



Post Educational Needs Provision Submission

Disability Action's Response

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INTRODUCTION

- 1 Disability Action is a pioneering Northern Ireland charity working with and for people with disabilities. We work with our members to provide information, training, transport awareness programmes and representation for people regardless of their disability; whether that is physical, mental, sensory, hidden or learning disability.
- 2 21% of adults and 6% of children in Northern Ireland have a disability and the incidence is higher here than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Over one quarter of all families here are affected.
- 3 As a campaigning body, we work to bring about positive change to the social, economic and cultural life of people with disabilities and consequently our entire community. In pursuit of our aims we serve 45,000 people each year.
- 4 Our network of services is provided via our Headquarters in Belfast and in three regional offices in Carrickfergus, Derry and Dungannon.
- 5 Disability Action welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Inquiry.

SPECIFIC COMMENTARY

- 6 Disability Action's Employment and Training Unit provides a range of supports to people with disabilities through Workable (NI), Employment Support, Disability Support, Support Works and Employment Advocacy.
- 7 The Support Works and Disability Support programmes are directly involved with school leavers and deliver specialist support to trainees with disabilities on the Training for Success programme. Currently we are providing learning support to 92 trainees with learning disabilities on Support Works and specialist disability support to 549 trainees a high proportion of whom have a learning disability on Disability Support. Disabled trainees can be referred by the Careers Service prior to leaving school or by Training Providers once they have commenced Training for Success.

- 8 Disability Action has provided comments on issues relating to post Special Education Need Provision that impact on the choices and opportunities for young people with learning disabilities on leaving school.
- 9 For the purposes of this consultation, Disability Action has also invited input from a cross section of trainees with learning disabilities on Training for Success across N. Ireland. Support staff engaged with 71 trainees placed with 20 Training Organisations and Further Education Colleges.

Current Range of Choice and Opportunities

- 10 While at school the careers advice that young people with learning disabilities receive is determined by the knowledge and awareness of the careers teacher and careers adviser. The gradual demise of the Specialist Careers Adviser has resulted in a less focused service for school leavers with learning disabilities. Generic careers advisers do not have the specialist knowledge and experience to guide this group of young people. In particular, this can be the case for young people with learning disabilities in main stream schools where they may “fall through the net” and not receive appropriate advice and guidance on suitable options available to them or the additional sources of support. In addition careers teachers may not be fully aware of programmes available to these pupils when they leave school.
- 11 The range of choice and opportunity available to school leavers with learning disabilities is dependent on the geographical area in which they live. In the larger towns and cities there may be a number of options available to young people. This could include a choice of Training for Success (TfS) Provider, Further Education courses or opportunities with Voluntary or Community organisations. However, in some rural areas there may be few choices with limited opportunities. This is compounded by a lack of public transport and the excessive cost of private taxis. While trainees on Training for Success should be able to receive support for taxi fares this may not be available for students at Further Educational Colleges. In addition, voluntary sector programmes have limited capacity and tend to be in receipt of short term funding which restricts choices and makes transition planning difficult.

- 12 Trainees with learning disabilities can access the Training for Success programme when they leave school. DEL provides funding for Disability Support for Training for Success and ApprenticeshipNI trainees. Disability Action is one of the Organisations that deliver the service. Provision of specialist support is a commitment from DEL under the Bamford Review Action Plan 2012-15, for young people considering participating in Training for Success (TfS).
- 13 Pupils are referred by the Careers Service in the last few months of their final year at school. Disability Action works with the Careers Service, the careers teacher, parents/carers and the young person to prepare them for the transfer to TfS. Staff advise on social security benefit entitlement, transport issues, appropriate Training Provider, hours and suitable vocational areas prior to the trainee commencing the programme. They support the trainee and their carer through the transition period and help the young person to settle into their new environment. Support continues throughout the training period as required.
- 14 As previously stated, the choice of TfS Provider is dependent on where the young person lives. Some trainees may have a number of choices while others may be limited to one option. Disability Action views access to the training for Success programme as an issue of equity, given the commitment to vocational training places for non-disabled 16-17 year olds.
- 15 Disability Action has raised concerns in the past when the Northern Regional College withdrew their targeted TfS options for people with disabilities and when Belfast Metropolitan College transferred the Pathfinder course from TfS to Further Education. At a programme level, such changes have diminished the inclusivity of TfS and have particularly detrimental impact on young people with learning disabilities. While the Bamford Review Action Plan specifically mentions specialist support and extended eligibility arrangements, it does not require that trainees particular needs are catered for geographically.

- 16 The Northern Regional College has campuses in Ballymena, Magherafelt, Coleraine, Ballymoney, Larne and Newtownabbey. The result of the loss of TfS opportunities in all these locations had a negative impact on the choices available to young people with learning disabilities. The college now offers Further Education vocational options in specialist programmes. However, trainees are disadvantaged as they can not claim the £40.00 non-means tested EMA available through TfS. EMA available on Further Education courses is means tested to a maximum of £30.00. Disabled trainees wishing to access the Pathfinder FE programme at BMC face similar issues.
- 17 School leavers with learning disabilities often find it difficult accessing some Further Education courses as often there is a high demand for places. F.E. Colleges generally select the most able students to reach their quotas and this disadvantages trainees with learning disabilities. Trainees may have good vocational skills but may not reach the eligibility criteria due to limited exam results.
- 18 F. E. Colleges do provide alternative courses for students with disabilities and offer life skills and work preparation courses although these may be part-time and offer limited vocational choices. It is Disability Action's view that young people with learning disabilities should have choices in both TfS and Further Education.
- 19 There are currently a number of excellent small scale transition projects delivered by Disability Organisations and largely funded through the European Social Fund that provide discrete support to students with learning disabilities in their final year at school. While these projects provide positive support, including work placements and one to one mentoring, they can only serve a small number of the more able students due to limited resources.
- 20 There is a need for mainstream funding to offer similar opportunities to all school leavers, regardless of location, to give them the chance to prepare for life after school. This is essential for young people with disabilities and in particular for those in Special schools or Specialist Units as they are often over protected and lack independence and life skills. This gap in provision is not addressed by the service provided by Transition Officers.

21 **Views of Trainees with Learning Disabilities on Training for Success**

Disability Action secured input from trainees with learning disabilities on the Training for Success programme. 71 trainees from 20 Training Providers across Northern Ireland were engaged in 1 to 1 discussions about their experience of transition to training. Trainees were asked about the careers advice they received at school and their experiences in Training. The results of the survey are listed below.

Question 1 (At School)

Did you get advice or speak to anyone about where you could go after leaving school?

Trainees were given 5 options. Some trainees ticked one box while others ticked more than 1. The majority of trainees said that they received advice from a careers adviser.

Teacher	17
Careers teacher	21
Careers adviser	48
Disability Organisation	21
Other	9 (parents, family, open day, student support officer)

Question 2 (At school)

What did you think about the information you got?

The majority of trainees ticked one box in this category although a number ticked more than one. A significant number of trainees felt that the advice helped them decide where they could go after school. A number of these trainees also felt that their parent/carers decided for them. It is clear that in many cases this group of young people are dependent on their parents to make decisions for them. A small but significant number of trainees felt confused and not sure what to do.

It helped me decide on where I could go after school	41
I felt confused and wasn't sure what to do	11
My parents/carers decided for me	22
I had already decided where I wanted to go	13
Other (school decided for me)	2

Question 3 (In training)

Do you feel that when you left school you had a good choice of where to go?

48 trainees said that they had a good choice with 23 saying they did not.

Some of the comments relating to good choices include:

- I had 2 choices
- I attended an Open Night with a few training organisations
- I felt the College offered a choice of good things to do
- I was happy about going to the Tech and didn't need a lot of choices
- Plenty of choices offered at SWC and it's local
- I knew from my work experience from school what I wanted to do.
- Wade was where I wanted to do hairdressing.

Some of the comments relating to why trainees felt they did not have good choices include:

- Not really. I could only go to Newtownards as I had no qualifications from school
- Clanrye only choice given
- Only one choice as I have no qualifications
- There wasn't much options open to me. Not many places to go
- School decided for me. I didn't get a chance to say what I wanted to
- I had only 1 or 2 choices which isn't good
- Limited to where I could go because of resources

Question 4 (In Training)

Are you happy with the choice you made?

66 of the trainees answered “Yes“ to this question which clearly suggests that once on Training for Success they are happy with their choice. Some of the comments given by trainees on why they are happy with their choice include:

- I enjoy all of it
- I enjoy meeting new people
- I like the course I’m doing in retail and my friends are with me
- It is giving me time to get my Maths and English and to get a job
- I like the course working with cars and I am interested
- I like my retail course. I get on with my tutors
- Enjoy my training and work experience days
- I am happy I have a placement and I am getting on well

5 trainees said they were not happy with their choice, although 3 have changed courses and are now happy. Their comments are listed below:

- I did cooking for a year but I didn’t like it. Now I like painting at Craft
- Don’t like painting
- No and then I changed course to TfS People 1st. Yes now I am happy
- Initially no but now doing vocational qualification in area I would like to have started with
- First I went to Mencap and then I changed to People 1st

Best practice in Post School Provision

- 22 Disability Action's direct experience and knowledge of post school provision is centred on the Training for Success programme. As is clear from the results of the survey, the vast majority of trainees who responded appear to enjoy their training and feel that they are benefiting from the experience. This is extremely positive feedback for the Training for Success programme and supports the assertion that young people with learning disabilities can successfully be included in mainstream provision given the right course and the right support
- 23 Disability Action supports a high number of trainees with many Training Providers across Northern Ireland. As with all programmes there are examples of best practice where trainees receive high levels of support and are given good opportunities to progress to positive outcomes. Providers make reasonable adjustments to meet the specific needs of disabled trainees and additional supports are put in place.
- 24 There are also examples of situations where trainees may not experience the best quality of training and may not be given appropriate work place opportunities in their chosen vocational area. Trainees with learning disabilities may drop out of training when they have negative experiences and it should be noted that the comments of these young people is not reflected in the findings of the survey above. It is critical that Disability Support organisations can advocate independently on behalf of disabled trainees and can retain their independent stance in spite of the difficulties inherent in the funding model. Disability Action endeavours to work in partnership with the Training Providers to try to ensure that trainees with learning disabilities are given every opportunity to achieve while on training.
- 25 Disability Action is in regular communication with Training Programmes Branch and will continue to work to achieve best outcomes for young people with disabilities in training.

CONCLUSION

Disability Action welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Inquiry and is happy to respond to any queries which you may have relating to this document.