

## **COMMITTEE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING**

### **INQUIRY INTO POST SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED PROVISION IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING FOR THOSE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

#### **1 Background Information**

Northern Regional College is the main provider of further education across 9 of the 26 Council areas in Northern Ireland covering a population of 450 000 or 25% of the people in Northern Ireland. Over 15000 students currently study full time or part time courses. In addition the College has over 600 enrolments on a range of Work Based Learning programmes. It is a member of all of the Learning Communities within its catchment area delivering programmes both on campus and in local schools to over 2500 pupils.

The College has 7 campuses, 2 in Ballymena and one each in Ballymoney, Coleraine, Larne, Magherafelt and Newtownabbey. It shares its campus in Larne with an organisation offering sheltered employment and it also has a community presence in a number of out-centres across the region.

The college has 8 academic schools:

- Engineering and Science
- Built environment
- Business and Computing
- Hospitality, Tourism and Sport
- Essential Skills
- Social Care and Early Years
- Hair, Beauty Therapy, Access and Special Needs
- Art and Design, Media and Performing Arts

The student population ranges from school pupils (aged 14+) and school leavers to mature students and professionals. There are 115 full time and 164 part time discrete special needs students and over 300 students in mainstream programmes who require additional learning support. Students require support across a wide range of mild, moderate and severe learning difficulties/disabilities.

## **2 Terms of Reference**

### **a. To examine the current range of choice and opportunities available for those with Learning Disabilities on leaving full time schooling**

#### **(i) Transition**

As a member of the North Eastern Education and Library Board Transition Steering Group the College has played an effective role in transition development within the College's catchment area. This multi disciplinary model has been rolled out successfully to other areas within Northern Ireland. Promotion of appropriate discrete programmes of study as outlined below is carried out by College staff working in partnership with our feeder schools. Students applying or intending to apply to NRC who have a learning disability/difficulty are offered support in a number of ways. Tutors are frequently involved with students prior to their final transitional review at school through school talks, liaison with key school staff, visits to College by parents and students and meetings with other professionals and support workers who currently provide support to the students.

College staff work closely with EOTAS and Guidance Centres to ensure that there are appropriate progression opportunities identified and that suitable support is available for students.

The College has developed an excellent working relationship with the Northern Trust Day Opportunity Team offering programmes which develop both life and employability skills (see 2 day programme below). One area identified for development is the selection process. Currently the College does not have a role in selecting students for this programme as this is handled by the Day Opportunity Teams.

#### **(ii) Interview and Pre enrolment**

All full time students who have applied for a discrete special needs programme are interviewed accompanied by their parent/guardian if they wish to attend. This provides an opportunity to share information, concerns and discuss transition plans and individual's needs.

All students have the opportunity to indicate their learning disability/difficulty at the application stage particularly if they feel additional support at interview would be of assistance.

### (iii) Registration and Induction

Discrete special needs groups register and commence their induction programme prior to the full College induction. This provides an opportunity to conduct orientation sessions, meet key staff in a quieter environment and to explore the campus identifying areas such as libraries, canteens and the location of support services.

The induction programme takes place over a number of weeks facilitating awareness of the College and its resources, expectations of and from students, development of individual learning plans and strategies. This will include diagnostic tests for skills levels, one to one assessments and where appropriate educational psychologist assessments.

### (iv) Course Options

A range of discrete programmes is available

#### **Aspire2Work**

Students: 16+ with moderate learning disabilities/difficulties

Maximum number in class: 12

Duration: 3 days per week for 1 year

Provision;

- NOCN Level 1 Award in Retail **or**
- C&G Level 1 Award in Introduction to the Hospitality Industry
- C&G Level 1 Certificate in Employability and Personal Development
- Essential Skills Literacy
- Essential Skills Numeracy
- Essential Skills ICT
- Course tutorial
- One day a week work placement

#### **Workready**

Students: 16+ with moderate learning disabilities/difficulties

Maximum number in class: 12

Duration: 3 days per week for 1 year

Provision:

- NOCN Level 1 Certificate in Retail **or**
- C&G Level 1 Certificate in Introduction to the Hospitality Industry
- C&G Level 1 Extended Certificate in Employability and Personal Development
- Essential Skills Literacy
- Essential Skills Numeracy
- Essential Skills ICT

- Course tutorial
- One day a week work placement

### **Route 2 Work**

Students: 16+ with moderate learning disabilities/difficulties (requiring focus on life skills rather than vocational qualifications)

Maximum number in class: 12

Duration: 4 days per week for 1 year

Provision;

- OCN NI Entry Level 3 Certificate in Vocational Skills Personal Progression – to include Career Preparation and Planning
- OCN NI Award in College Orientation
- Essential Skills Literacy
- Essential Skills Numeracy
- Essential Skills ICT or Entry 3 Award in ICT
- Course Tutorial

### **Wider Choices**

Students: 19+ with moderate to severe learning disabilities/difficulties

Maximum number in class: 10

Duration: 2 days per week for 2 years

Provision:

- C&G Entry Level 1 Diploma in Personal Progress
- C&G Entry Level 2 Certificate in Employability and Personal Development
- Qualification attained over two years

### **Life Skills**

Students: 19+ with moderate to severe learning disabilities/difficulties

Maximum number in class: 10

Duration: 4 hours per week for 1 year

Provision:

- NOCN Entry Level 1 Award in Life Skills

### **Horizons**

Students: 19+ with profound learning disabilities/difficulties

Maximum number in class: 10

Duration: 1 – 2 hours per week for 1 year

The Inclusive Curriculum Strategy is reviewed annually to ensure that opportunities for accredited learning match the students' needs. A range of stakeholders are consulted throughout this process

- Schools within the College catchment area
- DEL Careers Advisers
- Transition Team
- NEELB Transport
- College learning support staff
- College SEN Curriculum Staff
- Students

The programme of study is carefully balanced to ensure that there are appropriate opportunities to achieve vocational and essential skills, develop independent living skills and prepare for future employment. Key elements of the curriculum offering are planned pathways from school to College, between programmes and transition out. Work experience is a vital element in preparing students for independent living.

All Further Education and Work Based Learning programmes are open to students with learning support needs or disabilities. In particular a number of vocational areas offer qualifications at level 1 including a new programme Access to Opportunity. This course is designed for young people who have not yet achieved the qualifications suitable for entry to a Level 2 course, and who need time to learn the life skills and maturity to benefit from a Level 2 course.

Additional learning support is put in place as and when necessary, however, a more challenging aspect of meeting student needs arises in relation to those students who have not been identified at school as having additional learning support needs or whose information is outdated. In these cases the College has to rely on either the student or parents declaring their concerns or support requirements. The College highlights the need, and the benefits of, providing such information in a variety of ways throughout the students' programme

#### (v) Ongoing Support

##### Education Support

The college has 3 Education Support Co-ordinators who analyse the data provided by students on an ongoing basis, offering one to one interviews to discuss additional support needs and where appropriate arranging educational psychologist assessments. Appropriate additional human and/or technical support can then be put in place. Examples of such support include one to one mentoring, dyslexia/dyscalculia support, laptops, specialist software etc.

## College Careers Advisors

The College Careers team will meet both with prospective students and their parents to discuss the most appropriate option including entry level, progression and employment opportunities. The information provided at these sessions is further developed during the vocational interview and initial support needs ascertained. Regular contact is also available with DEL Careers Advisors.

## Pastoral Care

All students have regular progress reviews which measure progress to date, identify targets for further progression and provide an opportunity to discuss concerns. Tutors, Student Services staff and College Counsellors are available for students to discuss both course related and personal concerns.

**b To seek the views of young people, family carers and groups representing children and young people with learning disabilities what services they would like to see in place and how the current situation meets their needs.**

The College seeks feedback from students on a regular basis at key times throughout the year. As part of the process students can make comments as well as answering the set questions. In a recent survey students were asked what they liked most about the course. The students' comments reflected the benefits of social interaction, increasing independence and skills development.

*I got to learn all different subjects and experience things that I have never done before*

*Meeting new people and getting more qualifications for a job*

*Making lots of friends and the teachers were helpful*

*Meeting new people and learning new things*

*The tutors were very helpful and supportive to me. Anything I didn't understand I was able to ask. I loved doing catering*

*The teachers were helpful. The course was fun. The work was challenging but not difficult.*

*Having the independence to go out on trips without mum or dad or carers*

*Meeting new friends building my confidence*

*Enjoyed the work and going places and having fun and the teachers were nice*

*Meeting new friends and I learn new skills. I have very nice tutors and I have really enjoyed my time on the course*

### **c To research best practice in post school provision for those with learning difficulties**

The SEN curriculum staff and education support specialists are constantly faced with many challenges and, therefore, continually developing strategies to deal with the increasing number of students presenting with a wide range of learning support needs. Ongoing staff development is essential to ensure that both specialist staff and curriculum staff can meet the needs of students particularly with regards to the increasing number of students presenting with behaviour management issues.

The Additional Support Funds provided by DEL are essential both for discrete and mainstream student support. In addition to those students who require individual carers/support workers for physical needs many students could not cope without one to one learning support on an ongoing basis. Over 50% of students with identified learning support needs on mainstream programmes have additional one to one weekly sessions with specialist tutors. As the need for additional support increases one challenge faced by the College is the availability and recruitment of support workers.

The discrete special needs programmes offer a particularly high level of pastoral and learning support including regular parental contact, home visits and individual learning plans. A number of students have particular behaviour management issues and will be given individual coping strategies.

The annual curriculum review ensures that the discrete programmes offer vocational training linked to employment opportunities within the area. For example the current programmes offer retail and catering as the main vocational components.

The curriculum team identified a number of years ago that not all students were ready or could immediately cope with mainstream programmes hence the development of the 1 year lifeskills and personal development course.

In order to ensure that students transferring to the College from the local Special Education Schools can develop and build on qualifications already attained, the College has worked in partnership with a number of the schools. Both the schools and the College now offer OCN NI accreditation for Independent Living Skills allowing students to progress to the next level of achievement at College.

Work experience is a key component of the discrete programmes. In order to increase the employability prospects for students the College approached the Disability Employment Service in 2012 with a view to working in partnership. This resulted in a pilot between the Service and the College (Southern Regional College have also joined the pilot) to increase employment opportunities

- 52 students have been referred to the project from the 2012-13 student cohort;

- 20 students have gone on to further training/education or have registered with specialist disability providers; and
- 12 students have secured paid employment through the project

The Delivering Excellence Programme funded by DEL provided an opportunity to share best practice across the 6 FE Colleges for 3 years and internationally via best practice visits. The project was managed/delivered by the Learning Support and Discrete Working Group and developed and disseminated best practice in support, training and specialist SLDD advice across the Colleges. In addition to the ongoing activities the annual conference provided a further opportunity to share best practice, network with key stakeholders and develop innovative approaches to training and delivery of courses. At the end of the programme the group sought permission from the College Directors to continue as a sector working group.

As part of the programme a group of College staff visited AMPROS - an Association in Cantabria (Northern Spain) for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (SSLD Discrete Provision) founded in 1965 by families of people with intellectual disabilities.

The fundamental difference between the AMPROS model and the approach in NI is that AMPROS deals with all aspects of transition from education at 16yrs to employment until 60yrs. The NI model by comparison is extremely disjointed as there are a number of organisations/agencies with different agendas eg DEL, DE, Health and Social Services Trusts and voluntary organisations all have different sets of priorities.

The Spanish model comes from top down ie it is enshrined in Spanish legislation that companies with 50+ employees must have 2% of employees with intellectual disabilities or the company is obliged to buy products/services from a company who can satisfy this requirement on their behalf eg a high skilled sector such as software development cannot meet the employment requirement but could have cleaning, catering and gardening provided by AMPROS.



**d To examine if the quantum and quality of post school provision for those with learning disabilities is meeting the demand and develop recommendations to address barriers to participation and delivery of high quality provision**

Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 the College is required to make reasonable adjustments for students with learning difficulties/disabilities. The College is assisted in making these adjustments and in providing individual support by the Additional Support Funds provided by DEL. These funds ensure that students are equipped to participate in both mainstream and discrete programmes. All students supported by such funds undergo initial assessment and are reviewed throughout the academic year.

Programmes are supported and delivered by professional, appropriately qualified staff who participate in ongoing staff development.

The curriculum offering is reviewed annually and provision amended according to the needs of the students eg 3 years ago it was becoming increasingly apparent that the needs of the discrete special needs students were not being fully met by the Training For Success programme hence a new range of programmes was developed within Further Education. This allowed greater flexibility in the structure of the curriculum offered and ensured that vocational, employability and personal/independent living skills were all addressed.

The report of the Inspection of the Further Education and Work Based Learning Provision of the College by the Education and Training Inspectorate in November 2012 stated that

*The quality of the provision for SLDD is good. Most of the learners are confident, motivated and are making good progress in their learning. Good individual support is also provided to most of those learners who require additional help with their learning, including the provision of specialist equipment; clear targets are set for them and regular reviews ensure that their progress is closely monitored.*

**e Given the complex and interrelated needs of individuals in this group to identify the barriers to co-ordination across the department – regionally and locally and make recommendations for improvement**

The College acknowledges the range of work, effort and good practice undertaken both by College staff and key stakeholders but recognises that there are a number of barriers to maintaining a sustainable, consistent and effective service for students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Such barriers include

(i) Transition into College

- A number of pupils remain in school when it would be more appropriate to transfer to College
- Students' expectations do not always match realistic/appropriate programmes and future employment
- Inconsistent transfer of information between school and College
- Inconsistent quality and detail of information provided
- Outdated educational psychologist assessments
- Lack of relevant information where a student has been excluded from school
- Lack of information from Day Centres re students. Practice varies across Centres and is dependent on individual management ie there is no coherent policy across the Province with only some encouraging links with FE.

(ii) In College

- Transport can be a concern for some students. The rural nature of the College's catchment area can present a challenge for those students who have relied on NEELB funded transport and are not yet ready or capable of undertaking independent travel. Cost is also often an issue.
- Risk management. The number of students who require risk assessments to ensure that appropriate standards of health and safety are in place is increasing.
- Measurement of achievement. Attainment of 'softer skills', regular attendance, development of independent living skills and social skills etc all need recognition as well as accredited vocational achievement.
- Sharing of information across education, health, support and social services is at best inconsistent and at worst non-existent

(iii) Transition out

- Supported employment opportunities are not consistently available
- Danger of post 16+ dropping out of the system. Increased networking, follow up and ongoing support is required particularly where the parents have support needs as well.

This concludes Northern Regional College's response.