

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS  
OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

An Evaluation of the

# VOCATIONAL ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME

in Schools and Colleges of Further Education

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

February 2008

*eti*

*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for  
Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE



## CONTENTS

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY .....	2
3. MAIN FINDINGS .....	3
4. LONGITUDINAL FINDINGS .....	6
5. CONCLUSION .....	7
KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT .....	8



# 1.

## INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Post-Primary Review and other significant policy initiatives, for example, the Department of Education's (DE) Curriculum Review, the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL) FE Means Business and Skills Strategy, all recognise the need for significant change within our education and training system. In addition, regional demographic trends and, in particular, the declining birth rate raise significant questions about the number, size and structure of our schools, colleges and training organisations. In this changing landscape, schools of all types must adapt to provide education opportunities which take account of each pupil's learning style, ability, aspirations and potential.

1.2 The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 provides the statutory basis for the introduction of the Revised Curriculum and the Entitlement Framework. Article 21 of the Order gives the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school the power to make arrangements for secondary education to be provided on its behalf by other schools, further education (FE) colleges or suitable bodies approved by DE. The Entitlement Framework is an integral element of the Revised Curriculum

as it is the counter-balance to the reduced core curriculum and will ensure all young people are offered a broad and balanced range of courses. The current target is that from September 2013 all pupils aged 14 and upwards must have access to the Entitlement Framework, which will require schools to offer access to at least 24 courses for pupils at key stage (KS) 4, and 27 courses for pupils post-16, with at least one-third applied and at least one-third general, as defined by DE. Such provision supported and informed by effective and impartial Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG), will assist young people to make informed decisions regarding their choice of courses, those which best meet their individual needs, ability, interests and aspirations.

1.3 The Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) was introduced in 2004 as one of a range of initiatives devised to support the implementation of the Entitlement Framework. The aim of VEP is to extend the vocational provision available to 14-19 year old young people and to provide DE and DEL with the opportunity to test models of effective collaborative working.

## 2.

## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1 The purpose of the survey of VEP is to inform further policy developments and contribute to the evidence base of 14-19 practice. The survey was commissioned jointly by DE and DEL.

2.2 The aims of the survey were:

- to evaluate the quality of the provision for young people who are following a course as part of the collaborative arrangements within the VEP and School Collaboration Programme; and
- to evaluate the progress made by schools and FE colleges in preparing for the implementation of the Entitlement Framework in 2009.

2.3 Between March and November 2007, the Inspectorate carried out a survey of VEP in post-primary schools, special education schools and colleges of FE. The survey was carried out in two phases; the purpose of the second phase being to follow up important findings from phase one and to evaluate the impact of VEP on the progression of pupils.

2.4 This report is based on evidence drawn from the inspection survey of all six of the regional colleges of FE and visits to a sample of post-primary (40) and special schools (13). As part of the survey the Inspectorate observed lessons, examined a wide range of documentation and held discussions with college directors, mainstream and special school principals, members of senior management teams in the schools and the colleges, VEP coordinators, teachers, lecturers, e2s development officers, pupils and students. Over both phases of the survey almost one thousand pupils and students who were previously or are currently involved in VEP, were interviewed.

## 3. MAIN FINDINGS

### 3.1 PROVISION

There is discernable improvement in the participation of schools in VEP and in their preparation for the implementation of the Entitlement Framework. The important work of principals, directors, senior management teams, VEP co-ordinators and e2s development officers in managing partnerships and collaborative working represents a significant cultural change. There is good evidence that the majority of post-primary schools are beginning to embrace such change and place high value on the benefits that collaboration affords their pupils.

There is evidence, in a significant minority of schools, of a more cohesive approach to curriculum planning resulting in clearly defined pathways for pupils of differing ability levels and progression aspirations.

The colleges demonstrate a high level of commitment in working with partner schools to introduce a broader range and level of qualifications at KS4 and post-16, which match better the progression aspirations of pupils.

There are insufficient, planned linkages between the school curriculum and the pupils' VEP programmes, for example, in mapping or cross-referencing related

aspects of learning experienced through their vocational programme to other subjects in school, or in applying their learning through their vocational programme in raising levels of achievement in English, mathematics and ICT.

There is inequitable access for pupils to relevant programmes across geographical areas.

There is increasing confidence in the currency and rigour of the Curriculum and Examinations Authority (CEA) Occupational Studies qualification, however, there are too few alternative qualifications available to pupils at Foundation and Entry level, to provide clear pathways of progression to higher level qualifications or employment.

### 3.2 QUALITY OF TEACHING, TRAINING AND LEARNING

The quality of the teaching and learning observed is good or better; of the 151 lessons observed just under 75% of lessons had important strengths or were excellent.

There are high levels of commitment from school and college staff involved in VEP; most FE staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to teach the 14-19 age range, their vocational expertise brings an enriching relevance to the pupils' learning

---

experience as well as providing integrated careers information advice and guidance within the vocational programme.

There is discernable improvement in the motivation and quality of learning of previously disaffected pupils through their participation in VEP.

Good opportunities are provided, in a minority of the provision, for mixed groups of pupils from schools of differing management types to work and learn together.

There is a lack of systematic identification, referral and provision of support for pupils who need help in English and maths.

Staff from schools and colleges, have insufficient opportunity to work together and to share good practice; for example, in undertaking class observation, to participate in team-teaching or shadowing, and to disseminate these experiences within their respective organisations.

### 3.3 LEARNING SUPPORT

There is discernable improvement in the range and quality of careers information available to pupils, which provides a sound basis to support the individual career planning.

There is insufficient linkage between the provision of careers information and the provision of impartial advice and guidance for pupils on an individual basis, which

informs their career aspirations and enables them to plan for realistic and achievable progression.

There is a need for schools and colleges to work together in tracking pupils' progression and to use quantitative data systematically to inform planning.

### 3.4 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Most of the e2s development officers are highly committed and work hard to initiate and support collaboration between schools and colleges of further education and among schools, this has been a crucial factor in the establishment of over thirty learning communities across Northern Ireland.

The schools and college VEP coordinators play a key role in establishing productive communication across schools and colleges, and in securing the confidence and commitment of the vast majority of pupils.

There are inconsistencies in approach between education and library boards (ELBs) and other managing authorities in supporting the implementation of the Entitlement Framework.

Learning communities and partnerships make insufficient use of labour market intelligence to inform area based planning.

There is a lack of clarity in the communication to key stakeholders of DE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

and DEL policies and procedures, regarding the duplication of resources for vocational courses between schools and colleges.

The Entitlement Framework is insufficiently articulated as an integral strand of a broader inter-departmental 14-19 curriculum strategy.

There is a lack of strategic planning by the FE and schools' sectors regarding their capacity to support the implementation of the Entitlement Framework, and which takes cognisance of the capacity of the FE sector in each geographical area, to offer specific numbers of places within particular vocational areas.

Higher education institutions do not provide sufficient clarity in their communication of preferred learning pathways and the transferability and currency of vocational qualifications.

## 4.

## LONGITUDINAL FINDINGS

On completion of the first phase, key stakeholders responded positively to the interim phase one survey report findings in informing their work and in implementing change. Over the duration of the survey there is clear evidence of progress in the following important areas:

- the good evidence of an increasingly creative approach by a significant minority of schools and colleges to identifying clear learning pathways which meet the progression aspirations of pupils on an individual basis;
- the improvement in the provision of impartial careers guidance and advice in particular, in preparation for selection of KS4 options;
- the significant development in the establishment of learning communities across all geographical areas and the increase in pupils participating in VEP;
- the considerable work undertaken to strengthen the pastoral aspect of the service level agreements (SLAs); the schools and colleges are working more effectively together to improve arrangements for pastoral care and child protection;
- the collaborative approach adopted by most partnerships in the development of a range of policies to support the pastoral care and protection of pupils; for example, in developing agreed policies and procedures relating to discipline matters or the occurrence of accident or injury; and
- the increased rigour of the SLAs arising from increased consultation, which now provide more detail and are understood and agreed by all parties; college and school staff are clearer about their roles and responsibilities and the implications of relevant school and college policies.

## 5.

## CONCLUSION

The Chief Inspector's Report, 2004–2006, in referring to 14–19 provision, identified as an important priority the need to 'ensure that the provision of subjects and courses at 14–19 creates a coherent curriculum experience for individual learners and helps them to achieve their goals and to ensure that they can make a positive contribution to the economic prosperity of Northern Ireland'. The report also highlighted a number of important areas for development required to achieve this aim. Key stakeholders have responded positively to the interim survey report findings and over the duration of the survey there is clear evidence of progress in the following important areas:

- the motivation of those pupils who see little of value in conventional curricular arrangements;
- the development of a more flexible, less prescriptive curriculum;
- the closer working together of schools and colleges of further education;
- the development of a common understanding of schools' and FE respective curricula,

vocational qualifications, and arrangements for pastoral care and child protection; and

- the communication by schools, colleges and training organisations to young people and their parents about the available pathways to further learning and employment.

## KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

While there is notable improvement in the extent and quality of the collaborative arrangements between FE and schools and among schools in their preparation for the implementation of the Entitlement Framework, there remain important challenges for both sectors:

The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning need to:

- continue their joint work in the development of appropriate 14-19 policies;
- articulate the Entitlement Framework as an integral strand of a broader inter-departmental 14-19 curriculum strategy;
- communicate policies and procedures more effectively to key stakeholders with regard to the provision of resources for vocational courses between schools and colleges and monitor effectively their implementation; and
- work with higher education institutions to determine and agree preferred learning pathways and the

transferability and currency of vocational qualifications.

The managing/employing authorities need to:

- establish clearly defined line management arrangements and adequate resources to support the e2s development officers in their work; and
- work together towards the implementation of area based planning.

The schools and colleges need to:

- develop and implement common systems and procedures for the quality assurance and improvement of provision;
- work collaboratively to identify a sufficiently broad range of accredited qualifications which meet the needs of all pupils;
- identify clear linkages between the school curriculum and the vocational programmes, particularly in relation to

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

raising standards in literacy and numeracy;

- establish procedures for the systematic tracking of pupil achievement; and
- develop a coherent, joint approach to the provision of CEIAG and learning support.

The Curriculum Advice and Support Service, the Learning and Skills Development Agency and the Regional Training Unit need to:

- collaborate in the identification and provision of a cohesive programme of professional development for school and FE staff at all levels, to support the implementation of the Entitlement Framework.

During the current period of significant change across the education and training system, all of those involved in the sector have been required to meet the demands of a wide range of often competing priorities. It is within this complex context that the important work of principals, directors, senior management teams, VEP coordinators and e2s development officers in managing partnerships and collaborative working represents a

significant cultural change. There is good evidence of an increasing momentum in the commitment and capacity of the majority of post-primary schools to embrace such change and place high value on the benefits that collaboration affords their pupils.





© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2008

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the DE website: [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk) or may be obtained from the Inspection Services Branch, Department of Education, Rathgael House, 43 Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down BT19 7PR.