

# Committee for Employment and Learning Visit Report

Alternative Angles, Ballymena, 4 November 2015

## **Background**

As part of its Inquiry into post Special Educational Need (SEN) Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland the Committee agreed, to go on a study visit to Alternative Angles, Ballymena.

## **Attendees**

The following Committee Members attended:

Mr Robin Swann MLA, Chairperson  
Mr Tom Buchanan MLA, Deputy Chairperson  
Mr Pat Ramsey MLA  
Ms Claire Sugden MLA  
Mrs Cathie White - Clerk to the Committee  
Mr Vincent Gribbin – Assistant Clerk

Alternative Angles representatives:

Chris Alexander, Chief Executive of Triangle Housing Association  
Kevin Duffy, Progression to Employment Coordinator  
Victoria Redmond

## **Meeting**

On arrival the Committee had an informal discussion with the representatives of Alternative Angles regarding its work and the issues facing individuals with learning difficulties seeking training, work experience and employment. The Committee was given a tour of the facilities and met with service users.

## **Issues raised**

- The lack of awareness of the benefits system by young people and their parents on leaving school. Alternative Angles receives referrals from the Health and Social Care Trusts.
- There are also different protocols, procedures and opportunities between the trusts.
- Funding is from ESF (40%), Trusts (35%) and DEL (25%).
- There is a lack of coordination between the funding organisations.
- The 16 hour benefits rules have an adverse impact on users.
- Alternative Angles supports 220 work placements.
- Alternative Angles work with 150 employers.
- Users work on the premises to increase their independence and “soft skills” if they are not yet ready to be placed with an employer.
- 10% of the service users are also in Triangle Housing Independent Living accommodation.
- The aim is to get people into work.
- On the Ballymena premises there are 14 workers per day supported by 2 staff members.