

Committee for Employment and Learning

Room 375, Parliament Buildings

Stormont BT4 3XX

10<sup>th</sup> March 2014

**Re: Committee Inquiry into Post Special Educational Need Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland**

The following comments have been compiled through engagement with a range of organisations that are involved in supporting or lobbying for greater provision and rights for people with learning disabilities.

A number of concerns and proposals to address these have been identified:

**1. Post Code Provision**

Dungannon is currently one of the worst provided for areas in relation to service provision for people with disabilities in the Southern College area. Good practice facilities in other parts of the Southern area do exist such as the Omagh College. It has been stated that disparity does exist due to additional funding being available to develop schemes or a greater willingness by personal to develop courses and opportunities.

In comparison to its neighbouring areas within Northern Trust area provision is very good and is based on good pilot models and again Dungannon does not compare well in relation to provision and this will reflect further in terms of disparities when the areas join in the new RPA.

Consultation with parents and organisations seeking to support people with disabilities have identified this disparity which is growing and cases have been identified where families have moved areas to ensure better quality service, however this is not an option for most.

**2. Boundaries and Co Terminosity**

The provision of good quality services needs to take account of co terminosity, for example Dungannon currently sits in the area of the Southern Regional College area with Enniskillen, Omagh, Cookstown however regarding education, health and transport it locates within the Southern Trust. This has major implications in that even if Omagh was available which it is not due to distance for vulnerable people to travel the transport provision would not be accessible across this boundary area.

The transition process for young people moving from education to adult services has further highlighted the issue and barrier relating to boundaries as support workers are operating in one area from across a range of boundary administrations, all with different systems, budgets and services.

### **3. Communication and Support**

Communication would seem to be a major issue with regard to provision, there is a lack of a joined up approach after a young person leaves the formal education system. It is important that parents and carers are supported and informed on the best opportunity for young people in relation to future learning and development and the environment that this is provided within.

There will be courses that people with greater independence can participate whereas other people may not be able to access. It is important that carers and parents are well informed and supported in relation to making suitable choices and that provision is there to accommodate a wide range of people.

There is a need for a greater joined up approach with Health Trust who is supporting people in transition from education and to allow for informed choice of courses and activities.

### **4. Flexible Need focused Provision**

Currently there is a focus on Colleges seeking to gain numbers on courses and then provide to suit the most popular.

It is important that some focus is on lifelong learning, where courses are not all driven in relation to levels of accreditation but that they serve a developmental agenda.

Provision of a range of levels of course should be available, if these cannot all be delivered in the college environment they could be based in outreach facilities in an environment that is accessible and safe. It is important that courses and development opportunities through DEL are tailored at both MLD and SLD people.

Currently groups and special schools pay directly to colleges for provision of courses which is at an extremely high level and there is no flexibility of use of this funding at another more competitive source through social enterprise etc.

A key issue that has been raised a number of times by parents and young people in lifelong learning and development is the number of times they can access a DEL course. This is currently restricted and needs reviewed as often development courses are a critical aspect of continuing social and public interaction for people.

### **5. Placements and Volunteering**

There is real concern at present with regard to people accessing placement and volunteering opportunities as there is a fear that this will impact upon much relied upon social security support.

There is a realisation that some placements for people with disabilities may lead to employment, particularly within the private sector and these should be encouraged for those that can participate in this process. However there are other volunteering activities that people with more complex learning opportunities can avail of which would have high levels of support and these will not lead to employment but assist with social interaction and development, mainly in the community and public sector where further support is available. There is reluctance for participation in volunteering opportunities for short periods as this can impact on long term quality of life provision by Government. One government strategy is implicating the delivery and success of the other.