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Report of the

Transitions Inter-Departmental Working Group

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ISSUES

FOREWORD

In practical terms the very real challenge before the IDG was to consider how children with Statements of Special Educational Needs (SENs) can realise their full potential in school and also go forward to achieve their after school goals and aspirations, through further education, training, work or day care.

The IDG recognise that the process of making this transition, which is a time of great change and re-adjustment, is highly significant for the young people and their parents. The IDG has, therefore, taken advice from the Education and Library Boards, Education and Training Inspectorate, a number of schools and parents groups, a community Health and Social Services Trust and a cross section of voluntary groups. A considerable amount of information has been gathered and many issues were presented to the IDG for consideration.

In this report the IDG have proposed over 20 actions, which emphasise the need for Government Departments and agencies to act collaboratively, to improve the transition process. These actions were developed by drawing on the collective experience and observation of those directly involved with the young people.

Our thanks go to all those who have provided advice and input to help compile the actions contained in this report. We hope that these actions will be both practical and useful in promoting improvement to enable young people with Statements of SENs make a successful transition from school to adult life.



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PART 1

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1. In late 2002 and in response to a growing lobby from parents and public representatives the then Ministers of Education, Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Employment and Learning asked the 3 Departments to form an Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) to consider how the transitions process could be improved for young people with Statements of Special Educational Needs. The IDG membership also included a representative from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

Key Issues

2. The IDG met with a wide range of interest groups, including parents, teachers and voluntary organisations and as a result of these discussions, and significant input from the ETI, a number of issues were identified.
3. Several key issues were discussed, including inappropriate and inflexible day care provision for young adults; uncoordinated approach and a lack of advice from statutory agencies and other professionals; limited options for vocational training, FE courses and other types of transition programmes; a lack of opportunities for flexible or supported employment; and insufficient life skills training and appropriate work experience while still at school. Whilst this report identifies and discusses all of the issues brought before the IDG, it recognises that not all of the issues could be addressed within the context and remit of this group.

Action Plan for Improvement

4. Part 1 of this report contains an action plan, which provides over 20 actions to address some of the many issues that were presented to the IDG and which are in varying stages of implementation. The Departments involved have continued to move this work forward and some of the actions have already been implemented in advance of the publication of this report. Full details of how each Department is progressing and improving the transition process are detailed in Part 2 of this report.
5. The action plan, in Part 1, provides a summary of the Departmental actions and are categorised in relation to **Provision** for the young people, the **Process** that is involved in putting the provision in place and the **Liaison** that is required to improve inter-agency working.
6. Under the Provision category, key actions include proposals, which will be supported by all Departments, to enable each Department to make appropriate funding bids: to provide appropriate age-related placements in adult day care centres; to fund Health Trusts and Boards to employ Transitions Officers; to enhance a range of further education and training provision by providing a suite of 'pre-vocational' education and training programmes for young people for whom current provision is not sufficiently tailored nor flexible; and, to strengthen the mechanism of the transition planning process in schools. An additional 100 extra day care places have already been created. The Careers and Guidance Service has been re-focused, as a priority, on young people aged 14-19 years with Statements of Special Educational Needs. A pre-vocational stream within the Jobskills Access strand is being piloted which will provide a greater degree of flexibility that will better meet the needs of this group of young people. Funding has been allocated to the Education and Library Boards to provide appropriate life skills training for independent living and under the Vocational Enhancement Programme a priority rating has been provided, within the overall

criteria set for the allocation of funding in 2005/06, to improve access to vocational opportunities for children in special schools.

7. To strengthen the transitions process, funding has been allocated, on a pilot basis, to enable each Education and Library Board to provide an effective transitions service for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs, by the recruitment of 2 Education Transitions Co-ordinators per Board.

8. Key actions to improve liaison and inter-agency working include a Stakeholder Forum to support policy development and good practice, a co-ordinated monitoring system for the Education and Library Boards transitions service and a clear referral and liaison process between DEL's Careers Service and the Disablement Advisory Service. In addition, Education and Library Boards will develop an information leaflet for pupils and parents about the support available from the Education Transitions Co-ordinators and how this support dovetails with other advice and support from statutory agencies, voluntary groups and Health and Social Services Trusts.

PART 1

1. Introduction and Remit

1.1 In September 2002, the then Ministers of Education, Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Employment and Learning set up an Inter-Departmental Working Group (IDG) of officials from the 3 Departments to consider how to make strategic improvements in the Transition process for young people with Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and how to fund such improvements.

1.2 The terms of reference of the IDG are:

- to consider gaps in the process of transition from school (mainstream and special) for children with Statements of Special Educational Needs;
- to address these gaps by considering needs and best practice in the area;
- To formulate an Inter-Departmental bid encompassing the transitions planning process through to post-school provision in employment, further education, training and day care.

1.3 Details of the membership of this group are attached at Appendix 1.

2. Transition Planning at School

2.1 Transition is a term used to refer to that time in a young person's life when plans are made to move from school to adult life. The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs and the recent (September 2005) Supplement to

the Code of Practice, which are issued by the Department of Education under Article 4 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, requires an Education and Library Board to produce a Transition Plan at the first (and subsequent) Annual Review of the Statement of Special Educational Needs following the young person's 14th birthday.

- 2.2 The Transition Plan draws together information from a variety of sources, including the young person, his/her parents, the school and any other professionals involved with the young person. It aims to plan coherently for the change when a young person moves from school to adult life.

3. Provision and Options Following School

- 3.1 Leaving school and moving into adulthood is a challenging time for young people and their parents as they consider what kind of real choices exist and how these choices will help the young person lead a fulfilling adult life. Once a young person moves from school the Education and Library Board will cease to maintain the Statement of Special Educational Needs.

- 3.2 There are several options available to young people who want to continue their development after school:

- Further or Higher Education;
- Employment and Training Programmes, including
 - Jobskills
 - New Deal
 - Access to Work
 - Employment Support
 - Job Introduction Scheme

3.3 Specialist advice about these options is available from a range of organisations (contact details can be found in Appendix 2):

- Specialist Careers Advisers in the local JobCentre
- Disablement Advisory Service
- Jobskills
- Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment
- The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (SKILL).

3.4 Some young people, however, may need the support and training offered by day care centres. These are run by the Health and Social Services Trusts and offer ongoing training in areas such as independent living and work skills. A placement could be short or long-term depending on the person's need. Referral for a placement is through a social worker.

4. Information Gathering

4.1 A considerable amount of information concerning the transitions process, and the areas that need to be improved, has been gathered. The IDG has taken advice from the Education and Library Boards, Education and Training Inspectorate, a number of schools and parents groups, community Health and Social Services Trusts, the Carers Forum; an MLA with a special interest in the Transitions process and a cross section of voluntary groups, including the Down's Syndrome Association and Disability Action. Some of the voluntary groups, including MENCAP, ACET, The Orchardville Society, The Cedar Foundation, SKILL and Triangle Housing Association, who provided information, presented their programmes and ideas at a seminar held in Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate, on 10 September 2003. A visit to East Tyrone Institute of Further and Higher Education, Dungannon Campus, took place on 22 January 2004 to view a sample of link course provision

being made by the Institute for pupils currently attending special schools in the area. The IDG wishes to thank all those who met with them and provided information.

4.2 A number of issues presented, mostly by parents and voluntary groups, to the IDG during the above information gathering can be summarised as follows:

- inappropriate and inflexible day care provision for young adults – no stimulus and few opportunities for any type of vocational or life skills training;
- uncoordinated approach from statutory agencies or other professionals in providing advice, support, training or care for young adults;
- limited options for vocational training, FE courses and other types of transition programmes (Jobskills is generally a minimum of 35 hours per week, which not all young people can cope with);
- lack of flexible employment opportunities, such as open or supported employment;
- benefits trap – some parents have concerns about young adults moving to employment or training as this could impact on the benefits received;
- lack of advice and information during the transition planning process accompanied by a general unawareness of opportunities and options;
- gaps in ‘transition training’ for independent living, ie use of public transport, social and life skills;
- insufficient work experience opportunities while at school;
- inequality in opportunities for 16 year olds at Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD) schools to stay at school until the age

of 19 (as is the case in schools for pupils with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD)).

- 4.3 To place the above issues in context, the IDG has considered the most recent information available in relation to policy provision and supporting statistical evidence from each of the member Departments.
- 4.4 Some of the statistical information¹ available from the Department of Education indicates that some 11,500 children have Statements of Special Educational Need. Of these, some 47% are placed in mainstream schools: this proportion has been increasing steadily in recent years and now is more than double that of 10 years ago. If pupils in Special Units attached to mainstream schools are included, the figure becomes 63%. Similarly this growing trend is reflected in the statistics available from the Further Education sector. The nearest related statistics, to the IDG's Terms of Reference, show that there were 6,631 fundable student enrolments in Further Education in 2003/04. Of these, 18% were in mainstream provision, 50.7% in discreet courses and 31.3% in day centres/hostels etc. Across Northern Ireland there were some 750 individual courses (this figure includes multiple courses run throughout the academic year by any one college) for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- 4.5 For those with specific needs, which FE is ill-equipped to address, DHSSPS provides a range of services within day care centres. Across Northern Ireland, 61 day care centres are provided, which offer a range of therapeutic, educational, lifestyle and creative activities. Additional investment over the last few years has been allocated to provide greater flexibility in the day care 'system'. This has led to services being offered in partnership with other organisations, giving clients a wider range of options.

¹ Source: 2004 Annual School Census

5. Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) Advice

5.1 The IDG has found input and advice from the ETI invaluable. In particular, 2 reports of surveys conducted by the ETI were very informative in highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the transition planning process for school leavers in special schools² and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD) in Colleges of Further Education³.

"A Survey of Provision for School Leavers in Special Schools for Pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties"

5.2 The first of these reports is The School Leavers Survey, which is in 2 parts. The first part is "A Short Postal Survey of Provision for Special School Leavers 2003-2004" and the second part is "A Survey of Provision for School Leavers in Special Schools for Pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties".

"Part 1 – A Short Postal Survey of Provision For Special School Leavers 2003–2004"

5.3 The first part of this survey considers that "the evidence indicates that the transition process in the special school sector has developed successfully as the majority (50%-74%) of the young people transfer to adult services, FE, training or the world of work, with little difficulty." The report advises that while this is the position in most of the schools, there are a number of factors that constrain the effective operation in a minority (10% to 29%) of the schools.

² A Survey of Provision for School Leavers in Special Schools for Pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties

³ Survey of Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities in Colleges of Further Education

These constraints, which relate to the remit of the transition IDG, include:

- a serious lack of adult service placements, compounded by waiting lists;
- inappropriate placements relating to an unsuitably wide age-mix, and poor provision for young people with challenging behaviour;
- poor lines of communication between the schools and the Social Services;
- Social Services not always involved in the transition process;
- last minute support by the Social Services in planning the placements;
- parental dissatisfaction with the quality of the adult provision;
- parental concerns regarding the possible loss of benefits;
- curriculum emphasis not sufficiently focused on vocational, life skills and independent travel; and
- the heavy academic content of some of the accreditation courses.

5.4 In respect of the Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) sector the report states “In this sector, it is clear that arrangements are satisfactory in a majority of schools; in the best examples, the Transition process is characterised by effective planning, good links with FE/Training, valued support from the Careers service and underpinned by the willing involvement of parents”. This part of the report concludes “that a number of factors are inhibiting the development of consistent and best practice across all schools” and highlights a number of issues to inform thinking and support the case for change and improvement. In relation to the SLD Sector the survey found - “The current FE links are satisfactory in the majority of cases, but provision would benefit from a review of the value and outcomes of existing courses developed for this pupil population”.

[“Part 2 – A Survey of Provision for School Leavers in Special Schools for Pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties \(MLD\)”](#)

- 5.5 Part 2 is a more in-depth survey of provision for Transition in the MLD sector. This part of the survey “finds much to commend the current arrangements supporting pupils during the transition period in the MLD schools”. However, one of the key findings relates to the issue of transfer at age 16 for a minority of pupils who may benefit from a further year in the MLD sector. This issue is discussed in paragraph 7.4 of this report. The ETI survey concludes by advising that, “ the evidence indicates that the transition period in the MLD sector has developed with success, as the majority of young people transfer to FE, training, the world of work, or other schools with little difficulty”.

[“Survey of Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities in Colleges of Further Education”](#)

- 5.6 This second report on an ETI Survey in the Further Education sector focussed on the provision made for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD) within mainstream college courses and in discrete courses for the learning disabled across 5 colleges.
- 5.7 The report advises that “The findings from the survey indicate that provision for SLDD has significantly improved since the last survey of 2001/2002”. It concludes by saying that “it is clear that there have been positive developments in the provision made for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities over the last few years”.
- 5.8 In finalising the conclusion, the report advises that “a number of problem areas, however, remain and need to be addressed if provision for SLDD is to meet as fully as possible, the needs of students with learning difficulties. Chief among these issues is the need for Colleges a. to review their learning support structures to ensure SLDD provision exists across the curriculum areas; b. to

provide SLDD with broader access to appropriate nationally accredited courses; and, c. to initiate a process of effective whole-college staff development in special needs. There is also a need to review the designation of SLDD itself to ensure that it is fit for purpose.”

6. Actions to Address the Issues

- 6.1 In addressing the issues and developing actions, each Department involved has been in full agreement that they want to help young people to make a successful transition through school to post-school destinations. The IDG recognises that the transition from school to adult life is a very confusing and often frustrating time for the young people and their parents.
- 6.2 A framework has been developed that includes a range of effective strategies and activities that can be implemented and as a consequence are of practical benefit to the young people. To ensure the delivery of the actions within the framework each Department has been allocated a lead role where that action falls within their statutory responsibility. However, to ensure that a strategic and consistent approach is adopted, some actions involve inter-departmental and inter-agency co-operation.
- 6.3 The following actions emphasise the need for Government Departments and agencies to act collaboratively and were developed by drawing on the collective experience and observation of those directly involved with the young people. Some of the actions are in varying stages of implementation while others are subject to the outcomes of funding bids.
- 6.4 Later in this report each Department will detail the actions, and the rationale behind them, which fall within each specific business area. The following tables include a summary of those actions, which have been categorised in relation to **PROVISION** for the young

people, the **PROCESS** that is involved in putting the provision in place and the **LIAISON** that is required to improve inter-agency working.

- 6.5 In the course of the development of this report, individual Departments have secured additional resources to take forward aspects of the transition pathway which fall to them. The first action in the Action Plan has been developed with inter-departmental links in order to formulate proposals to meet the third point of the Terms of Reference. It presents a package of inter-departmentally supported actions to enable each Department to make appropriate funding bids from a range of funding sources.

PROVISION – SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Action	Lead Department	Target Date	Inter-dependencies
<p>Proposals encompassing actions under <i>Provision</i> and <i>Process</i>, which are supported by all Departments, have been developed to enable each Department to make appropriate funding bids on the basis of assessed need as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to enable adult day care centres to provide appropriate placements suitable to the needs of young people; • to enable Health Trusts and Boards to employ Transition Officers to ensure a person centred approach and alleviate the difficulties encountered by young people in relation to the healthcare aspect of the process; • to enhance a range of further education and training provision available by providing a suite of 'pre-vocational' education and training programmes for young people for whom current provision is not sufficiently tailored nor flexible in order to deal with the difficult transition from school to other provision; • to strengthen the mechanism of the transition planning process in schools (subject to the evaluation of the pilot project funded under Spend Review 2004). <p>Restructuring of Careers and Guidance Service in NI to focus, as a priority, on young people aged 14-19 with Statements of Special Educational Needs by appointing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers Managers • 12 Specialist Careers Advisors. 	<p>DHSSPS, DEL&DE</p> <p style="text-align: right;">DEL</p>	<p>Relevant bidding deadlines such as: Children and Young Peoples Package – 2006/07 & 2007/08</p> <p>Skills and Science Fund – awaiting decisions; Spending Review 2007 (timescale not yet known)</p> <p>Activated September 2004</p>	<p>Support by all Departments and outcomes of funding bids.</p>

PROVISION – SUMMARY OF ACTIONS (cont'd)			
Action	Lead Department	Target Date	Inter-dependencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide advice and guidance on local employment opportunities, training opportunities or referral for specialist occupational assessment. ■ Provide a range of programmes aimed at assisting people leaving Special Schools find suitable employment eg "Access to Work", "Employment Support (ES)", "Job Introduction Scheme" (JIS) and "New Deal for Disabled People" (NDDP). ■ Assist leavers of Special Schools who are unable to access mainstream vocational training provision such as Jobskills or Jobskills Access and specialist Vocational training. ■ Develop and pilot a pre-vocational stream within the Jobskills Access strand. The proposed pre-vocational arrangements will provide a greater degree of flexibility and will better meet the needs of this group of young people. ■ Improve access to vocational opportunities for 14-19 year olds in Special Schools by adopting a flexible approach to the criteria used to determine funding under the Vocational Enhancement Programme in 2005/06. ■ Allocate funding to each Education and Library Board to enable appropriate life skills training for independent living to be provided for those children with statements of special educational needs who have entered into transition planning. ■ Encourage and support FE Colleges to widen access to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through a number of initiatives and funding mechanisms. These include extra funding under the Colleges' funding formula and financial assistance towards the provision of auxiliary aids and personal support. 	<p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DE/DEL</p> <p>DE</p> <p>DEL</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>Activated September 2004</p> <p>Activated September 2005</p> <p>Activated April 2005</p> <p>Children and Young Peoples Package – 2006/07 & 2007/08</p> <p>On-going</p>	

PROVISION – SUMMARY OF ACTIONS (cont'd)

Action	Lead Department	Target Date	Inter-dependencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allocation of extra funding to help FE Colleges comply with the provisions of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 eg towards the cost of providing extra auxiliary aids and services and improving physical access. ■ Support the Further and Higher Education sectors to develop an inclusive learning project aimed at ensuring that all management, lecturing and administrative staff in Colleges are trained on how to make the necessary adjustments to accommodate students with disabilities and to ensure that ongoing support arrangements are in place. ■ 100 extra Day Care places. ■ Small-scale projects with the voluntary sector to be developed to offer alternatives to facility based activities. ■ Life skills courses to continue to be provided by Health Trusts on the basis of a personal care plan. 	<p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DHSSPS</p> <p>DHSSPS</p> <p>DHSSPS</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>September 2006</p> <p>Activated 2003/04</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p>	

PROCESS – SUMMARY OF ACTIONS			
Action	Lead Department	Target Date	Inter-dependencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allocate funding, on a pilot basis, to enable each Education and Library Board to provide an effective transition service for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs, by the recruitment of 2 Education Transitions Co-ordinators, per Board. ■ From 1 April 2005, all Day Care Centres will be registered and Inspected by the Health and Personnel, Social Services Registration and Inspection Authority (HPSSRIA). Facilities will be measured against agreed standards, which will be underpinned by regulations. ■ See also the 2 Process actions encompassed in the first action point, which is supported by all Departments. 	<p>DE</p> <p>DHSSPS</p>	<p>Activated April 2005</p> <p>Activated April 2005</p>	

LIAISON – SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Action	Lead Department	Target Date	Inter-dependencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In April 2006 DEL will establish a Stakeholder Forum to support policy Development and good practice in relation to transition processes and provision. ■ Education and Library Boards to put in place a co-ordinated monitoring system for the transition service by April 2006. ■ Close links to be formed with organisations such as the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC) and the Equality Commission to ensure that colleges are fully aware of their obligations under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 and its associated Code of Practice. ■ To establish a clear referral and liaison process between DEL's Careers Service and the Disablement Advisory Service (DAS). ■ DAS and Careers Service to explore with Ulster Supported Employment Ltd the possibility of them offering work experience/work sampler placements in the Belfast area to pupils of Special Schools. ■ To further develop links with disability organisations, such as Mencap, Orchardville Society and Cedar Foundation, to assist Special School leavers to access appropriate training with work experience. ■ Education and Library Boards to develop an information leaflet for pupils and parents about the support available from the Education Transitions Co-ordinators and how this support dovetails with other advice and support from statutory agencies, voluntary groups and health trusts. 	<p>DEL</p> <p>DE</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DE</p>	<p>April 2006</p> <p>April 2006</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>Activated September 2005</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>January 2006</p>	

7. Policy Issues Beyond the Remit of the IDG

- 7.1 In developing the above actions the IDG was aware that some of the issues involved wider strategic policies, sometimes embracing issues not only beyond the remit of this IDG, but beyond the remit of Northern Ireland Government Departments. These issues and the background to them are detailed below.

Transport

- 7.2 The IDG recognises the challenges facing those reliant on transport to enable a transition to adult life as well as improving social inclusion. It has been advised that a report and action plan for a Transport Strategy will be forthcoming from the Learning Disability Sub-committee of the Regional Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability. The IDG awaits the recommendations of this review with interest, but it will be a matter for individual departments to consider the recommendations within the remit of their responsibilities.

Benefits trap

- 7.3 The IDG is aware of the concerns raised by parents regarding their child's continued eligibility and receipt of benefits should they consider moving into vocational training or employment on leaving school.

The existing Benefits infrastructure, although legislatively separate from Great Britain (GB), operates in parallel under what is termed the parity principle. This ensures that people in NI have access to the same range of Social Security benefits, subject to the same conditions and rules and that these are paid at the same rates as benefit recipients in GB. The "Benefits Trap" is therefore not solely a Northern Ireland but a GB-wide issue and it is outside the competence of the IDG on Transitions to change the Benefits regime.

The IDG did, however, attempt to simplify the process for obtaining advice. It engaged with officials from a variety of benefit branches in the Department for Social Development in an attempt to identify if there is one individual branch that can offer a single point of contact for information, advice and guidance across the benefit spectrum. We were informed that all enquiries regarding any benefit have to be dealt with by that particular Benefit Branch. This obviously can present difficulties in a situation where an individual is receiving several benefits.

The Benefits regime was recognised as an issue by the Taskforce on Employability and Long-Term Unemployment, which was established as a direct outcome of the Northern Ireland Programme for Government. Its report was published in December 2002 and paragraph 4.2.2 was entitled “The Benefits Trap”. It states that the benefits trap is a widely recognised phenomenon and one that successive UK Governments have sought to address. The various Welfare to Work initiatives including the New Deals, the National Minimum Wage, and the National Childcare Strategy are all part of a framework which is seeking to address this issue and ensure that being in work is more financially beneficial than being unemployed.

There is support for the Supported Employment model advocated by the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment from a number of organisations with special interest in the “Transitions” process such as MENCAP, ACET, Orchardville Society, Cedar Foundation, SKILL and Triangle Housing Association. A difficulty with this particular Supported Employment model is that it is based on participants’ continued receipt of their Welfare benefits. The Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment is undertaking a research project to examine the issues surrounding the introduction of Supported Employment as a “mainstream” programme in Northern Ireland.

Post 16 Provision for Pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)

7.4 Currently, it is normal practice across the Education and Library Boards that pupils with MLD, whether placed in an ordinary school, a special unit or a special school, leave school at the statutory school leaving age (16 years), which is the same practice as for those pupils who do not have SENs and who do not wish to pursue higher qualifications such as 'A' levels or equivalents. Should the Board decide to cease to maintain a statement, for any reason, then it must write to the child's parents to give notice of the decision. The Board must always explain its decision to the parents and also their right of appeal to the SEN Tribunal. Parents have a right of appeal to the SEN Tribunal if they disagree with the Boards decision to cease to maintain a statement at any time. Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO) Boards must continue to maintain the child's statement until the outcome of the appeal to the tribunal is known.

One Education and Library Board has introduced specialist provision to allow a few pupils to remain in school beyond age 16 to complete transition programmes.

Within the context of the work of this IDG, the Department of Education (DE) has considered one of the key findings contained in the ETI School Leavers Survey, which relates to the issue of transfer at age 16 for a minority of pupils who clearly would benefit from a further year in the MLD school. In addition to the ETI recommendation, the Department of Education, through the work of the IDG, is aware of the representations of a small number of parents and MLAs who have lobbied the Department on this issue.

DE has taken legal advice about this policy and is currently considering a number of options to enable progress to be made. The Department is, therefore, unable to finalise this policy review within the terms of reference of this IDG, which is considering the gaps in the process of transition from school for all children with

Statements of Special Educational Needs. However, it is the Department's intention to carry out a wider phased Strategic Review of SEN Provision, which it is hoped will commence early in 2006. The Review will, inter-alia, consider and evaluate all opinions and advice in relation to the policy on post 16 provision for MLD pupils.

8. Monitoring of Actions

Each Department will record the relevant actions within its Business Planning Process and monitor progress to ensure that all objectives are met within the appropriate timescales.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

PART 2

9. Department of Education (DE) – Special Education Branch

Introduction

- 9.1 Special Education provision is matched to individual needs and, under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, the statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SENs) rests with the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the Board of Governors of Schools. Paragraph 6 of The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs provides detailed practical guidance to schools and ELBs on Annual Reviews and the inclusion of a formal Transition Plan on the first, and subsequent, annual review following the pupil's 14th birthday.
- 9.2 Before making and implementing decisions about their future, pupils with statements of SENs need to develop knowledge and understanding about themselves in relation to the wider world and society beyond school. This includes consolidating the skills required to learn further, either in formal or informal settings, as well as recognising and developing social, life and employability skills through the course of their everyday learning at school, at home and in the community.

Actions to Address Issues

Education Transitions Co-ordinators

- 9.3. All pupils with Statements of SENs are involved with the education service. Schools and ELBs have a key role in managing the

transition process and this role is detailed throughout paragraph 6 of the Code of Practice. In light of the issues presented to DE (see paragraph 4.2), the Department intends to enable Education and Library Boards to promote better practice and provide a cohesive strategic approach to ensure that pupils are facilitated and supported until they leave school.

- 9.4 DE, therefore, made funding of £60k available in April 2005, on a pilot basis, to each Education and Library Board to employ 2 Education Transitions Co-ordinators to provide an effective transition service for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs. As part of their role in the Transitions process the Transitions Co-ordinators will be required to participate, as appropriate, in the Stakeholder Forum proposed by DEL.
- 9.5 Subject to the outcome of an evaluation of the above pilot project, the Department will examine the needs of the ELB transition service and consider a bid, under Spending Review 2007, to strengthen the mechanism of the transition planning process in schools.

Information Leaflet

- 9.6 In recognition that different types of information and advice can often confuse this process rather than support it, it is also proposed that the Education and Library Boards develop an information leaflet for pupils and parents. It is hoped that this information will ensure that pupils and parents are aware of the support available from the Education Transitions Co-ordinators and how this support dovetails with other advice and support from statutory agencies, voluntary groups and health trusts.

Life Skills Training

- 9.7 Funding of £20k was made available in April 2005, to each Education and Library Board, to provide appropriate life skills training for independent living for those pupils with statements who

have entered into transition planning and who require such training. The Department will avail of future funding opportunities to bid for a further £20k to increase training capacity in accordance with the Action Plan.

Monitoring

- 9.8 The above funding is allocated on a pilot basis and will be subject to on-going monitoring and evaluation.

Vocational Enhancement Programme

- 9.9 The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning are jointly funding a pilot Vocational Enhancement Programme which supports local collaboration between schools and Further Education colleges to provide 14-19 year olds of all abilities with exposure to a broad range of learning experiences. See paragraph 13.3 for details of this programme.

Strategic Review of SEN Provision

- 9.10 A Supplement, to the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, to support the impact of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SEND0) was introduced in September 2005.
- 9.11 It is the Department's intention to carry out a wider phased Strategic Review of SEN Provision, which it is hoped will commence early in 2006, at which time all aspects of the Code of Practice will be considered. The Department, as part of this Review, will also consider and evaluate all opinions and advice in relation to the policy on post 16 provision for MLD pupils. Paragraph 7.4 provides details of the Department's work in relation to Post 16 Provision.

10. Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) – Careers Service

Introduction

10.1 The Careers Service is an all age information, advice and guidance service that helps young people and adults make informed choices about their future career paths. Careers Advisers are based in 35 JobCentres, Jobs and Benefits Offices and Careers Offices throughout Northern Ireland.

Actions to Address Issues

10.2 With effect from 2 February 2004, Careers Managers were appointed to take line management responsibility for Careers Advisers and Careers Support Staff within the following units of management:

Unit of Management	
1.	South/North/East Belfast
2.	Ballymena/Carrick/Larne/Newtownabbey
3.	Cookstown/Magherafelt/Antrim
4.	Bangor/Newtownards/Ballynahinch/Downpatrick/Newcastle
5.	Limavady/Coleraine/Ballymoney
6.	Richmond Chambers
7.	Armagh/Newry/Kilkeel/Dungannon
8.	Lurgan/Banbridge/Portadown
9.	Lisburn/Andersonstown/Falls/Shankill
10.	Omagh/Strabane/Enniskillen

This is a major step in the change management process of the Careers and Guidance Services in Northern Ireland.

Within the change management process it is the intention to focus on the support required by young people aged 14-19 with Statements of Special Educational Needs as a priority. It is for this reason that the Careers Service has decided to appoint 12 (full-time equivalent) Specialist Careers Advisers to provide information, advice and guidance to this group in education and training and to the unemployed.

Role of the Specialist Careers Adviser

10.3 The Specialist Careers Adviser will:

- on invitation, play an active role in the Transition Planning Process within school;
- meet with the young person to discuss options on leaving education;
- work in partnership with colleagues from other agencies in order to support clients' guidance needs;
- work pro-actively with young people to help them identify their needs, potential and assist them in the decision making process;
- engage with the young person's wider social network (eg family and friends) in order to gain insight into issues affecting progression.

10.4 Key staff, who will take on this new responsibility, have been identified. Training has been delivered during the period April-September 2004 to ensure that staff are equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills to deliver information, advice and guidance to this client group.

Outline of training needs:

- The Transitions Process;
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- Assessment;
- Advocacy;
- Networking;
- Options;
- Specific Disability Awareness;
- Advanced Models and Theories of Guidance;
- Support Services.

Stakeholder Group

10.5 Careers and Guidance Services Branch is currently working closely with the Department of Education, the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment, and other Stakeholders to develop a coherent and comprehensive Strategy for Careers Education and for all-age Careers Information, Advice and Guidance. In April 2006 the Careers Service will establish and maintain a range of Stakeholder forums to implement an agreed strategy. These will include, Parents, Young People, Adults, Employers, Educationalists, Voluntary and Community Sectors, Trade Union, Transitions Officers and Departmental representatives. A specific forum will be established under the title of "Social Inclusion" and this group will support the development and implementation of the actions within this Transitions Report with a particular focus on the transitions process and on provision for young people with Statements of Special Education Needs.

11. Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) – Jobskills Access Provision

Introduction

11.1 The existing Jobskills Access strand was designed to meet the training needs of young disadvantaged people and those with special needs. The current arrangements focus mainly on the achievement of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) at Level 1. However, this focus on ‘hard’ outcomes is increasingly being regarded as inappropriate for a significant proportion of the young people concerned, including those with a learning disability, and a contributory factor to poor retention and achievement rates.

Actions to Address Issues

11.2 DEL is currently developing a pre-vocational stream within Jobskills Access strand. The proposed pre-vocational arrangements provide a greater degree of flexibility and will better meet the needs of this group of young people. For example, where required they allow attendance of less than 35 hours per week, particularly during the early stages of training, with trainees progressing to the full 35 hours as quickly as possible. Rather than the achievement of NVQs the new arrangements concentrate on:

- dealing with the personal and social development of the client group;
- equipping them with essential skills (literacy and numeracy) to enable them to progress to higher level training or employment; and
- providing them with opportunities to sample a variety of occupations.

11.3 The pre-vocational arrangements are being piloted in a number of training organisations from September 2004 with the intention of

including them in the tender process for the award of Jobskills contracts from April 2007.

- 11.4 While revising the existing Jobskills programme, developmental work is underway on a replacement which will address transitions as a specific stream.

12. Department for Employment and Learning – Disablement Advisory Service (DAS)

Introduction

- 12.1 The Disablement Advisory Service has a team of Disablement Employment Advisers (DEAs) based in local JobCentres/Jobs and Benefits Offices. DAS works in conjunction with and complements the services of the Department's Career Service.
- 12.2 In relation to the interface between the young person and DEL, the Disablement Advisory Service's involvement would normally follow on from the contacts between the Careers Service and the young person.

Actions to Address Issues

- 12.3 DAS will contribute to the Transitions process by:
- working in close co-operation with the Careers Service in providing advice for young people leaving Special Schools and their parents/carers on accessing appropriate employment and training;
 - further developing our links with disability organisations and consortia e.g. Mencap, Orchardville Society, Cedar Foundation to help assist young people leaving Special Schools access appropriate training with work experience;

- collaborating with the Department’s Careers Service and Ulster Supported Employment Ltd (USEL) to explore the possibility of USEL delivering work experience/work sampler placements in the Belfast area for pupils of Special Schools;
- providing advice and guidance on local employment opportunities, training opportunities or referral for specialist occupational assessment by the Occupational Psychologists in our Employment Assessment team;
- providing a range of programmes aimed at assisting people leaving Special Schools find employment eg “Access to Work”, “Employment Support”, “Job Introduction Scheme” and “New Deal for Disabled People”;
- assist leavers of Special Schools who are unable to access mainstream vocational training provision such as Jobskills Access and specialist vocational training.

13. Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) – Further Education Branch and Learning and Curriculum Policy Branch

Introduction

13.1 Further Education (FE) colleges are autonomous bodies and as such are responsible for determining their own provision. They are statutorily required to “have regard to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age who have learning difficulties”. People with learning difficulties and/or disabilities participate in many FE courses and many colleges provide a range of courses designed specifically for people with special needs. During 2003-04 there were 6,631 fundable student enrolments in FE colleges. Across NI there were some 750 courses, in addition, several FE colleges have established link courses for children attending special schools in response to local need. In a report published in 2004, the Education and Training Inspectorate acknowledges the good links

that exist between special schools and FE colleges in a majority of cases.

13.2 The Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL's) strategy document "Further Education Means Business" has recognised the importance of continuing to promote opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

13.3 The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning are jointly funding a pilot Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) which supports local collaboration between schools and FE colleges to provide 14-19 year olds of all abilities with exposure to a broad range of learning experiences. Many of the modules/units/options offered by the VEP will provide coherent progression routes into higher education, further education and training and/or employment.

13.4 To provide support to FE colleges, DEL has put in place a number of initiatives and funding mechanisms for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These include:

- enhanced funding under the FE funding formula;
- the Additional Support Fund, which is used primarily for additional technical and/or human support; and
- a Support Fund, which enables colleges to provide financial help to students, particularly those entering from care and to those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, whose participation in further education is inhibited by financial considerations.

In addition, DEL has invested significant funding to improve physical access to colleges, for example by installing ramps, stair-lifts and providing car parking spaces for disabled students.

The above measures are being reinforced by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDI), which came into operation on 1st September 2005. The Order provides comprehensive and enforceable rights to education for all people with disabilities on the same basis as that which presently exists in the rest of the United Kingdom under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

- 13.5 In a report commissioned for the Department for Employment and Learning (May 2005), it was recognised that many FE institutions provide learning opportunities for those with learning difficulties. While, the students on these courses were very positive about the course content, and the support they were receiving, there was some evidence that the curriculum in discrete provision in some colleges is relatively static. The Department, and the FE sector, would accept the report's recommendation that, for these young people, the achievement of educational goals should remain as important as the social element of students getting involved in all aspects of college life.

Actions to Address Issues

- 13.6 To enhance the range of further education and training provision available, DEL will bid for a suite of "pre-vocational" education and training programmes to meet the needs of young people with a disability (physical or with special educational needs) or experiencing social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties for whom existing, mainstream training provision is not sufficiently tailored nor flexible in order to deal with the difficult transition from school to appropriate provision. These flexible programmes would focus on personal and social development and essential and employability skills within a vocational context. The programmes would be designed and delivered, in partnership, by the organisation(s) with the greatest expertise in dealing with the specific educational needs, or disabilities involved. This provision would have clear goals and

progression routes, and provide opportunities for some students to move into more advanced or mainstream courses.

13.7 Currently all 16 FE colleges and 162 schools are working together locally to deliver the Vocational Enhancement Programme to approximately 11,000 pupils. The programme is open to all special schools and they are afforded a priority rating within the overall criteria set for considering applications.

13.8 To help the FE sector meet its obligations under the new SENDO legislation DEL is taking account of best practice in other parts of the United Kingdom. It is working with organisations such as the Centre for Inclusive Learning in Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges and SKILL NI to develop an inclusive learning project, which will enable the FE sector to fully meet its obligations under the legislation. The project will aim to ensure that all college staff are trained on how to meet the needs of students with disabilities and that ongoing support arrangements are in place. The project will address some of the issues raised by the ETI following a survey of provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities in colleges of Further Education in Northern Ireland (see Paragraph 5.6).

14. Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety (DHSS&PS) – Disability and Mental Health Unit

Introduction

14.1 Section 5 of the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 sets out the arrangements for 'disabled persons leaving special education'. This requires an Education and Library Board to notify the responsible Health and Social Services Trust of the date full-time education will cease for a young disabled person. The Trust is then responsible for arranging for an assessment of the young person's needs to be undertaken and provision of appropriate services.

Duties of Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts

- 14.2 Article 14 of The Education (NI) Order 1996 imposes duties on health and social services boards and trusts in relation to the identification and assessment of children with special educational needs.
- 14.3 The responsibilities of health and social services boards and trusts include:
- meeting the welfare needs of school leavers with learning disabilities and their families;
 - making an assessment of the needs of the school leaver taking into account the view of the young person and his/her carer and considering individual circumstances;
 - working closely with the education and library board in developing a transition plan for the young person at age 14;
 - working closely with other agencies including the primary health care team, housing providers, the careers service and voluntary organisations to ensure that a co-ordinated service is provided for the young person.

Provision for Young People at Transition

- 14.4 Many parents prefer their son or daughter to attend an adult day care centre 5 days per week because it provides a reliable service in a secure environment, usually with transport to and from the centre. This day care is provided every weekday throughout the year and does not affect any entitlement to benefits. The disadvantages of this type of provision are that it may not develop the abilities and skills of the individual, or meet their aspirations, and it potentially perpetuates social exclusion.

Action to Address Issues

- 14.5 Within day care centres, the range of courses offered includes therapeutic, educational, lifestyle, creative, sports and recreational activities. The purpose of these centres is to provide education and training to meet the personal, physical, social, vocational and recreational needs of its clients. The type of course offered within each centre is dependent on both the needs and wishes of their clients.
- 14.6 Additional investment over the last few years has been designed to provide greater flexibility in the provision of day care. In 2003/04 DHSS&PS allocated £1m recurrent to Health Boards to develop 100 extra Day Care places. The overall aim is to create capacity in the day care 'system' by moving older clients to more age appropriate settings, and developing local, small-scale projects with the voluntary sector, offering alternatives to facility based activities. To enable adult day care centres to provide appropriate placements suitable to the needs of young people, the Department will make appropriate funding bids, at least £1m, on the basis of assessed need.
- 14.7 For young people who are unable to access further education, vocational training schemes or supported employment schemes, placements are offered in an adult training centre or voluntary sector scheme providing highly supported places.
- 14.8 Specific examples of innovative day care projects are:

EHSSB

- An EU funded scheme in Newtownards Hospital providing opportunities for young people to work in the catering department.
- The 'Stepping Stones' project in Lisburn, enabling young people to work in a commercial coffee shop environment.

NHSSB

- The Bridge Association in Antrim runs a commercial garden centre employing young people with a learning disability.
- In the Coleraine area, young people with a learning disability have the contract for grounds maintenance at Coleraine Hospital and the Robinson Hospital.

SHSSB

- Mencap's Pathways scheme provides support workers to assist young people in employment.
- In Newry, the Coachouse is a commercially run restaurant staffed by young people with learning disabilities.
- Prospects provides a range of day activities including attendance at further education courses, crafts, and outdoor pursuits.

WHSSB

- In the Sperrin Lakeland area, local outreach centres provide the focus for day care offering employment opportunities for young people in shops, small manufacturing businesses, bakeries and in clerical environments.
- In Londonderry, the DAWN Group works with the FE College to enable people with learning disability to access accredited courses.
- The Cookie Company is a commercial baking and retail project. There is also a horticultural business attached to the local Adult Training Centre.
- The Lilliput Theatre Company is the only local theatre company made up of people with learning disabilities and is based at the Playhouse in Londonderry.

- 14.9 The Department has recently conducted extensive consultations with Day Care Providers. As from 1 April 2005, all Day Care Centres will be registered and inspected by the Health, Personnel and Social Regulation and Improvement Authority, which will have the responsibility for inspecting all facilities funded by the DHSSPS. Facilities will be measured against agreed standards, which will be underpinned by regulations.

Healthcare and Social Care Transitions Officers

- 14.10 In order to alleviate the difficulties encountered by young people during the transitions period, one option available is to employ a Transitions Officer to deal with the healthcare aspect of the process. Within several trusts, there are currently Transitions Officers employed and the DHSS&PS will continue to encourage the remaining Trusts to appoint Transitions Officers on the basis of assessed need. As part of their role in the Transitions process these officers will be required to participate, as appropriate, in the Stakeholder Forum proposed by DEL.

Reviews

- 14.11 The Department is still awaiting the full report of the review on Mental Health and Learning Disability Northern Ireland. The Equal Lives Report was published in September 2005 and will help inform future provision in day care centres.

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Report of the

Transitions Inter-Departmental
Working Group