



Submission to the Committee Inquiry into post
Special Educational Need Provision in education,
employment and training for those with Learning
Disabilities

20th March 2014

Executive Summary

The Southern Regional College introduced its Inclusive Curriculum Strategy in 2012 in response to identified weaknesses and issues regarding the curriculum offer for students with Special Educational Needs and those not in education, training or employment.

As part of the inclusive curriculum strategy the Southern Regional College reviewed and redesigned its curriculum offer at L1 and below for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Full Time Learners. This led to the provision of a regional curriculum portfolio offering a choice of education and training pathways to young people with a focus on employability.

The College has developed effective 'transition arrangements' with a number of stakeholders thus ensuring SEN learners and their parents, guardians and carers make more informed decisions. This also ensures that the level of support provided by the College is planned in advance of the young person enrolling in the programme. High quality CEIAG is also a key component to informing decisions, prior to joining a course, during a course and on exiting a course.

This submission provides a description of Southern Regional College provision to support students with Special Educational Needs. The submission also makes a number of recommendations/suggestions for improving Special Educational Need Provision in education, employment and training.

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1. Introduction

Southern Regional College is the largest Further and Higher Education College in Northern Ireland outside of Belfast. With a total of six campuses across the counties of Armagh and Down and covering four district council areas, the College provides a diverse range of courses in further education, training/apprenticeships and higher education, which achieved a grade of Very Good from ETI Inspection Team November 2013.

The College reviews its curriculum offer annually to ensure that we meet the needs of the wider community including the most marginalised and disadvantaged in our society.

The College remains committed to working with the community and voluntary sectors in providing relevant and meaningful education and training through a range of initiatives including DSD funded Neighbourhood Renewal project work, increasing participation in higher education through the piloting of a 'Higher Education Centre' and extending our community outreach engagement including the provision of mentoring and support services provided through the Learner Access and Engagement Programme.

The College is also committed to widening participation of learners including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and learners from under represented groups in society and those not in education or training (NEETs).

The College's **Inclusive Curriculum Strategy** was introduced in 2012 to provide a relevant and fit for purpose curriculum offer for students with learning difficulties and disabilities as well as addressing the needs of those not in education and training that had significant social and behavioural issues that prevented participation on mainstream programmes. The key elements of the strategy included;

- Widening our portfolio of discrete SLDD courses across the region;
- Widening our portfolio of discrete full time courses for those young people with social and behavioural issues that prevent progression to mainstream education and training;
- Development of a more coherent full time provision through Further Education and Training for Success;
- Improved transition services with Special Schools, the Southern Education and Library Board and Health Trust;
- Improved Student Support services including financial assistance;

- Partnerships with community and voluntary groups;
- Promotion of discrete SLDD offer through the College's Community Development team and Learner Access and Engagement Programme; and
- Increasing the number of support interventions within Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

The College also introduced a dedicated programme for young people with social and behavioural problems who have had a poor educational experience to date and for whom progression to full time education and training was not yet appropriate. The programme launched in September 2013 includes personal development and opportunities to raise the individual's self esteem. The one year course will offer progression pathways through to further education and training within the college.

2. Inclusive Curriculum Strategy – Provision for SEN Students

Prior to the curriculum review at Level 1 and below, provision was largely unstructured and there was limited engagement with external stakeholders including special schools, learning support units and ELB transition officers. In light of these identified problems the Senior Management Team commissioned a review of provision at L1 and Entry Level for SEN learners and developed the **Inclusive Curriculum** offer which was introduced in 2012.

The inclusive curriculum strategy had aimed to establish:

- Supportive transition arrangements for the target group of learners
- A curriculum offer that meets the needs of young people on a regional basis
- Clear progression pathways to further education and training or employment

The College's 'Transition Group' was charged with reviewing the College's existing provision, support arrangements and to advise on addressing barriers to participation. The Transition Group including external transition officers from the ELB and Southern Trust identified a number of barriers to participation including:

- Limited provision across the region
- travel distances
- limitations on post 19 travel support
- awareness of curriculum offer; and
- transition arrangements.

This led to the College increasing the curriculum offer across the SRC Region at Entry and Level 1 in 2012.

The excellent **Entry Level** provision offered at the SRC Armagh Campus was replicated in the College's Banbridge Campus in order to provide a regional coverage and thus reduce travel distances. The Entry Level programme is characterised by:

- learners being valued and afforded status as equals
- the pre-vocational curriculum being led by learners' aspirations
- charismatic and committed teaching
- effective support for risk taking
- admission criteria based on ability
- comprehensive pre enrolment transition and assessment processes
- realistic and appropriate progression pathways outlined at pre enrolment

This provision is working well and was inspected (ETI) in November 2014 and graded as 'very good'.

SRC Entry Level Provision Offered in 2013-14

SRC Campus	School	Course
Armagh	Early Years & Health	Entry OCR Life & Living Skills 3 year (3 rd year of programme Introduced for 2013)
Banbridge	Early Years & Health	Entry OCR Life & Living Skills 3 year (Yr 1 progressing to Yr 2, new intake of Yr 1, 3 rd year of programme under development)

The curriculum offer was also enhanced to provide **Level 1 bundled programmes** that best meet the wider needs of SEN learners in the SRC catchment area and to offer progression opportunities into employment and/or further training. These bundled programmes allow young people to sample at least 2 vocational areas including hospitality, horticulture, retail and graphic design. This revised offer was first piloted in 2012 and was further reviewed and enhanced for the start of the 2013-14 academic year.

SRC Level 1 Combined Bundled Provision Offered in 2013-14

SRC Campus	School Lead	Course
Armagh	Computing & Business	L1 Combined Catering/Retail Creative Craft /Graphic Design(2 hrs per week) 2 year
Banbridge	Computing & Business	L1 Combined Retail /Catering / Creative Craft /Graphic Design(2 hrs per week) 2 year
Portadown	Computing & Business	L1 Combined Retail/Horticulture / Creative Craft /Graphic Design (2 hrs per week) 2 year
	Hospitality & Tourism	L1 Combined Catering/Retail / Creative Craft /Graphic Design(2 hrs per week) 2 year
Lurgan	Computing & Business	L1 Combined Retail/Business Admin / Creative Craft /Graphic Design (2 hrs per week) 2 year
Newry	Hospitality & Tourism	L1 Combined Catering/Retail / Creative Craft /Graphic Design(2 hrs per week) 2 year
	Computing & Business	L1 Combined Retail / Business Admin / Creative Craft /Graphic Design (2 hrs per week) 2 year

By the very nature of learners enrolling on provision at Level 1 and below, their learning and support needs are wide and varied. The College reviews its Open Day, and Pre-enrolment advice processes to ensure this group of learners is fully supported through the transition process in collaboration and consultation with their family, carers, guardians and support stakeholders.

SRC Level 1 Training Provision Offered in 2013-14

SRC Campus	School Lead	Course
Armagh	Construction	TFS Skills 156 Motor Vehicle & Engineering
Portadown	Construction	TFS Skills 156 Construction
	Hospitality & Tourism	TFS Skills 156 Catering & Hospitality Step by Step (External Partnership Provision)
Newry	Construction	TFS Skills 156 Construction
	Construction	TFS Skills 156 Horticulture

The third element of the inclusive curriculum strategy led to the introduction of the Fresh Start Programme for NEETS and other disengaged learners at level 1.

The work undertaken by the College was reviewed as part of the ETI College Inspection November 2013.

Extract from the ETI Inspection Report November 2013:

“5.2 The College provides an extensive curriculum offer. It is broad and balanced and relevant to the needs of learners, industry and the wider community. The curriculum offer is

*a high strategic priority and a continual focus of review and further development. **An important development is the inclusive curriculum strategy to meet the diverse needs of those learners who experience barriers to learning.***

3. Enrolments

In 2013-14 SRC has 198 16-19 SEN enrolments and 477 19+ SEN enrolments in full and part time provision.

	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
16-18 yr old	10	9	99*	29	42	156
19+	13	346	26	328	30	447

12-13 figures marked * included some NEETS enrolments that are provided for through our Fresh Start Programmes for 13 – 14

4. Inclusive Curriculum – Key Features

Key features of the SRC Inclusive Curriculum Project:

- Plans aligned to wider strategic planning at SRC
- Inclusive to Students with a Learning Difficulty and/or Disability (SLDD)
- Clearly identify pathways for students without learning difficulties who wish to re engage with learning and skills
- Curriculum designed is appropriate to learner ability
- Transition and progression pathways are communicated
- Social inclusion is promoted
- Provision is affordable and accessible
- Provision is desirable by public and employers to meet economic inclusion
- Provision recognises the individual circumstances of learners

Key Actions included:

- Establishing an Inclusive Curriculum Group
- Strategic research related to inclusive learning at SRC
- Revision of structures for management, development, coordination and learning support
- Proposal and set up for Inclusive Curriculum in line with CDP
- Launch of revised Inclusive Curriculum offer at Level 1 and Level 0

- Introduction of revised marketing, admission, pre-enrolment and enrolment processes
- Introduction of revised inclusive admissions criteria
- Ensure clear options for progression from SRC are outlined throughout the admissions process
- Communicate action cycle, timescale and review processes
- Review of TFS Skills for Life and Skills for Work 156
- Policy and procedure update in line with revised Additional Support Fund Circular
- Developed links with DEL Disability Employment Service to plan progression to employment.

5. Best Practice

At Southern Regional College we have worked on our transition procedures for six years to encourage engagement with stakeholders through the SRC Transition Group to ensure learners and prospective learners are offered appropriate opportunities and support for transition to and from Further Education. This work has been shared as best practice with the FE Sector in N Ireland.

Southern Regional College Transition Group

Terms of Reference includes representatives from:-

- Disability Action
- SELB Transport
- Transition Officers (Southern Trust)
- Transition Officers (SELB)
- Catchment Schools
- Community and Voluntary Sector
- DEL Careers Service
- SRC Learning Support
- SRC SEN & TFS Curriculum Staff

Evaluation Processes used to inform Inclusive Curriculum Provision:

The College undertook a review of the provision following the first year of operation in 2012-13. Student feedback was sought through Student Focus Groups and Student Councils on campus. These were conducted bi-annually and the feedback was used to improve the delivery of the Learning Support Service. Student Surveys are also used by SRC Quality Improvement Unit to give feedback to curriculum and support areas.

All areas of the College (teaching & support) are required to produce a self-evaluation report, using the ETI IQ:RS and self-evaluation framework. Data is presented in a comprehensive range of report formats which staff at all levels in making evidence based evaluations about the quality of provision including achievements and progress on stated aims and objectives. The Self-Evaluation Review is an opportunity for identifying areas for improvement. A SER is produced and forwarded to the report (short and full length) is produced and forwarded to the Senior Management Team (SMT), via the Quality Improvement Unit. A collective analysis of these reports is carried out and a broad self-assessment established against IQRS.

Learning Support and the Curriculum for Students with a Learning Disability and or Difficulty(SLDD) has recently been observed and assessed by ETI inspection in November 2013. Learning Support was graded as **Outstanding** and the SLDD Curriculum was graded as **Very Good** .

External validating agencies have awarded the following Quality Marks to the College:

Sensory Engagement:

- Action on Hearing Loss - Louder Than Words Quality Mark
- RNIB – Model of Excellence Quality Award
- Buttle UK Quality Mark – Care Experienced Learners
- Matrix Quality Award for Careers
- IIP
- Beacon Award – Widening Participation

6. Quality of SRC Provision

Marketing and Promotion of SEN Provision at Southern Regional College

Southern Regional College has promoted its Inclusive Curriculum programmes by:

- College Teams working in partnership with internal and external stakeholders
- Promotional material, training and awareness sessions
- Specially designed Open Days and Pre Enrolment Advice Sessions

Learning Support & Pastoral Care

Extract from ETI College Inspection November 2013:

5.10 The arrangements for the care, guidance and support of the learners, including the provision for pastoral care and additional learning support is outstanding. The learner support team, along with curriculum staff, work together very hard to support and promote the care, welfare and academic progress of all learners. There are comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding.

Personal Tutorial System

The College' Personal Tutorial System provides 1:1 Pastoral Care and Learning Support during the programme of learning. The individual Personal Tutor monitors the progress of each individual student and provides a level of pastoral care that aims to ensure the young people meets their full potential and succeeds against agreed targets. Other internal support services including learning support, finance and careers are co-ordinated through the personal tutorial system.

The system enables learners to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to make informed choices and decisions for the future by providing them with an opportunity to consider their personal development in the context of their future career aspirations.

Careers Information, Guidance & Engagement for SEN Learners

The College offers the prospective SEN learner with:

- Pre-Entry Guidance
- Reliable and impartial educational guidance, which takes into, account the learner's prior achievement, ability and realistic career aspirations
- On Course and Exit Guidance
- Specialist Careers Advice will be given in relation to the matching of ability , aspirations and opportunities
- Collaborative work with DEL Disability Employment Service
- Supported Employment and Social Enterprise developments
- Preparation and Progression Training
- Maintain contact with agencies with the ability to meet specific needs of students/trainees which are outside the expertise of the College

Work Experience

The importance of work experience in developing learners' career potential is vital and at Southern Regional College work experience is regarded an integral part of the broader vision of Careers Education. In preparation for transition from Further Education to employment/ supported employment or other day time activities based on the learners knowledge skills and abilities. This work has been enhanced for SEN Learners through our collaborative work with the **DEL Disability Employment Services**. Learners are offered the opportunity to extend their knowledge of work and working roles Learners will participate in:

- Job Shadowing
- Industrial Visits
- Placement opportunities for current learners

7. Barriers and Limitations

When the College came into existence in 2007 it was recognised that transition arrangements for young people progressing from secondary education into FE needed strengthening.

SRC took the proactive step of establishing a Transition Working Group to act as a facilitator for local transition staff including Social Workers, SELB Transition staff, DEL Careers, Community Access Co-ordinators. The group has been working over recent years and meetings now take place each term and act as a forum for discussion and dissemination of information at both a local and regional level.

The Transition Working Group, facilitated by SRC, is absolutely vital to ensuring that the complex and interrelated needs of SEN learners are addressed when moving from secondary education to further education. Without the proactive steps taken by SRC a co-ordinated approach to such transition arrangements would not exist.

This group plays an active role in the review and development of curriculum design and support provision. We passionately believe that this model should be adopted across all regions of NI. Information on all learning disability services across both the local and regional areas should have a clear and consistent structure. The structure roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined and communicated to all stakeholders.

Whilst the College provides education and training opportunities for SEN students our role is one where we are attempting to enable young people to obtain knowledge and skills that will lead to employment. However, the College's role is not one of provision of day centre services for young people and adults with severe learning difficulties. It should be noted that Further Education Colleges are not equipped to provide the following:

- Medical support and care (facilitation for external medical professionals can be provided)
- Violent or challenging behaviour that will put a SEN learner or others at risk
- Learners that have not an ability to progress to supported employment or other opportunities
- Very complex care needs
- Learners that have very limited independence or a capacity for integration in an FE setting

8. Issues and Recommendations for future developments

a. FE Provision and Progression

Future provision should be informed by accurate data from the School and Health Sectors indicating demographic trends.

b. Quality of SRC Provision

Recommendation for further Developments

SRC has developed a model of best practice that may inform developments in N Ireland. There is a need for further investigation of international best practice to inform development, encourage sharing in relation to the provision for this group of learners. These developments must ensure a holistic approach which looks at the pathway into and from FE which can contribute to the economy and an enhanced esteem and quality of life for this group of people.

ETI Report November 2013

“STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND/OR DISABILITIES (SLDD)

Performance Level: Very Good

Areas Inspected: Further Education (Discrete) and Work Based Learning Provision in:

- *Full-time and part-time further education courses at levels 1 and below, and courses for learners with additional support needs.*

CONTEXT

19.1 As part of an inclusive curriculum policy, the College provides a very good range of further education and work-based learning courses to meet the diverse needs of learners with barriers to learning. This aims to ensure that all learners are placed on the programme which best meets their needs. These include full-time and part-time recreational, independent living and discrete employability programmes ranging from entry level to level 1. Forty-four full-time and 249 part-time learners with moderate or severe learning difficulties and disabilities are registered on programmes. In 2013, the College introduced a bespoke further education programme for 27 learners with significant histories of disengagement from education. The Learning Support team contributes very effectively to the College's widening participation and inclusion agenda through supporting effectively the individual needs of learners throughout the College.

The quality of leadership and management is very good.

19.2 The Assistant Director for Learning Support demonstrates very effective leadership for the planning, introduction and development of the inclusive curriculum across the College provision."

c. Bamford Report and the implications

- Ensure that all partners are fully engaged when future planning and developments are being considered
- Develop more progression opportunities and Social Enterprises south and west of Belfast
- Consider the needs of rural communities
- Review the opportunities for supported employment

The SRC believes that it is living up to the commitments as outlined in the Bamford Report. SRC have embedded the 5 core values of social inclusion, citizenship, empowerment, working together and the provision of individual support in its Inclusive Curriculum Strategy.

We have some queries arising from the actions set out in the 2012 – 2015 Bamford Action Plan.

Page 22 of the Bamford report includes a reference to a new regional cross-sectoral group called the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, SRC have not heard of this and we feel this group could possibly do more to promote co-operation between agencies and organisations involved in transition to Post 16 education.

Point 11 of the Mental Health Action within the Bamford Report mentions access to counselling support which is independent of the school being made available in all secondary and special schools. We feel that if this service is provided to a student in secondary education / special school that this continues during the transition period and into the chosen course within FE.

Point 23 of the Mental Health Action within the Bamford Report mentions 'continue to provide specialist support, as appropriate, for young people considering participating in Training for Success'. We feel that DEL funding mechanisms may benefit from review in relation to TFS learners to match processes to provide additional support that is equitable to FE students.

The College's role through its Inclusive Curriculum offer is to provide opportunity for training leading to employment. Our experience to date shows that there is an increasing number of applicants for whom such provision is not suitable where they have more complex learning support, safety and care needs. It is therefore imperative that clarification is provided on the future role of Further Education is supporting students with complex learning difficulties and disabilities.

d. Best Practice and Barriers to Development

The Promotion of Special Education Need and Progression Pathways:

Employability along with gradual progression into the work setting is essential for this group of learners which needs to be based on sound realistic opportunities being further developed locally.

The Regional Provision informed by Global Best Practice:

AMPROS – Organisation in Northern Spain which has innovative practice in relation to inclusive and supported employment including work with BMW and Bosch.

There is a regional need to review the support and provision for supported employment and daytime opportunities for SEN Learners across N Ireland.

Barriers

- Lack of provision of transport for post 19 students
- DEL funding which is based on academic performance rather than performance indicators based on softer skills such as social and emotional development
- Lack of Curriculum Pathway planning for this group of Learners from year 10 in secondary school so that qualifications achieved lend themselves to appropriate progression to Further Education and employment or supported employment
- Provision of services to rural communities
- Lack of development of social enterprise employment opportunities in the South and West of Northern Ireland.

e. Issues related to safety, supervision and holistic care needs at Southern Regional College

Information Sharing on Learning Support and Discrete Provision for Colleges of Further Education and External Stakeholders

Provision by SRC for those that are below level 2 and who have safety, supervision and holistic care needs:

- OCR Life and Living Skills (Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3)
- Entry Level / Level 1 ASDAN Employability
- L1 Combined Catering / Retail / Creative Craft / Graphic Design
- L1 Combined Retail / Horticulture / Creative Craft / Graphic Design
- Fresh Start
- Training for Success

As the roles and responsibilities of Social Care Trusts and new District Councils are introduced it is essential that the transfer of information to support appropriate transition of learners is built in at all levels. Some work has been developed in this area, however SRC is not provided with comprehensive information in a consistent format for all SEN learners transferring to the College.

There is clearly a need for a more structured and coherent engagement between all relevant stakeholders to ensure the effective transition of learners to the most appropriate learning pathway leading to employment and learning opportunities.

f. Definitions in an FE Context - physical activity, social and communication skills

OCR Life and Living skills are offering for students who have an academic ability of entry level 1 to entry level 3 and are designed to encourage the development of personal and independence skills and include modules such as:

- Working as part of a group
- Developing communication skills
- Managing social relationships
- Taking part in a performance

Level 1 courses concentrate on practical and academic skills in retail, catering, horticulture and construction.

Concluding Comments

Transition into and from Further Education for this group of learners is complex and requires collaboration and involvement from a range of stakeholders.

This involvement can be challenging for all involved and remains inconsistent across the region with great variation in urban and rural settings. It is essential that the person with SEN remains central to the process and that provision and services are well planned based on aspiration, ability, and attainment and avoid uncertainty.

All of the stakeholders, who are working to support the SEN Learner, need in turn to be supported through the provision of accurate data, procedures, resources, and through the provision of supported employment centres on a regional basis. It is essential that future development of policy, programmes and opportunities available in Northern Ireland for those with SEN leaving education recognises the contribution made by the Further Education Sector for SEN Learners who have abilities and aspiration to contribute to the economic growth of the country with particular focus on those with moderate learning disabilities as per the SEN.

Further Education offers a caring and supportive environment for Training and Education; however Further Education must never be considered as only a care provider where learners have no opportunity for progression to employment or other opportunities. Appropriate and relevant

transition to further education will be based on good communication and transparency in the sharing of information related to pathway planning and admissions procedures. As a region we must learn from others and develop the progression opportunities to give these learners real opportunities to contribute.

Written submissions can be sent to the Committee by e-mail to cel@niassembly.gov.uk or by post to the Committee Clerk, Room 375, Parliament Buildings, Ballymiscaw, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3XX.

The closing date for written submissions is 21 March 2014.