

FROM THE MINISTER/ÓN AIRE



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17th
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Robin a chra

Thank you for your letter of 23 January in relation to the Committee's Inquiry into Post-School Special Educational Needs Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities.

As requested, please see the enclosed Memorandum of Reply which addresses those Terms of Reference which are pertinent to the work of the Department of Education.

I look forward to the Committee's report and its recommendations with much interest.

JOHN O'DOWD MLA
Minister for Education

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Memorandum of Reply

Department of Education Submission to Committee for Employment and Learning Inquiry into Post-School Special Educational Needs Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities

Terms of Reference 1: To examine the current range of choice and opportunities available for those with Learning Disabilities on leaving full time schooling.

DE response:

Transitions

1. Issues around 'transitions', which relate to difficulties that may arise after young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) leave school, are frequently raised as a matter of concern by various stakeholders.
2. Transitions planning was the subject of a NICCY report – "Review of Transitions to Adult Services for Young People with Learning Disabilities" (September 2012). In addition, the CYPSP's "Transition to Adulthood of Young People with Disabilities" Action Plan and the Bamford Action Plan both identify a need for further work to be carried out to improve transitions planning.
3. In accordance with the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN, an Education and Library Board (ELB) is required to produce a Transition Plan at the first (and subsequent) Annual Review of the statement of SEN following the young person's 14th birthday.
4. The Transition Plan draws together information from a variety of sources, including the young person, his/her parents, the school and any other professionals involved with the young person. It aims to plan coherently for the change when a young person moves from school to adult life.

5. DE has previously taken actions to strengthen the transitions planning process, including the permanent appointment of Education Transition Co-ordinators in each of the ELBs and the provision of life skills training for young people.
6. The ELBs' Transition Service, which is funded by DE, exists to help young people and their parents/carers access the appropriate information, guidance and support to allow them to make informed choices for the future.
7. The Education Transition Co-ordinator is there to support the parent and child throughout the transition process, providing a co-ordinated approach and ensuring that connections for access to post-school education, health and social care sector supports are made.

SEN and Inclusion Review

8. There are no proposals in the Review to remove or weaken the statutory transitions arrangements for statemented children.
9. As part of the new SEN Framework, a revised statutory SEN Code of Practice, which will be subject to public consultation, will aim to enhance further the existing arrangements for transition planning for all children with SEN, and ensure that all school leavers and their parents understand the opportunities available and the pathways to these.
10. New guidance will therefore stress the importance of school and ELB liaison with DEL's Careers Service, the local Health and Social Care Trust where appropriate, other relevant statutory services such as DEL's Disability Employment Service, and relevant voluntary sector organisations which may be of assistance.

ETI Review of Transitions Arrangements

11. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is carrying out a review of the current statutory Transitions arrangements, including post-primary to adult

services, in both mainstream (including Learning Support Centres) and special schools, with a view to identifying what is working well and what requires improvement.

Careers Advice

12. DE is committed to the continuous improvement of the quality of careers education in schools and both DE and DEL are working well together to take forward the full and continuing implementation of the joint DE/DEL 'Preparing for Success – Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy'.
13. The Strategy recognises that young people who are vulnerable to social exclusion have high priority career guidance needs and that specialist skills are required for this area of work. DEL careers advisors can provide information, advice and guidance to the pupil and parents on appropriate progression routes.
14. For pupils with statements of SEN, the Education Transition Co-ordinators work in conjunction with DEL's Careers Service, Health and Social Care Trust professionals and health transition workers to ensure the provision of comprehensive and co-ordinated information about a range of options available.
15. The advice of the DEL Careers Service is available in schools to advise all children with SEN, whether or not they have a statement or a formal transitions plan.

Work Experience Opportunities

16. There are opportunities for all pupils in schools for work experience. Transition Co-ordinators support schools in conjunction with DEL's Careers Service to develop and monitor connections with potential employers who could offer work experience placements for pupils.

17. Special schools incorporate work experience into their leavers' programmes and a number of schools would have links with voluntary organisations, such as MENCAP, the NOW Project and The Orchardville Society. These organisations provide internal work placements for SEN pupils within their own organisations and also source external work placements. The MENCAP Transitions Project is designed to offer young adults with a learning disability a qualification in Employability along with work experience, volunteering placements and work skills training.

18. Young people attending mainstream schools with a Moderate Learning Difficulty have access to work experience placements through Business in the Community's Charter Work Experience database (*Employers willing to offer structured, informative, and valuable work experience placements to post-primary school students interested in a variety of occupational areas and disciplines*).

19. However, the ELBs have indicated that difficulties that schools encounter in getting potential employers to offer work experience placements for SEN pupils include:

- Limitations on the number of appropriate work experience placements.
- Employers' reluctance to engage due to a lack of confidence in their ability to work with a young person with a learning difficulty.
- The current economic climate where employers are unable to offer placements due to staff shortages – employers are unable to offer the appropriate time and support required to a young person with MLD/SLD.
- Ensuring that employers offer students quality work experience placements that match their career choice and interest.

Qualifications Provision for 14-19 Learners with SEN – CCEA Report

20. In advance of the Entitlement Framework becoming statutory in September 2013, DE commissioned the Regulatory side of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to conduct a two-year

development project with Special Schools and Learning Support Centres (LSCs) within mainstream schools to better recognise and reward the achievements of pupils with SEN and promote coherent progression pathways.

21. CCEA's Final Report – "Qualifications Provision for 14-19 Learners with SEN" (September 2013) – listed a number of recommendations for DE's consideration. Arising from this report, a guidance document has been produced for Special Schools and LSCs, exemplified by a series of case studies.

22. Accredited qualifications appear on the Register of Regulated Qualifications. The guidance advises that credit-based qualifications offer particular benefits to learners with SEN because they are flexible and accessible. Qualifications in a learning programme can range from Entry Level to Level 1 – though some learners may be able to undertake a Level 2 qualification; if so, this should be included in their learning programme - and not all qualifications must be at the same level for an individual learner across the curricular areas.

23. The guidance sets out that, to give their learners a curriculum offer that meets the aspirations and principles of the Entitlement Framework, Special Schools and LSCs should focus on:

- using accredited qualifications;
- covering Key Stage 4 statutory curriculum areas through accredited qualifications; and
- establishing appropriate progression pathways.

24. Schools should make every effort to offer qualifications covering the three curriculum areas of literacy and numeracy, Learning for Life and Work, and a vocational area. When identifying which qualifications to use in a learning programme, it is important to consider each learner's progression route or destination. Schools should consider the entry requirements of the learner's preferred Further Education College, training course or other route.

25. When considering progression routes, special schools and LSCs should take particular account of the transition planning process guidelines.

26. This guidance will shortly be issued to special schools and LSCs.

Terms of Reference 5: Given the complex and interrelated need of individuals in this group, to identify the barriers to co-ordination across departments – regionally and locally – and make recommendations for improvement.

DE response:

1. DE recognises the importance of liaison and inter-agency working to support policy development and good practice.
2. For pupils with statements of SEN, the ELBs' Education Transition Co-ordinators work in conjunction with DEL's Careers Service, Health and Social Care Trust professionals and health transition workers to ensure the provision of comprehensive and co-ordinated information about a range of options available.
3. The Department continues to engage with ELBs, DHSSPS and DEL in relation to transition planning through both the Autism Strategy & Action Plan and the Bamford Action Plan; and also with the cross-agency CYPSP 'Transition to Adulthood of Young People with Disabilities' sub-group.
4. As referred to in Terms of Reference 1, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is carrying out a review of the current statutory Transitions arrangements, including post-primary to adult services, in both mainstream (including Learning Support Centres) and special schools, with a view to identifying what is working well and what requires improvement.
5. It is the intention that this review will, among other things, evaluate the scope and effectiveness of collaboration between DE, DEL, health and social services, and the voluntary sector.
6. At the meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability on 21 November 2013, DEL's paper on the provision of services (including Transitions) for people with a learning disability post-19 was

discussed. Minister Farry asked that the relevant Departments formally engage to consider this issue.

7. I agreed to share with the Group the ETI report on Transitions when completed. I also raised the possibility of funding a project on the provision of services for people with a learning disability post-19 under Delivering Social Change. OFMDFM agreed to co-ordinate a meeting between the relevant Departments to discuss 'Transitions' and post-19 provision for people with a learning disability.
8. As indicated under Terms of Reference 1, as part of the implementation of the new SEN Framework, new guidance will stress the importance of school and ELB liaison with DEL's Careers Service, the local Health and Social Care Trust where appropriate, other relevant statutory services such as DEL's Disability Employment Service, and relevant voluntary sector organisations which may be of assistance.
9. As highlighted in our response to Terms of Reference 1:
 - a. it is recognised that young people who are vulnerable to social exclusion have high priority career guidance needs and that specialist skills are required for this area of work. In this respect, support is available through the ELBs' Transitions Service and DEL's Careers Service;
 - b. DE is committed to the continuous improvement of the quality of careers education in schools and both DE and DEL are working well together to take forward the full and continuing implementation of the joint DE/DEL 'Preparing for Success – Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy';
 - c. DEL careers advisors can provide information, advice and guidance to the pupil and parents on appropriate progression routes, including accessible post-school educational opportunities; and

- d. The advice of DEL's Careers Service is available in schools to advise all children with SEN – whether or not they have a statement or a formal transitions plan.

10. CCEA's Final Report – "Qualifications Provision for 14-19 Learners with SEN" (September 2013), as referenced under Terms of Reference 1, also included the following recommendations relating to cross-Departmental co-operation:

- a. Provision for MLD learners beyond the age of 16 should be further explored by both DE and DEL.
- b. Discussion should take place across DE, DEL and DHSSPS to explore establishing a coherent provision of learning and care that supports progression for young people with SEN. This is particularly important for those young people with severe and/or profound and multiple learning difficulties who come under the care of the health trusts once they reach the age of 19. In particular, the three Departments should consider putting in place a robust tracking system, with facilities for information sharing that will track and manage the transition of post-16 and post-19 learners.
- c. Further awareness raising should be carried out with the FE sector and other stakeholders about the qualifications schools are now using. CCEA Regulation could take this work forward.

11. DE is considering CCEA's recommendations and will be discussing with interdepartmental colleagues how best to take these forward.