

FROM THE MINISTER



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**

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Dear *George*

During Oral Question Time in the Assembly Chamber on 12th June 2012, on the subject of measures employed by my Department to address the issue of young persons who are not in employment, education or training, you asked the following question, 'Will these measures take into consideration the employability skills of young people with disabilities?'

Having undertaken to provide you with fuller details on the services and programmes delivered by my Department, please be advised of the following.

My Department's Training for Success (TfS) programme provides a guaranteed training place for all 16 and 17 year old school-leavers. In addition, eligibility is extended up to age 22 for those with a disability. The focus of this programme is firmly based on the individual young person and his/her needs and aspirations.

To assist potential participants with a disability, a Pre-Entry Training Support referral offer is made whereby support needs can be identified prior to the young person entering the programme so that specialist support can be in place as soon as possible after they start their training.

Once the young person enters the programme, he/she goes through an assessment process, usually in conjunction with and informed by a Careers Adviser, parents, the school, social services and specialist support providers. The purpose of this initial and thorough assessment is to agree a Personal Training Plan that is tailored to meet the personal and training development objectives identified for the individual participant, including for example, any Essential Skills requirements and specialist support needs.

The TfS programme is designed to enable all participants, including those with a disability, to enter at a level appropriate to their individual situation, to access tailored support to help address their barriers, to experience

occupational/employability skills and to subsequently progress to higher level training, further education, or employment.

The Department has engaged Specialist Support Providers to work with Training Suppliers in order to ensure that such participants are not disadvantaged and are given every opportunity to overcome their difficulties and to provide them with access to the most appropriate support mechanisms. In addition, the Department pays an enhanced weekly training fee to Training Suppliers in respect of participants with a disability to help a Supplier provide additional resources such as specialist equipment.

The Department's Disability Employment Service (DES), delivers and manages a range of programmes and services which assist clients with disabilities to access and sustain employment. Information on all such programmes is available throughout the Jobs & Benefits office/JobCentre network. The programmes and services are delivered on a pan-disability basis and are generally available to clients of all ages, including young people who are trying to progress towards, move into and sustain employment.

Specific provisions available to clients include the Condition Management Programme (CMP), a work-focused, rehabilitation programme which is delivered in partnership with health care professionals. CMP can last up to twelve weeks and is aimed at clients in receipt of incapacity-related benefits. The programme helps clients understand and manage their condition and assists them in returning to and sustaining employment.

Also, in line with the 'Welfare to Work' initiative, DES has developed a new programme called 'Work Connect'. This programme, which will be introduced over the coming months, is designed to help clients overcome work-related barriers and will offer quality pre-employment and employment provision to clients who have health conditions and / or disabilities but who are capable of, and wish to play a full and active role in society.

The Job Introduction Scheme is a wage subsidy job trial lasting 13 weeks. It offers both the employer and the person with a disability, the opportunity to see if the requirements of the job and the skills of the disabled person match.

A financial incentive is available to clients taking up employment in the form of Return to Work Credit (RTWC), which consists of a tax free payment of £40 per week for up to 52 weeks for those obtaining work of at least 16 hours a week and earning up to £15,000 per year.

Access to Work (AtW) provides a range of support to help disabled people overcome work-related obstacles resulting from their disability and can help them find and sustain work. Practical support includes assistance with travel to and from work, communication support at interview, provision of a support worker in the workplace, and the provision of special aids and equipment.

Workable (NI) brings employers and employees together in order to overcome complex barriers at work. This programme supports many people with mental

health conditions and learning disabilities and the tailored support offered helps both the employers and the employee to ensure that the individual can manage their work and be an effective member of staff for their employer. The support package should naturally decline over a period of time but can be long term if necessary.

Finally, DES operates the Occupational Psychology Services (OPS), which offers consultancy, advice and guidance relating to work, disability and health. OPS staff will also carry out employment assessments for individuals seeking employment and on behalf of employers for disabled employees.

I hope you find this information useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Farry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

DR STEPHEN FARRY MLA
Minister for Employment and Learning

cc: Speaker's Office
Northern Ireland Assembly Library