Evaluation of the Vocational Enhancement Programme 2005/08

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1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The purpose of this report undertaken by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) is to provide an evaluation of the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) from 2005/06 until 2007/08. The terms of reference are:

- To evaluate the pupil experience.

- To analyse the schools' experience including partnership management, staffing and staff development and delivery arrangements.

- To analyse the colleges' experience regarding enrolments and retention, partnership management, staffing and staff development, delivery arrangements, funding, innovations and priority skills.

- To identify evidence of good practice and areas for improvement across school/college partnerships.

- To make recommendations to inform the way ahead for future school and Further Education collaboration and the shape of the Entitlement Framework from September 2013.

2 OVERVIEW

2.1 Context

The Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) was introduced in September 2004, with the primary purpose of ensuring that future collaboration between Further Education (FE) Colleges and local schools would be viable and would offer school pupils of all abilities an appropriate range and choice of vocational courses that would be focused on economic development and meets the needs of local business.

DEL and the Department of Education (DE) agreed that from the outset collaboration with FE colleges would be one of the main ways in which schools would seek to meet the requirements of the new Entitlement Framework, under which schools will be expected to offer access to a wider range of courses to pupils from Key Stage 4 onwards, including those of a professional and technical nature.

Jointly administered by both Departments, the main aims of the programme were: to produce a framework to support local collaboration between schools and FE colleges; to provide coherent progression routes into higher education, further education and training and/or employment; and to widen the pathways provided by 14-19 education and training to ensure that young people are aware of all the career choices available to them.

VEP aimed to provide 14-19 year olds with:

- o a better choice of education to include professional and technical subjects, developing post-16 routes within well-articulated lines, and providing better progression from Key Stage 4 through to age 19;
- o an offer of vocational modules which will tie in with academic studies to "stretch" young people of all abilities;

- o a coherent progression route into HE, FE, training and/or employment;
- o the basic competences, skills, knowledge and attributes to equip young people with the skills employers want; and
- o a new vocational "brand" to reflect achievement on professional and technical programmes.

VEP is one element of the wider 14-19 agenda, and was developed as a precursor to the introduction of the Entitlement Framework (EF), which DE will introduce in 2013. The EF will guarantee each young person access to a minimum range of courses at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and post-16 (24 and 27 courses respectively), with a minimum of one-third of the courses to be professional and technical and one-third academic. It is a major element in the package of reforms announced in Future Post primary Arrangements in Northern Ireland: advice from the Post primary review group (the Costello report, DEL January 2004) and being implemented by DE and DEL. It features as one of DEL's 12 projects in the FE reform strategy implementation plan, Further Education Means Business: a programme for implementation (June 2006).

Initially piloted with 6 of the then 16 FE colleges and 30 Post Primary schools, VEP has grown from fewer than 2000 post primary school pupils in the 2004/05 academic year, to over 12,000 vocational opportunities being made available to post primary school pupils in the 2007/08 academic year.

Participation rates for schools have increased at a similar rate, with 47% of all post primary schools participating in 2005/06, rising to 77% in 2006/07. Participation continued to rise to 86% in 2007/08, representing 86% of Secondary schools, 67% Special schools and 57% of all Grammar schools. All 6 of the new merged FE colleges have been involved in delivery of VEP.

Throughout the life of the VEP it was funded by both Departments, and was administered through the FE colleges.

Since September 2008 the responsibility for the funding and administration of the replacement of the VEP transferred from DEL / FE colleges to DE / Post primary schools / Education & Library Boards. With the impending introduction of the Entitlement Framework, DE has moved to collaborative arrangements between Post primary schools and vocational providers to a purchaser/provider arrangement, where schools will decide from whom they will purchase provision.

The VEP pilot has been very successful in strengthening relationships between Post primary schools and FE colleges and it has placed FE colleges as the provider of first choice for the professional and technical education envisaged in the Entitlement Framework. This evaluation and its findings will inform the way ahead for the VEP replacement and the shape of the Entitlement Framework from 2013.

2.2 Purpose and Background

VEP arose out of recommendations made for strengthening collaboration between schools and the FE sector contained in 'Future Post primary Arrangements in Northern Ireland'. The Costello report recognised the important range of provision for school pupils currently offered by the FE sector in Northern Ireland and the potential to expand this provision even further for school pupils aged 14+ at all ability levels.

The Entitlement Framework, a key element of the Costello report, will guarantee that each young person has access to a minimum range of courses at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and post-16 (24 and 27 courses respectively), with a minimum of one-third of the courses to be professional and technical and one-third academic. The development of school and FE collaboration will create new opportunities for pupils by offering a wider range of courses and new

progression pathways, and by responding to local skills development needs. In particular, it is intended that the partnerships should provide:

- access to a broader curriculum;
- the choice and flexibility which will be required by the Entitlement Framework ;
- a richer, more varied and cost-effective educational provision; and
- locally determined arrangements to meet local wishes, needs and circumstances.

The purpose of this report is to review the work carried out by FE colleges and the Post primary school sector in preparation for the Entitlement Framework. In particular, the report presents findings in the areas of pupil participation, school involvement, delivery mechanisms and quality of provision, and identifies strengths and weaknesses of the collaborative process.

2.3 Delivery Mechanism

The design and delivery of VEP was structured to reflect the key elements of the Entitlement Framework and provided pupils with access to learning pathways that offered a broader and more flexible curriculum and enabled them to choose vocational courses which best met their needs, aptitudes, aspirations and interests. The Entitlement Framework does not prescribe how schools should provide their pupils with access to professional and technical education. Through VEP, most vocational provision that did not take place in Post primary school premises was arranged in partnership with FE colleges with delivery taking place either at a FE campus or in the school by an FE lecturer, or in a combination of sites.

The VEP 2004/05 evaluation pointed out that strong links existed between many schools and FE colleges in Northern Ireland before the launch of the VEP pilot in June 2004. Most of this earlier provision falls into two broad categories: 14–16 provision (school years 11 and 12) aimed at pupils for whom the largely academic, statutory curriculum was deemed unsuitable; and

16–19 provision for A-level or AVCE students in years 13 and 14. The school and FE sectors have much greater experience of the former, largely through the Occupational Studies programme. This innovative qualification, which was first funded through VEP in 2005/06, is targeted at learners working towards, and at, Level 1 and 2.[1] These are levels set out within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The qualification is approved by DE for teaching at Key Stage 4 in Northern Ireland and is accredited by the Regulatory Authorities. Occupational Studies units are designed to 'be accessible to a wide range of learners of all abilities' and 'to provide a coherent and flexible programme which is rooted in practical and occupational contexts'. A total of 50 Occupational Studies units are available.

From 2005/06 Occupational Studies was funded alongside 'other VEP' provision by DEL, with funding going directly to FE colleges. For the purpose of this report, the provision that was offered as part of the VEP will be broken into two main areas: (i) 'Occupational Studies' - this provision has consistently been in excess of 50% of the VEP provision over the three years of the programme; and (ii) 'other' - this refers to all other provision offered under the VEP, and ranges from at the most basic level, 'sampling', mainly provided for Special schools, to BTEC, GCSE, and level 2 and 3 qualifications.

VEP has built on existing collaborative partnerships between schools and the FE sector. It has extended this work by including pupils aged 14–16 and 16+ at all ability levels, opening up new vocational pathways to higher education, and testing different partnership arrangements and their effectiveness in contributing to the delivery of the Entitlement Framework to be introduced in 2013.

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[1]In terms of DEL's statistical analysis throughout this evaluation, all Occupational Studies figures are recorded at level 1 – Inconsistent recording of data in 2005/06 & 2006/07 meant that DEL was unable to break data into level 1 or level 2 or into Single or Double award.

3 METHODOLOGY

The information contained in this report is taken from research which has been collated from previous evaluation surveys[2] carried out on the VEP. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) was commissioned by DEL to undertake an overview and evaluation of the VEP over the years 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08. The methodology adopted within each of these reports included quantitative and qualitative data analysis from surveys, face-to-face interviews and desk research. The surveys were targeted at participating schools, participating colleges, pupils and lecturers and parent governors. The case study visits included individual and group interviews arranged with school VEP Co-ordinators and Principals, college VEP Co-ordinators and lecturers and pupils who had participated on VEP courses. These pupils were drawn from a mix of Special schools, Secondary/High schools and Grammar schools.

The quantitative data used in statistical analysis throughout the report is taken from the VEP submission analysis records held by DEL over the three years 2005-08. The submission analysis information which included details on pupils by school, year group, qualification type, level etc was supplied by FE Colleges as part of the claim process and was used by DEL to fund colleges for approved students on the VEP. In September 2007, DEL introduced the VEP Northern Ireland College Information System (NICIS) report which incorporated records extracted from the Colleges Further Education Leavers Survey (FELS) system[3] to facilitate the collection of data to allocate funding to colleges under VEP.

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[2] Annual surveys undertaken by SQW 2005-06; 2007/08 LSDA. An evaluation of VEP was also undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate in February 2008 and is available here
[3] All data supplied by colleges to DEL was verified and signed off by FE College accounting officer as accurate

4 PUPIL EXPERIENCE

4.1 Pupil Experience - Enrolments

Although the programme was initially piloted during 2004/05, the data collected during this period will not form part of this analysis, as this initial pilot year was tested with 6 of the then 16 Further Education colleges and 32 Post Primary schools, and as such would not be representative of the either the FE or Post Primary sectors.

VEP Pupils Enrolments 2005-08

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08		Average 2005-08	%Change
Total Enrolments	7708		8825		12733			39.46%
Male	4725	61.30%	5392	61.10%	7669	60.23%	60.88%	38.39%
Female	2983	38.70%	3433	38.90%	5064	39.77%	39.12%	41.09%
Year 11	2928	37.99%	3397	38.49%	4779	37.53%	38.00%	38.73%
Year 12	2289	29.70%	2783	31.54%	4393	34.50%	31.91%	47.89%
Year 13	1702	22.08%	1817	20.59%	2506	19.68%	20.78%	32.08%
Year 14	789	10.24%	826	9.36%	908	7.13%	8.91%	13.11%
Year 14+	0	0.00%	2	0.02%	147	1.15%	0.39%	100.00%
Secondary	5728	74.31%	6830	77.39%	9870	77.52%	76.41%	41.97%
Special	612	7.94%	874	9.90%	1092	8.58%	8.81%	43.96%
Grammar	1359	17.63%	1106	12.53%	1706	13.40%	14.52%	20.34%
Other	9	0.12%	15	0.17%	65	0.51%	0.27%	86.15%

Participation on the VEP increased significantly over the period of this analysis, from 7708 enrolments in 2005/06 to 12733 in 2007/08, which represents almost 40% increase in enrolments over the three years.

While the male to female ratio in each of the 3 years remained at 60% male and 40% female, actual female enrolments increased by 41% over the period while male enrolments increased by 38%.

When actual enrolments are analysed against school type, it displays a growth in all areas over the three years. However, there was also a notable 23% dip in enrolments from Grammar schools during the 2006/07 academic year, although this was compensated for the following year with a 35% increase in 2007/08.
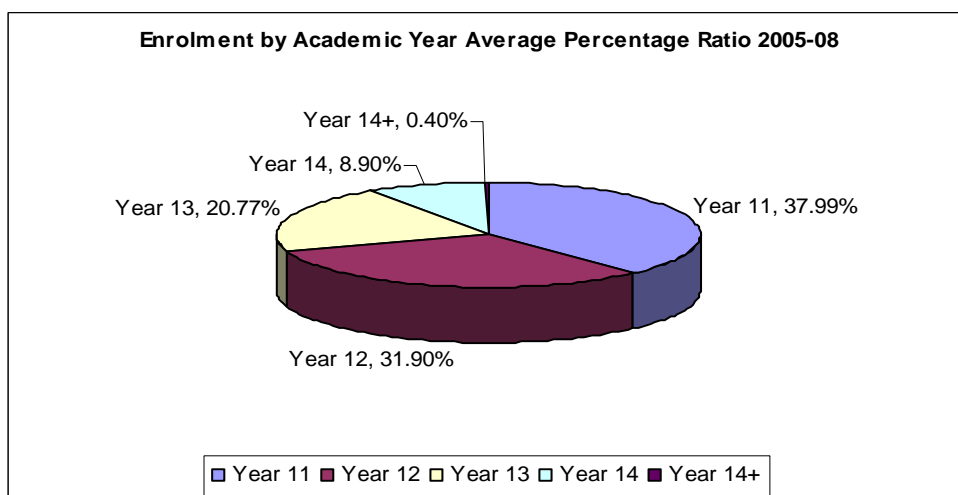
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2006/07 Actual % Growth	2006/07 Average % Growth	2007/08 Actual % Growth	2007/08 Average % Growth
Total Pupils	7708	8825	12733	12.66%	27.38%	30.69%	15.12%
Secondary	5728	6830	9870	16.13%	27.49%	30.80%	14.76%
Special	612	874	1092	29.98%	30.59%	19.96%	2.21%
Grammar	1359	1106	1706	-22.88%	-16.92%	35.17%	18.94%
Other	9	15	65	40.00%	29.29%	76.92%	15.25%
	7708	8825	12733				

Revisions to the VEP criteria[4], on the advice of the Educational Training Inspectorate, which resulted in some level 2 courses being disallowed for post 16 pupils, may have been responsible for this drop in Grammar school enrolments in 2006/07.

School Type	2005-08 Class Total	Yr 11	Yr 12	Yr 13	Yr 14	Yr 14+
Grammar	4171	362	178	2736	874	21
Other	89	19	36	19	15	0
Secondary	22428	9953	8350	2857	1217	51
Special	2578	769	901	412	417	79
Total	29266	11103	9465	6024	2523	151

The vast majority of pupils coming from Grammar schools tended to fall into the post 16 cohort whereas the majority of pupils from Secondary schools was concentrated at Key stage 4.
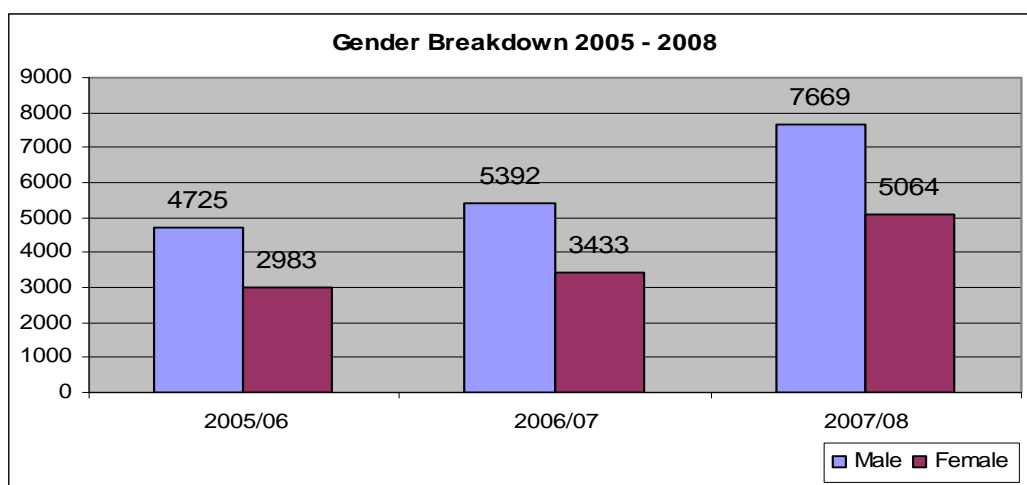
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[4] Circulars outlining the criteria for VEP for years 2005/06; 2006/07 and 2007/08 are available on the DEL website on www.delni.gov.uk

Enrolment by Academic Year Average Percentage Ratio 2005-08

Year 14+, 0.40%
Year 14, 8.90%
Year 13, 20.77%
Year 11, 37.99%
Year 12, 31.90%

☐ Year 11 ■ Year 12 ☐ Year 13 ☐ Year 14 ■ Year 14+

When pupil enrolments are shown in graph form against the school academic year, it is clear that between 2005 and 2008 the majorty of pupils participating on VEP were in years 11 and 12 (Key stage 4) and accounted for almost 70% of the total pupil count.   The remaining 30% was comprised of post-16 pupils.

4.2 Gender

Whilst numbers of pupils have increased significantly over the period of the analysis, participation between males and females has on average remained at a constant 60% male / 40% female split. The analysis is unable to offer any explanation as to why this split has remained constant, other than comments provided by pupils during the three years of the surveys.

Gender Breakdown 2005 - 2008

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Male	4725	5392	7669
Female	2983	3433	5064

☐ Male ■ Female

On examining the breakdown of males/ females against each school type it is clear that within Secondary and Special Schools the 60% male to 40% female remains. However, within Grammar Schools the split is 50% males to 50 % females.

	Totals	Males	Females	%	%
2005/06	7708	4725	2983	61.30%	38.70%
2006/07	8825	5392	3433	61.10%	38.90%
2007/08	12733	7669	5064	60.23%	39.77%
Secondary					
2005/06	5728	3663	2065	63.95%	36.05%
2006/07	6830	4305	2525	63.03%	36.97%
2007/08	9870	6075	3795	61.55%	38.45%
Special					
2005/06	612	374	238	61.11%	38.89%
2006/07	874	523	351	59.84%	40.16%
2007/08	1092	680	412	62.27%	37.73%
Grammar					
2005/06	1359	679	680	49.96%	50.04%
2006/07	1106	552	554	49.91%	50.09%
2007/08	1706	877	829	51.41%	48.59%
Other					
2005/06	9	9	0	100.00%	0.00%
2006/07	15	12	3	80.00%	20.00%
2007/08	65	37	28	56.92%	43.08%

The gender split, when looking at the level of qualification over the 3 year period, shows that males are more inclined to opt for the lower level qualifications.

Qualification Level	% Split 2005-08 Males	% Split 2005-08 Females
Entry	64.20%	35.80%
1	65.11%	34.89%
2	58.07%	41.93%
3	45.16%	54.85 %
4	100.00%	0.00%

The pupils participated in courses which addressed a wide range of vocational areas, though it is possible to identify trends of more popular vocational options. The distribution of pupils across the different subject areas also reveals strong gender preferences. The degree to which these

preferences are driven by student choice or the schools selection process is obscure, and due to variations in the survey questions across the various survey groups it was not possible to make a valid correlation between gender, vocational area and students' reasons for being on the programme.

From previous surveys it is possible to identify clear preferences in subject areas. In 2005/06 29% of all male enrolments (years 11 and 12) were on 'Construction, Planning and the Built Environment' and a further 21% of all male enrolments were on 'Information and Communications Technology'. In contrast female pupil enrolments (years 11 and 12) were concentrated in 'Leisure, Travel and Tourism' with 54% and 'Retail and Commercial Enterprise' with 52%. In the majority of schools surveyed, female and male pupils were given the same choice of subjects and no distinction was made between the male and female pupils in relation to their possible range of choice for VEP. In contrast, however, in some schools, male and female pupils stated that they were given different options to choose from, depending on gender.   In one school it was reported that female pupils were discouraged from doing 'boys' subjects.

The overall picture regarding Sector Skills areas and Priority Skills are covered later in much more detail in Chapter 7.

4.3 Course Selection and Decision Making

The 2005/06 survey identified that the degrees to which pupils were able to choose their VEP courses varied by programme type, school type, school year and pupil gender.   Pupils enrolled on other VEP courses had more choice than pupils enrolled on Occupational Studies.   Special school pupils and pupils in years 11 and 12 (particularly female pupils) had less choice than other pupils enrolled for VEP courses.

VEP Qualification type and level by school type 2005-08											
Qual Type	Level	Total	%	Grammar Total	%	Secondary Total	%	Special Total	%	Other Total	%
AQA	Entry	130		0		0		130		0	
ASDAN	Entry	120		0		0		120		0	
EL	Entry	462		17		56		384		5	
Non NDAQ	Entry	83		0		0		83		0	
NSP	Entry	624		73		166		385		0	
Entry totals - %		1419	4.8%	90	0.3%	222	0.8%	1102	3.8%	5	0.0%
DIP L1	L1	12		0		0		12		0	
NVQ L1	L1	555		17		460		78		0	
OG L1	L1	17178		5		15939		1173		61	
VRQ L1	L1	1255		358		806		91		0	
Level 1 totals - %		19000	64.9%	380	1.3%	17205	58.8%	1354	4.6%	61	0.2%
GCE L2	L2	11		11		0		0		0	
GCSE	L2	1127		141		935		51		0	
NVQ L2	L2	278		87		169		18		4	
QCF	L2	7		7		0		0		0	
VRQ L2	L2	2460		1046		1342		53		19	
Level 2 totals - %		3883	13.3%	1292	4.4%	2446	8.4%	122	0.4%	23	0.1%
DIP L3	L3	39		39		0		0		0	
GCE L3	L3	2312		908		1404		0		0	
GCE AS	L3	687		335		352		0		0	
NVQ L3	L3	63		0		63		0		0	
VCE	L3	98		44		54		0		0	
VRQ L3	L3	1750		1083		667		0		0	
Level 3 totals - %		4949	16.9%	2409	8.2%	2540	8.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
NVQ L4	L4	15		15		0		0		0	
Level 4 totals - %		15	0.1%	15	0.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTALS		29266	100%	4186	14%	22413	77%	2578	9%	89	0%

From the chart above it is possible to identify the type and level of qualifications chosen on VEP across the school types. Qualifications at Level 1 come out as the most prevalent choice of provision across Post primary schools, accounting for almost 65% of all provision on VEP between 2005 and 2008. However, it is worth noting this category is largely dominated by the choice of CCEA's Occupational Studies which is very popular with both Secondary schools (58.8%) and Special schools (4.6%). It is also worth mentioning again that the quantitative data used in statistical analysis throughout the report is taken from the VEP submission analysis records held

by DEL over the three years 2005-08. Because of inconsistent recording of qualification data in 2005/06 & 2006/07, the department was unable to split Occupational Studies into level 1 or level 2 or into Single or Double award. Subsequently, it was decided to record the qualification at Level 1.

It is encouraging to note that over 30% of all the qualifications chosen on VEP over the three years are at Level 2 and above with over 16% at Level 3. If it were possible to factor in the Level 2 provision from Occupational Studies, in real terms, it is likely that the figure would be much greater than 30%. Pupils in Special schools account for almost 9% of qualifications studied between Entry Level and Level 2, while almost the same number of pupils (just over 8%) from Grammar schools and Secondary schools had chosen Level 3 courses.

The 2006/07 survey produced the following data in relation to the degree of choice exercised by the pupils in relation to the breath of choice in selecting a VEP course of their choosing:

- Were all pupils in your class given a choice about which VEP course they could take? Yes 76%, No 24%.
- Were all the pupils in your class given the same course options? Yes 87%, No 13%.
- Which options did you choose between (if any)? 3 or more options were identified by 68%, and no choice or an 'either/or' option were identified by 32%.
- Did you get the FE college course you wanted? Yes 80%, No 20%.

When asked to suggest why this had occurred, the two most common reasons given where:
1) the vocational area they were interested in was not provided; and

2) there were too many pupils already in the cohort for a particular vocational course, and they were required to select an alternative.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that 20% of the pupils also expressed that they were not interested in the vocational course they had studied. This situation remains relatively similar in 2007/08. While it was encouraging that 40% of pupils stated they were offered a range of five or more alternative VEP courses, the fact that 26% of pupils were given an 'either/or' option, at best, is likely to detract from the benefits and experience of the pupils VEP. This is borne out by 29% of pupils volunteering that they were not on their programme of choice as being an element of the VEP they disliked.

Pupils participating in the 2006/07 survey identified the issue of career information and guidance as being a matter requiring greater attention, with 48% of pupils having stated they would like to have more career information. In the 2007/08 survey 30% of school co-ordinators stated that pupils are not involved in the decision to participate in VEP or to decide which vocational area to study. Only 55% of schools identified pupils as a group involved in the decision making process regarding potential provision. This feedback from the school co-ordinators corresponds with the feedback received from pupils themselves.   The 2007/08 survey also found that evidence of gender bias remained with, 28% (23) of school Co-ordinators stating that in co-education schools boys and girls were not given the same choices.

4.4 Pupil Satisfaction and Impact

Overall feedback from pupils over the three years from 2005 until 2008 has been very positive.   In 2005, 63% of pupils felt their VEP course was pitched just right, and by 2008 this statistic had risen to 85%.   Interviews were conducted with pupils who had participated in VEP courses in order to obtain an insight into their perspective of the VEP experience. Students particularly enjoyed the increased autonomy that their experience at college brought. This feeling of independence was greeted positively right across the school spectrum. A pupil from a Special school commented "I like all the practical work and learning new things". He enjoyed the break from the normal school environment.   This comment was echoed by a student from a Grammar

school who stated "I got more freedom and individual attention". Overall students tended to comment disapprovingly on poor behaviour in class.

These comments do not indicate that the pupils thought college would be more relaxed and less demanding than school. Rather, it reflects that the move from the normal school environment was seen as a refreshing change. As one pupil stated from an all girls Secondary school, "We are more confident about our learning now, more sophisticated".

A common theme to come across from interviewees is that they enjoyed seeing the progress they had made and having the ability to reflect on concrete learning outcomes. For example, when giving feedback on positive aspects of VEP, a cohort of students from a Special school attending a catering course spoke constantly of their achievements. For example, one student commented, "I can balance four plates of food on one hand". This was reflected across a wide range of students; one Secondary school pupil summed up his experience simply by commenting, "I can build a wall and I know I had done something". The clear link between the learning and creating a tangible outcome was seen as an important positive aspect of participating in VEP.

In 2005/06 there was little evidence of pupil progression being collected by FE colleges, apart from some information about VEP pupils who subsequently enrolled on FE courses. In 2005/06 most college and school managers were of the opinion that a significant proportion of Occupational Studies pupils subsequently enrolled on FE courses. FE lecturers reported that VEP pupils in general had asked them about progression. In 2005/06 it was noted that female pupils were considerably more interested in progression to FE than male pupils, while male pupils were more interested in progression to employment.

However, in this year's survey 72% of male pupils were more interested in possible FE courses in comparison to 69% of female pupils. Also, 74% of male pupils were positive about career progression as opposed to 65% of

female pupils. When asked if, due to their VEP course and experience in an FE college, they had changed what they thought about further education, 47% of pupils stated that it had. The pupils responded very positively when asked about their experience and views of their college. The following represents only a fraction of the comments given by the learners, "it's good fun and the teachers are nice to you", "I like the way you learn interesting things here", "it is good, I like it", "I like everything". There was a lower response in relation to the change in attitude towards attending university, with only 17%, responding that their VEP course had influenced how they had previoursly perceived University study.   However, this could be anticipated, as the college lecturers and the college co-ordinators maintained a view across the survey years that the schools were targeting VEP attendance to the lower stream pupils. When asked if the VEP course had helped them to become clearer about career progression, future employment and whether they would go onto further or higher education, 61% stated that it had. The evidence of impact continued to increase in the 2007/08 survey, with 71% agreeing that their VEP experience had helped them to become clearer about career progression and employment and 71% agreeing it had also helped them to become clearer regarding further courses of study.

The VEP has positively influenced many of the learners. They expressed how their VEP has given them an insight into college life and the possibility of following up on their learning. For some pupils, they were experiencing a vocational area which they now believed may be a possible employment choice. When invited to expand upon why they believed their VEP course and experience had helped them to be clearer about career, employment and further study, the most frequent comments referred to how the VEP had given them an insight into the different jobs available and the skills needed. It may even be considered a positive outcome for those pupils who stated that the VEP has helped them realise that the particular vocational area chosen is not a future career choice that they would now like to make.

This perception of the impact of VEP experiences upon the pupils progression is further supported by the feedback from their school and the college they

attended. When asked if they believed, thinking back to previous years, that the VEP had had an impact on the pupils' subsequent progression, 82% (75) of school VEP Co-ordinators and 87% (13) of college VEP Co-ordinators stated that they did believe there had been an impact. As further evidence of the possible impact of VEP upon students subsequent education and career decision, the lecturers involved in delivering VEP were asked if pupils had made enquiries with them. 64% of the lecturers stated that pupils had enquired about progression into further education and 56% stated their pupils had enquired about progression into employment.

When asked if they liked the VEP course they were doing in college the pupils gave a very positive response, with 89% saying 'yes'. The students who participated in this survey were significantly more enthusiastic in their efforts to describe what it was they liked and enjoyed about their VEP experience than in their responses to identifying anything which had taken away from their experience. When provided with a free response question, in the 2007/08 survey, allowing the pupils to describe any elements of their VEP which they particularly liked or disliked, the pupils contributed many statements. Approximately 1,785 responses were recorded regarding 'likes' as compared to approximately 234 responses to 'dislikes'. The most commonly identified 'likes' about their VEP courses were that they found:

- it interesting and useful in terms of skills (43%);
- they enjoyed the practical hands-on style of learning (19%);
- they believed the course to be beneficial to their future job prospects (17%); and
- they enjoyed the different environment in the college and their relationship with college lecturers (17%).

When asked to identify things they disliked, the most commonly expressed point of dissatisfaction was that the pupil had not received a place in their chosen vocational area (29%). The second highest complaint was that the pupil did not seem to be engaged, with expressions such as 'bored' or 'boring' being used without any explanation from the pupils (22%). Some pupils

stated that they did not find their programme practical or varied enough (18%) or that their VEP course was not as they had expected (14%).

4.5 Pupil experience - Pastoral care

The practice of having pupils, or their parents, sign an agreement about the college rules was inconsistent, with 47% of pupils stating they or their parents had signed such an agreement with the school or the college, and 53% stating they had not. Those 47% of pupils who stated they had signed an agreement did not consistently revisit the document during the course of their VEP. Nevertheless, the majority of pupils did state that they had been given rules about:

- health and safety – 91%;
- behaviour in class and to the teacher – 92%;
- behaviour out of the classroom and in unsupervised time – 81%; and
- behaviour towards each other – 85%.

In 8% of cases the pupils stated that these rules had been provided by the school, 27% stated by the college, and 65% of the pupils stated they had been provided with these rules by both the school and the college.

The supervision of pupils at break and dinner times was mixed, with 55% saying they were supervised and 45% saying they were not. The form this supervision takes is varied. For some pupils the supervision is provided by someone from their own school or another school and in some instances this has been provided by the college.

4.6 Pupil Experience - Summary of main findings

VEP provision is available to pupils aged 14-19 to assist them in making choices which may shape their future. However, the majority of pupils responding to this survey (80%) were in years 11 and 12 (ages 14-16).   In

2007/08 the survey data produced the following percentages of student participation in occupational Studies and 'other' VEP courses as follows:

- Years 11 and 12 in Occupational Studies 89%.
- Years 11 and 12 in 'other' VEP courses 11%.
- Years 13 and 14(+) in Occupational Studies 24%.
- Years 13 and 14(+) in 'other' VEP courses 76%.

In comparision to the 2007/08 survey figures, the total figures captured by DEL illustrate that between 2005 and 2008 the number of pupils on VEP in years 11 and 12 amounted to 69.9%, and that over 17,000 pupils (58.7%) were enrolled on the Occupational Studies provision.

Overall, the male pupils outnumbered the females 2:1. There is currently a range of approximately fifteen vocational areas on offer to the pupils. While this may vary across the colleges and schools, all six Priority Skills areas are on offer in the colleges. However, according to survey evidence the most significant uptake in vocational areas is in Construction and Built Environment, with 40% of all male pupils undertaking this vocational area, and in Health, Public Services and Care, with 38% of all the females undertaking this vocational area. It should be noted that in both these vocational areas the numbers of pupils of the opposite sex is virtually insignificant. There was a mere 4% if females enrolled in Construction, Planning and the Built Environment, and only 3% of males enrolled in Health, Public Services and Care.

The pupils reported varying degrees of choice in relation to the vocational programmes they may select from. Some pupils were given a good range of VEP choice, while a significant number of pupils were offered either/or choices at best. The fact that a pupil is not actually undertaking a VEP of choice was the single most occuring reason for the pupil not enjoying their experience.

The overall feedback from the majority of pupils was very positive and they were very enthusiastic in their statements to explain what it was they enjoyed about their VEP course.   The most frequently occuring statements of enthusiasm from the pupils referred to the practical and hands-on elements of their courses, the environment within the colleges and the usefulness with which they viewed the skills they were learning. A very positive 91% of pupils stated they had found their course interesting, and 85% of pupils were of the opinion that their course was appropriate to their ability level.
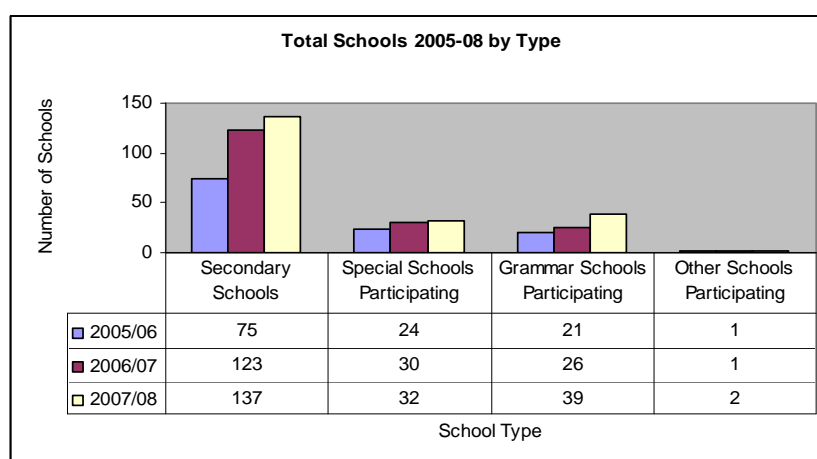
Contrary to the experience reported of the 14 to 19 agenda in England, the equivalent to the VEP in Northern Ireland, [SQW report, Vocational Enhancement Programme:evaluating school/college partnerships 2006] this survey suggests that the VEP in Northern Ireland has a measurable impact on students and how they focus upon the future.   There was a general agreement amongst the pupils that the VEP had helped them to focus upon possible areas for further study and on possible future careers. To reinforce this, the school Co-ordinators and college Co-ordinators had also agreed that, on reflection of pupils from previous years and where they had progressed to, the VEP experience had had an influence on student decision-making.

5 SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

5.1 School Participation

Post primary school participation showed a significant increase over the period of the evaluation, from 121 Post Primary schools involved in 2005/06 to 210 in the final year of the programme, representing a 57% increase.

Although Post primary schools increased participation during the period, when this is analysed by type of school, a marked difference in participation was identified with 75 Secondary schools* increasing to 137 (54% increase), and Special schools* increasing from 24 to 32 (75% increase) and Grammar* schools 21 to 39 (53% increase). However, these figures change when measured against available schools in each category, with 86% of Secondary schools being involved, 67% of Special schools and 56% of Grammar schools.

Total Schools 2005-08 by Type

	Secondary Schools	Special Schools Participating	Grammar Schools Participating	Other Schools Participating
2005/06	75	24	21	1
2006/07	123	30	26	1
2007/08	137	32	39	2

When further analysed by school management type, continued growth over the period was evident. While the Voluntary schools sector increased it's participation by 53% over the three years, representing 53% of school involvement, this sector still had the greatest distance to travel, with 47% of Voluntary schools not involved in the VEP.

With the exception of those schools management types with less than 10 schools, the controlled schools sector displayed the greatest growth over the period with an increase of 66% from 2005/06 to 2007/08.

Year	Controlled Schools Participating	Voluntary Schools Participating	Roman Catholic Maintained Schools Participating	Other Maintained Schools Participating	Controlled Integrated Schools Participating	Grant Maintained Schools Participating	Other Schools Participating
Number in Group	127	52	76	2	4	15	3
2005/06	63	15	34	0	3	5	1
2006/07	87	18	60	1	3	10	1
2007/08	95	28	66	2	3	14	2
Never Participated	29	21	8	0	1	1	0

Identified via the Department of Educations School Reference number.

5.2 School Experience

The schools were asked to identify specific strengths perceived with the VEP courses offered by their local college.   In 2006/07 those strengths were identified as being the variety of courses which were made available to the pupils, the access to Specialised teaching facilities and expertise which did not exist in the schools learning community and would, therefore, be difficult for the schools to resource.   In 2007/08, 77% of the schools responded that a strength of the VEP was the coherence of the curricular offer and 99% stated its strength in developing practical skills for pupils.   The effect of VEP in building pupil motivation and self-esteem, and the fact that it also seemed to improve the pupils' levels of maturity, were common features in school responses. The 2007/08 survey continues to identify this impact, with 89% of the schools stating that VEP had helped build the confidence of pupils.

In the 2006/07 survey, the existence of a strong college management structure was identified as an enabler to building good relations between schools and college and the ability of the college to address the needs of different schools.   Communications between school and college was a

significant feature and strength in the 2007/08 survey results.   The following areas of communication were identified as being 'good' or 'very good':

- communication between college and school regarding provision - 98%;
- communication between college and school on agreeing pastoral care - 86%; and
- communication between college and school regarding management arrangements - 85%.

There were no commonly recurring weaknesses identified in the 2006/07 survey, apart from some comments on communication and tracking of achievement. Therefore, the following issues which were raised may be specific to a college/school partnership.   There were some concerns raised regarding the lack of experience of college staff in teaching to 14 – 16 year old age groups. Also, the flow of information required to decide upon course provision and student numbers does not always flow on a timeline for effective planning for the upcoming academic year.   In 2007/08, the main area of weakness identified by the schools, at 23% of responses, was the tracking of pupil achievement. There would appear to be gaps in the communication process in relation to the registering of learners for qualifications and the recording of their success.   It is important that the schools and colleges ensure that this information is appropriately shared for recording purposes.   A further area of weakness which may need addressed in the future is the level of communication between the schools and the E2S officers in providing advice and guidance, with 36% of schools ranking it as poor. This issue was also raised by the colleges, with 7 of the 15 colleges ranking their relationship with their local E2S officer as 'unsatisfactory'.

5.3 School Experience - Benefits and Costs

In 2006/07 schools felt that the increased opportunity for pupils to experience vocational education over and above their academic subjects potentially increased their likelihood of securing employment, attaining qualifications and gaining a learning experience and introduction to the world of work.   The opportunity to work with and mutually support, rather than being competitive

with, other schools and the college in partnership to provide pupils with a wider curriculum was also clearly identified as positive by the schools. They also believed that the VEP developed opportunities to prepare for and meet the requirements of the Entitlement Framework. Similar responses were received in 2007/08. The increased choice to pupils and in particular the increase in vocational options was viewed as a key benefit by 88% of schools, and 82% believed it enhanced the learning experience for pupils and helped them build confidence 73%. The improvement in collaboration between schools and local college was again identified as a key benefit by 71% of the schools.

The costs identified by the schools included, the time in arranging the provision and timetable, travelling costs and the need to provide a broader curriculum which would require schools to increase resources such as accommodation, staff and equipment. There was no general identification of cost in the 2007/08 survey, although transport was specifically addressed.

Targeted interviews were conducted in June 2008 to gather further anecdotal evidence of schools experience of VEP. The element of enhanced choice for pupils was greeted positively across the school spectrum. For one Grammar school it gave a more industrially focused choice to what was a very traditional academic curriculum. In one school, which faced considerable conflict and socio – economic challenges, the building of self esteem and giving educational success was the key success factor of VEP. In this school, some 72%of students reported greater self esteem as a result of participating in the programme. The VEP, by providing subjects more kinaesthetic and practical, tends to suit the learning styles of some non traditional learners, leading to greater engagement.

Progression as a result of the VEP was commented on by all school co-ordinators; the idea of what progression meant though was different depending on the objectives of each school. For example, for a Special school the VEP allowed their learners to make the first step towards the transition to greater independence. For a Grammar school it was to allow

students to consider progression outside the traditional academic / professional route to more vocational qualifications and industrial occupations. For a Secondary, high school it was to provide greater accessibility to a wider range of vocational areas and, therefore, facilitate offering a route to employment. This is particularly relevant for learners who may find themselves neither in employment or training post 16.

5.4 School Experience- Planning

VEP was linked to broader school planning by 68% of the schools in 2006/07 and was identified as a priority in the school development plans. These schools linked the VEP to revised curriculum planning and provision of the Entitlement Framework. Some schools felt it was an effective strategy for addressing dissatisfaction amongst some pupils at KS4. In 2007/08, 97% of the schools who responded agreed that the expansion of the vocational offer was an integral part of the schools development plan, with 85% agreeing that the VEP had a high priority within their schools provision. Furthermore, 81% of the schools believed that the VEP increased the opportunity for pupils and 79% felt it broadened the curriculum choice. It is also positive to note that 48% of the schools were also of the opinion that the VEP experience helps improve pupil performance and behaviour, and 28% added that it reduces absenteeism.

With the VEP provision being accepted as an integral part of the schools curriculum provision, there has been some effective planning by schools in relation to developing a framework for this, determining the potential number of pupils and also determining the total capacity for provision. However, some schools have not planned effectively for VEP, with 42 schools stating they did not know or had not yet established a framework for provision. 30 schools did not know, or had not established, the potential number of pupils to be involved, and 40 did not know or had not estabished the total capacity for provision.

However, while there has been some effective planning in relation to the overall framework for provision, many of the schools have not fully planned for the resources which may be required. 42 schools have not yet addressed transport issues, 66 schools have not developed vocational training for staff, 30 schools have not allocated staff for pastoral care and 51 schools have not identified resources.

5.5 School Experience – Travel

The above statistics may, however, reflect the schools plans to maintain the continuity of their links with the relevant colleges and anticipate that college staff and resources will be utilised. The issue of transport remains more of a problem area, with 51% of schools stating that travel has presented difficulties for the selection and delivery of VEP provision during 2007/08. The majority of schools (77%) are located less than 10 miles from their local FE College and in some instances the pupils are able to walk between school and college (21%). However, this requires transport to be arranged for the remaining 79% of pupils, which creates a greater difficulty for the 23% of schools in this survey who are located greater than 10 miles from the FE College, bearing in mind that the pupils will be required to attend the FE College for all or part of their VEP in approximately 73% of cases.   The effective use of remote learning through the colleges' Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) was utilised in only 14% of instances, with 60% of the schools stating that they had not used this delivery approach at all. There would appear to be scope for further exploration of this method of delivery as a possible means of addressing transport problems.   In those schools where a remote VLE was used, 16% of school co-ordinators stated they had found it to be effective, while only 5% stated they had found its use ineffective

5.6 School Experience - Summary of main findings

One of the key stages in education for all learners at the age of 16 is the issue of 'what next?' To assist in decision making regarding progression, the

Entitlement Framework, to be introduced in 2013, aims to expand the curriculum so that pupils gain a broader experience, and to ensure that the curriculum offers sufficient focus on employment, life skills and vocational training. Partnerships between schools and colleges participating in the VEP may assist in the smooth transition from current curriculum to Entitlement Framework. Therefore, this survey reports on the schools' experiences with VEP and collaboration with their local FE college.

On evaluating the level of embedding of VEP into the schools curriculum, the majority (97%) concurred that VEP has a high priority within the school provision and was perceived as an area of expansion. The eventual introduction of the EF will make it essential that schools plan for the implementation of effective processes to ensure the delivery of quality vocational education and efficient management practices. The majority of those schools who responded have progressed in developing a framework for vocational provision, although some schools remain unsure as to their VEP capacity requirements and need to collaborate more effectively with their local FE college in this regard. There is evidence that there remains a need to forward plan the practical structures which will need to be in place to ensure quality of provision.

At this point in time, 36% of the schools have initiated vocational training for staff. It is possible that many of the schools plan to continue utilising college staff, resources and sites for the delivery of vocational education. The issue of transport has been problematic in previous years and remains unresolved for over 40% of the schools. The issues surrounding transport, for the schools, may range from costs to the logistics involved in moving the students from one geographical place to another during the school day.

6 COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

6.1 College Experience - Enrolments

College breakdown by Males & Females and academic year 2005 - 08								
Year	Total	Males	Females	Yr 11	Yr 12	Yr 13	Yr 14	Yr 14+
BMC	3788	2239	1549	1324	1153	1018	249	44
NRC	6576	4019	2557	2107	1816	1839	778	36
NWRC	4490	2703	1787	1723	1315	815	618	19
SERC	3318	2051	1267	1267	1280	502	252	17
SRC	7801	4915	2886	3459	2837	1194	287	24
SWC	3293	1857	1436	1223	1059	650	347	14
Total	29266	17784	11482	11103	9460	6018	2531	154

When actual enrolments is analysed against Colleges, it is possible to observe that within each College and across the Sector as a whole, participation between males and females has on average remained at a constant 60% male / 40% female split. The analysis is unable to offer any explanation why this split has remained constant, other than the comments provided by pupils regarding choice of courses during the three years of the surveys (Refer to section 4 Pupil Experience). The College Enrolment figures highlight that SRC and NRC have attracted the largest amount of pupils.

It is not possible in this report to measure this against the number of schools and available pupils within the catchments area of each college as this level of data is not captured within the DEL statistical analysis.

6.2 College Experience – Delivery

In managing the delivery of VEP courses, the lecturing staff assigned represents an even mix of full-time and part-time staff. This is a slight variation from the position in 2005/06 when it was reported that lecturers who taught

VEP pupils were more likely to be employed full-time (60%) than part-time or on a fractional basis.

During 2006/07 the delivery methods for VEP courses were traditional teaching, guidance and demonstrations. Colleges felt that the delivery methods utilised enabled practical content to be delivered in a non-school environment. The Specialist facilities which are available within colleges aid effective workplace scenarios and training opportunities. There is the possibility of the VLE facilitating pupils' access to materials outside college VEP hours. The main weakness in delivery, which was referred to by a number of colleges, was class sizes which made supervising all pupils equally quite difficult, particularly in workshop situations. Colleges expressed an interest in increasing the use made of VLE and Information and Learning Technology (ILT) in delivering VEP courses. The methods of delivery had not altered considerably in 2007/08 with all the colleges stating that traditional methods were 'effective' or 'highly effective' in delivering VEP. However, the use of blended learning (traditional + ILT) appears to have increased, with 12 of the 15 colleges (80%) who participated now finding this approach to be 'effective' or 'highly effective'. Delivering remotely using VLE also appears to be on the increase, with four colleges finding this approach effective. This corresponded with the school VEP Co-ordinators who also rated traditional (93%) and/or a blended approach (62%) to delivery as being the most effective delivery methods.

When asked to identify the changes they perceived as most likely in the partnership arrangements for September 2013, the following numbers of colleges, out of the total of 15 respondents, agreed with these statements:

- Increase in capacity, 12
- Higher demand on teaching resources, 13
- Increased investment in resources, 10
- Wider perspectus of provision, 15
- Regional impact of the college, 11

- Structure of VEP co-ordination, 12

It was also felt that there was likely to be an increase in the capacity for overall provision, and that this would likely impact on the structure of the VEP co-ordination.

6.3 College Experience - Service Level Agreements

Service Level Agreements (SLA) are reported as being in place in most partnerships in 2005/06, and that in some cases they were tailored to suit particular partnership needs. However, there are no statistics reported in relation to SLAs.   The college Co-ordinators who responded in the 2006/07 survey all (100% of those colleges who responded) replied positively that they were using SLAs in their partnership. In 2007/08, all colleges had signed SLAs with the exception of one college Co-ordinator who replied that the college had not signed a service level agreement with all schools in its partnership. On further drilling into this issue it would appear that this college had sent SLAs to all the relevant schools but experienced difficulty in getting the schools to sign and return these, despite reminders.

6.4 College Experience - Pupil satisfaction and data recording

Most of the FE managers who were interviewed in 2005/06 thought VEP pupils were satisfied with their course, but the means of determining this were different in each of the colleges visited. There was no standard method for collecting feedback from VEP pupils. Only one of the colleges systematically sought feedback from all VEP pupils, while another included VEP pupils in their all-student satisfaction survey. Another was advised to do similarly by the Education and Training Inspectorate, a fourth monitored pupil satisfaction

of 'A' level pupils but not Occupational Studies, a fifth asked Occupational Studies pupils to complete an evaluation of the programme as part of their porfolio evidence, while a sixth thought the schools should collect the feedback on pupil satisfaction. When college Co-ordinators were asked what evidence they had that pupils were satisfied with their VEP courses, 12 responses were received.

The most common approach for gathering pupil satisfaction data by colleges were surveys, the results of which would then form part of a quality assurance process.   This was referred to by eight of the 12 respondents (67%). The remaining responses made reference to a combination of results and achievements and the number of VEP pupils who subsequently returned on full FE programmes.

Ongoing communication with schools, college curriculum Co-ordinators and vocational tutors were also used as indicators. By 2007/08 the process for gathering pupil satisfaction appears to be becoming more structured. College Co-ordinators confirmed that this information was gathered and fed back to schools by means of verbal feedback (73%), course evaluation forms (47%), evaluation forms of pupils' overall experiences (60%), exam results (60%), coursework (33%) and feedback from course tutors (67%).

Despite this apparent improvement, there would still appear to be some issues regarding how effectively this information, and in particular information on pupil achievements, is being communicated to schools.

In 2005/06, inconsistent practices for collecting progression data for VEP pupils were observed at the partnerships visited during the study. Some colleges held data on VEP pupils progression to other FE courses and some schools held data on the progression of other VEP pupils; but data from both sources were not consolidated. It was recommended in the 'Evaluation of the Vocational Enhancement Programme 2005/06' prepared by SQW that a more systematic approach to data collection and monitoring was required in order to track VEP pupil progression in the future. Nonetheless, one of the few

weaknesses to be identified by school managers in 2006/07 was the need for improved communication and tracking, which they felt could be better addressed. This is correlating across the co-ordinators in both the schools and the colleges. This was again raised in the same survey when pastoral care arrangements and responsibilities for tracing the progress and achievements of the learners were identified as areas for improvement with regards management arrangements.

By the time of the 2007/08 survey 68%, of the school VEP co-coordinators were satisfied with the tracking of pupil achievement, which suggests that this issue is being tackled by the colleges. The levels of communication between school and college were also obtaining very high satisfaction scores (communication between college and school regarding provision 95%, communication between college and school regarding pastoral care 86% and communication between college and school 85%). Nevertheless, 23% of school VEP managers were not satisfied with the tracking arrangements and it, therefore, remains an issue warranting further attention.

6.5 College Experience - Pastoral Care

From the 2005/06 survey pastoral, care arrangements appeared to vary from partnership to partnership, between schools within the same partnership and between departments within the same FE College. Greatest consistency in approach was observed when VEP pupils were taught within their own schools. Here, the school retained primary responsibility for pupils' welfare. Pastoral care for pupils taught in FE colleges was more varied, with some evident strengths and weaknesses. Most college VEP Co-ordinators perceived the college as being the responsible body for pupils when they were on site. However, in the early days of VEP it may be fair to say that pastoral care arrangements in colleges were not fully delineated and some colleges utilised existing 16-19 policies and procedures. Pastoral care arrangements appeared to work best when they were set out clearly in a SLA.

School managers appeared to have adopted varying approaches during 2005/06 towards monitoring their pupils when off the school premises and in communicating pastoral care information.   Three different approaches were identified:

1. Larger schools, Special schools and outlying schools usually sent staff to accompany the pupils as they travelled to the FE college and attended classes throughout the day.

2. Smaller schools sent staff to accompany pupils only while they travelled to the FE college and some also sent staff to check on the pupils at different times during the day.

3. Schools made it clear that primary responsibility for pastoral care of their pupils lay with the partner college while their pupils were on site.

It was felt that the first option could prove costly and may prevent partner colleges from developing appropriate pastoral care arrangements. The second approach may be less costly but will place greater responsibility for pupils' pastoral care upon the college. As mentioned previously, the extent to which FE colleges were delivering adequate pastoral care at this time was in its infancy. To this end we can see a greater consistency in the development of pastoral care appropriate for 14-16 year old age group developing within colleges. This is best when roles and responsibilities are clearly explained in a SLA and when FE staff are provided with appropriate training for delivery to this age group.

School managers expressed dissatisfaction in two main aspects of FE pastoral care arrangements; the lack of break-time supervision and inappropriate disciplinary procedures.   One school's solution, which was reported by pupils at interview with considerable pupil unhappiness, was to restrict their break-time movements to the canteen.   Secondly, whilst maintaining discipline was generally regarded to be the responsibility of the FE College, the widely-used three-stage formal warning system was thought to be inappropriate for young people. One school manager complained that

some lecturers very quickly exhausted the procedure and were then left without any means of maintaining discipline.

Lecturers themselves were sometimes unclear about who was responsible for the pastoral care of the pupils they taught. Most agreed that they would phone the college VEP Co-ordinator in the first instance should a problem arise in class, such as an injury or disciplinary matter. However, none thought their responsibilities went beyond the classroom, although several did express concern about the absence of break time supervision. Only one lecturer thought that she had no responsibility for her VEP pupils' pastoral care. Several reported examples of poor communication in this area between schools and their FE partner.

The identification of role and responsibilities for pastoral care remains inconsistent. In the 2006/07 survey, the main response from college VEP Co-ordinators was that pastoral care responsibility was a shared role between college and school. No college Co-ordinator identified the school alone to have pastoral care responsibilities when their pupils where on college premises. On the other hand, in the 2007/08 survey the decision was again varied. College Co-ordinators identified the FE College as having responsibility and seven identified both the college and school as sharing responsibility. One respondent did identify the school as having key responsibility for pupil pastoral care. There is still evidence that the actual college lecturers involved in delivering VEP are unclear regarding pastoral care responsibility towards VEP pupils.

The school approach of sending a member of staff to accompany the pupils has been continued through to the current year, although their role while in college remains inconsistent. In 2006/07 all the college VEP Co-ordinators who provided a response to the survey stated that the role of the school member varied from school to school. Some school staff members are there to be available just in case a pastoral care issue should arise, while others also stay with the pupils during their class sessions. This second situation is particularly true of Special schools and remains the same at present.

The question of pupil supervision over break times is also varied from partnership to partnership and within partnerships and various schools. In 2006/07 the question of supervision was put to college VEP Co-ordinators, and responses ranged from no supervision being provided during break times, to school staff member and/or college staff member providing supervision cover. In 2007/08 the issue of supervision seems to be addressed differently across the partnerships. Almost 50% of college Co-ordinators stated this cover was provided by the college and the other 50% stated this was being provided by the school. Only two respondents said that no cover was provided, and some pupils had parental consent to leave the college premises during break times. Therefore, it is not unexpected that these arrangements regarding supervision of pupils is reported as being unsatisfactory by college VEP Co-ordinators; unsatisfactory by 64% in 2006/07 and by 47% in 2007/08.

When asked if they were confident that both the school and college were clear about their responsibilities with regards to pastoral care six (40%) college Co-ordinators said they were not. However, it is positive that college Co-ordinators identified staff development events as a key means of communicating pastoral care arrangements to VEP lecturers. The message needs to be communicated very clearly, and 73% of respondents stating that information that is provided to lecturers verbally may need to be 'hardened up'.

The focused interviews conducted by LSDA NI in June 2008[5] identified that much of the misbehaviour occurred during break-times. Clear lines of supervision and codes of conduct are very important with co-operation extending between schools and colleges. The current survey reported that 70% of VEP pupils are aware of college disciplinary procedures and the majority of VEP pupils did not find the rules and regulations, or the disciplinary procedures at the college, to be different from their own school. While this is

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[5] Annual surveys undertaken by SQW 2005-06; LSDA 2007/08 LSDA

a positive response, it is worrying that 30% of the pupils surveyed remain uncertain as to behaviour rules and regulations within the college.

The pupils attending college are registered upon arrival, though one college Co-ordinator stated that they were registered after break. However, when read in conjunction with the lecturers' responses to this question, it would seem that 94% of lecturers register their VEP pupils on attending class with 39% also registering them after break.

6.6 College Experience – Timetabling

Both schools and colleges expressed frustration with the VEP planning arrangements for 2005/06, but held different views about the best time in the year for planning future VEP provision. Both wanted to secure maximum flexibility for planning. College partners sought the earliest possible timing to confirm pupil numbers in order to plan the coming year's provision effectively, while school partners sought the latest possible timing to allow for changes in pupils' preferences. Schools with experience of FE collaboration were more inclined to understand their college partner's requirements and to accommodate these within their internal planning processes, whilst schools with little experience of FE collaboration were generally less willing to do so. A number of school and college Co-ordinators indicated that Easter would be a good time for deciding numbers for VEP pupil enrolments in the following September.

The results of the 2005/06 survey indicated that timetabling for Occupational Studies was generally regarded as less problematic for FE partners than timetabling for 'other VEP' provision. Whole-day block-bookings were typically used for Occupational Studies, when pupils from all participating schools would attend the FE College on the same day to be taught in multiple-school pupil cohorts. Block-booked provision for pupils aged 14-16 year is well established in Secondary and Special schools, where the rest of the

school timetable is worked around the need to release pupils for one or two days per week.

Timetabling 'other VEP' provision, when negotiated bi-laterally with individual schools, was considerably more difficult for FE partners to manage. One institute delivered all of its Occupational Studies provision on a whole-day block-booking basis at the college, and 'other VEP' provision at the schools on various days of the week to suit the schools. This 'other VEP' provision was more difficult to timetable because it often involved individual lessons or shorter blocks. Lecturers who went out to partner schools preferred to teach long classes over a whole day, eSpecially when travel was involved, and the question of travel time was raised by some of lecturers in the 2007/08 survey.

Some school managers regarded the timetabling of VEP courses delivered at their schools as much easier than timetabling block-booked sessions delivered at the college. Grammar school managers in particular stated a strong preference for VEP courses delivered at their schools. However, not all school managers regarded block booking as problematic, as one remarked, 'When timetabling for 14-16 year olds, the sessions are block-booked and the schools buy in. The schools know well in advance what is available and so there are no issues'. The critical thing for this school manager was that any difficulties could be talked through and resolved at regular meetings of partnership decision makers.

The issue of timetabling would appear to becoming less contentious as the schools and their local college develop their partnership working relationships and learn to understand the operational issues experienced by each other. In the 2006/07 survey, six (50%) of the college Co-ordinators stated that they had experienced some timetabling difficulties but said that these were resolved through discussion and negotiation. Some schools experienced difficulties in blocking their pupils out of the school timetable for one whole day. There were, and remain, difficulties in trying to timetable VEP courses in such a way that they efficiently and effectively meet the needs of each partner organisation. The key is ensuring that information relating to potential VEP

provision to be timetabled during the upcoming academic year is made available as early as is practicable, which will enable college department heads to timetable around school needs as effectively as possible. All the colleges had worked closely with their partnership schools through meetings and negotiations to ensure the supply of viable pupil cohorts for VEP courses. The planning for VEP provision would appear to be an on-going activity within the schools and colleges, though the majority of the work and decision making takes place from March to June. The school VEP managers' answers ranged from May, which would provide very little lead in time for the college for courses due to commence that September, to the perception that a year lead in time was necessary.

When asked how they had overcome timetabling difficulties for the academic year 2007/08, the majority of college Co-ordinators identified two main approaches, 93% said that agreement was reached through direct discussion with the schools, while 73% responded there had also been direct discussion with college department tutors. For some partnerships the solution was to agree the delivery of the VEP courses at the college (80%) and on other occasions it was to deliver the VEP courses at the school (60%). Unfortunately all the colleges (100%) responded that they had experienced some difficulties in this area. On analysis, four distinct reasons for timetabling difficulties were identified:

1. The difficulties and pressures placed upon the rest of the students' school timetable due to block attending VEP at college.

2. The requirement to reach target numbers of students before a college class would be considered viable.

3. The difficulty in matching and co-ordinating to college timetables and staff availability.

4. Transport issues.

In addressing provision and timetabling needs, a variety of approaches were adopted by the different schools and college partnerships. The choice as to range of VEP provision was generally decided upon by joint discussion. Some schools and partnerships adopted their own specific information gathering and decision making approaches. For example, the distribution of option sheets circulated to pupils and the school students were to choose their two preferred options. This information was then collated by college management to assist with decision making.

Another tactic adopted was a series of meetings between school principals and college management teams, with feedback from pupils and parents on previous courses being used to drive decision making. There still remains scope for greater collaboration between schools and colleges in relation to decision making on selection of VEP provision and timetabling, as 29% of the college lecturers said they had experienced some timetabling difficulties during the years 2006/07, and again in 2007/08.

6.7 College Experience – Travel

The issue of travel and transport remains a problematic area. In the 2005/06 survey few transport difficulties were referred to when VEP courses were delivered by lecturers travelling to teach classes in schools, or when local pupils made their own way to the FE College. Some of the interviewed pupils taught at an FE college travelled there by bus over quite short distances (five or ten minutes travel time). Others made their own way by foot, public bus service, taxi or parents, unaccompanied by a member of school staff. Generally, local travel arrangements appeared to work well.

Not surprisingly, greater travel difficulties were identified for pupils attending colleges from outlying schools. These schools are disadvantaged by higher travel costs, shorter class times and less timetable flexibility. In the 2005/06 survey it was stated that these obstacles had resulted in some schools insisting on VEP delivery at their school, or refusing to participate in parts of

the programme. Pupils travelling from outlying schools often arrived later and left earlier than local pupils. Lecturers reported that this had caused disruption to multiple-school classes when different groups left at different times.

In 2006/07 80% of the schools in the survey were less than ten miles from their local FE College. The most frequent means of transport used was the school mini bus or the hire of a commercial bus. Where proximity allowed, pupils walked from school premises to college. However, there were some questions raised by the school Co-ordinators as to the health and safety implications of this. Six school co-ordinators (40%) stipulated that travel had presented difficulties for the selection and delivery of VEP provision in 2006/07. Unfortunately it was not possible to drill further into this issue for that survey period.

In 2007/08 77% of the schools participating in the survey were situated less than ten miles from their local college and, again, the main mode of transport (68%) was by bus, or pupils would walk from school to college (21%). This issue is presenting an on-going topic of concern for schools, with 51% stating that travel had presented difficulties in the selection of VEP provision in 2007/08. Again, no further drilling was possible from the survey.

The lecturers noted that the time required for pupils to travel between school and college meant that they did not actually obtain the full time allocation on the timetable. The average time lost was approximately 15 minutes in each session.

7 PROVISION ANALYSIS

7.1 Priority Skill/ Sector Skill Areas

Throughout the life of VEP, a key priority for both Departments was to ensure that the quality of vocational education encouraged the development of professional and technical skills that contributed directly to the local/regional economy. To ensure opportunities for progression, and in line with the Department's skills strategy, only provision that lead to an accredited qualification or were units of courses that lead to an accredited qualification were considered for funding. The bids were assessed using the following priority areas.

(a) Skills: provision that is:

- on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) National Database of Accredited Qualifications; and

- clearly and robustly linked to any of the following 6 priority skill areas:

    o Software Engineering
    o Electronics
    o Manufacturing Engineering
    o ICT
    o Hospitality, Catering and Tourism
    o Construction

(b) Local relevance: provision that is:

- on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF); and

- clearly in line with the following areas of the New Sector and Subject Categories' NSSC:

Area 1   - Health, public services and care
Area 3   - Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care
Area 7   - Retail and Commercial Enterprise
Area 8   - Leisure, Travel and Tourism
Area 9   - Arts, Media and Publishing
Area 14   - Preparation for Life and Work

As a guide to what was considered suitable provision within the 6 priority skill areas, FE colleges/schools were referred to the 15 'New Sector and Subject Categories' (NSSC), which are described within Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) database of accredited qualifications www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk

New Sector and Subject Categories:

01. Health, Public Services and Care
02. Science and Mathematics
03. Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care
04. Engineering and Manufacturing Technology
05. Construction, Planning and the Built Environment
06. Information and Communication Technology
07. Retail and Commercial Enterprise
08. Leisure, Travel and Tourism
09. Arts, Media and Publishing
10. History, Philosophy and Theology
11. Social Sciences
12. Languages, Literature and Culture
13. Education and Training
14. Preparation for Life and Work
15. Business, Administration and Law

The sector and subject categories were created in 2001 after QCA received a remit from ministers to develop sector and subject categories that all major education bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland could use. The NSSCs are comprehensive enough to cover all qualification types, subject areas and employment sectors, and their aim is to provide a single, consistent, subject framework for use in classifying and reporting on UK qualifications.

Data on VEP pupil participation is recorded on the Further Education Colleges Northern Ireland College Information System (NICIS). In September 2007, the Department introduced the VEP NICIS report which facilitated the collection of data to allocate funding to colleges under VEP. This data extract also included general information on pupils' school, year group, and the level and type of qualification being studied. This, in turn, enabled the department to analyse and measure VEP participation across a range of different

variables. Information on qualifications is broken down into Priority Skill Areas and the New Sector and Subject Categories, and this is illustrated below.

VEP Analysis – Sector Subject Areas

Sectors	Total	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08			
01. Health, Public Services and Care	1316	324	4.2%	379	4.3%	613	4.8%	1316	4%
02. Science and Mathematics	183	46	0.6%	14	0.2%	123	1.0%	183	1%
03. Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	87	11	0.1%	29	0.3%	47	0.4%	87	0%
04. Engineering and Manufacturing Technology	1567	461	6.0%	465	5.3%	641	5.0%	1567	5%
05. Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	1711	427	5.5%	534	6.1%	750	5.9%	1711	6%
06. Information and Communication Technology	1682	664	8.6%	520	5.9%	498	3.9%	1682	6%
07. Retail and Commercial Enterprise	1199	319	4.1%	498	5.6%	382	3.0%	1199	4%
08. Leisure, Travel and Tourism	763	136	1.8%	197	2.2%	430	3.4%	763	3%
09. Arts, Media and Publishing	1228	219	2.8%	380	4.3%	629	4.9%	1228	4%
10. History, Philosophy and Theology	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0%
11. Social Sciences	101	91	1.2%	0	0.0%	10	0.1%	101	0%
12. Languages, Literature and Culture	27	0	0.0%	11	0.1%	16	0.1%	27	0%
13. Education and Training	20	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	20	0.2%	20	0%
14. Preparation for Life and Work	18600	4790	62.1%	5611	63.6%	8199	64.4%	18600	64%
15. Business, Administration and Law	782	220	2.9%	187	2.1%	375	2.9%	782	3%
Total	29266	7708	100.0%	8825	100.0%	12733	100.0%	29266	

Between 2005 and 2008, VEP has offered 29,266 vocational education opportunities to students through FE colleges, and 63% of this provision was categorised as Preparation for Life and Work. This figure was significantly high in comparison to other sectors and may be explained by two facts. Firstly, much of the Special needs provision tends to be based around life skills training and is subsequently categorised on the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ) as Preparation for Life and Work. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, Occupational Studies has come out as the predominant provision over the three years of this evaluation and accounts for over 50% of all qualifications studied on VEP. Although there are a total of 50 Occupational Studies units available covering a wide range of occupations, the qualification is designed to allow learners to job sample different occupational areas as a careers tool, and to gain insight into different

vocationally related areas throughout the world of work. It is, therefore, categorised in line with the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ) as Preparation for Life and Work.

However, from the data obtained from interviewing pupils across the three surveys, it is possible to identify clear preferences in subject areas. In 2005/06, 29% of all male enrolments (years 11 and 12) were on 'Construction, Planning and the Built Environment' and a further 21% of all male enrolments were on 'Information and Communications Technology'. In contrast female pupil enrolments (years 11 and 12) were concentrated in 'Leisure, Travel and Tourism' with 54% and 'Retail and Commercial Enterprise' with 52%. In 2006/07 the most popular VEP courses, apart from Occupational Studies which is identified generically and therefore cannot be further broken down for analysis, was 'Construction and the Built Environment' with 19% of all pupil enrolments on other VEP courses followed by 'Health and Social Care' with 10% of all enrolments. In 2006/07 'Engineering and Manufacturiing Technologies' accounted for 8% of pupils enrolments. By 2007/08 'Construction and the Built Environment' had the highest uptake with 31% of all VEP enrolments. 'Engineering and Manufacturing had 20% and 'Health and Care' had 17%.

Priority Skills	Total	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08			
Construction	1666	427	5.5%	517	5.9%	722	5.7%	1666	6%
Electronics	47	10	0.1%	25	0.3%	12	0.1%	47	0%
Hospitality, Catering and Tourism	1546	351	4.6%	524	5.9%	671	5.3%	1546	5%
ICT	1797	698	9.1%	528	6.0%	571	4.5%	1797	6%
Local	22873	5774	74.9%	6847	77.6%	10252	80.5%	22873	78%
Manufacturing Engineering	749	131	1.7%	242	2.7%	376	3.0%	749	3%
Software Engineering	588	317	4.1%	142	1.6%	129	1.0%	588	2%
Total	29266	7708	100.0%	8825	100.0%	12733	100.0%	29266	

A similar picture has emerged when the VEP provision is broken down by Priority Skills. Between 2005- 2008, VEP offered 29,266 vocational education opportunities to students through FE colleges, and 78% (22,873 opportunities)

of this provision has been categorised as being of local relevance. This figure is significantly high in comparison to the six priority skills and unfortunately skews the overall analysis. Even when the data categorised as local is cross referenced with the New Sector and Subject Categories, a comparable situation arises - over 80% of the provision is again categorised in line with the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ) as Preparation for Life and Work.

Priority Skills	Pupil Nos	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08			
Construction	1666	427	22.1%	517	26.1%	722	29.1%	1666	26%
Electronics	47	10	0.5%	25	1.3%	12	0.5%	47	1%
Hospitality, Catering and Tourism	1546	351	18.1%	524	26.5%	671	27.0%	1546	24%
ICT	1797	698	36.1%	528	26.7%	571	23.0%	1797	28%
Manufacturing Engineering	749	131	6.8%	242	12.2%	376	15.2%	749	12%
Software Engineering	588	317	16.4%	142	7.2%	129	5.2%	588	9%
Total	**6393**	**1934**	100.0%	**1978**	100.0%	**2481**	100.0%	**6393**	100%

A different picture emerges when the Local Skill (23,873) figures are removed. However, given that the VEP figures have reduced to 6, 393 and do not represent the full pupil participation, it would be inappropriate to draw on any conclusion from this data set.

Priority Skill Anysis 2005/08 - Excluding Local
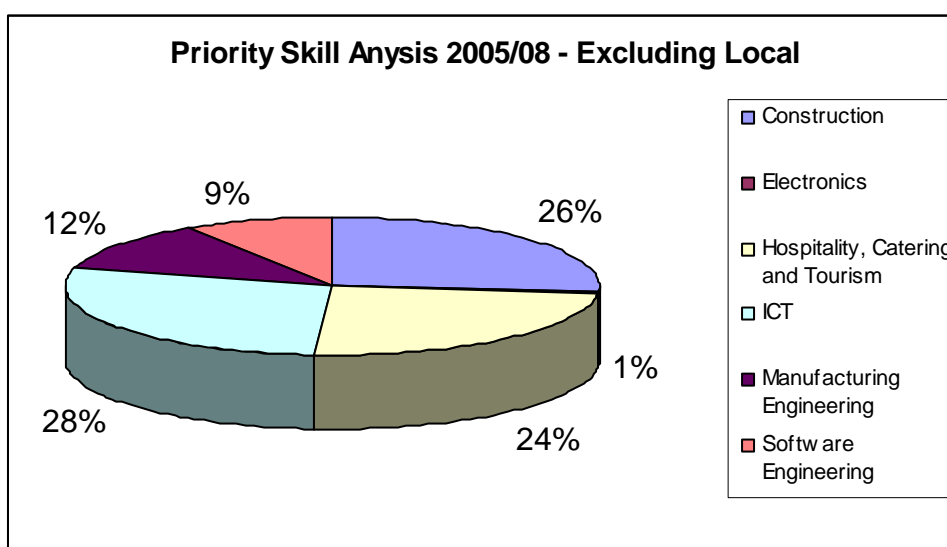
8 ACHIEVEMENTS

In the first two years of the VEP, outcome and achievement data was not collected from the colleges or schools. At this early stage in the VEP process, many of the roles and responsibilities between school and college had yet to be agreed and formalised through Service Level Agreements (SLA), and subsequently, some issues emerged around who was actually responsible for registering pupils for exams, whether it was the school or College. Some concerns were also expressed regarding the sharing of pupil achievement information. However, following the re-development of the claim process in 2007 it was decided that outcome data would be collected through the NICIS system and provided in report form in subsequent years.

In 2006/07, DEL undertook a huge administrative exercise to go back over existing information relating to pupils on VEP in 2005/06 and 2006/07, in an attempt to retrieve an outcome against each student. Data relating to the 2007/08 year was collected through NICIS reports. In the first stage of the exercise the department met with the Council for the Curriculum Examinations & Assessment (CCEA), the awarding body for Occupational Studies qualification (OS) which has consistently been in excess of 50% of the VEP provision over the three years of the programme. CCEA agreed to provide the department with all the exam results for VEP students studying Occupational Studies over the three year period 2005-08, and the results data was then matched against the student names held from VEP NICIS claims.

To obtain all other outcome data, that is for all students not following Occupational Studies, DEL liaised with VEP co-ordinators and MIS staff within colleges. There was a range of different qualifications studied on VEP and the awarding bodies adopted different methods for assessing students and awarding results. Results took many forms, i.e. Pass / Fail, %, A, B, 1, 2, Distinction etc, and in order to ensure a consistent approach across the sector, Colleges were asked to record successful results as an Achievement,

and non-successful results as Non-Achievement. The data received was collated into the following sections: Year 1 of 2 includes those students who were in the first year of two year provision over the three years and this result was available until the year 2 of their provision.

	Total	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Achievement	11010	2847	3535	4628
Non Achievement	2355	494	633	1228
Year 1 of 2	8380	1780	2498	4102
Cancelled	201	0	0	201
Duplicate	2035	287	173	1575
Transferred	84	0	3	81
Withdrawn	908	164	230	514
Not Known	4442	1738	1657	1047
Other	-149	398	96	-643
Total	29266	7708	8825	12733

The table above shows an overall achievement rate of 37% for the 3 year period. In 2005/06 this figure was 37%, rising to 40% in 2006/07 and falling to 33% in 2007/08. However, it is worth noting that, in real terms, it is likely that the achievement figure is much higher than the quoted figures, and is probably closer to 52% across the three years. If the figures from those categories which would never yield a result, such as Year 1 of 2, Cancelled, Duplicate, Transferred and Withdrawn, are removed, the remaining figure would represent the available outcome total. Measuring the achievements against this total would have the effect of raising the overall percentage.
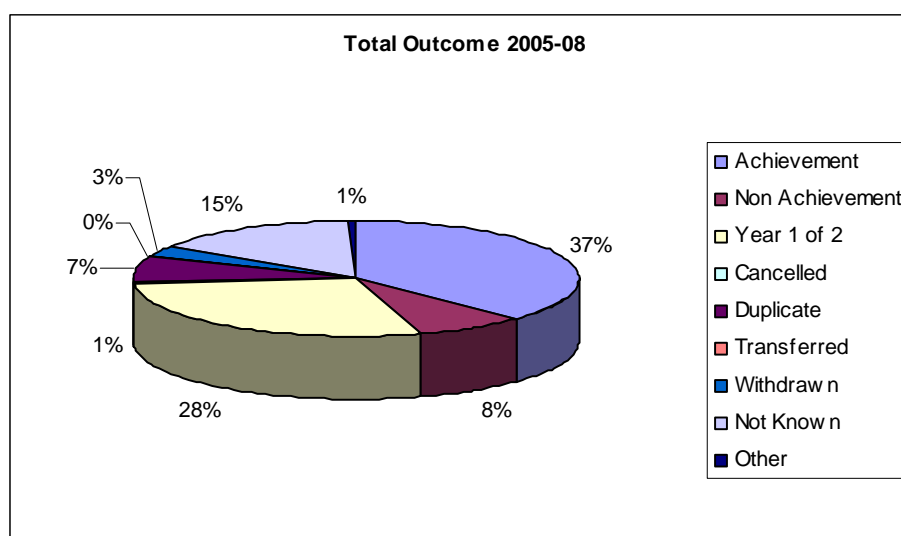
The exercise to retrace students over the three years of VEP and record an outcome against each one took over six months, and it was encouraging to note that when all categories that give an outcome were taken together i.e. Achievement, Non Achievement, Cancelled, Duplicate, Transferred and Withdrawn, the total figure for 2005/08 shows 84% students recorded with an outcome.

2005-08 Outcome Summary
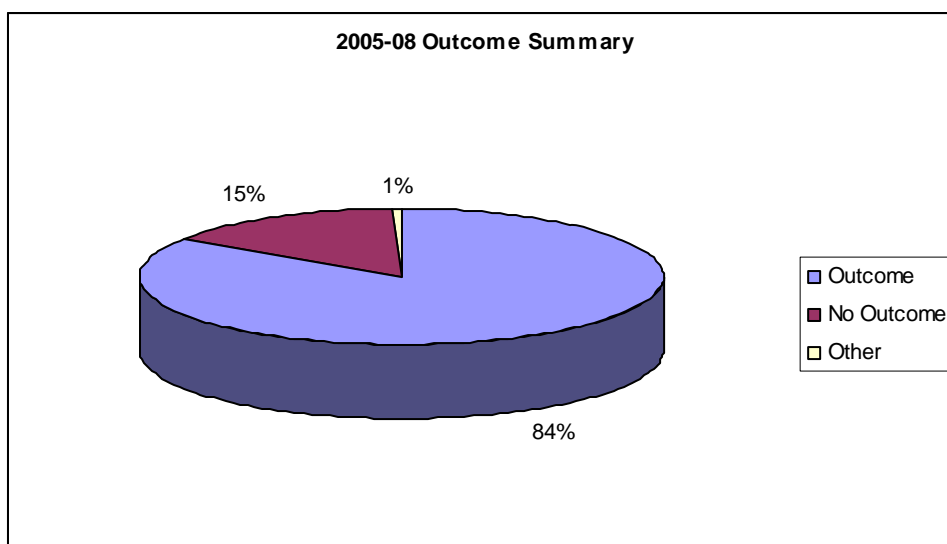
The collation of information on student progression has been poor within VEP, and the tracking of pupils across the school sector is carried out on a very ad hoc basis. Some schools collect the information, while others do not. Most FE colleges have tried to gather the information on progression. However, again this is not structured, and in many cases relied heavily on anecdotal evidence.

9 INNOVATION

9.1 Introduction

In the second year of VEP it was decided to introduce an Innovation Fund to encourage colleges to test innovative and inventive methods of delivering provision. The main purpose of the fund was to persuade Colleges to deliver provision that reflected some of the key features of the future delivery of the Entitlement Framework and the associated broadening of the curricular offer to pupils.

9.2 Background

Between 2006 and 2007 proposals were invited from Colleges who wished to offer provision that would be considered innovative, or delivered in an interactive manner, possibly via electronic methods and which did not rely solely on traditional student teacher relationships but, rather, provided alternative or blended methods of teaching.

An assessment panel comprising representatives from LSDA, Education Training Inspectorate, Regional Support Centre (RSCni)[6] and C2K[7] was set up to help to assess the bids and consider the appropriateness of the proposed VEP provision. The following innovative projects were funded in 2006/07. The funding covered areas such as teaching, minor set up costs and some technical support. It did not support the purchase of equipment, software or software licences.

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[6] RSCni was setup in October 2000 to provide support for FE Colleges in their development and use of E-Learning Technologies and Resources.
[7] C2k on behalf of the five education and library boards is responsible for the provision of an information and communications technology (ICT) managed service to all schools in Northern Ireland. C2k is supported by the Department of Education.

INNOVATION PROJECTS 2006/2007

COLLEGE	DETAILS OF BID	AMOUNT FUNDED	COMMENTS
SRC	**CCEA Advanced GCE in Design & Technology** – specific modules within this course to provide students the opportunity to experience Computer Aided Design & Manufacture through the use of industry standard software packages such as *SolidWorks* which will be delivered remotely using video/web conferencing technology	£19,933	Funded for 1 year.
SERC	**BTEC National Award in Engineering** – Unit 14 CAD – this unit allows a period of training in the use of *SolidWorks* software.	£6,740	Not fully funded - Original cost decreased by college as they substituted the software with a cheaper option.
NRC	**BTEC First Certificate**, Units of a **games development** course to be delivered by a blended learning approach with on-line access via the college's VLE	£12,300	Fully Funded
NRC	To deliver the **CCEA Certificate in Business Enterprise** with the aid of VLE	£10,856	Fully Funded
NRC	To deliver the **CCEA GCSE in Construction** through e-learning with the aid of VLE	£17,886	Fully Funded
NWC	To deliver **CISCO Certified Network Associate (CCNA)1-Networking Basics** to a consortium of schools via VLE	£350	Not fully funded
SRC	To develop state of the art e-learning materials to deliver **AS/A2 Health & Social Care** through VLE	£15,000	Fully funded
SWC	**OCR Certificate/Diploma for iMedia Users Level 3** to be delivered substantially online using the college's VLE	£24,380	Fully funded

In the 2007/08 year of innovative funding, the representatives from C2K, who provided technical advice, suggested that in many of the bids, the C2K infrastructure could accommodate most of the online resources in terms of video conferencing and online forums. This was a significant development and each College was asked to revisit the bids associated with their application in the context that much of the online technology was already available through the school network.

The projects were reviewed at the end of 2007/08 to establish if the C2K technology was able to deliver online resources in terms of video conferencing and online forums. Many of the colleges reported system

incompatibility between the college and schools and some suggested C2k bandwidth was not able to cope with the demands of conducting online communication. In one such instance, a college reported their internet pipeline could handle up to 100mb download, however at peak level during class time, the bandwidth never went over 40mb. There were also some complaints that C2K was much slower than expected at rolling the Marratech software (preferred C2K software for e-meetings such as web conferencing and videoconferencing) out to all the schools.

At the other end of the scale, one college reported that their project had been very successful in establishing E-Learning links with C2K to clearly prove the viability or otherwise of large scale school links. This proved to be a realistic working arrangement with extensive work having been carried out in the C2K project pilot. C2K have established a system which has a very good level of graphics and works in real time to achieve an effective curriculum delivery.

The following table provides a summary review of some of the innovation projects funded in 2007/08.

INNOVATION PROJECTS 2007/2008

College	Details of Bids	Costs	College Review Comments
Southern Regional College	**Flexible Learning Innovation Project - FLIP** To exploit new technologies to deliver Level 3 Vocational qualifications in National Certificate in Construction and A/S Media and First Certificate in Media to 10 schools across the Southern Regional College. Delivery will include:- - Web Conferencing - Interactive Multimedia - Online forums - Pod-Casts	£9,000 one year Revised costs £11,000 one year	Probably the most significant achievement coming out of the FLIP project to-date has been the creation of a team of experts with a sharp focus on creating innovative learning opportunities for pupils from local schools. This is an exciting and ground-breaking development which we expect will produce significant rewards in terms of future ways of student-engagement.
South Eastern Regional College	**Delivery of Entry Level Certificate – Drama (supported by information technology) to students with Special educational** Allow students with Special needs to achieve short-term goals and to acquire a basic understanding, knowledge and range of skills in Drama and gain confidence in	£5,000 one year	All students from Special School taking part in the project achieved the Asdan Cert in Performing Arts. Webspace creation is not practical with this level of student – it is

	the use of common information technology applications.		hoped to use College intranet.
South Eastern Regional College	To offer Music Technology modules from CCEA's GCE Music qualification through Blended learning (bulk of the delivery will be on-line, using NDAI's VLE) to pupils from four Grammar schools outside of the college's normal catchment area.	£6,900 one year	Pupils achieved a high level of skills which enabled them to progress onto FE&HE programmes within the music production & performance field.
Northern Regional College	**E-Learning solutions to problems associated with the delivery of the CCEA GCSE in Construction.** Development of an E-Learning solution which will provide teachers in schools with a ILT based resource of learning materials for unit two "Construction Technology" and unit 3 "Computer Aided Drawing". The materials will be available to use on line from the Institutes Black Board Site to encourage teachers to make use of ILT in their own school environment	£35,540 one year	A large number of schools are making use of the resource materials developed by NRC, some of whom are using the VLE.
Northern Regional College	**Development Work with C2K in the use of Marratech to establish an E-Learning platform** To test the use of Marratech web conferencing utility which will be hosted by C2K. This software is the preferred option for developing links across C2K	£14,000 one year	This project has been very successful in establishing E-Learning links with C2K to clearly prove the viability or otherwise of large scale school links. This project has successfully proved that practical viability curriculum delivery between School, Colleges when using C2K and Marratech software.
Northern Regional College	**Learning for Life and Work Certificate in Employment Skills incorporating the use of a VLE (Blackboard)and E-Learning** Enhance CCEA Occupational Studies programme and develop Careers Education material by incorporating a large element of 'Online' study/delivery by using the NRC VLE (Blackboard) to provide learning support for the CCEA Certificate in Employment Skills.	£23,960 one year	Substantial resource materials have been developed for use with students. This has been placed on the Blackboard site. These materials have been noted as best practice in a recent ILT DEL inspection.

10 FUNDING

During the period 2005-08, VEP was funded by both Departments and allocated through the FE colleges. In order to distribute the funding equally across the FE sector and schools, the Department's applied a common formula to take account of class size, hours taught and lecture time. Although the component parts of the formula varied over the three years, the principle remained the same. The background is summarised as follows.

In 2005/06, A VEP working group of FE representation, ETI and LSDA provided a number of options to the Departments as to how the funding contribution would be allocated. These ranged from funding per cohort to a payable hourly rate. As FE Colleges had a range of different lecture rates per hour, the two departments agreed that it would not be possible to fully fund the delivery of VEP. Following consultation, a lecture rate of £60 was agreed and a common formula was developed to allocate money based on pupil class size as follows: £60 x number of taught hours per week x number of weeks on course duration. The financial support, which was seen as a contribution toward the overall costs of delivery, was paid to FE colleges in two separate occasions within each academic year.

The Departments wanted to ensure that projects in all 16 FE Colleges (prior to merger) were supported and that more pupils in more schools had access to vocational courses at FE colleges. Emphasis was placed on the provision of skills for the local/regional economy and priority was given to provision that encouraged the development of enterprise skills among young people through the provision of a qualifications-based curriculum. Those courses that were not on the National Qualifications Framework, or were outside of the 6 Skills Priority Areas, or did not support local or regional skills priorities, did not attract funding. The total amount of funding allocated in 2005/06 was £3.9m.

Learning from VEP experience in 2005/06, the Departments assigned a lower priority to bids which were not economically viable in terms of class size. Following consultation with the VEP working group, it was decided that a minimum class size, for the purposes of VEP, should be 16 pupils. Bids with class sizes smaller than 16 were assigned a lower priority and funded at a reduced level.

The common formula was applied as normal (£60 x hrs per week x no of weeks). However, class sizes of 14 -16 pupils attracted 100% funding based on the above formula. Class sizes over 16 attracted a pro rata percentage increase per pupil (1/16 x100% for each pupil over class size 16). Class sizes from 10 to 13 pupils attracted 75% funding in recognition of the fact that there may be cases where health and safety, or other, issues prevented the stipulated class viability threshold being achieved. Classes with fewer than 10 pupils did not attract VEP funding, unless they were second year of a two year course or involved Special School pupils, and these received pro rata funding per pupil. The total amount of funding allocated in 2006/07 was £7.9m

Following representation from the FE Sector regarding the viable class size and additional funding contribution for SEN pupils, the formula was again revised in 2007/08 to fund all pupils and recognise a smaller class size of 14. The common formula was applied (£60 x hrs per week x no of weeks) and the new class sizes of 14 pupils attracted 100% funding based on the above formula. Class sizes above or below the 14 target figure attracted funding on a pro rata percentage increase/decrease per pupil (1/14 x100% for each pupil over or below class size 14).

In recognition of the fact that class sizes in Special schools and Special units tended to be smaller, the target class size figure for these groups was set at 10, and funding was calculated on a pro rata basis above or below that figure. Where cohorts included a mixture of SEN and non-SEN pupils, funding was calculated at the two levels on a pro rata basis based on the individual

numbers of SEN and non SEN pupils. The total amount of funding allocated in 2007/08 was £7.5m

11 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ENTITLEMENT FRAMEWORK

The 2005/06 survey found that the position of schools with regard to the requirements for the Entitlement Framework in 2013 varied widely and did not adhere to school-type patterns. Some school managers reported that their schools were 'a long way off' from being prepared for 2013', while others thought they had already met the requirements. Collaboration with FE was valued highly by those schools with some distance still to travel. They saw their FE college partner as a central part of their future plans to extend the range of subjects offered to pupils, many of which the schools themselves would be unable to deliver. In contrast, other schools sought collaboration with each other rather than with FE colleges. More typically, Secondary schools looked to their FE College partners to help them deliver the new curriculum requirements.

Two of the interviewed Grammar school managers (2005/06) actively resisted the introduction of the EF. One was opposed to reducing the number of traditional A-levels in order to meet the new curriculum requirements, and hoped that more applied subjects would come on stream, 'in which case teachers will be able to adapt their existing subjects for the Entitlement Framework'. The other Grammar school manager thought his school would find ways around the new curriculum requirements; "the school may tweak its current provision so that some courses can be called "applied", thus making them vocational'. Both managers argued that most of their pupils go on to university and have no interest in vocational education, but did not mind participating in the VEP so long as it continues to complement their academic provision and is delivered at their school.

The survey of school VEP Co-ordinators in 2006/07 found that most had developed a positive approach to the introduction of the EF in 2013 and all,

with the exception of one or two schools, viewed the following as being opportunities:

- offering more courses in more subject areas;
- increasing the number and range of participating pupils;
- developing innovative course delivery methods; and
- strengthening relevance to local economic development.

The schools generally identified a need to extend learning communities with other schools to allow for the provision of an extended range of subjects and the need to continue to develop the range of subjects through partnership with their local FE College in order to be able to meet the requirements of the Entitlement Framework by 2013. However, the survey undertaken in 2007/08 reported a mix of reactions to the potential for the Entitlement Framework to present an opportunity or threat to the schools.

When asked their perceptions of future opportunities or threats to the VEP, there was a general consensus amongst the school and college VEP Co-ordinators that expanding the types of schools in the partnership, increasing the number and range of VEP courses and extending methods of delivery to be positive opportunities. It was also agreed by 100% of college Co-ordinators and the majority (87%) of school Co-ordinators that VEP provision was an opportunity to meet local economic development needs.

Over the anticipated move towards a purchaser/provider funding model for the delivery of the EF, which will encompass VEP, there were some areas of disparity in perceptions of the future. The move towards schools purchasing EF provision was perceived as a threat for developing the partnership by 80% of college Co-ordinators, but as an opportunity for developing the partnership by 66% of the school Co-ordinators.

Other issues where there was a mixed view included the role of Learning Communities, which was perceived as a threat by some (33%) college Co-ordinators but as an opportunity by others (67%). The schools viewed the

role of Learning Communities in a more positive light, with 73% of school Co-ordinators viewing this as an opportunity. Equally, the change in responsibility for co-ordination had a mixed result. Some college Co-ordinators (40%) viewed this as a threat, while others (53%) viewed it as an opportunity. Some school Co-ordinators (14%) viewed this as a threat, while others (61%) viewed it as an opportunity.

Overall, successful delivery of the 14-19 reform agenda will be dependant on collaboration between school and colleges, or even other providers. In driving the expansion and reorganisation of vocational education provision the needs of the learners and employers should remain at the centre so that the EF encompasses a Career Enhancement Programme.

It is essential that vocational provision supports local economic development needs. This calls for an active, assertive and collaborative approach by schools and colleges in order to identify both the interests of the pupils and the challenges facing employers. Vocational education has a significant role to play in economic development and productivity.

It is generally accepted that schools are likely to have less economic and market intelligence than colleges and this is borne up through the surveys.   In 2005/06, the school VEP Co-ordinators acknowledged that the VEP courses equipped pupils with skills which may lead to local employment or further training. They identified that these courses provide possible access to trades and qualifications with real value; construction skills were singled out as an opportunity for pupils. However, these school responses are very general and do not relate to a changing economic landscape.   When asked the same question regarding the link between VEP and local economic development needs, college lecturers responded that the VEP provision on offer by colleges addressed all the Strategy 2010 skills areas.   VEP offers an opportunity to respond to local economic development needs.   Sampling vocational areas can also mean that pupils identify career areas they would not like to pursue, possibly avoiding a waste of their, and their employers', time and money.

The 2007/08 survey illustrated the greater awareness of regional and local economic need and research methods that exist within the colleges. This is largely based in the more business culture created within colleges, for example as a result of 'FE Means Business'. While it is accepted that this has been, and is likely to continue to be, the case, it is advisable that schools become more aware of market changes and employer needs. For example, the large number of boys either choosing or being directed into construction may not be appropriate for a Northern Ireland economy with a declining construction sector.

At present, the colleges are adopting a range of research methods for data collection into regional and local economic trends. This includes utilising employer forums, undertaking local surveys with employers and taking cognisance of published local and regional employment statistics. The schools undertake some of these research techniques, but to a much lesser extent. To ensure that VEP provision is aligned closely with economic development needs, it will be essential that colleges and schools collaborate in deciding upon the range of provision to be offered.

Looking towards the introduction of the Entitlement Framework in 2013 college and school managers identified the following success factors for sustaining and developing VEP partnerships in the future:

- funding, transparency and pupil numbers;

- effective communication, openness and trust between partners, with regular meetings attended by decision makers in partner institutions. Regular consultation and planning via steering groups;

- senior managers' within the schools and FE colleges commitment and time, with all parties genuinely committed at the most senior level;

- a strong focus on the DE/DEL priority skills areas in VEP provision and robust guidance on what is acceptable provision under the EF;

- high quality and reliable FE lecturers, high quality delivery in order to achieve high quality outputs;

- all local schools participating in each VEP partnership from all school types;

- clear guidance from the Departments on partnership arrangements; and

- consistent use of SLAs and Individual Learner Agreements which outline agreed standards and procedures for ensuring pupil discipline and roles and responsibilities.

It is essential that vocational provision is aligned with local economic development needs. The findings of the DEL Northern Ireland Skills Survey 2005 identified that many employers in Northern Ireland are having difficulties in recruiting successfully to fill all vacancies. Across all sectors, Financial Services had the highest incidence of difficult to fill vacancies. The occupational groups that were most frequently perceived to be difficult to fill were Personal Service as well as Elementary Occupations. Overall, 34% of all difficult to fill vacancies were due to external skill shortages. For industrial sectors for which reliable estimates were possible, external skill shortages were more prevalent within Transport and Communication, Construction, Business Services and Financial Services. Skills gaps (internally) were also identified within Health & Social Care. Difficulties in recruitment due to the existence of skills gaps will clearly have an impact on business and, therefore, potential economic growth.

The college VEP Co-ordinators have a keen awareness of local economic development needs and the colleges use multiple means of gathering data on regional and local economy needs. This process is not as well developed within the schools and overall the school Co-ordinators are less aware of how VEP programmes meet economic need. It is essential that economic need drives vocational provision. The concentration on two key areas, Construction and Built Environment and Health, Public Services and Care, may need to be reviewed in light of the above statistics regarding skills gaps within the Northern Ireland industrial sectors.

Operational management issues are reasonably well structured at this point, although a few areas for improvement remain. In particular, the provision of relevant information between the schools and colleges regarding student learning needs and literacy/numeracy skills and the feedback on pupil progression on the VEP. Both schools and colleges were dissatisfied with their relationship with their E2S Officers and, with VEP becoming DE led in September 2008, the roles and responsibilities of E2S officers will become more important. The place of Service Level Agreements is well established within the colleges, but the formalising of relationships is not seen as a priority in schools. Such SLAs would assist in clarifying roles and responsibilities for those involved in the management and delivery of VEP.

Looking towards the future and the introduction of the EF, it is clear that schools view VEP as an area of expansion and an important part of their curriculum. The anticipated move towards schools purchasing such provision is viewed as a threat by most of the colleges. For many Colleges, the exact role of the Learning Communities is unclear, although the schools viewed this development as a positive step forward.

Based upon the findings in this report and the conclusions made the following recommendations are put forward for consideration:

1. Schools should become more aware of market changes and employer needs. Clear strategies to be developed both by schools and the colleges on how market intelligence is to be gathered and shared on local and regional economic development needs, to ensure that planned VEP provision matches need.

2. Strengthen careers advice and guidance by incorporating this as in integral element in all VEP courses and develop collaborative structures for addressing pupil career education to facilitate decision making regarding VEP course choice.

3. Schools and colleges should develop a process which faciltates robust tracking, recording and sharing of information on pupil progression, achievement and links to career and course choices.

4. The concentration on two key areas, Construction and Built Environment' and 'Health, Public Services and Care' may need to be reviewed in light of the current economic climate and the statistics on skills gaps within the Northern Ireland sectors.

5. Quality Reviews to be a joint activity between schools and college to assess the effectiveness of VEP programmes and address any shortfalls.

6. Develop mechanisms to ensure parents and pupils are involved in decision making regarding VEP provision and choice and the sharing of information regarding pupil progress and achievement.

7. Embed the use of agreed SLAs to address roles and responsibilities, tighter pastoral care arrangements with clarification of responsibilities, funding and costs, information requirements, supervision and quality review procedures.

8. Schools to provide colleges with information on pupils' prior achievements and any identified special educational needs.

9. Actively target increased participation from Grammar schools in VEP activity.

10. Address the gender bias existing in the pupil numbers within the priority areas.

11. Implement a wider range of teaching strategies to increase the use of e-learning to deliver online resources in terms of video conferencing and online forums and further develop the C2K infrastructure to ensure there is compatibility between the schools and FE college networks.

12 APPENDICES

VEP Guidance

2005/06 Guidance DEL FE 02/05

2006/07 Guidance DEL FE 13/05

2007/08 Guidance DEL FE 02/07

VEP SURVEYS

VEP Evaluation 2005/06 SQW

VEP Evaluation 2007/08, LSDA

An Evaluation of the VOCATIONAL ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME in Schools and Colleges of Further Education. February 2008, Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)

MISCELLANEOUS

Learning and Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland

Future Post primary Arrangements in Northern Ireland: advice from the Post primary review group (the Costello report, DEL January 2004)

Further Education Means Business: a programme for implementation (June 2006).

Entitlement Framework

Occupational Studies

National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

Council for the Curriculum Examinations & Assessment (CCEA),

Education and Training Inspectorate

C2K