to individuals' needs. We discussed whether that might be a way of taking things forward. We liked the idea of it being very much community-based and were very aware of the need to try to change society's attitudes to and understanding of people with disabilities. Having a community-based approach from the ground up would help equip other agencies, and so on, to include people with disabilities successfully in their services. They need support and encouragement to do that initially to build their confidence, but, once it is done a few times, by and large it works very well. We thought that might be a way of trying to create a hub of local services that have a responsibility for or are involved with people with disabilities.

Who would support work in the environment and how could it be made a safe environment? As others said, we felt that there is a need to have a person-centred approach so that you can look at a particular individual's needs and the risks involved. You can address them that way. Again, it is a multidisciplinary, multi-agency approach that is required. Where would funding come from? We reckoned that, if you have the mechanisms in place, it gives you a means of pooling resources. All of us come with bits of funding and resources, but, if you pool the money, you have much more scope to deliver the kind of model that we were talking about.

We were also asked to look at a monitoring and evaluation system for ensuring good practice. We felt that that needs to have various levels to it. One way of doing that would be through the multi-agency forum that we have talked about, which is about performance management and being able to report back on how you are implementing the action plan. However, you need to have a range of tools in place to have good evaluation and monitoring and to ensure that things move forward. We were asked about an audit of the kind of local support that is available. That point was made by one of the other groups. We reckoned that that is absolutely the starting point. Many of us do not know what is in our own area, never mind anywhere else. That should be the starting point, but we recognised that that is not always easy to do. You can create a directory, but you need to have a means of keeping it up to date and to be changing it all the time. If you have some kind of written document, you will need to have it in a lot of formats. You need to make it accessible to people with learning difficulties. You also need to have it on a website, with links to other websites, and on Twitter, Facebook and all those things. That is achievable. We just need to think our way through it.

I am being reminded that there was also a lot of discussion about transport, particularly in rural localities. It adds another layer of disadvantage to people with difficulties when they cannot access even the services that are there.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Thanks, Lesley. To let you know, we contacted all 37 councils — the 26 old ones and the 11 new ones — and none of them sent a representative. I know that Councillor

Donna Anderson is here, although she is here more in a party and parent capacity than in a Mid and East Antrim District Council capacity.

**Councillor Donna Anderson (Mid and East Antrim District Council):** A bit of both.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Therefore, you will be able to take some of this back to the council. I appreciate that. I just wanted to let everyone know that we contacted all 37 providers, but nobody attended.

**Mr Tom O'Sullivan (Parkanaur College):** It was interesting to hear about the need to develop the holistic person. We recognise that there is a deficiency in the mainstream. This is an opportunity for us to highlight the role of the residential college. We are able not just to provide access to formalised training but to address the needs of the person, which table 3 highlighted there is a deficiency in. We are still very much lacking when compared with England, where it is very much recognised that that personal development is of great importance. This is an opportunity to recognise the role that a residential college plays in Northern Ireland.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Does anyone wish to feed in on that subject? Table 4 was looking at the future roles of health and social care day centres and day opportunities.

**Mr Aidan Murray (Health and Social Care Board):** Our table had parents and carers of children and young people and representatives from trusts, other Departments, the board, and the voluntary and community sector. We had a very good discussion on many of the issues. We approached it by trying to get some answers on the issues that were laid out for us, specifying what is happening in the first instance, trying to see what people think the problem is, and then making some broad recommendations, which I will come to in a moment.

I will start at the top of what we were asked to do. Among us, we tried to identify what the provision of day centres for people with learning disability is at the minute, the plans, and what has been done to bring forward day opportunities. Central to that is establishing, in the first instance, about whom we are talking. It is quite apparent from your documents and from the discussion that, sometimes, when we talk about people with learning difficulties, it is not precisely the same group of people as we mean when we talk about people with learning disabilities, who are eligible for health and social care services. We need to be really clear about that before we go forward and design the solutions.

That said, we were also quite clear that a lot of work has been undertaken in the past number of months and years in partnership with schools and families to seek people's views about what Health and Social Care should be doing in that field for people over the age of 18 when they leave school. There was a general acknowledgement that the choices that we are providing for people over the age of 18 are not enough and that we do not have sole responsibility for meeting transition planning needs. We need to improve both the range and level of provision and to make sure that a high-quality service is available equally across Northern Ireland.

The day opportunities paper that we consulted on the year before last is now being implemented. Some people around the table knew that, while some did not. Some people from the other sectors participated with us in trying to take that forward. Some suggested that the partnership was already in place and was something to build on; others said that they were not even aware that it was in place. Obviously, that cannot meet the whole need. However, it brought up the point of everybody across the different sectors talking to each other at events like this and planning more, rather than letting things happen in an ad hoc way with each Department, board, facility or sector discharging its own responsibility without necessarily discussing in advance the best way to deliver services. That, in itself, was very valuable in trying to scope out the size of the problem.

When we came to talk about size, we reminded ourselves that, in a given year, we are not talking about tens of thousands, or even thousands, of people with a learning disability leaving special schools and moving through transition into adult services. We know, through the work that we have done, the number of people who are coming and which areas they are coming to for the next five years. So, it should be possible for us to identify in a more joined-up way what that resource is.

We heard stories from people around the table that the transition service is not working as well as it could for those people. We heard accounts of the discussion starting for people at 14 but their still not knowing clearly what service they were going to have even though they were approaching their 17th or 18th birthday or leaving school. It is fine to have in place a very good statutory process that starts

at age 14 and puts forward a plan, and people said that assessments were undertaken and plans made. However, people identified that there was still a failing, in that there is not the adequate resource or choice in their local area when those plans had been made. That set the tone for us trying to make recommendations. Obviously, there are still difficulties in the system, as it is being operated, between the different Departments and organisations with responsibilities in this area.

I turn now to the more positive aspects of what we think could and should be done and our recommendations to the Committee. Unsurprisingly, funding loomed large. Notwithstanding my comment that the number involved is not in the tens of thousands, it was recognised that it is a growing population. The number of people with learning disability who are living into adulthood has increased and will continue to increase over the next number of years. Improvements in health and lifestyle have led to more of these youngsters becoming adults. They will continue to live into old age in a way that was not previously the case. So, the number of people who need some level of service is growing. Alongside the health improvements is the continued living of people with more major disabilities and long-term conditions who, previously, would not have survived into adulthood. There is an undoubted need for funding to be made available.

That said, we also identified the different funding streams already available. A joined-up approach was recommended to try to see whether better use could be made of those existing pots. Somebody referred earlier to pooling budgets. Central to this, which was also mentioned earlier, is the apparent inconsistency and unreliability of some of this funding. The funding is European, and some Departments and local authorities put in match funding. The problem with that is, if funding from the ESF or other European funding goes away, as it does because it is time limited, how secure is that funding from the statutory sector? So, a clear recommendation is to try to make more consistent the availability of funding in the long term so that providers, both statutory and voluntary and community, are able to make plans that give security to parents and young people that the services will be available for the years ahead.

Also on the issue of consistency is making sure that everybody has access to good services. We responded to people saying that there is a patchwork, a word used earlier, and pockets of good practice, but that those need to be replicated everywhere. It should not be haphazard: whether you get access to high-quality services and a good choice of services should not depend on where you live. That recommendation is about planning jointly between, for example, the board, other agencies and the different Departments so that we are all clear on the roles and responsibilities that each has and on how we can work together to make sure that the respective roles for health and social care, further education, employment and vocational training, which are all covered in our departmental and arm's-length body responsibilities, can be carried out in a planned way. There are some umbrella organisations and administration for that: under the Bamford review, an interdepartmental senior officers' group reports to the Ministers' interdepartmental group. So, there is already a forum to have that discussion. Other people suggested that a disability policy, as it comes forward, might be the vehicle. Whatever the vehicle, the recommendation is for a plan of action — someone referred to something similar earlier — that can hold all the organisations to account for taking this forward with their respective responsibilities.

Transport came through strongly as an issue. Rather than dwelling on the difficulties, we focused on what we thought might be a positive response. There is a need to redress the imbalance, as people see it, between transport arrangements for going to day centres and transport arrangements for taking part in other daytime, further education or employment opportunities. It is felt very strongly that the present system is not a level playing field and that there is a disincentive for people to take part in activities that are not day centre-located with transport already covered by Health and Social Care provision. We had a discussion about how that might be done. We did not reach a resolved position on, for example, supplementing benefits to make sure that people could access transport independently. However, the recommendation is a levelling of that playing field to make sure that the alternatives to day centres are not viewed as disadvantaged.

Day opportunities and day centres need to improve. We are clear that it should not be a case of either/or and that there needs to be improvement in both. As the model of day centres develops, fewer and fewer people go there for work, training or employment. People are much more likely to attend Health and Social Care day centres because, in addition to their learning disability, they have some other profound long-term condition or multiple disability. People who would benefit from further training, employment and education opportunities are more likely to access those outside the day centres. Therefore, we need to make sure that the provision of both types of service is of a high quality. Those are our major recommendations.



**Councillor D Anderson:** I am here in two roles: as a parent and as a diversity champion for Mid and East Antrim District Council. I just wanted to let you all know that there will be a diversity champion for each new council area, so you can find out who they are. The topic of leisure centres came up earlier. I have the figures for Mid and East Antrim District Council's input into the schemes available for anybody who has a disability and the rates that groups have to pay on top of what the council already puts into projects. If you can find out who the diversity champion is for your area, they should be able to help with leisure facilities and stuff.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Thanks, Donna.

We move on to table 5, which was discussing the coordination of post-school services for individuals.

**Mr Mark O'Hara (Department for Employment and Learning):** Good afternoon. I am a senior occupational psychologist with disability services, which is part of DEL. Our table is made up of departmental officials, service providers and parents of people with disability. Probably the most valuable input was from the parents, who gave their perspective. We all know that civil servants and service providers believe that we are doing things right, but we get it right only when we listen to the families.

We had to consider a number of issues and come up with three or four recommendations. The main question was this: are the various bodies involved in the transition process working effectively together? The people here from the Department believe that we have good processes in place to help people, but it appears that they are not delivered in a standardised manner across all schools and post-school settings. The story from one parent showed that they had great aspirations for their son, who has his own ideas and aspirations. He wanted to work, but the parent felt that they were not being informed or guided. Therefore, we accept that we are not working as well together as we could, and that is supported by other responses.

We were asked to consider a number of issues. One was about how and at what age support should be offered to support transition. We believe that it starts at about 14 years of age. We are thinking of 25 years of age or so as the upper threshold in the transition process, but we are aware that in certain specific cases, there may be people with learning disability who need additional support. However, if it runs on too far, it is possible that the agencies have not done their jobs correctly. We need to ensure that an exceptional, rather than routine, service is delivered. Perhaps, we have recycled people in some settings, but that is not across the board.

We were asked whether transition meetings were attended by all responsible parties. The experience of our parent is that that is not the case. It really seems to be down to the leadership in schools. Some principals are great leaders and ambassadors for young people with disabilities and will bring together the necessary partners. On other occasions, not everybody is there, so there is a lack of information for the family to make the right choice.

There was a question about direct payments being an asset to help people in the process. Even people in the group who were members of the community and voluntary sector and so should know about this felt that they were not able to navigate the direct payments system. Therefore, that may be untapped. More information is required there, too.

Despite a number of reports and strategies over the years, the group concluded that we have not moved on a great deal since the 2003 strategy, which was the last one led by the Department of Education. Another transition strategy is led by DEL. There is a bit of concern about the future of DEL and whether it will continue to have ownership. We have learnt that when strategies and approaches do not have ownership, they can dissolve, so we need authority, responsibility and ownership.

We did not get as far as looking at legislation for post-school services and their co-ordination. We are aware that there has been a quota scheme in this country for people with disabilities: companies were expected to employ 3% of staff from people with disabilities. There are risks with that kind of legislation, in that, in the past, the lesser-paid, unskilled jobs tended to be earmarked for those individuals. Any quota system should be right across a sector of employment. We have people with disabilities who should be at board level but fail to progress that far because of the ceilings and restrictions.

The first of our four recommendations is on enhanced information for parents and all stakeholders. We think that the NI Direct website could be a useful vehicle for this. However, we are aware that our young people and their families can have difficulties navigating such a service. We think that we need

champions to make that more accessible. In addition, we need other mediums of communication with young people. We have highlighted the provision by, for example, Mencap, of really useful, readable sources for young people. We need that kind of easily accessible source to be available for these young people. If we write in "ourspeak", they will not get it, and it will be about us, not them.

A key worker should be assigned to each young person at the age of 19 for the transition-out stage. The key worker should take the individual from their previous schooling, or whatever sector they were in, and there should be a warm handover to the new destination, whether that is a provision by DEL, health or some other sector. These key workers need to be adequately trained, supported and developed, and we can help them to develop good practice and take the lead in any new approach.

Our third recommendation is for a quality standard of provision for all young people transferring out of education with a learning disability. This requires a framework stipulating what the journey should be and detailing a service guarantee. This needs to be monitored by a body fit for that purpose, and we suggest that the likes of the Education and Training Inspectorate ETI could do that. This should apply across the Departments responsible for the transition and any agencies in the supply chain.

Our fourth recommendation is that Departments and agencies work together to deliver this approach. We welcome the fact that DEL is leading on this inquiry. We recommend that ownership and accountability be guaranteed. The children and young people's strategy should be delivering an integrated transition plan. More can be done, and it is often achieved more readily when Departments are brought together at an operational level. Perhaps key workers from education, health, the DEL and the agencies could come together in some form of hub and work together in a regional resource that families can access. That might be a strong means of implementing the approach. I think that that was all.

**Mr Phil Flanagan:** I want to explore the quota of places for people in employment, which Mark brought up. When I raised the issue on Twitter today, somebody fed back to me that such a system should apply to ring-fenced apprenticeship places. What is your view?

**Mr O'Hara:** Are you asking for my view on young people with disabilities accessing a proportionate number of apprenticeship places?

**Mr Flanagan:** Yes

**Mr O'Hara:** The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 prohibits restrictions to services for people with disabilities. Their access to apprenticeships is already protected.

**Mr Flanagan:** The problem is this: a large engineering company offers 40 apprenticeships a year, for which there are 2,500 applications. Obviously, the company will pick the most gifted and able people, and, as a result, it is very unlikely that somebody with special educational needs will get that opportunity. Someone told me on Twitter — just to clarify that I am not stealing the idea — that ring-fencing a proportion of places for people with special educational needs would increase opportunities for them.

**Mr O'Hara:** I will call on my colleagues in FE delivery to help me here. We are aware that a lot of our people work up to level 1. Some would struggle with apprenticeships, so we need to develop them to the point at which they are ready for training at that level. Perhaps the educationalists here could tell us whether they are equipped for that.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Mark, do not panic; we are not putting you on the spot as a departmental official. It is just a conversation that we can feed back into the inquiry.

**Mr Flanagan:** The problem is, Mark, that this will be an evidence-based report. If I raise this at a Committee meeting in six weeks' time, the Committee Clerk will tell me that we did not get any evidence on that and cannot include it in the report. Now she has no excuse.

**Mr Jasper McKinney (Southern Regional College):** I will pick up on apprenticeships. There are trainees or young people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) who may want to progress into apprenticeships. Hopefully, from what Mark was saying, they would be included and could progress, but we find that some of those folk have difficulty with the social aspects of that employment situation and would require support in any company, whether engineering or computing. It is the social

interaction that is very often the barrier. The support that Mark talks about is very important, if spaces for those people were to be ring-fenced in any sense.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Does anyone else wish to speak on that subject? If not, we will move on to table 6, which was dealing with the coordination of services in a locality.

**Ms Jenny Ruddy (Mencap):** I am the campaigns' officer for Mencap Northern Ireland. We struggled with what is meant by "locality", because every agency — trusts, education and library boards, colleges — is mapped slightly differently. What do we actually mean by "locality"? I apologise if I repeat some of what has already been discussed.

There has been a lot of focus on the process of transition over the last few years. We really need to concentrate now on the provision, because there is no point in having a great process if you have nothing to transition into. Generally, we think that the process works well for people who are stated but that there is a real lack of a process for people without a statement, who make up the majority. Each Department looks at transition separately, but the Health and Social Care Board is reviewing the availability of day opportunities in each trust area: that is a multi-agency group, which covers all the different agencies. It is important not to repeat work that has already been done.

It is also important to build relationships at a local level so that people have time to meet each other and discuss local solutions for local problems and to think about how to share resources and develop creative ways of working together to solve these problems. That needs to be driven at a strategic Executive level as well, so Departments need to work more closely together. Transport needs to be brought in at an earlier stage. There is no point in developing strategies for training or day opportunities without involving transport, because the person will not be able to get to the provision.

We need to measure and monitor someone's process. Good work is happening in youth training: the developing and monitoring of systems to determine people's outcomes and how satisfied they are with their career. It is important that people do not take a course simply because that is what is available to them. It should be about being able to meet their ambitions and career aspirations. It is also important to focus on the pathway. People need to have access to good advice and information. The sharing of information between agencies needs to be easier. It is often difficult to pass on information from, for example, education and library boards to a local college, which can then make it difficult to assess a person's needs. It was suggested that there should be a greater statutory duty on other Departments for transition so that DEL or the Department of Health might have a similar process to that used by the Department of Education.

Probably the most important thing identified by this group was the need to focus on the emerging gaps in provision. There seems to be a real gap between those who attend day centres and those who are supported into employment. There is no provision for people who fall into that big gap in the middle. We also talked quite a bit about the link-in with community planning and what role the new councils had to ensure that people knew what was happening locally and had access to those services.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Thank you, Jenny. Does anyone want to add anything? We are still open to written submissions should there be something that you wanted or meant to say today or something said at your table that you think should have been fed back.

On behalf of the Committee for Employment and Learning, which is heading up the inquiry, not the Department — Mark, I know that you were trying to steal that from us — I thank you very much for taking the time to come along.

As Tom probably said in his introduction, this is a serious piece of work, and we have committed ourselves to introducing legislation, if necessary, which would be only the second time in the history of the Northern Ireland Assembly that a Committee has done so. Your input is vital to the work that we are trying to do and the results that we are trying to deliver. Our next event will be a stakeholders' event for all service users with learning difficulties or disabilities so that we can get feedback from them, rather than just the providers or parents. We think that the voices of users of the services provided are also crucial to the inquiry. Ladies and gentlemen, once again, thank you very much on behalf of the Committee for Employment and Learning for coming along today.