

FROM THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
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Our Ref: AGY/56/2014

Date: 19 March 2014

Dear Robin

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

As requested, please find enclosed a Memorandum of Reply which addresses those Terms of Reference which are appropriate for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Edwin Poots MLA
Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety

COMMITTEE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING'S INQUIRY INTO POST-SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING FOR THOSE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

DHSSPS WRITTEN RESPONSE:

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

1. The Department recognises the importance of ensuring that people with a learning disability have access to high-quality, person-centred day opportunities which facilitates their integration into the community and living a full life – progressing a key goal of Bamford (2005).

Bamford

2. The Bamford "Equal Lives: Review of Policy and Services for People with a Learning Disability in Northern Ireland - September 2005" document outlined a strategy for improvement of people's lives – one that directly challenged the social exclusion of men and women with a learning disability from mainstream services and opportunities, and set out a number of steps which were required to allow them to achieve greater participation and involvement in their communities and access to education, employment, personal relationships and leisure opportunities, whilst ensuring that individual support was available where required.
3. "Equal Lives" is based on the core values of citizenship, social inclusion, empowerment, working together and individual support. It highlighted the necessity for services to attune to the changed perception of what it means to have a learning disability.

4. It also underlined that the needs and aspirations of people with Learning Disability cannot be met solely by health and social care. Support is needed from education, housing, leisure, employment, transport and many other sectors.
5. "Delivering the Bamford Vision – Action Plan 2012-15" was launched on behalf of the NI Executive in 2013 and it contains a specific action - to enhance provision of person centred day opportunities for people with a learning disability that facilitate integration into the community.

Transforming Your Care

6. Transforming Your Care (which sets out proposals for change across a wide range of health and social care services) places emphasis on integrated care and promotion of personalised care in the community, closer to people's homes. It aims to give people with a learning disability more choice about the services they receive – including the development of creative and age-appropriate day opportunities.

Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership - Transitions

7. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) regional Sub Group on Transitions has developed a draft action plan. This includes the priorities which need to be taken forward to improve the six high level outcomes for young people with disabilities as they transition into adulthood (these include Being Healthy; Enjoying, Learning and Achieving; Living in Safety and with Stability; Experiencing Economic and Environmental Wellbeing; Contributing Positively to Community and Society; and Living in a Society which Respects their Rights). This draft action plan should be read in conjunction with the overall Children and Young People's Plan which establishes that all the CYPSP planning work will contribute towards a shift to early intervention, and to integration of resources from all possible sources to improve outcomes for children and young people.

8. The provision of adequate support services into adulthood is vital for children and young people with a disability. The focus of this Sub Group is children and young people who have a physical, sensory or learning disability or prolonged illness or condition. Such disability or illness, in interaction with various barriers, and without the provision of adequate support services, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others, and may hinder their optimal potential for personal development and social inclusion.

Health and Social Care (HSC) Transitions Planning

9. Each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland is at a different stage in the modernisation and reform of its day services in line with Bamford's vision for day opportunities.
10. To assist young people with learning disabilities during transition from childhood to adult services, each of the Health and Social Care Trusts has designated individuals/teams. As part of their role, these teams or individual co-ordinators collaborate with other Departments and Agencies, allied health professionals and the voluntary and community sector, to provide transition plans for young disabled people who are making the move from children's services into adult services and transitioning from full-time education. This should include the plans and aspirations of young people with learning disabilities to progress into some form of further education, training or employment. In the HSC transitions planning commences from age 14.
11. With increasing demand, the traditional model of buildings-based day care provision is not sustainable. For example, during the period of 2013-15 it is estimated that there will be some 486 individuals coming through transition from education who will need some form of daycare/day opportunities. However, it is acknowledged that not all of these young people would be on the severe end of the learning disability spectrum.

12. Therefore, there is an onus on society and statutory agencies to seek to maximise independence and promote social inclusion, through the provision of further education, training, sheltered employment and the full range of other services for those who have the capacity to avail of it. Day centre provision will always be required to provide services and support for people with complex needs.
13. In some areas, there has been over 50% shift into community-based day provision developing a range of opportunities including further education, vocational and social provision.
14. Partnerships between Health and Social Care Trusts and the community and voluntary sector has enabled some learning disabled citizens to realise their vocational aspirations and, in some instances, progress towards paid employment.
15. The development of social "clubhouse/bases" and "Drop-In" Centres have gone a significant way towards the integration of people with learning disability into leisure services and local amenities within their own communities. A Drop-in Centre can be a place identified in each town where people can literally "drop-in" to meet their friends. This might be in a leisure or community centre, or in a hired room in a college, church, or business premises. This facility can be open on certain days or at certain times, including evenings and weekends. There is normally a coordinator at each 'Drop In' to act as support and to coordinate the centre and its outreach activities. There may also be a pool of staff and/or volunteers to assist the co-ordinators in activities and provide a venue in the evenings or at weekends.
16. Structured Activities can include eg reading and visiting the library, swimming, walking, dancing and yoga, watching television and going to the cinema,

snooker/pool, bowls, golf, listening to music, shopping, gardening, eating out, arts & crafts, Special Olympics or Riding for the Disabled.

17. Generally, people attend a "Drop-In" as part of a package of community-based day services on the days when they are not at college, volunteering, in social enterprise or in supported employment.
18. There are also good examples of partnership working with further education campuses enabling accredited lifelong learning and integration into the population of adult learners.

Integrated Services

19. This radical shift from traditional segregated services towards integrated, socially inclusive provision has required a reconfiguration of HSC staffing resource and a disinvestment from some traditional buildings-based day provision. Some Trusts have reduced, or have plans to reduce, the number of their buildings-based facilities, with a general move towards smaller satellite-type services within the community and with independent and third sector partnerships.
20. This means a change not only in the traditional day service but in the associated therapies and allied health professions such as speech and language; occupational and physiotherapy being delivered in the community rather than in a day centre building.

Day Services for People with Complex Care Needs

21. Individuals with complex needs or higher support requirements will continue to have this provided in purpose designed buildings based on the traditional day care setting, however, the challenge remains that many such services continue to be segregated from local communities on the edge of towns, or even in industrial estates away from all community infrastructures.

22. Working within the true meaning of citizenship, individuals have a right to be part of the community that they live in and their day service should enable them to access meaningful activities in the community wherever possible.
23. HSC Trusts are improving or replacing the stock of Day Centres to make them more responsive to the more complex needs of some people with a learning disability. These improvements to Day Centres will continue alongside the development of Day Opportunities in each Trust.
24. The need to provide an individualised service for the most vulnerable in our society remains an absolute priority for any modernised or reforming day service.

Cross- Departmental working and funding

25. Future services should be delivered on a collaborative basis, requiring government departments to engage in a cross-departmental arrangement, to put in place a network of services delivering for people with learning disabilities.
26. This model enables the adoption of a joint approach to resourcing and management to promote integrated working across agencies, develop community infrastructure to support adults with learning disability, maximise the use of public monies, streamline policy and procedures, simplify pathways to service provision, minimise the duplication and facilitate better governance arrangements.
27. The essential characteristics of the new cross-departmental, integrated model of service should be realistic and achievable. People with learning disabilities should be able to access high quality, individualised services through supported living, supported employment, productive day time opportunities, educational, social and leisure activities.

28. Based on the proposed new model of future service delivery, partnership means working across various government Departments including Education; Health, Social Services and Public Safety; Social Development; Culture Arts and Leisure and also Employment and Learning.

Regional Learning Disability Day Opportunities Model

29. The HSC Board has provided the Committee for Employment and Learning with a copy of its Regional Day Opportunities Model for adults with learning disabilities, on which consultation closed on 17 January 2014. The paper was developed through a learning disability sub-group of the Bamford Taskforce, co-chaired by the Chief Executive of the HSCB and the Chief Executive of the Public Health Agency with representations from other government departments.
30. The proposed model sets out a way forward to improve day opportunities and day centres for those with learning disabilities and makes a number of recommendations. The paper would allow benchmarking of Day Services/Day Opportunities in order to drive improvements. The model intends to ensure that there is a consistent regional framework and that day opportunities would be redesigned locally - with full and meaningful engagement with clients, their families and carers, and also with staff within this framework.
31. Any proposed change to existing services would require the HSC Trust to inform the HSC Board with detailed communication plans and high level time lines; the work programmes would need to be developed, consulted on, agreed, and put in place in each Trust area. It is envisaged that the whole programme of change may take three to five years to complete and its success would be highly dependent on the cooperation of relevant government departments, voluntary and community, and third sector organisations working with statutory agencies.

32. The responses to the consultation have now been collated and themes identified. The report will be considered by the HSC Board in April 2014. The Board intends to convene a Regional Implementation Group to provide strategic direction and to facilitate co-ordinated implementation and it is anticipated that the HSCB will approach various organisations for nominees for the Regional Group, especially those involved in education, further education and employment, transport and, culture, arts and leisure.

PHA Review of AHP Services to Statemented Children

33. The Public Health Agency is currently undertaking a Review of Allied Health Professionals' services for children with statements of special educational needs. The aim is to agree a regional model to best meet the assessed needs of these children, ensuring that resources are used to the best effect and that the children have equitable access to the services of Allied Health Professions, regardless of the school they attend. The Agency is in the process of engaging with key stakeholders, including DHSSPS and the Department of Education, and individual special schools.
34. In addition, there are a wide range of services available from Health and Social Care Trusts to support children, young people, and adults who have special educational needs and their families and carers). Services and support stretch from early intervention and pre-school through nursery, primary school, secondary school, and through the transition from children to adult services where young people may wish to access further education and training and enter employment.