



**Summary response* to the
Employment and Learning Committee inquiry into post Special
Educational Needs Provision in education, employment and
training for those with Learning Disabilities**

June 2014

**Some College's have submitted their own response also*

Introduction to our submission

Colleges NI is the representative body for NI's six regional FE Colleges which between them offer provision to over 90,000 learners and 156,000 enrolments per year. The six Colleges which make up the sector are as follows:

- Belfast Metropolitan College
- Northern Regional College
- North West Regional College
- Southern Regional College
- South Eastern Regional College
- South West College.



All six regional FE colleges provide a range of courses for young people leaving full-time education to enable to participate in **either mainstream or discrete FE programmes**, depending on abilities. The colleges offer provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities across its provision including:

- FE
- Training for Success
- the Entitlement Framework
- European Social Fund (ESF) provision.

The Colleges have a £260 million turnover and operate across 40 campuses and over 400 community outreach centres.

In January 2014 the Employment and Learning Committee announced an inquiry into the post Special Education Needs (SEN) provision in education, employment and training for those with learning disabilities in NI.

The deadline for responses was 21 March 2014. Three colleges submitted their own individual responses namely:

- Southern Regional College (SRC)
- North West Regional College (NWRC)
- South Eastern Regional College (SERC)

In addition, all six regional Colleges provided input into a response collated by the Department for Employment and Learning.

The Committee then announced an extension to the consultation period up to 30 June. Following this one other college submitted an individual response, namely:

- Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC).

This submission from Colleges NI simply summarises the key messages that have been collated across all the above responses for the sector.

Key messages from the Further Education (FE) sector

This is a summary of the key messages under each area of the terms of reference for this inquiry.

Range of choice and opportunities available for those with Learning Disabilities upon leaving full time schooling

Across the FE sector the proportion of enrolments from those with a declared learning disability has ranged somewhere between 4% and 6% over the five year period up to 2010/2011.

| Number of enrolments | | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Disability | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/2010 | 2010/2011 |
| Disabled | 5,606 | 6,165 | 7,887 | 9,285 | 7,987 |
| Not disabled / not known | 145,680 | 135,935 | 134,599 | 154,065 | 147,438 |
| Total | 151,288 | 142,100 | 142,486 | 163,350 | 155,425 |
| Percentage of learners with a declared disability | 4% | 4% | 6% | 6% | 5% |

Source: Further Educational Statistical Record. Information on disability refers to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD). These students receive learning support and funding.

According to the FELS data the achievement and retention rates for such learners currently stands at 92% (Source: FELS 2012/13 data).

The main funding from DEL to support such learners is:

- £1.5 million per year from the Additional Support Fund (ASF)
- £2 million per year support tailored discrete courses for SLDD for whom mainstream courses are not appropriate due the nature or degree of their learning difficulty or disability

Best practice in post school provision for those with learning disabilities

Examples of best practice across the sector include:

- The Disability Employment Service pilot programme in two colleges which has shown good education and employment outcomes to date
- The DEL Delivering Excellence programme, introduced in 2010, has supported study visits, staff training and best practice sharing through the Learning Support and Discrete Managers Working Group – which has SSLD staff from all 6 colleges represented. The Colleges all have Disabled Access guides collated through Disabled GO (providing details of access and onsite facilities across all 40+ campuses for learners with support needs).
- Learning and Support staff have benefitted from Beattie Resources for Inclusiveness in Technology and Education (BRITE)
- Training for staff outside of the Learning Support arena within the colleges. E.g. front of house staff trained in awareness raising for those with Autistic spectrum disorders, Tourette syndrome, etc
- Learning Support Staff at the college engage with parents / carers of such students in the Year 12 early transition period and this involves a multi agency transition plan
- Pre induction orientation to provide the students with sufficient time to familiarise themselves with new surroundings
- A college has developed and implemented an Inclusive Curriculum Strategy to support transition and help offer clear pathways

Examine if the quality and quantum of provision is meeting demand

The quality of provision is assessed through Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) reports. The most recent inspections were carried out at SWC (2014), BMC (2013), SRC (2013) and NRC (2012). The inspection of SLDD is carried out within the context of the whole college inspection. The college inspection reports and, the supporting ETI reports on SSLD for each college, all refer to good provision of SLDD within each of these colleges with some specific examples of good (e.g. work placements, visiting speakers and continuous professional development).

The ETI inspection reports referred to the quality of provision for students with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities (Discrete Provision) for those inspections carried out from 2013 onwards. Each of the three colleges received 'Very Good' performance for this provision (SWC, BMC and SRC). This was the second top point along a six point scale for performance.

In terms of the quantum of delivery – all colleges provide a range of courses for young people leaving full-time education to enable to participate in either mainstream or discrete FE programmes, depending on abilities. A summary of the provision is as follows:

- Most at entry level – to reflect the needs of students leaving special needs schools and special units within mainstream schools.
- Most courses are accredited and are around 30 weeks in duration
- Majority are part-time
- Majority of provision is on-campus
- Over 270 different courses available during 2013/2014 (e.g. Essential Skills, Personal Development, Skills for Every Day Life, Speech and Language, Hospitality, Customer Care)
- All provision covers elements of physical activity / recreation activities, social and communication skills, personal development and life skills
- High levels of pastoral care, regular needs assessments, progress reviews, additional learning
- Good provision across most campuses of all 6 colleges, with some exceptions

Recommendations to address barriers to participation and to meet delivery of high quality provision

- Concerns arise where students have not been identified in primary or post primary as having additional support needs, or whose information is significantly out dated. Such cases can result in delaying the process of support
- For students from the border counties enrolling at one of the 6 colleges, assessment and support history is not always readily available
- Evidence that some pupils are being kept on at school simply as their transport provision will continue and this would not be the case should they move to a college (especially those relying on specially adapted taxis).
- Funding to support those young people with a Statement of Special Needs (up to the age of 18) more or less ends once they enrol in a FE college yet the level of need remains. Possibility of Statements being extended in age would be beneficial.
- For certain students the funding process should be linked to softer outcomes (e.g. independence) rather than pure academic achievements / progress.
- More guidance is needed for those young people transitioning from school (and without a Statement of Special Needs) to ensure consistency in approach
- Travel distances for some students to access appropriate provision and limitations on post 19 travel support
- Lack of curriculum pathway planning for these students from Year 10 in school to ensure a seamless progression into FE and beyond
- Lack of social enterprise employment opportunities in some parts of NI
- Need for more information sharing from international best practice.

Contact details

Should you wish to discuss the content of this submission further then please contact Karen Lennon at Colleges NI. Contact details below:

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