

Ulster Supported Employment Ltd

Submission to the Employment and Learning committee

In response to a call for evidence into Post SEN provision.

1: Perspective:

USEL's perspective is derived from our experience gained over 52 years in the field of employability / employment for people with disabilities, health conditions and other significant societal barriers to employment. As a deliverer of DEL programmes ranging in long term intervention support such as the Employment Support Programme and Workable NI, to shorter term interventions such as Steps to Work or our own ESF supported Skills Training for Employment Progression traineeship programme.

2: Client Journey:

We cannot consider the personal journey without due recognition of the influence and impact of the family / guardians of the individuals.

We have experience of families providing very positive and affirmative support and others who appear to be driven differently.

This difference ranges from concern for their child / young person that the change from full time supported education to employment may leave them exposed or without the necessary support. Concerns over inappropriate conduct towards their child such as impatience by the employer due to a lack of understanding or empathy with their condition or background. To concerns about how the change may affect the family income / benefits package.

Other times we discover families that have low expectation for their child and what they may be capable of, which leads some to seek day facilities for their child. These facilities are of great value to some clients, but potentially some clients are in such provision inappropriately and are therefore not able to reach their personal potential or provide to the full their positive contribution to society.

3: Policy:

We see the outworking of the committee deliberations to impact numerous and cross cutting departments and policy units. Such as Education, Benefits, Health and Employment.

A policy that educates and supports families at an early stage, to provide clear journey planning for their family member and the family unit.

Policies around benefits that eases the transition and ensures the family unit is not significantly financially impacted.

Policies to inform employers about employing people with disabilities and different abilities, covering the full suite of financial supports, employer supports, legal issues such as DDA compliance and employment law.

Policies which provide for financial support to employers to engage individuals from a disability background.

Policies which ensure Access to work is resourced to provide immediate support would ease the client journey into work.

Policies that recognise the capacity of the individual, currently there is a 16 hour basis for employment, we understand under Universal Credit this is not a stringent but only joined up policy planning in this area will smooth the way.

Policy to set up a central body, that links all the key stakeholder groups under one umbrella which is a single point of contact for families to be signposted to the right support. Underpinning such policy would be the assurance that the client / family is not passed from department to department to find they have to restart their journey afresh which adds significantly to the stress on the individual and family but also adds cost.

Perhaps a shared passport system could be developed where intervention with one agency / department could pass the client into the next level irrespective of which department / agency they are signposted to.

Education policies that ensure our children respect and recognise each other especially in terms of people who have a many similar abilities but recognising some different abilities due to the individual disability. This education and normalisation means when the generation enters the work place they have an expectation that they will work alongside people with different abilities.

Policies that ensure government as the single largest employer in Northern Ireland, leads the way by employing more disabled people, providing more work sampling / placement opportunities and employment opportunities utilising the positive supports of Supported Employment methodologies.

Post European funding support: We are mindful of the changing nature of European Social Fund (ESF) provision, this means that as core themes for funding change, potentially many of the current provisions which are funded by ESF provision may face lack of funding. Policies need to be developed to ensure the service is available even if the funding provider changes. The assembly needs to consider the post ESF provision funding gap!

4: Programme Provisions:

Early intervention for the individual in the school. Transitions planning cannot be restricted to later in the school life and to near the time the individual will leave that school environment. This compresses the time available to make informed and rational decisions. Such provision needs to be age appropriate and person centred and inclusive of the family.

Careers advice needs to be earlier at a higher engagement level for this client group.

Work experience / sampling provisions need to be in place that are highly supportive and provide more opportunities than may be currently available especially with cognisance to geographic spread.

Employer Support programmes which tie together all of the available supports to encourage the employer. Our experience is many employers really do care and want to help but financial, legal and business concerns can cause them to shy away.

We recognise the difficulty our JBO Personal advisors face when customer facing. They have multiple programmes and benefits to consider and it is a challenge to provide a higher level of one to one for clients from this background. It should never be underestimated the impact on an individual who has come from a supported school

environment into the JBO world. We understand that DES is considering the return of a specialist disability officer in JBO's this can only be a positive progression and we would heartily recommend this.

Special programmes to support families where parents have special needs and their children have also special needs. The number may be small, but the impact on the individual is high.

5: Opportunities:

Person centred: Recognise the need of the individual and family unit. Manage Needs / Wants / Aspirations appropriately.

Follow individuals: Many clients from the Special education background cannot easily make the transition quickly, that means support for them over a long period of time. It is hoped that the level of support could diminish over time but for many, condition dependant, it may actually increase over time.

Fuller integration of the condition management programme could be of benefit.

A central body which takes responsibility for Advice, guidance, signposting and joining the dots for families and service users / service providers / clients / customers and employers would be of immense benefit.

Data Protection: Ensure there is a clear path for data sharing which is not held up by concerns of data security.

Stop Recycling people: Many clients end up in a cycle of pillar to post as they get placed in a range of changing provisions and programmes in areas such as Further Education.

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