



VET STUDY VISIT IN BELFAST, N. IRELAND

28th February – 1st March 2011

Visit details

Study visit participants :

Bjørn Baugstø (expert from Norway)
Eva Valtersson (expert from Sweden)
Shirley Jones (expert from N. Ireland and host)
Mary Kyriazopoulou (European Agency staff member)
Anabel Corral Granados (European Agency staff member)

Programme:

1st day

Meeting in DE, Chief Inspector's Office

Meeting with key Departmental staff, who provided an overview of “14-19 policy” in relation to VET

POLICY LEVEL/ NATIONAL OVERVIEW



In VET in NI there are two departments that work on the “14-19 policy”; the Department of Education (4-19 years old in Nursery, Primary and Post Primary Schools) and the Department of Employment and Learning (14/16 onwards in Further Education Colleges and Work based Learning Organisations).

This academic year, there are 1200 students in vocational education across all the levels. The students with SEN in special classes within VET schools currently total 70 students. Within these groups the students range from having severe disabilities to moderate learning difficulties and disabilities. Students have free access to education up to 19/20 years old or even 24 in some cases.

Stormont is the home of the Assembly and has 10 departments, 3 of which serve education: the Department of Education, the Department of Employment and Learning and



the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, each with a separate minister. There are 3 5 education and library boards.

There are 42 special schools in Northern Ireland, Of the total population of 1.6 million people and 300.000 school aged pupils, 63 400 (19%) of these are identified as having SEN From these 63.000, 93% are in mainstream school and 3% are in special schools. Therefore only a small percentage of pupils, with the most significant barriers to learning attend Special Schools.

There are 3 levels of intervention for pupils with SEN: the school based adaptations, inclusion or integration and special schools. There are 11.000 students with a required statement of formal assessment of needs and 63% of these are in mainstream schools. The Statement is an assessment by an Educational Psychologists from an Education and Library board is carried out with the input of the school, parents and other services.

The number of young people with SEN that remain in education is increasing due to continued provision of resources. Figures show that people with SEN are finding routes and pathways that allow them to pursue further education and work.

From the total number of students (with or without SEN), 29-30% participate in VET and 25% of these go onto further education following VET. There is a strong emphasis on directing leavers into practical training and employment.

A conference will take place in March entitled "Special schools journey into inclusion". The aim is to discuss why schools are different today than 20 years ago. Each school is given two pages to explain how they promote inclusion for children with SEN. The schools see themselves as part of the system and intends to present examples of good practice at the conference.

Legislative framework / Strong statutory framework that gives strengths and the rights to the students:

There is a dispute resolution service, a Statutory Appeal Body and a disability tribunal. These bodies impose duties on the school and make provision on the basis of the needs of the individual, not the diagnosis. The type of provision is different at each stage of development. Assessment and provision are not standard requirements for all students; for some students statements are not necessary as they provide rather more resources and assistance to the student, e.g. 7000 classroom assistant appointments are made on the basis of statements. Over 50.000 students with SEN are in mainstream schools and many of them do not have statements.

SEN statistics:

All schools provide a sophisticated set of a data in a census that is taken every year.

Challenges: Statements of SEN are not transferable from schools to further education institutions and additional assessments have to take place at these transition points. , In addition, it is not easy for the health and education departments to track transition.

It is often the case that the effectiveness of the law depends directly on the actions and expectations of parents. The decision between mainstream and special schools must be taken by the parents. The staff do not think that special schools should be scrapped as they have good provision. The ideal would be for both sectors to work together depending on the child's needs. There are many examples of dual enrolment. There are 100 units in



mainstream schools where students are able to work alongside their peers (up to 50% of the time). There are effective links between special schools and mainstream schools. When students move into VET they do not automatically have an assistant and need to repeat the statement assessments. Traditionally there exists a tension regarding funding between the Department of Employment and Learning and the Department of Health and Social Services regarding the needs of learners. Some colleges have employed special staff to work with students with Aspergers and, in particular, to help teachers to deliver the curriculum to these students.

Response: An advisory system exists external to the school under the curriculum advisory service and the Learning and Skills Development Agency, in order to build the capacity of the staff. In the last year links have been made with the BRITE centre in Scotland, was to help train staff to deal more effectively with young people with a range of SENs .There is an increased focus on training teachers to ensure that they have the skills to work with students with a range of disabilities.

Priorities for further development :

- Irish medium education associated with SEN
- Each education and library board has an officer responsible for the transition process with an emphasis on training in a supportive environment to develop life skills that enable independent living.
- In the Northern Irish political system there are a number of Departments that are responsible for children and young people. There has been a major review that looked at the inclusion framework and barriers to learning. It showed that there should be a greater focus on
- capacity building, creating a more flexible process and moving away from the use of statements
- Improved accountability and greater emphasis on outcomes for children
- Look at the support and input of the children.

One outcome from this review has been capacity building in schools and colleges and producing a series of conference workshops for teachers as a major resource for schools. Schools are best placed to work with the children and young people.



Presentation on the 14-19 PROJECT




Main characteristics: The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning are working on a joint 14 -19 statement on progression from school to college. The statement includes a commitment to a curriculum which aims to increase the level of qualifications of all learners, including those with SEN, and places priority on skilled vocations (e.g. construction, engineering, ICT, hospitality and catering) and the essential skills of literacy and numeracy. Part of the work would be to develop a strong school-college collaborative relationship to support further the transition of young people from school to college.

Qualification framework: 95% of college courses need to be accredited and on the national qualification framework. It is very similar to the European framework.

Both departments advocate highly qualified skills and flexibility in order to improve the economy and promote social inclusion. The main aim is that “all young people fulfil their potential”. This policy will be initiated within the “Entitlement framework” from 2013 onwards, which will provide all people with a broad academic and vocational curriculum (the final implementation phase will be in all schools). “Training for success” provision requires a flexible ‘menu’ from 16-24, which was revised in 2008 and is characterised by different educational strands. The Education and Training Inspectorate (2009) provided an evaluation of provision. Approximately 28% of students transferred from special schools on to Training for Success programmes. The main aims is for the programmes to provide an appropriate accreditation pathway for all young people, including individualised curricula that meet the needs and motivate young people and aim to create smooth transitions. Future evaluations will be carried out in order to improve the focus on the employability skills of the learners. It should begin with an initial assessment and training plan that should be tracked. It should advocate a multidisciplinary approach that involves the community.

Areas for improvement:

- Transition process: we need to improve at sharing information during the transition. The schools have rules relating to data protection and information does not ‘follow the pupil’ to further education and training. The families should share the information, which requires trust in the parents and young people but in many cases



families do not provide the information. A potential solution could be for a worker to work alongside the young person.

- Another problem arises where a young person has many needs and there are many departments involved.
- More effort must be focused on capacity building in new technologies, which is an area in which tutors could be better trained.

CURRENT POSITION 14-19 VET AND SEN

At present there is a Project taking place which is reviewing the curriculum for learners with SEN. The Project aims to ensure that the curriculum offer is broad and balanced and aims to enhance good collaboration between schools and colleges. The project is based on ensuring that transitions between school and college are smoother and young people are prepared well for the job market.

In N, Ireland we will introduce a new set of foundation (entry level or level one) qualifications with personalised programs. We will make it available for all 44 special schools.

Employability skills and personal development is included in all the packages. There are 6 or 7 organisations involved in the pilot and the qualifications will be prepared for September 2011. It will initially be implemented in special schools and units for 2 years and will later be introduced to mainstream schools ([see reports N-IRL-1.pdf](#), [N-IRL-2.pdf](#), [N-IRL-3.pdf](#), [N-IRL-4.pdf](#), [N-IRL-5.pdf](#), [N-IRL-6.pdf](#)).

2. Visit to Fleming Fulton School, Belfast: Visit to school with focus on pupils with physical disabilities – discussion with the Director about the activities and tour of school, specialist ICT equipment, overview of LILAC project.

2nd day

Visit to Southern Regional College – Newry Campus

Meeting with Mrs Sandra Flynn, Principal of Lisanally Special School;

There is a lot of interest in tourism courses. We collaborate with the Department of Agriculture, Department of Learning and Training and the Department of Education. The Southern Regional College is the largest Further and Higher Education College in Northern Ireland outside of Belfast. With a total of six campuses across the counties of Armagh and Down and covering four district councils, the College offers further and higher education. Approximately 3000 students attend the vocational programmes on a part-time basis one day a week.

The school (Lisanally) is actively involved in VET and encourages all the 14 years old to sample vocational education programmes. There is close collaboration with the special school with students with severe learning difficulties. We are working hard on securing good transitions. Students are 18 years of age when they finish their special education and for them this is a very challenging process; we think that is better to engage them as soon



as possible. Some of them come in one day a week and travel by bus - we encourage this experience. They are integrated into normal classes. We have students with all kind of disabilities.

The barriers to the flow of information are a massive challenge, e.g. the sharing of the information on student statements. We work with a supportive unit in the school regarding the learners for whom we have no background information. We think that the transition arrangements are very important and we try to identify their needs as early as possible and give the provision that they need. We think that the best approach is to tailor provision to the individual student.

For example, with the students with visual impairments, we try to bring the group together. This is one of the examples of students that we don't integrate into the mainstream; they have their own group in the system.

SEN SCHOOL NEARBY:

The school and college have worked together for 10 years. At 14 years of age all students with SEN have transition planning. Regarding the transition for learners with SEN we have shifted from a competitive to a collaborative approach. The SEN school is situated 20 miles from the high school. We think that the campus here is very good and that travelling here by bus is an important part of the transition process where a lot of the social skills are developed. This also helps to build routines. Most of the students are involved in the catering units that provide them all with the opportunity to participate in food service, food production and catering. As a separate group (level one diploma/ NVQ national vocational qualification/practical competence) with a separate tutor they work with different members of staff. We have the additional support provided by the college. Our responsibility is to provide the human support; we have a huge amount of students that are supported in a way. I think this is enriching as it reflects society and life. Last year there was a programme in the restaurant with a mentor of a group of SEN students. From that programme one of the students decided to have a career in special needs. We inform the staff about special needs education and give them access to the training, e.g. on managing behaviour. Our staff are personally committed and come into school in the evening. The special needs classes are delivered by vocational tutors. All students with SEN have individual learning plans- this is the responsibility of the SEN school in conjunction with the college. We have made the curriculum flexible by creating units that can be divided into blocks of learning.

Under the apprenticeship scheme we have a 'skills for work' program level 1 for the young people that attend 3 days a week. They do food production and spend one day on personal skills. Our industries need motivated people with high skill levels. The national vocational and qualification program included many students with low numeracy and literacy skills. Although the new curriculum is missing this aspect, in a survey we carried out recently, 72% of students felt that the knowledge aspects of the qualification were difficult and only 7% thought that the practical aspects were difficult enough.

Challenges:

- Students are not tracked when they finish so we do not know how many are employed.
- There are differences between the curricula of students with SEN and the other students. NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3 have been used over the last 16 years and as of this year we are moving into sector skills as the main diploma for children with SEN



as it is more practical. We would like all students to have these curricula as it is more accessible and can produce better results.

- Post 19 students are normally transferred to another college course with young people with difficulties or they choose supported employment. Other pathways could be the adult education centre or not working (and taking part in recreational activities).

Tour of Hospitality and Catering facilities + discussion with Further Education staff;
Observation of pupils from Lisanally SS engaged in training;
Meeting with Mrs Margot Cosgrove, Principal of St Mary's High School

Visit to Clanrye Training Organisation, Newry

This is a private vocational training organisation for students with SEN which focuses on VET and independent living. The manager of the organisation presented the main activities (VET workshops, training for independent living, cafe, etc) and we visited the different workshops and spoke with the trainees and the students.

