

# Education Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee

## ELLS(2) 09-06(p4)

### REVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS – PART 3 – TRANSITION CAREERS WALES

Careers Wales welcomes the opportunity to provide an input into Part 3 of the committee's review of Special Educational Needs.

Careers Wales is one of the key players in the transition arrangements of young people and is currently involved with the Assembly's development work on Inclusion, through the subgroups "Statutory Assessment and Statementing" and "Educational Achievement and Outcomes". Careers Wales is also very much involved in the Assembly's 14-19 Learning Pathways policy area, and there are clear linkages between Transition, national Inclusion policies and 14-19 Learning Pathways with its learner centred approach. In addition, Careers Wales has been working with the Assembly to enhance the guidance documentation in respect of the SEN Code of Practice and will be delivering jointly, with the Assembly, training/awareness raising sessions targeted at multi-agency audiences across Wales.

Careers Wales has both a statutory and a contractual requirement to support the transition of young people with SEN, via:

- Providing advice and guidance to young people from Year 9 onwards and until they are "settled" in appropriate post education opportunities;
- Attendance at Year 9 and 'leaver' transitional planning reviews, and other annual reviews as appropriate;
- The production of Learning and Skills Plans for young people participating in the transitional planning process progressing into post school opportunities.

It is useful at this point to underline that the Careers Wales focus, within its all age brief, is on transition and importantly on the resulting progression and "destinations" of individuals (and on the impact our services have on this progression). We particularly support the inclusion, within the terms of reference of this review, of the transition to adult life and to employment. The end product is crucial – to where do the individuals eventually progress, what is their place and role in the community/society and how has their educational provision and the transition arrangements assisted them along the way?

The status quo with its lack of focus on progress is not defensible or desirable. It is absolutely fundamental that any new approaches taken (such as developments from the current work within the Inclusion agenda on assessment and statementing) have a very clear focus on "pupil progress".

## General points

Initially, there are a number of what we believe to be key points that we would wish to make:

- Special needs provision inevitably involves a multi-agency approach. Wales needs a more holistic and co-ordinated policy framework for identification, assessment, provision and transition arrangements which clearly lays out multi-agency roles and responsibilities with very clear protocols (e.g. information sharing), covering all relevant Assembly departments and all key partner organisations. There needs to be a common understanding of these protocols by all the agencies involved. Importantly, there need to be clear linkages with policies and practice relating to adults with a learning disability.
- There needs to be a commitment across the range of agencies involved to implement agreed procedures and protocols consistently. At present, whilst there is much good practice, there is significant variation between educational establishments, local authorities and the health sector. Quality assurance will be key - there will need to be robust internal monitoring of implementation by all partners, together with some form of external "inspection" process. This whole area needs strong central direction, given the long term inconsistencies in the present arrangements and the raft of players likely to remain involved in the future.
- As described in a recent Estyn Report, there is wide variation in local authority SEN provision in Wales in general. There has been no real evaluation of the impact of Special Educational Needs provision in terms of its longer term benefits for the individual pupil/student. This is vital in relation to transition and longer term progression issues.
- Funding is obviously a "turnkey" in this whole area. Mechanisms for accessing funding for provision for young people with SEN are complicated and cumbersome and need to be clearer and streamlined. This is often complicated by the fact that the funding can be from more than one source. As stated above, effective joint procedures and protocols are urgently required. The funding of programmes rather than learner need puts providers under pressure to fill courses rather than meet the needs of the individual. Funding is not equal across the different post 16 sectors. The current development work seeking a Common Funding System for post 16 provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is welcomed. However, this work is likely to lead to significant issues and potential changes in the different sectors in receipt of such funding and these will need very careful and sensitive handling. Transparency of funding will be absolutely essential, particularly in terms of building up trust amongst parents.

## **We would wish to identify a number of specific funding issues from a Careers Wales perspective:**

- There needs to be a fundamental review of the balance of the overall current funding allocation, with more emphasis being placed on funding aimed at improving longer term positive outcomes such as the take-up of employment / economic activity after education and training e.

- g. incentives to employers.
- The financial involvement of education, social services and the health sector brings some concerns with regard to residential specialist colleges. Different organisations have different criteria and assessment processes for the provision of services. They also work under differing legislation. This often works against the best interests of an individual student. There would be great benefit in the Welsh Assembly Government looking strategically at this issue with a view to streamlining the process.
  - Training Providers are funded on qualification outcomes but no longer on job outcomes. The funding in work based learning/training needs to be reviewed and there is a real need for the re-introduction of progression payments for job/work placement outcomes (i.e. as well as for qualification outcomes). The present "qualifications-only" funding system can actually act as a deterrent to the recruitment of certain young people by training providers who can tend to favour recruits who are more likely to achieve qualifications and therefore attract funding payments. There is also a need to widen the range of qualifications which are funded in order to embrace progress and achievement at the lower levels.
  - There is a decreasing and inadequate level of funding for "support work/workers" for young people with SEN e.g. a young person with autism may require substantial support when placed in a work environment in order to settle in and adapt to the requirements of the workplace. The same issue exists for clients with mental health difficulties – funding for support is not clear. Another example would be where two young people "share" a support worker in a school, which can make it difficult for either of the young people to experience work related activities outside of school unless additional support is funded.
  - Funding needs to be available for all post 16 providers to be able to offer link provision as a method of introducing the young person to the "next stage provision". This not only gives the young person the opportunity to make a gradual transition but also enables the new provider to assess the needs of the individual over a period of time in order to make adequate preparation. The funding of "link courses" (e.g. between schools and colleges) should be clarified - there has been disagreement between LEAs and FE Colleges about the responsibility for funding these courses and as a result some courses have been withdrawn.
  - The application of both the Estyn Common Inspection Framework and ELWa-WAG's Provider Performance Review in the work based learning route needs to be particularly sensitive to measuring the impact of provision on the progress of young people with special educational needs.

## **Transitional Planning in Schools**

Careers Wales would firstly refer the committee to our response to the consultation questionnaire on the Statutory Assessment Framework in Phase 2 of this review which contained many points relevant to transition.

The transitional planning which takes place in schools is of course the foundation for the subsequent transitions made by individuals. As an organisation dealing with all 22 local authorities, we see a real lack of consistency in transitional planning across Wales, ranging from very good practice to the opposite end of the scale. This inconsistency is evident in relation to most aspects of transition including for example the sharing of information, timing and arrangements for reviews, preparation of young people and parents/guardians, support for parents and referrals to SNAP, attendance of key

professionals at reviews, the content of reviews and action plans, the currency of statements, the monitoring of the implementation of any required actions.

There is firstly then the need (referred to above) for widely agreed multi-agency policies, protocols and procedures for transition planning. This area is already being addressed by some organisations as the following examples indicate:

- In one area, a Transition Panel has been set up on a County level, which includes the LEA, Health, Social Services and Careers Wales. The panel looks at young people who are going through the statutory assessment process and aims to establish the services and support required by the young person for a smooth progression from school on to the next step.
- Some local authorities are trying to improve joint working through a transition protocol that involves representatives from the LEA, Social Services, Careers Wales and the Health sector. This has sometimes influenced involvement in other strategic areas e.g. Social Services in one area involved all the above agencies in a seminar to look at joint working to support individuals with a view to producing a strategy for working with disabled children.
- Careers Wales is in the process of finalising a national transition protocol relating to our role in transition planning in an effort to enhance consistency internally and also to influence any "local" multi-agency protocols as in the example above. As stated earlier, we have also been working with the Assembly to enhance the guidance documentation in respect of the SEN Code of Practice and will be delivering jointly, with the Assembly, training/awareness raising sessions targeted at multi-agency audiences across Wales.

It will be important to take account of these sorts of developments in any national discussions and subsequent agreements.

However, a key message from Careers Wales in relation to transition planning is the need for robust quality assurance of the implementation of any protocols and procedures, both national and local. Present systems would produce better results if appropriate monitoring was taking place consistently – the same will be true in relation to any new developments/systems. This could be carried out by local authorities and should also include an external element (an inspection), as well as each contributing organisation properly monitoring its own implementation.

## **Transition – Post School**

Increasingly it is the case that young people with special educational needs see college as the only real progression route when they leave school. One contributing factor to this is the decreasing number of appropriate opportunities in the work based learning route available for young people with special educational needs (and indeed for mainstream young people as a whole). There are a range of reasons for this situation as identified in the Assembly's Work Based Learning Improvement Plan, including a failure to engage employers generally. The poor quality of some provision in this route, as identified by Estyn, does not help the overall situation.

There would be real benefits in a bespoke pre-entry provision for young people who are not ready to access mainstream training provision.

Some funding issues in relation to work based training providers have already been alluded to, including the need to re-introduce job outcomes payments to sit alongside current payments relating to the achievement of qualifications.

Finance is also a consideration for young people who would like to access work based learning. The low level of the training allowance means that, in certain circumstances, there is no financial incentive in that a young person on work based training/learning can be worse off financially than if they were at home on benefits.

In addition, the benefits regulations are complex and there is a perceived element of financial risk in giving up benefits to access training, in that it can then be difficult to return to those benefits in the future should the need arise. Some examples of issues related to benefits are included as an annex to this paper.

## **Transition – Post Further Education**

There is in general a decreasing number of opportunities available for young people with special educational needs in the areas of work based learning/training, employment and day care provision.

Earlier, it was suggested that there needs to a fundamental review of the balance of the overall current funding allocation, with more emphasis being placed on funding aimed at improving longer-term positive outcomes such as the take-up of employment / economic activity after education and training. A mixed economy of provision is required.

Funding needs to be targeted in a number of ways and the following areas are worthy of consideration:

- Concerted awareness raising amongst employers of the whole area of SEN and the advantages of employing young people with SEN;
- Financial incentives to employers to provide sustainable employment opportunities for young people with special needs and also to provide work placements, including transitional one to one support/back-up;
- Financial incentives for young people and their families to enter the work training route;
- Exploration and cost benefit analysis of subsidized employment which could be cheaper for the country than a life spent on benefits, and much more satisfying for the individual concerned;
- Raising aspirations of parents in relation to the potential of their children;
- Statutory funding for sheltered "Supported Employment" options where, in the current non-statutory situation, planning is extremely difficult;
- Increased funding for transition support such as Job Coaching Programmes which should be appropriately long term (a way of investing to save).

In conclusion, Careers Wales is highly committed to providing high quality services to young people with SEN and to working in partnership to benefit these clients. We look forward as an organisation

to working with the Assembly and other partners to help address, and hopefully resolve, issues raised in this report and in the review as a whole.

## **Annex**

### Examples of Benefit Issues for Young People Considering the Work Based Learning Route

If a young person claimed Incapacity Benefit and Income Support and wanted to access training opportunities, they would lose both of these benefits and receive £45 per week. In most cases the disability benefits would be greater than £45 and the young person would therefore be at a disadvantage financially. A person may be able to top up their allowance if they are also in receipt of Disability Living Allowance. Even if this happened they would only receive the same amount as they received for staying at home.

The 2 year linking rule applies to the training route. This means that if a young person is eligible for Incapacity Benefit but chooses to enter training, they can return to their benefit if they finish within two years because of their disability and are deemed as incapable of work the day they finish. Obviously parents and young people often see this as a risk that they are not prepared to take. Many parents feel that they have had to battle to access disability benefits and will quote examples of other people who tried to work and then lost their benefits and couldn't get them back.

A Careers Wales adviser interviewed a young person last year who lived independently. He was in receipt of Incapacity Benefit and Income Support. He wanted to go on the Army preparation course to see if he would be suited to the Army – he was nearing the time where he would be eligible from a medical point of view and wanted to gain experience. The adviser contacted JobcentrePlus on his behalf to check the implications for his benefits. It transpired that he would be at least £20 worse off by going on training. The option of attending the training without payment was also explored but this wasn't possible. He was living on his own and couldn't afford to lose that much money and, as a result, he stayed at home and did nothing.