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Chairperson
Committee for Employment and Learning
Room 375
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Your Ref:
Our Ref: DRD/COR/89/2014
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**INQUIRY INTO POST SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED (SEN) PROVISION IN
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING FOR THOSE WITH LEARNING
DISABILITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

Thank you for your letter dated 23 January 2014 asking for a written submission to your Committee's inquiry into post Special Educational Need Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland.

DRD recognises the difficulties faced by those with a learning disability when using public transport and have developed transport initiatives specifically to address their needs. These are detailed in the attached Submission and Annex A.

DANNY KENNEDY MLA
Minister for Regional Development

DRD Written Submission for the Committee for DEL's Inquiry into post Special Education Need Provision in education, employment and training for those with a Learning Disability.

Introduction

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) and its Arm's Length Bodies maintain and develop infrastructure and services that are vital for everyone in Northern Ireland. This includes water and sewerage networks, roads and footpaths, and public transport services.

DRD's range of functions include:

- regional strategic planning and development policy;
- transport strategy and sustainable transport policy;
- provision and maintenance of all public roads;
- public transport policy and performance;
- certain policy and support work for air and sea ports; and
- policy on water and sewerage services and management of the Department's shareholder interest in Northern Ireland Water (NIW)

DRD does not provide education, training or employment to those with a learning difficulty on leaving full time education. However it does deliver a range of transport related initiatives which may be of benefit in enabling those with learning difficulties getting to and from education, training or employment. These are detailed in Annex A.

DRD has no recommendations for action to be considered by your Committee.

Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into post Special Education Need Provision in education, employment and training for those with a Learning Disability - Updated to reflect actions undertaken by DRD.

1. To examine the current range of choice and opportunities available for those with learning disabilities on leaving full time schooling.

Transport related initiatives which may be of benefit in enabling those with learning difficulties getting to and from education, training or employment are:

Leaflets

- A "Travel Safe Guide" which aims to help people with a learning disability, to travel safely and with confidence when they are out and about and using public transport. The revised Guide which was developed in consultation with Autism Network NI will be available from April 2014.
- Translink, an arms length body, has produced an Access Guide for disabled users of bus and rail services for people with a disability and those older people who may find using transport difficult. It contains information and advice on how to use services, and provides contact details to help plan a journey.

Transport Initiatives

Transport Buddy Scheme

- DRD has been funding a pilot travel training scheme, the Transport Buddy Scheme, using volunteers who are trained to help people with a learning difficulty to use public transport safely and encourage them to develop all the necessary skills to do this independently.

- This scheme is funded through the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities and currently operates as a pilot scheme operated by Volunteer Now.

Half Fare Concessionary Travel Pass on Mainstream Public Transport

- There is a half fare concessionary travel pass available to those who have a learning disability. To qualify for the Pass you must be known to your local Health and Social Services Trust, be aged between 16 and 59, and have been resident in Northern Ireland for a minimum period of three months.

Blue Badge

- The Blue Badge Scheme is a service for people with severe mobility problems that enables badge holders to park close to where they need to go. Full eligibility criteria for the scheme can be found via this link <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/people-with-disabilities/people-with-disabilities-motoring-and-transport/blue-badge-scheme/the-blue-badge-parking-scheme.htm>
- During a recent public consultation on proposed changes to the scheme my Department received responses from a number of organisations representing people with Learning Disabilities. These views are being taken into account in developing the changes to the Blue Badge Scheme, which may help some people with Learning Disabilities gain easier access (by parking closer) to their 'post Special Educational Need education, employment or training.

2. 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.

Not applicable to DRD.

- 3. To research best practice in post school provision for those with learning disabilities.**

Not applicable to DRD.

- 4. 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.**

Transport Buddy Scheme

The pilot scheme is currently being evaluated, in consultation with Health officials. It is hoped that, with co-operation, the scheme can be rolled out more widely.

Blue Badge

My Department regularly reviews its Blue Badge Scheme, including who should be eligible for a Blue Badge in Northern Ireland.

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

Not applicable to DRD.

**6. To report the Committee's findings and recommendations to the Assembly.
In reaching its recommendations the Committee will:**

- a. Request that the Department details the range of provision it provides across all FE provision, vocational provision and employment support. What is the duration of courses and the number of hours per week (and what happens when it ends)?**
- b. Assess the quality of current provision by looking at evaluations carried out.**
- c. Assess whether DEL is living up to its commitments under the Bamford Report.**
- d. Examine what approaches are working and what the barriers are.**
- e. Examine the provision by FE colleges for those that are below level 2 and who have safety, supervision and holistic care needs and the options available to such individuals from Health and Social Care Trusts or new District Councils.**
- f. Assess whether the definition of further education for this student population needs to be broadened: for example: to include physical activity, social and communication skills.**

My Department has provided the information above at points 1 and 4 which may assist the Committee for DEL in reaching its recommendations.