



## **Belfast Metropolitan College**

**Submission to the Committee Inquiry to Post  
Special Educational Need Provision in Education,  
Employment and Training for those with Learning  
Disabilities**

29 August 2014

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## INTRODUCTION

Belfast Metropolitan College (Belfast Met) welcomes the Department for Learning and Employment Committee's Inquiry into post Special Educational Need (SEN) provision in education, training and employment for those with learning disabilities and believes that the Inquiry presents an important opportunity to critically review, with a view to fundamentally improving, provision across the sector.

We commend the Committee for its genuine and sustained commitment to enhancing the lives of people with a learning disability and are keen to work with Members, and indeed across the full range of stakeholder groups to ensure that school leavers and adults across Northern Ireland have access to the same type of high quality, inclusive and specialist education and training that is provided by Belfast Met.

Staff and students at Belfast Met's dedicated Centre for Supported Learning had the pleasure of hosting a visit by the Committee in October 2013 and Members will therefore be aware to some extent of the unique scope, value and quality of this provision. This submission highlights the key elements of that provision, outlines what we believe are the barriers which constrain this contribution and suggests areas of Belfast Met's approach which we believe should be adopted as models of good practice across the sector.

Belfast Met would welcome the opportunity to give oral evidence to the Committee and believe we are best placed within the sector to help shape and inform future policy and provision.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Summary Position

Belfast Met has developed a unique, high quality, innovative approach to ensuring fully integrated, inclusive and individually tailored education, training and support to school-leavers and adults with learning disabilities. This provision caters for every level of need; including those students with complex and severe learning disabilities.

Belfast Met firmly believes that aspects of its provision should be recognised as models of good practice and adopted more broadly across the sector. In addition, we would urge that those barriers which currently hinder or make more difficult this delivery, should be explored and addressed at the earliest possible opportunity.

We commend the Committee for its commitment and look forward to making an important strategic contribution to the Inquiry as it progresses.

### Belfast Met's unique strengths

- A recognised, award-winning leader in the field with a dedicated Centre for Supported Learning.
- Centre for Supported Learning is fully inclusive and part of the wider College fabric.
- The Centre caters for every level of need in that it provides expert education and training for individuals with moderate, severe and complex learning disabilities.
- Highly trained, dedicated and expert staff.
- Sheer volume, breadth and choice of provision. The Centre offers programmes from entry Level 3 to Level 1 and progression pathways are mapped out and tailored to the needs and abilities of individual student.
- The Centre acts as a single point of contact – a form of “One Stop Shop” – for students, their families and the plethora of third party statutory/voluntary agencies.
- Students are provided with practical and emotional support on a continual and individual basis as they navigate their way through this important and often times, stressful, stage of their lives.
- Highly proactive and coordinated approach aimed at helping ease the transition from school to college and beyond. This includes recognising and overcoming practical difficulties such as the issue of transport to and from the College which can, if not addressed, prevent students being able to access provision.
- Tuition is free to all students, including costs for part time courses.
- All courses are fully accredited on the national QCF framework. This helps ensure clear progression pathways and facilitates the achievement of personal aspirations and goals.
- Fully aligned and coordinated approach across Belfast Met to in relation to harnessing the Additional Support O2 funds to support the O3 students.

- Tailored admissions process for supported learning students aligned to the College Admissions procedures.
- A 30 year proven track record in delivering high quality provision.

### Our Key Recommendations

- Employment should not be viewed as the single most important objective of post Special Education Needs provision. For a large majority of students this is neither a realistic nor most suitable goal. The College recognises that a wider debate needs to take place on the broader curriculum framework on how we measure the outputs from the system where employment is considered as one of a number of options alongside physical activity, independent living, social and communication skills.
- Significantly improved inter-agency and interdepartmental collaboration and the establishment of inter-agency forums. These would function in similar ways to the Area Learning Networks which support the delivery of the Entitlement Framework.
- That provision is extended across the sector to cater for students with severe learning disabilities. Belfast Met has proved that this is possible, in spite of the challenges posed and even when delivered against a backdrop of the current and challenging interagency/inter departmental coordination, planning and collaboration. Further Education Colleges and DEL need to formulate a response to this changing demographics within a multi-agency framework and this debate must include the provision of services to the SLDD group of learners as the College believes that this should be an integral part of its offering.
- The current funding arrangement, whereby a single pot of money is allocated for the sector as a whole, requires urgent review. The current approach severely limits Belfast Met's efforts to grow provision to meet demand and cater for the complex needs of learners. It should also be noted that Belfast Met consistently draws down the largest slice of this funding (27 per cent).
- That the sector adopts Belfast Met's curricular framework which we believe is an exemplar in terms of breadth, range and quality. This is in addition to the fact that all courses are fully accredited and promote progression routes from Entry Levels 1-3 into Level 1 and progressing to Level 2 for respective learners. This curriculum provision has also been linked into Level 1 Training Programmes.
- The College recognises that the issue of transport can be a problematic area for the sector but it is one that Belfast Met has successfully addressed. We believe this could be replicated across the sector. A vital part of Belfast Met's commitment to an inclusive curriculum is the provision of courtesy transport service in the first year only, within a 3 mile radius, to new first year fulltime students.
- Many of the students now presenting to FE colleges require significant social work and medical intervention and support, which needs to be in place before the student enters College. Again joint protocols or agreements between DHPSS, DE and DEL to support families with this transition must be a priority moving forward ensuring that care packages are in place when learners are leaving Children's Services to Adult Services. This will ultimately lessen the learner's dependencies on other core services.

## BELFAST MET RESPONSE

The following section constitutes Belfast Met's response to the six areas as identified in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. We have grouped our response into two main sections:

Inquiry Recommendations Section 1 – Areas 1–3

Inquiry Recommendations Section 2 – Areas 4–6

We have highlighted those points that we feel are of particular note.

### INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS SECTION 1 – AREAS 1-3

1. Current range of choice and opportunity available for those with learning disabilities on leaving full time schooling.
2. Assess the quality of the current provision by looking at evaluations carried out.
3. Assess whether DEL is living up to its commitments under the Bamford Report.

This section contains a fairly detailed account of current provision. It is split into full time, part time and community provision as well as a list of current staffing.

#### OVERVIEW OF CENTRE FOR SUPPORTED LEARNING

This provision is sited in the Centre for Supported Learning within the School of Community Education and Lifeskills and is based primarily on the Millfield Campus. It is the first choice specialist provider of educational opportunity for school leavers and adults with moderate, severe and complex learning difficulties in the greater Belfast area and has been offering comprehensive provision for over 30 years.

Belfast Met is a recognised leader in this field and its dynamic centre delivers ground breaking, innovative and creative educational vocational and training programmes tailored to meet individual learner needs.

The Centre attained a grade 2 in the inspection of 2013.

The programmes are delivered in an inclusive and supportive environment and all students follow nationally accredited pathways ensuring they are well placed to fulfil personal goals and aspirations.

Belfast Met and the Centre for Supported Learning subscribes to the principles of Inclusive Learning so powerfully described by Professor John Tomlinson.

*Put simply, we want to avoid a viewpoint which locates the difficulty or deficit with the student and focus instead on the capacity of the educational institution to understand and respond to the individual learner's requirement.*

*This means we must move away from labelling the student and towards creating an appropriate educational environment; concentrate on understanding better how people learn so that they can better be helped to learn; and see people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties first and foremost as learners.*

The Centre for Supported Learning has a clear value set and ethos that underpins provision and links with the College's key strategic priorities. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are:

- Respected and valued and are at the centre of everything we do
- Have the right to be treated as adults
- Have the right to be included in all aspects of College life
- Have the right to the highest standards of excellence in curriculum experience.

The Centre has a range of full time, part time, community based school links and training provision across the city of Belfast. The suite of programme provide independence training, vocational and employability skills development for fulltime, part time, TFS and school partnerships.

Programmes are all QCF accredited and are tailored to meet student's unique learning and pastoral support needs. They are offered from EL1 to L1 using a range of delivery models.

This provision is additionally funded and supported through the DEL Additional Support Fund.

In 2013/14 Belfast Met represented approximately 27% of the FE sector making us the biggest provider of educational and vocational skills training programmes of all the colleges. Belfast Met would call on the Department to review the funding mechanism to allow each college to grow provision to meet the demand and the increasing complexities of student needs in this key area of work. This includes a better approach to business planning and forecasting model.

#### Fulltime Provision

In relation to its, full-time provision, Belfast Met believes it is meeting the commitments set out under the Bamford Report. The Bamford Report recommendation 15 states:

*“The Department for Employment and Learning will ensure that revised funding arrangements are in place so that FE Colleges are able to increase significantly the number of full-time places available to students who have a Statement of Severe Learning Disability, to undertake a 3 year accredited course.”*

In line with Bamford recommendations, in the past five years Belfast Met has increased its full time FE provision from 64 available places to 124 available places for the academic year 2014/2015.

All Belfast Met provision, both full time and part time is fully accredited and full time programmes can be up to three years in duration

Belfast Met is also committed to increasing the training places allocated to young people with moderate learning difficulties which currently sits at 48.

There are 5 fulltime programmes based on the Millfield and Tower Street sites and 1 TFS Programme

#### Full-time Provision at Belfast Met

Programme	No of classes	No of places available	Age range	Academic Level	FE/ TFS	Duration of Provision	Awarding Body	Retention 13/14
Towards Work and Independence	7	77	16-23	Entry 3	FE	32 weeks per year for up to 3 years	NOCN	95.5% Outstanding
Community Enterprise and Business (new programme for 14/15)	1	11	23-35	Entry 3	FE	32 weeks per year for up to 1 year	ASDAN	n/a Course starting in September 2014/15
Certificate in Community Independence	1	12	16-30	Level 1	FE	32 weeks per year for up to 1 year	NOCN	91% Outstanding
Pathfinder	2	24	16-25	Level 1	FE	32 weeks per year for up to 2 years	City and Guilds	91% Outstanding
Routeways	4	48	16-25	Level 1	TFS	152 Weeks	BTEC	94.6% Outstanding
<b>Total number of fulltime and TFS places available for 14/15</b>		<b>172</b>						

In relation to its full-time provision, the College offers the most comprehensive range of courses available in the sector from entry Level 3 to Level 2. The provision offers learners an FE and Training route where its students have choice, progression and opportunity to develop other skills such as employability and independence skills. The six full-time programmes are meeting individual student needs as well as providing progression opportunities. We believe this is a model of good practice.

### Towards Work and Independence Programme

This is Belfast Met's most comprehensive full-time programme for young school leavers with moderate/severe learning difficulties with 84 places available. It is based on the Millfield site. Attendance is over a 4 day period and young people may have up to 3 years on the programme. It is NOCN accredited.

#### There are 3 learner Pathways

**Towards Independence:** this is a highly supported strand for young people leaving special schools. The emphasis is on the development of independent skills, independent travel skills, self-confidence and self-esteem as they transition to adulthood along with the core skills of literacy numeracy and ICT.

**Towards Work:** This strand is for those young people for whom an element of work is feasible and realistic. The curriculum emphasises pre employability skills as well as the core skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

**Employability:** this strand is for young people for whom sheltered employment or employment is a realistic goal. It focusses on employability skills and students are expected to engage in work placement 1 day per week organised by the College. Essential Skills Literacy at entry level is offered on this strand.

### Certificate in Community Independence

This is a 1 year level 1 programme based primarily on the Millfield site for adults with moderate to severe learning difficulties aged 18 plus for whom employment is not a realistic option in the short term.

The main ethos of the programme is to provide a broad curriculum base which promotes the development of independent living skills while increasing self confidence and self-esteem.

The curriculum includes the core skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT as well as social and communication skills, volunteering, team work and independence skills.

### Pathfinder

This is a 2 year level 1 programme, City and Guilds Planning for Life and Work.

The Pathfinder programme is designed for young people aged 16 and over who have a moderate to severe physical disability and/or learning difficulty and who require additional support in order to access further education. The programme has an emphasis on support students who severe autism or Asperger's. Pathfinder provides an integrated full time educational experience with the opportunity to sample a work placement or to work with the Storehouse enterprise project. The Pathfinder programme aims to support the students to develop the confidence and skills necessary to become more independent in daily life and to progress to a mainstream level 2 programme within the College if appropriate. Essential Skills Literacy Numeracy and ICT at Entry Level or Level 1 is offered. In 13 /14 80% are moving to mainstream level 1 or 2 provision.

The College is continually refreshing its curriculum in response to learner need. Following a review of the 2013/14 curriculum, the College identified the need to develop a programme for adults with severe learning difficulties. Further information about this course is detailed in the next section

### Community Business and Enterprise

In 13 /14 it was identified that there was a gap in fulltime provision for people with severe learning difficulties aged 25 to 30 who had not previously attended fulltime but had moved to community provision straight from school.

In consultation with our stakeholders a curriculum has been designed to meet the needs of this group and a pilot programme will run in 14/15 for 12 students on the Tower Street site 3 days per week.

The curriculum will focus on helping the students develop socially valued roles in the community with the creation of a community business being central to the provision. The students will study the core skills of Literacy Numeracy and ICT as well as digital media, retail and customer services.

### Part time Provision

In relation to the delivery of its part-time provision, the College is meeting the recommendations set out in the Bamford Report. Recommendation 16 of the Bamford Report states.

*“In order to afford lifelong learning opportunities the Department for Employment and Learning should ensure that revised funding arrangements will enable more part-time places to be created in FE for older students. Access to FE by people with a learning disability should be monitored and we welcome the intention of the Department for Employment and Learning to do so.”*

The Centre for Supported Learning offers a wide and diverse part time programme for mature students with moderate, severe or complex learning difficulties across the City of Belfast learners can avail of a range of College delivery modes from 2 hours a day right through to 2 days a week.

There are 2 main strands to this provision, substantive part time (Right Track ) offered on main sites and our Community Provision which is offered on main sites and on our community sites across the city.

### Right Track Provision

This is a fully supported provision with programmes running for 6 hours each day on the Millfield, Castlereagh, Chichester Ave and Riddell sites. The provision also runs in Muckamore Abbey Hospital for those students retained under the Mental Health order. Independent Living Skills, Computers, Enterprise and Drama and Art are the main curricular offer. This provision was designed and developed with our partners from the NOW Project, the Orchardville Society and the Belfast Trust. The programme is designed to be complimentary to the services offered by the above partner agencies. There are 160 places available on these programmes and retention is 96% outstanding

### Community Programmes

These are a series of short 2 hour courses held on local college campuses or in local Community Venues covering North, South, East and West Belfast. Independent travel is difficult for this a cohort of students so location is crucial to aid inclusivity and enable students to attend. Where possible provision is offered at point of need.

This cohort of students have severe and complex disabilities and can face isolation in their everyday life. This provision gives them the opportunity to interact with other students and to be included in the mainstream of College Life.

This provision is offered in partnership with the Belfast Trust and provides a gateway to College. The programme accredited by NOCN and addresses barriers to participation by providing a highly sheltered supportive environment where students can be introduced to College life. The programme coordinators work with staff from Belfast Trust to provide a relevant programme enhancing students social and communication skills. Subjects offered in 13/14 included Literacy, Numeracy, Computers, Cookery, Personal Development, Horticulture, Arts and Crafts. Over 200 students participate in this provision and the retention rate is 89% outstanding.

The provision at Belfast Met is based on the Learner Pathway model allowing learners options to progress from highly supported provision at entry level through to mainstream provision at level 2 students are continuously assessed and supported through a system of student appraisal where **progress is reviewed 3 times per year against individual learning goals.**

#### Staffing structure

The Centre for Supported Learning employs a highly skilled and specialist staff team both academic and support who are experts in the field of learning difficulty and are dedicated to ensuring that the learner is empowered to achieve their personal best, become more independent and ultimately a valued and confident citizen of the City of Belfast.

This provides many additional benefits including a single point of contact for internal and external clients, the ongoing development and strengthening of relationships with parents or carers as well as a one stop shop for learners in relation to educational opportunities and progression routes.

The staffing team consists of:

1	Full-time Centre Manager
9	Full-time Lecturers
8	Associate Lecturers
15	Part-time Lecturers
6	permanent support staff including 2 driver support
180 hours per week	additional support from the Register for Learning Support Staff

## INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS SECTION 2 – AREAS 4-6

Section 2 of the Report addresses Q 4-6 set out in the Enquiry Terms of Reference which include:

4. Examine what approaches are working and what the barriers are.
5. Examine the provision by FE colleges for those that are below Level 2 and who has safety, supervision and holistic care needs and the options available to such individuals from Health and Social Care Trusts or new district councils.
6. Assess whether the definition of FE for the student population needs to be broadened for example to include physical activity, social and communication skills

### Transition and Admission to Belfast Met for Students with Complex, Severe and Moderate Learning Difficulties on Discrete Provision.

The Centre for Supported Learning in Belfast Met recognises that transition to Further Education is an extremely stressful and anxious time for families and young people. Very often young people will have attended only one special school for all of their academic lives thus far and have had a very secure and sheltered experience. College can appear large, busy and intimidating after such a school experience.

Belfast Met has invested significantly in developing transition arrangements in the delivery of its post school provision for learners with learning disabilities. Over a period of years, the Centre for Supported Learning in partnership with our stakeholder schools has devised a robust and lengthy transition process to full-time FE or training which the College regards as a model of good practice.

This process begins approximately one year or earlier, before the young person is expected to commence their College career and key facets include:

- Course Coordinators visit schools and talk to families and young people regarding their options at College.
- Families are given extensive opportunities to visit the Centre and talk to staff.
- An open day is held where young people and families can see the curriculum in action and speak to stakeholders who support and enhance the curriculum.
- An information morning is held for school leavers' teachers, transitions officers and careers officers to enable them to represent the College provision to young people and their families.
- Young people are invited to attend College for a 2 day sampling in February where they are assessed in terms of both academic ability and support requirements for the programmes.
- An academic panel is convened to assess the reports and allocate potential places, "Offer" letters are then sent out.
- A series of pre entry guidance sessions are held with families and young people between March and May.
- Home visits are offered over the summer period to talk through any issues that may have arisen and to ensure that any additional support requirements are put in place prior to September start.

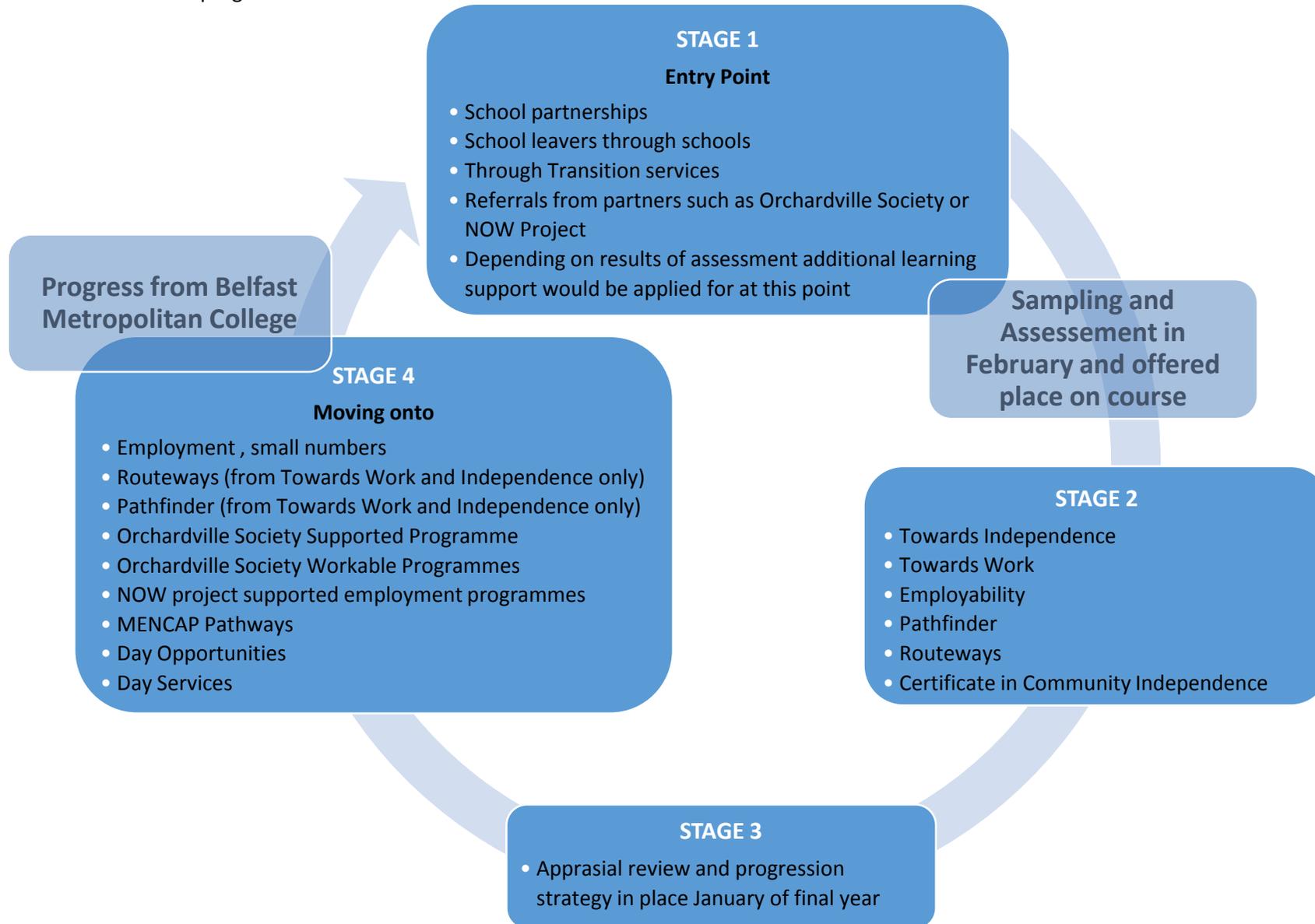
While this is a lengthy process, it is a very supportive process, allowing families time to visit the college and talk to tutors about their concerns. It also gives young people the opportunity to have a taste of College life and therefore make informed decisions about their future and the course of study they would like to follow.

The nature of these learners mean that their learning and support needs are complex and varied. Belfast Met is very aware of the unique requirements of these learners and their families during this transition period and during their College career.

The Centre for Supported Learning reviews its admission processes with the College's Central Admissions Services annually to ensure that they are fit for purpose and that with reasonable adjustments they fit within the overall College processes as well as ensuring compliance with the SENDO and Section 75 legislative framework.

## Recruitment and Progression Fulltime Programmes

In line with the College admissions procedure, the Centre for Supported Learning has tailored the admissions process to allow for reasonable adjustments for its learners and this is working really well to provide a solid platform to support the transitions and progression processes. The flowchart below details the key processes involved in the recruitment and progression routes of learners within this framework.



### Just Like You. Best Practice at Belfast Met

One of the cornerstones of the Bamford Report for people with learning Difficulties is the Just Like You concept of equal lives and equal value. Belfast Met and the Centre for Supported Learning has adopted the philosophy of Just for You in terms of the statement regarding education.

*We need education to motivate us to achieve our potential, build our confidence, enrich our lives and provide the foundation for an inclusive Society-----‘Just Like You’*

Belfast Met is fulfilling this aspiration by delivering an enriched and enhanced curriculum and details of these programmes are included in the next section.

### An Enriched and Enhanced Curriculum

The complex learning needs of students with complex severe and moderate learning difficulties requires a vibrant, energetic , relevant and creative curriculum using a wide variety of teaching pedagogies to ensure the highest quality of teaching and learning to engage and motivate students.

The Centre for Supported Learning ascribes to the philosophy that ‘no man is an island’ (John Donne) and no curriculum can operate in isolation. To that end the Centre engages with a range of bodies and projects to bring breadth and variety to the delivery to ensure outstanding learning opportunities and to enable students to learn to interact with a wider audience to broaden their experiences.

Some examples of curriculum enhancement in Belfast Met are given below.

### Learning in Action

It is widely acknowledged that people with complex, severe and moderate learning difficulties engage best with active and concrete learning and face many challenges in generalising their learning. The provision in Belfast Met maximises its City Centre Location and uses the City to practice the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom. The ability to assume independence in everyday life, engage in leisure activities or take up employment is dependent on the ability to travel independently. The ACCESS Belfast taught module aims to:

- Develop appropriate adult behaviour and the promotion of social inclusion by extensively using the facilities of the City of Belfast to practise skills in real life situations.
- Citizenship, visits to City Hall and Stormont to meet with and to witness local government in action.
- Road safety, travel and transport training.
- Use of public transport, bus, rail and private taxi hire.
- Managing money and budgeting in real life situations.
- Self-advocacy and personal awareness skills training.

### Project with Belfast Hills Partnership

The Centre for Supported Learning is developing a partnership to encourage students to use local outdoor spaces across the City of Belfast by taking part in conservation and preservation projects for example monitoring and protecting rare wild plants on the Cavehill. Effective use of leisure time and health and wellbeing are key issues to the students in the Centre and the staff in the centre are currently working in partnership with the Belfast Hills Partnership to provide a more extensive programme for 14/15.

### C-SAW Project

Active health and wellbeing specifically designed to meet the needs of students with more complex disabilities underpinning the curriculum objectives of team work and communication skills as well as developing the softer skills of maintaining health and wellbeing, building confidence and self esteem.

### Storehouse

This innovative and exciting collaboration between our fulltime Pathfinder provision and Storehouse, the major Belfast Food Bank encourages and supports the development of employability skills for students who because of the very specific nature of their disability (for example severe autism) need an extremely structured and supported introduction to the world of work.

The work with Storehouse gives them a very supported experience of the work environment as well demonstrating in action the modules of their curriculum that engender an understanding of diversity in our society enabling them to fully comprehend cultural and social diversity from concrete experience. It also underpins the Essential skills literacy and numeracy curriculum allowing students to practice those skills in real life situations.

### Belfast Community Circus School

This innovative, creative and dynamic project aims to develop self-esteem self-confidence group work and team building skills through the development of Circus skills such as juggling, diabolo, trapeze and acro. It also helps them the underpinning skills for literacy and numeracy such as sequencing and patterning.

Students with very severe learning difficulties go to the Circus Space in Gordon Street for this programme and are taught by a team of Belfast Met Tutors and Circus tutors. They benefit from different teaching techniques and learning in a very different creative environment. This culminated in a show in the Circus space.

This project is funded by Children in need and is currently being externally evaluated.

Belfast Met is currently working with BCCS to ensure that more students will have this unique opportunity in 2014/15 and there may be an opportunity for them to perform in the internationally acclaimed Belfast Festival of Fools in May 2015.

### PSNI

The Centre for Supported Learning has benefitted for a number of years of involvement by the CASE Programme officers who deliver a 6 week programme designed to support and educate our very vulnerable students on the key issues of online bullying, crime and the role of the Police Service in the Community. There is a significant emphasis on becoming a responsible citizen of the City of Belfast.

## Hype Project

The transition to adulthood and in particular issues regarding sexuality and relationships are complex and difficult for both students and staff. The Staff from the Centre for Supported Learning have worked with North and West Belfast Trust and their HYPE team to devise an appropriate programme promoting healthy relationships sex education and sexual health that is sensitively tailored to meet the complex needs of this diverse group and their families. This programme is vital and essential to the Centre and enables staff to support these very vulnerable students as they try to deal with the extremely difficult emotional and personal aspects of transition to adulthood.

A key factor in the development of the enhanced curriculum is the College's relationships with its partner organisations and interagency collaborations and it is this extensive liaison and strong relationships with a number of key stakeholders which enables us to continue to develop and achieve excellence.

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## Promotion of an Inclusive Curriculum

*'We believe that learning can only be fully effective if it is inclusive'* (Tomlinson Report 1996).

Belfast Met is committed to ensuring that our provision for students with complex, severe and moderate learning difficulties is an inclusive experience and based on the principles set down by Professor John Tomlinson in The report of the Further Education Funding Council Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Committee.

On the difficult journey to adulthood they must learning to cope in many different situations and to successfully relate in an appropriate manner with people from many different backgrounds. The movement towards adulthood requires Colleges to work towards the achievement of autonomy for these students and the development of a positive self-image which enables students to contribute realistically both to the economy and their local community.

An example of good practice that the College is immensely proud of is its ability to provide a bespoke curriculum framework for its learners. This offers them providing them the widest curriculum provision whilst widening access to promote progression routes from Entry Levels 1-3 into Level 1 and progressing to Level 2 for respective learners.

Belfast Met provides as safe, supported and inclusive environment which values and celebrates the diversity of its students with complex severe and moderate learning difficulties by:

- Working with NOCN to develop a bespoke curricular framework, both full and part time, specifically for students with complex severe and moderate learning difficulties which will provide an enhanced breath to the curriculum. This ranges from Employability skills at level 1 through to independent living skills at levels Entry 1-3. This will be operational from September 2014 and will standardise the curricular offer. It is hoped that other Colleges will adopt this specialist framework therefore providing standardisation across the sector.
- Celebrating the achievement of these students through a specific and bespoke graduation ceremonies accompanied by a specially designed Graduation booklet. The Supported Learning Graduation is a key highlight in the College's Events Calendar with the Graduation ceremony being attended by the Chief Executive, Members of the Governing Body, Executive and the Senior Leadership teams demonstrating both the importance of the provision and the commitment of Belfast Met to this vital and critical area of work.

- Hosting bespoke events to promote understanding of our provision such as an Employers forum for those employers who provide supported work placements and a transitions event for transitions officers to ensure understanding of our curricular offer.
- Ensuring that learners from the Centre for Supported Learning are included in all College showcase events such as the opening of the TQ building with Princess Anne, making a presentation to the President of Ireland Michael D Higgins about their College experience, showcasing their work at the inaugural prestigious ‘Belfast Met Creative Week’ leading to a further showcase to be held in Stormont in November 2014.
- Promoting opportunities for shared learning through project work especially with the sports, performing arts and health and social care departments.
- Providing support to help students access Canteen and restaurant facilities and general college facilities.
- Providing support to meet the personal care and medical needs of students to enable them to attend College.
- Providing support to underpin learning both in the classroom and in social college situations including canteen and restaurant facilities, learning resource services and the Students Union. This includes significant input from Disability Services in securing additional learning support from the DEL ASF02 fund as well as full utilisation of the ASF03 fund. There is strong collaboration between college departments in relation to harnessing ASF 02 funds to support the students in discrete provision; some further details are provided in the table below.

Additional Support	2013/ 2014	2014/2015
Support from ASF 02 fund	10 students receiving additional 1:1 support	19 students receiving additional 1:1 support
Support from ASF03 fund	6 permanent support staff including 2 driver support 180 hours per week of additional support from Belfast Mets register of support workers	6 permanent support staff including 2 driver support 180 hours per week of additional support from Belfast Mets register of support workers

It is also worth noting that tuition is free for learners on discrete part time courses ensuring that the provision is accessible to all.

Central to the success of the College’s provision is the pastoral care provided to its learners. High levels of pastoral support from experienced and skilled tutors expert in working within a multi-disciplinary framework. Student reviews are carried out 3 times per year. Parents are actively encouraged to work with the teaching staff to ensure that the pastoral care needs of students are met. Academic staff and the Curriculum Centre Manager work proactively with Social Services DEL Special Needs Careers Service, ELB Transitions Officers and stakeholder agencies to provide a holistic and comprehensive pastoral support system thus ensuring retention rates of over 95%.

Comprehensive stakeholder relationships to underpin programmes. Belfast Met links with all the special schools in the greater Belfast Area, the SENCOS from the secondary school sector across the city and the major voluntary organisations such as Orchardville Cedar Mencap NOW etc. This partnership approach is vital to ensure that that the provision is fit for purpose and is a harmonious fit with the provision offered by stakeholder organisations.

Bespoke support from the College's Corporate Communications and Marketing Department to support and promote the provision throughout the academic calendar, including the creation of a new suite of awareness raising programmes such as a very successful Open Day for key stakeholders and local schools.

### Progression from Belfast Met

Belfast Met is very aware of the unique and specialist requirements of learners with complex severe and moderate learning difficulties as they prepare to progress on from College. It is an acknowledged difficult time and anxious time for families and students and the College makes strenuous efforts to make this transition from College as seamless as possible.

In the last year of provision for a student the Centre for Supported Learning:

- Holds specialist careers meetings in partnership with the DEL careers service outlining future options
- Hosts talks by stakeholder organisations such as NOW, Orchardville Society, Mencap, Cedar Foundation who offer post College provision.
- 
- Holds a series of leaver meetings from November through to June for families and students to assess progression opportunities.
- 
- Signposts career and progression opportunities to students and families both internally in the College and with our external partners.
- 
- Engages with Social Services particularly social work to support families and students through the process of moving on from College.

### Transport

The Centre for Supported Learning within Belfast Met is fully cognisant of the fact that for some young school leavers independent travel is not feasible when they first leave school. Many of them will have been transported on school buses from home to school for all of their school career. It is an issue that is very concerning for parents and families and an additional stressor.

The College recognises that the issue of transport can be problematic for the sector however it is one that Belfast Met has successfully addressed. A vital part of Belfast Met's commitment to an inclusive curriculum is the provision of courtesy transport service in the first year only, within a 3 mile radius, to new first year fulltime students. Belfast Met employs 2 driver support workers to facilitate this.

In  
2013

Belfast Met applied to DEL for capital funds and was able to purchase a new 17 seater tail lift wheelchair accessible mini bus.

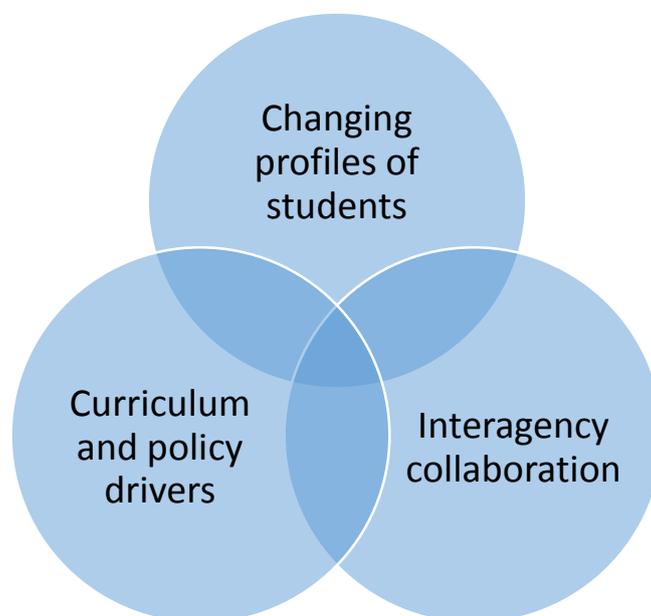
In the first year of their programme these students engage in an independent travel programme and parents and families are encouraged to mirror this at home to develop independent travel skills for year 2 of their College career.

As part of the College's commitment to an inclusive curriculum students from the Centre for Supported Learning participate where possible in all College activities. The mini bus is used to transport our students between campuses to College events and as it is a tail lift ensures that our students who are wheelchair users are also included.

## Barriers and Issues

The provision of Further Education and Training for people with complex, severe and moderate learning difficulties is complicated, challenging and multifaceted. Learning support needs are unique, varied and each requires individual responses from Colleges.

Some of the barriers and issues facing Belfast Met can be banded under 3 main headings although all are interdependent.



### Changing profile of students

The profile of students applying to Belfast Met's Centre for Supported Learning has included an increase in those with complex disabilities and ongoing discussions with the main special schools in the Belfast Area are indicating that this trend will continue over the next 5 years. There are increasing numbers of students with Autism, Asperger's, ADHD and severe mental ill health issues as well as complex physical and sensory disabilities and medical needs. All these require an individual curricular response.

While Further Education needs to be mindful that its core activity is the provision of education not the provision of day services, however it also needs to make provision for those who can learn and benefit from being a student regardless of the complexity of their disability.

One of the core values of Belfast Met is to put the learner at the centre of everything we do and a key strategic aim is to work with our stakeholders to ensure that we meet the ever changing needs of our students to ensure a successful learning experience.

Further Education Colleges and DEL need to formulate a response to this changing demographic within a multi-agency framework.

Further Education Colleges and DEL need to formulate a response to this changing demographic within a multi-agency framework and that this debate must include the provision of services to the SLDD group of learners as the College believes that this should be an integral part of its offering.

### Interagency Collaboration

Belfast Met has a proven track record of making provision for students with complex needs. In 2004 the College engaged with Skill NI and Children In Need to make a fully supported part time 'Moving ON' provision for 6-8 adults with very complex physical and medical needs. This project has provided the staff team with enhanced skills when working with this degree of disability and proved that Further Education had a positive impact on the lives of these adults. However in order for Colleges to engage in this work and the meet the changing demographic, agencies must form partnerships so that medical and personal care needs that could prove a barrier to participation to further Education can be facilitated.

This interagency working has to commence with interdepartmental agreements at the highest level to ensure that students are not excluded due to their non-educational requirements. Medical and personal care packages developed in school should follow to FE.

#### Case Study

Joe left special school in Belfast in 2011 needing a care package put in place to meet his personal care requirements. Prior to Joe leaving school the school and College began a needs assessment to facilitate Joe's transition to College.

Joe is a wheelchair user with limited upper body movement and no lower body movement and he requires catheterisation at lunchtimes. College staff pushed for a care package to be put in place and extensive, lengthy and prolonged negotiations with Health and Social Services took place using considerable College resources in terms of staff time. As there was no interdepartmental protocol or agreement it meant that Joe could not start College the year he left school but had to stay at home for 2 years until the care package was finally agreed.

Joe has benefitted from 1:1 support provided by Disability Services through DELS ASF02 fund.

Joe has completed the first year of a 3 year fulltime provision and is well on track to achieve his Entry 3 qualification. He is an amazing student who is enhances all of the classes he attends.

Traditionally it has not been the role of the FE sector to put these packages in place however historically this role has fallen to the College. The College would recommend that this area is given consideration within the Inquiry and that discussions could take place about putting a holistic interagency framework in place to ensure that the needs of the learners are addressed.

Students are presenting with ever increasing issues that require social services interventions. The transition from children's social work services to adult social work services is not always smooth and can prove traumatic for both student and family. This transition coincides with their transition to College.

There is clearly a need for a more structured and coherent engagement between all key stakeholders to ensure the effective transition of learners into education, employment and training. The College would advocate the establishment of an Interagency Forum in each Sectoral area to ensure a joined up approach to the delivery of special educational need provision in relation to education, employment and training.

Many of the students now presenting to FE colleges require significant social work intervention and support which needs to be in place before the student enters College. Again joint protocols or agreements between DHPSS, DE and DEL to support families with this transition must be a priority moving forward to ensure that care packages are in place when learners are leaving Children's Services and moving to Adult Services. This will ultimately will lessen the learner's dependencies on other core services.

### Curriculum Drivers

The key curriculum driver for DEL is employment and the development of skills for employment.

In terms of further education for young people and adults with complex, severe and moderate learning difficulties it must be recognised that for many the goal of employment and the development of relevant employment skills may not be a realistic one for every learner. The ability to progress to supported employment cannot be a precursor for admission to FE as often to ability to access such employment may naturally evolve after the College experience as the young person develops and matures.

That does not mean that Further Education does not have a pivotal and vital role to play in the development of life skills and independent living skills for this student cohort. All key policy and principles dating back to 1972 support the requirement for a broad curricular framework that includes the 'softer skills' of personal and social development, health and wellbeing, citizenship and independent living skills for those for whom employment is not a realistic end goal.

The College recognises that a wider debate needs to take place on the broader curriculum framework on how we measure the outputs from the system where employment is considered as one of a number of options alongside physical activity, social and communication skills.

Further education has a major role to play to enable young people and adults with disabilities to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to live more independent and fulfilling lives, lessening their dependency on services and families and move towards supported or independent living.

## OVERVIEW OF BELFAST METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

Belfast Met is the largest Further and Higher Education College in Northern Ireland and one of only 30 to join the influential 157 Group – a consortium of the UK’s leading FE Colleges. Founded in 1906, as the Belfast Municipal Technical Institute, we have been making a contribution to the economic and enterprise development of the City for over 100 years.

With over 30,000 students and spanning an estate in excess of 100,000m<sup>2</sup>, Belfast Met provides education, training and skills development to enhance individual, community and economic prosperity.

Belfast met has transformed itself over the last three years to become a trailblazer for further education and vocational skills both nationally and internationally. Going forward, the College’s Mission will be to deliver outstanding education and skills, while transforming lives and contributing to the economic success of Belfast and Northern Ireland.

As the economy and skills agenda has transformed in recent years, so too has Belfast Met. Our focus for the next three years is to deliver on our 4 Point Plan which combines to achieve our mission. These are:

- Put the learner at the centre of everything we do.
- Deliver the highest quality possible in all we do.
- Achieve the highest possible positive impact on the economic and social wellbeing of Belfast and Northern Ireland.
- Strive to be an excellent organisation, growing sustainably, innovating and investing.

In order to achieve these priorities the College remains committed to widening the participation of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities across all College activities. This is only fitting given that the College has over 30 years’ experience and is an exemplar of best practice in this challenging area of work.

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