



Department for  
**Employment  
and Learning**  
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Dear Cathie

I refer to your letter of 16 May 2013 concerning the Committee's request for comments on the issues raised on 15 May by the Post 19 SEN Lobby Group.

The Department recognises the immensely difficult circumstances which people with Special Educational Needs face in many aspects of their daily lives. Every young person, regardless of their individual circumstances, should have the opportunity to engage in learning and development that will help them to participate, achieve and progress in life.

The Department seeks to play a full role, along with other relevant Departments and public bodies, in supporting those with Special Educational Needs, and disabilities, to benefit from public services, including further education, training and employment support provision.

As a result of recent Assembly Debates and related representations (which included members of the Post 19 Lobby Group who presented to the Committee on 25 May 2013) concerning the issues raised, the Minister for Employment and Learning has instructed officials to take forward a number of actions, including an audit of Further Education provision for young people with learning difficulties/disabilities across all College campuses. In addition, DHSSPS officials are being engaged to consider how to improve interfaces and service provision.

In terms of the Department's current approach, I attach at **Appendix 1** details on DEL's provision in the Dungannon area in particular and at **Appendix 2** a general overview of DEL's overall contribution to this matter.

Yours sincerely

**FIONA STANLEY**  
**Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer**

## Appendix 1

### DEL Provision in the Dungannon area

#### Further Education

In the 2011/12 academic year South West College (SWC) was made aware, following meetings with Education and Library Board transition officers, that approximately 18 young adults leaving special schools Sperrinview, Dungannon, & Kilronan, Magherafelt in June 2012 could avail of education in a further education (FE) environment.

As SWC had no full-time provision in Cookstown or Dungannon for adults with learning difficulties aged 19 years and over, it expanded its 2012/13 curriculum offer to increase provision from a part-time basis in the Cookstown and Dungannon campuses, to providing a full-time offer in the Cookstown campus. The college determined that the Cookstown campus to be mid-way between both Dungannon and Magherafelt, and had a sufficient rural transport system amongst other considerations. To date 7 learners have enrolled on this programme.

#### Discrete Provision (specifically tailored for students with disabilities and / or learning difficulties) in the Dungannon area

There is no provision of this type in the Dungannon campus. However, the Cookstown campus offers 3 non accredited courses and 3 courses at level 1. South West College has a range of provision across the other 3 campuses at all levels:

	Non accredited	Entry levels	Level 1
Cookstown	3	0	3
Enniskillen	0	2	4
Omagh	36	11	2

### Full time provision in rural areas in general and Dungannon in particular

As FE colleges are incorporated bodies responsible for determining their own curriculum provision, it is the responsibility of the college to assess the need for specific courses, taking into consideration all relevant factors including potential demand, transport infrastructure and financial viability.

### Audit of Provision across the province

The Minister has instigated an audit of provision across the FE sector, which aims to complete around the end of June 2013. The next steps will be agreed at that time.

### Careers Service

A Partnership Agreement is in place between the Careers Service and Sperrinview Special School in Dungannon. This allows young people and their parents/guardians to make informed decisions about the options available to them on leaving school. Careers advisers keep abreast of local provision for post 19 Special Needs students and as part of the careers information, advice and guidance process will discuss what provision is available locally and further afield. In the 2012/13 academic year a careers adviser attended 5 transition plan meetings and 20 annual reviews in Sperrinview Special School.

### European Social Fund (ESF)

One project from the Dungannon area that targets people with Special Educational Needs successfully applied for funding under the most recent Call for applications in September 2010. The Appleby Trust was offered support for their 'Print It Dungannon' project, which aims to provide a sheltered working environment for participants with disabilities and high functioning autism. The project was offered funding of around £105k from the European Social Fund, and

£ 65k contribution from the Department over the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2015.

Print It Dungannon is a social economy project that operates as a small business servicing the local community and businesses. Participants on the project are involved in time bound training, working towards the acquisition of basic skills and achievement of entry level qualifications and other qualifications appropriate to participants' individual needs. The project also aims to provide participants with the necessary skills and confidence to enhance their employability and reduce economic inactivity.

## **Appendix 2**

### **DEL's Provision - Overview**

1. DEL's services are provided on a 'pan-disability' approach; the key aim is to ensure that the needs of all people with special needs or disabilities are individually identified and addressed in the most effective way.

### **DEL's Programmes and Services**

2. DEL offers a wide range of services to the public, including students leaving Special Schools - from job searches to training programmes to more formal education. Care is taken across the board to ensure that our services and facilities are open to people with disabilities and can be accessed by them. The Department's provision can be broken down into four main areas: Advice and Guidance; Employment Support; Education and Professional and Technical Training.

## **ADVICE AND GUIDANCE**

### **Careers Service**

3. DEL's Careers Service has developed and implemented a social inclusion policy which focuses on addressing the needs of young people facing, or vulnerable to, social exclusion, including young people with a severe learning difficulty. It has established working relationships with the relevant statutory, voluntary and community sector bodies across Northern Ireland with a shared interest in supporting clients vulnerable to social exclusion.
4. The Careers Service is an all-age, all-ability service that provides impartial guidance to people in education, employment and training and to the unemployed, including those with learning difficulties. This is delivered

through a network of careers advisers who are based in JobCentres, Jobs and Benefit Offices and Careers Offices throughout Northern Ireland.

5. Partnership Agreements are in place with post-primary schools including special schools to support the schools' careers education programme. These agreements allow schools, in consultation with qualified careers advisers, the opportunity to select from a suite of services appropriate to the needs of their pupils and to support them in the transition process.
6. As part of this agreement careers advisers are invited to attend Transition Plan Meetings of Year 10 pupils and their subsequent Annual Reviews. This allows young people and their parents/guardians to make informed decisions about the options available to them on leaving school.
7. Careers advisers have an active role to play in the transition planning process of young people with a Statement of Special Educational Need. Working with multi-disciplinary teams including teachers and educational psychologists, they contribute to the young person's Transition Plan by providing impartial careers guidance on the range of educational, training and employment opportunities available to them.

### **EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT**

8. The Disability Employment Service (DES) manages and delivers a range of pan-disability employment services and programmes, aimed at helping people of all ages progress towards, move into and sustain meaningful paid work. Some of the young adults leaving Special Schools may find this service beneficial.
9. These programmes and services are primarily accessed through teams of specialist Employment Advisers based in the Jobs and Benefits Offices and Job Centres throughout Northern Ireland.

10. In addition, DES has its own team of Occupational Psychologists who can support and assist the Employment Adviser teams but who can also carry out employment assessments for individual clients.
11. Disability Employment Service (DES) programmes include:
  - (a) **Job Introduction Scheme**

A job-trial lasting up to 13 weeks to enable a person with a disability and a potential employer to work together to consider if this or work in general is an appropriate way forward for that individual.
  - (b) **Access to Work**

Access to Work provides individually assessed support to assist people with a disability find and keep suitable employment. A range of one-off or longer term, often indefinite, supports are offered. The supports include: assistance with travel to and from work; the provision of a support worker; provision of equipment and adaptations to premises. Additional assessment services are available from Occupational Therapists, the RNID and Action On Hearing Loss.
  - (c) **Workable (NI)**

This programme provides a flexible range of long term supports to assist people with a disability with substantial barriers to employment to find and keep employment. Workable (NI) is delivered by a range of organisations with extensive experience of meeting the vocational needs of disabled people. The support needs of each individual are assessed and the provision can include supports such as; a Job Coach to assist the workers with a disability and their colleagues adapt to the needs of the particular job; a financial subsidy to the employer; extra training; and disability awareness training. Of the 418 employees currently availing of support under the Workable programme, 232 have a learning difficulty or disability.

It should also be noted that employees with a disability can avail of Workable and Access to Work support concurrently.

Both Access to Work, and particularly Workable, are there to provide the necessary supports and ongoing assistance to enable a person to make a smooth transition into employment, to help them sustain their job, and over time, to reach their full potential within the organisation.

These programmes provide necessary support to both the employer and the disabled employee, supports that go beyond the Employer's requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act, and this is in recognition that, particularly for people with mental ill-health and / or a learning disability, the support needs to be individually tailored and personal, it needs to be ongoing and fairly intense, particularly in the early stages, and it applies to the employer and the other employees as well as the person who is being directly supported through the programme.

Workable is delivered by local disability organisations, a number of which specialise in their support for people with mental ill-health and learning disability.

(d) **Residential Training**

An option for young adults leaving Special Schools is the facility at Parkanaur College, Dungannon. DEL funds residential training opportunities at Parkanaur for people with a disability who are not ready to access mainstream training. Each individual's suitability for this training and his/her future potential for progression towards or into employment is assessed by the Department's Occupational Psychology Service.

(e) **Condition Management Programme (CMP)**

CMP aims to help manage the health conditions of those clients in receipt of Incapacity Benefits with mild to moderate health conditions and enable them to return to work. It is based on short-term, work-focused support and advice and is delivered on DEL's behalf by Health Trust partners.

(f) **Work Connect**

Work Connect is a new specialist employment programme which aims to help people to overcome their health and/or disability related barriers to work and to support them make the transition from welfare into employment. Work Connect has three key elements: Pre-employment; Work Entry; and Sustained Employment. These elements include quality interventions and support to enable clients to enhance their employability skills and prepare themselves for work, to help them make a successful transition from welfare into work and then to sustain employment. Work Connect is delivered by a consortium of local disability organisations, some of whom specialise in support for people with a learning disability.

(g) **Occupational Psychologists**

DES has a team of Occupational Psychologists (soon to be 5) that provide support to staff and clients to ensure that programmes and services assist disabled people find and sustain appropriate employment.

**European Social Fund Projects**

12. Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2007-2013 **does not reserve funding for any particular participant group**, but provides support for a broad range of individuals experiencing disadvantage in the labour market, including participants with special educational needs among others. Currently, there are 20 projects funded under Priority 1 that target participants with disabilities or health conditions, however other projects with a broader focus also include

people with disabilities among their wider participant group. These 20 projects have been offered funding of around £11.5 million ESF (40%) and £7.2 DEL (25%) contribution.

13. Funding is allocated on an open and competitive basis. There is no allocation by geographical region, with funding allocated to projects that assist unemployed people throughout Northern Ireland, including those residing in the Dungannon area.
14. Over the period 1 April 2008 and 31 December 2012 ESF projects have assisted approximately 19,000 participants with disabilities or health conditions.
15. The ESF projects supported by DES funds, offer vocational training and employment support for many people, including a large number with learning disabilities who are supported by organisations who specialise in their support for this disability group.

#### **Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS)**

16. This community-based employment-focused initiative is aimed at those furthest from the labour market. It is available in Belfast, Londonderry, Strabane, Newry and Mourne, Moyle and Cookstown. In addition to these areas, LEMIS is also available on an outreach basis throughout Northern Ireland to individuals with a common employability barrier, ie homelessness, ex-offenders/ex-prisoners, people with a history of drug/alcohol misuse and looked after children/care leavers. It is tailored assistance to help voluntary clients, including those with disabilities, overcome their personal barriers to employment. Benefit recipients on Incapacity Benefit/Employment Support Allowance and Severe Disablement Allowance have been included in the priority client group.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Further Education (FE)**

17. Further Education (FE) colleges are incorporated bodies responsible for determining their own provision. However, they are required under the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 to “have regard to the requirements of persons over compulsory school leaving age who have learning difficulties”.
18. Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005, FE colleges are required to make reasonable adjustments to allow students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities access to both their premises and mainstream curriculum.
19. All students enrolling with a learning difficulty and/or disability at an FE college undergo an educational needs assessment, which determines the level of additional support required to meet their particular needs. The level of support provided depends on both the nature of the disability and the course of study. Colleges are required to review any agreed additional support twice-yearly, to ensure that it remains appropriate, and to allow the student to be involved in their own assistance and progression.
20. Mainstream FE courses are not suitable for everyone and may not be suitable for a number of young people, for whom nursing and other personal care may be required, which colleges are not equipped to provide. Therefore colleges collaborate with special schools and adult day centres to provide customised training and development opportunities on discrete, vocational and life skills courses for young people with moderate or severe learning difficulties. These courses may be offered in the college, at a day centre, or in other suitable premises. Colleges are keen to offer courses locally, where possible, which take account of individual

needs and local circumstances, subject to demand. The Disability Employment Service, through the Occupational Psychology Service and the local Employment Adviser Team Leaders have instigated a pilot project to ensure that those young people who wish to progress through from education to employment, are given every support and advice to help them do so.

21. The degree of support available in FE for students with disabilities is intended to be 'reasonable' and can involve a judgement on what is proportionate and affordable. For students with severe disabilities, the educational element can be overshadowed by medical and personal assistance considerations. In these circumstances, the Department insists that whilst FE might have a contributory role, primary responsibility must remain with health authorities; hence FE Colleges will engage with Day Centres on the understanding that the Colleges can have no involvement in care or attendance arrangements but will provide educational support in situ, to whatever level is appropriate.
22. The Department for Employment and Learning provides colleges with £1.5m per annum, through the Additional Support Fund, to help colleges meet the cost of providing additional technical and/or personal support required for these students, and £2m per annum, to help meet the cost of providing reduced classroom sizes, additional lecturer contact time, classroom assistants, or any other services involved in delivering tailored discrete courses for those students, for whom mainstream courses are not appropriate.
23. Finally, in considering the extent to which FE provision can make a difference for everyone with a severe learning disability, the most recent Chief Inspector's Report from the Education and Training Inspectorate provides some evidence for potential future Executive action. It states -

“The more effective senior leadership teams in special schools ensure transition arrangements are focused more effectively on the longer-term placement and aspirations of school leavers and on their well-being. Securing an appropriate placement within adult service provision is becoming increasingly difficult, in particular, for a small minority of pupils with more complex sensory and dependent learning needs and others with persistent levels of challenging and aggressive behaviour. The Department of Education, the Education and Library Boards and the Health and Social Care Trusts need to work more closely and purposefully together to secure appropriate placements for this group of young people.”

### **Higher Education**

24. “Access to Success” is DEL’s integrated regional strategy for Widening Participation in Higher Education. It is a key element in ensuring that university education will continue to be accessible to people from all backgrounds. It aims to raise attainment by students from under-represented groups, including disabled persons, through a number of projects which include: an awareness raising campaign to promote the benefits of higher education, a campaign to raise aspiration and attainment among under-represented groups, the piloting of regional programmes for disadvantage and disability application routes into higher education and the development of additional support measures for students to sustain continuing participation.
25. Access to Success, also aims to expand the outreach activities of higher education institutions to promote higher education as ‘a real possibility’ to young children with learning disabilities, their parents and advocates, through a programme of informative workshops led by disabled students and graduates.

26. To assist persons with a disability or learning difficulty to access Higher Education and fulfil their potential, DEL has the following mechanisms in place:
- a. DEL makes available funding through Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to help pay the extra costs which may be incurred in attending a course of study, as a direct result of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. DSA can help with the cost of a non-medical support provider, major items of specialist equipment, travel and other costs;
  - b. DEL pays a widening access premium to the universities and university colleges for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The premium is to provide specialist equipment and/or specific support for these students. This premium is based on the number of full-time undergraduate students in receipt of DSA;
  - c. Through DSA, DEL also funds a Register of Support Providers in each of the Universities. These are registers of freelance professional and non-professional support providers who are recruited and trained to assist students with disabilities. The support needs of each student are assessed and they are “matched” with a support provider(s). The services of the Register are available to all disabled students in the universities, university colleges and Further Education colleges with higher education provision. Disabled students can avail of a range of support provider roles including dyslexic coach, note-taker, proof-reader, typist, campus assistant, library assistant and sign language interpreter; and
  - d. DEL’s widening access premium to the universities and university colleges for students with learning difficulties and disabilities this

amounted to £231, 425 in the 2012/13 academic year. The premium is intended to provide specialist equipment and/or specific support for these students and it is allocated based on the number of full-time undergraduate students in each institution in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance. DSA itself attracted £3.013m during 2011/12, which was paid to students of all ages.

## **PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING**

### **Training for Success**

27. The Department provides a guaranteed training place on its Training for Success (TfS) programme for all unemployed young people in the 16-17 age groups (including those with special educational needs). The programme also provides extended eligibility for those with a disability up to age 22 and up to age 24 for those from an in-care background.
28. The Department provides a Pre-Entry Training Support referral for school-leavers with learning, or other, disability. Clients are referred, after parental/ guardian consent, by the Department's Careers Advisers to contracted specialist support providers specialising in disability and learning support. This process aims to ensure that support needs in training are identified and put in place as soon as possible after commencement of training.
29. All TfS participants receive a non means-tested Educational Maintenance Allowance of £40 per week, assistance towards the costs of travel and, where applicable, childcare and lodgings. Specialist Support funding of up to £1,000 annually can be accessed for participants requiring help with their training. An enhanced training fee is also payable to a Training

Supplier in order to provide significant additional input of resources such as specialist equipment.

### **ApprenticeshipsNI**

30. The Department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme is open to those who have reached school leaving age, are either entering or already in employment and contracted to work a minimum of 21 hours per week. Support is available for participants with a disability as required.
31. Young people on TfS and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes requiring additional specialist support will be given every opportunity to overcome difficulties and to develop using the most appropriate support mechanisms. Specialist support providers such as Disability Action\*, Sensory Learning Support and the Cedar Foundation are contracted by the Department to work in conjunction with Training Suppliers delivering these programmes. Whilst their main target group will be those who are participating on TfS, there will be individual support for participants undertaking an apprenticeship as necessary. Disability Action has also been permitted to sub-contract with the National Autistic Society to provide specialist support where needed for participants diagnosed as being on the Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The Department also provides a Pre-Entry Training Support Referral for school leavers with a disability who express an interest in joining Training for Success with the aim of meeting any support needs should they enter training.
32. Specialist providers have been engaged to work in conjunction with training suppliers to ensure that specialist support is provided, where needed, to participants in Training for Success and the "ApprenticeshipsNI" programme. For the financial year 2012/12, the Department provided approximately £605,000 for this specialist support.

33. An additional premium of £30 is paid to the training supplier on top of the weekly training fee under the “Training for Success” programme for the duration of training. Similarly, a disability supplement, of up to £1,560, is payable under “ApprenticeshipsNI” to allow training suppliers to provide additional support, such as specialist equipment. These payments are contained within the overall funding offer and it is not possible to isolate the expenditure.

#### **PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS – YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING (NEET)**

34. DEL leads on the new strategy, “Pathways to Success“, in relation to young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). This Strategy was published in 2012 and comprises a three tier package of measures aimed at:
- preventing young people missing opportunities for education and training, and/or becoming unemployed;
  - helping young people in the 16-18 age group, especially those facing barriers to participation; and
  - assisting unemployed young people aged 18-24 more generally.
35. To support delivery of this vision, the Strategy introduces a number of new initiatives within the context of existing and developing programmes:
- (a) The **Pathways for Young People Educational Maintenance Allowance**, for young people participating in projects funded by the European Social Fund, was introduced on 15 October. This allowance was introduced to ensure there are effective incentives in place for young people in the NEET category, aged 16 and 17 on entry, but up to age 22 if

they have disability or 24 if they have experience of care, to progress from provision which re-engages them with learning and develops skills linked to education and training, to programmes that provide the skills and qualifications to support progression and success in work.

(b) A **Collaboration and Innovation Fund** to test new approaches to re-engaging young people in the NEET category and to deliver collaborative and innovative support to help young people aged 16-24 who are disadvantaged, or at risk of disadvantage, helping them progress to, participate and succeed in education, employment or training and most importantly improve their employability through the acquisition of economically relevant skills.

(c) The **Learner Access and Engagement NEET Pilot Programme**, described in 'Pathways to Success' as the Community- Based Access Programme, will provide opportunities for non-statutory organisations to provide learner support to those aged 16–18 through a contractual arrangement with a Further Education College. In line with the mainstream Learner Access and Engagement Programme, the pilot will commence enrolments for September 2013. The pilot programme is intended to deliver the following aims to:

- engage and enrol the 16-18 year-old cohort, who are not in employment, education or training, nor in Essential Skills provision;
- increase the numbers of 16-18 year olds achieving Essential Skills, through FE; and
- create pathways to enable disengaged 16–18 year olds to progress from Entry Level/Level 1 to Level 2 Essential Skills provision into mainstream FE, or other government-funded training programmes.

(d) The **Community Family Support Programme (CFSP)**, focusing on the needs of the most disadvantaged families, to enable young people to re-engage with education, employment or training. The initial 44 families' CFSP pilot will be delivered by Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) providers, in partnership with other mainstream provision. The pilot commenced in January 2013 and aims to support parents, help prevent younger family members falling into the NEET category and help younger family members already in this situation to re-engage with education, training or employment.

36. Families will get help to tackle a range of issues and receive support to improve parenting skills. Working closely with schools, children will receive support for needs they may have including additional help with essential skills, numeracy, literacy, problem solving and ICT. Help and support for social and economic issues, health, housing, alcohol and drugs will also feature in the support package and everyone of working age will get help to develop skills to find work.
37. The pilot has been designated as a Delivering Social Change signature project and additional resources have been allocated to enable the pilot to be up-scaled and rolled out across NI to support a further 500 families during 2013 to 2015 period.