

Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee

ELLS(2) 12-06 (p8)

Date: 20 September 2006

Venue: Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Title: University of Birmingham, evidence to the SEN review, part 3 transitions – research into the experiences of disabled students and their families.

1.0 Purpose:

1.1 The University of Birmingham has been invited to submit written evidence to the Committee's SEN review part 3. The findings from their DRC-funded projects, informed by wider work in Wales, have relevance for three aspects of the Committee's remit, specifically:

- Review of the transition arrangements for post-16 students with special educational needs between secondary education and further/higher education or training opportunities including the Independent Living Skills Programme; identify examples of good practice
- Review of the process of Transition Planning from school to adult life as documented in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and the effectiveness of multi agency working arrangements,
- Investigation of partnerships and collaborative planning for transition between relevant public sector organisations (in training, employment, careers and health), and with charitable and voluntary agencies,

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are invited to note the content of this paper as part of the SEN review.

3.0 Background

3.1 Professor Ann Lewis and colleagues at the University of Birmingham presented a background to their research into the experiences of disabled students and their families, at the Equality of

Opportunity Committee on 14th June (paper EOC(2)05-06 (p2) annex). They were subsequently invited to submit evidence to the ELLS committee's SEN review.

4. Consideration

4.1 The following summaries extract relevant points in relation to the SEN review. They have been drawn from the studies referenced below (Lewis et al 2006a, 2006b, 2006c) as well as informed by discussions with, and evidence to WA ELL, from DRC colleagues in Wales (DRC Wales 2006).

4.2 Phase 1 (August 04- April 05)

Please note: full report available via DRC website

http://www.drc.org.uk/library/research/education/new_experiences_of_disabled_st.aspx

4.2.1 This research (pilot work for phase 2) included an e survey (157 respondents of whom 10 were from various regions across Wales), small group discussion (N=8) with students attending a specialist further education college (with a national recruitment) plus case study work with 29 young people (11 of whom were at a post school transition phase; England only) and 8 families (spanning disability, age group and provision; England only).

4.2.2 Several points emerged from the dataset as a whole with probable relevance for post school transition issues in Wales:

- A disabled identity was not of prime importance to the young disabled people involved in our case studies. Some of them expressed views about disability and identity but none saw themselves as being first and foremost a disabled person. This suggests that approaches to transition for such young people are best seen in the context of optimum approaches for all young people.
- The desire for independence by young disabled people (possibly at odds with the views of their parents/ carers) needs to be recognised and facilitated. College, for both day and residential students, offered our young people opportunities to make decisions about both their learning and their social lives. These opportunities were most positive when the students received appropriate (but not overbearing) backing from enablers, support and care workers.
- Opportunities for achieving greater independence and positive educational outcomes for some disabled young people are provided by specialist colleges. A number of young people made this point, relating it directly to their own experiences, to insightful experiences about their own personal development, and to an argument in favour of moving beyond unhelpful debates about the relative merits of mainstream versus special provision.
- The post school transition was but a specific instance of many transitional experiences across a range of contexts (including for example, negotiating entry into a new social group). So

preparation for the post school transition might helpfully be referenced explicitly to the skills, knowledge and attitudes required and developed in these other contexts.

- There was a need to ascertain systematically what resources (including those from voluntary bodies) were available to disabled young people and their families at times of transition.
- Following from this, exemplars of good practice might be identified (eg through individual case studies) with a view to developing and implementing policy in this context.

4.3 Phase 2 survey of parents/ carers of disabled children and young people (August 05-April 06).

For background information please refer to oral and written evidence presented to EOC committee on 14 June, (EOC(2)05-06 (p2) annex).

4.3.1 Background: sub-sample re post school transition in Wales region surveyed

1. 1776 parents/carers responded to our GB-wide survey. This included 247 returns from the Wales region of which 120 were from parents/carers of young people in years 11, 12 or 13. Of these, nearly half (n=49, 41%) were parents/carers of young women and 69 (58%) parents /carers of young men. 11% (n=13) of these young people were receiving free school meals. The same number (n=13, 11%) had been excluded from school; a surprisingly high percentage which prompts questions about why this had occurred in these cohorts (and/ or it may reflect the parents' high motivation in returning the survey form). The area surveyed was selected, with advice from DRC colleagues in Wales, as including a good number of both Welsh and English medium schools as well as not being atypical of Wales as a whole.

2. Just over a quarter of these parents (n=32, 27%) described their child as having disabilities, special needs or general difficulties. This set of 32 was broken down into 19 (16%) who described their child as having disabilities, 23 (19%) who described their child as having special or additional needs (of whom 18 had a statement), and 29 (24%) who described their child as having general difficulties (e.g. emotional problems associated with family breakdown); the three sub-groups overlapping.

4.3.2 Post-school options including Welsh medium provision

1. All parents were asked about options being considered for their child after year 11/12/13 (as relevant) (Note- ticking all that applied).

2. Table 1: Post school options being considered (N=120) *

	Frequency (n)	Percent
Further education	46	38

6 th form college	26	22
English medium	21	18
School 6 th form	21	18
Employment + education	20	17
Higher education	19	16
Welsh medium	16	13
Employment	16	13
Specialist college	13	11
Other	7	6
Not thought yet	0	0
Total	120	100

* omits response categories ticked by 2 or fewer parents

3. The wide scatter of responses illustrates the complexity of post school transition with parents considering a wide range of options. Open answers gave further information about the types of courses being considered:

4. Table 2: types of course being considered (open question) (N=42)

	Frequency	Percent
A level	16	38

NVQ/BTEC	16	38
Degree	9	21
None of above	1	2
Total	42	100

5. A more specific question asked directly whether parents had a choice, with reference to various post school course options, between Welsh and English medium settings.

Nearly three quarters (n=66, 72% - valid responses only) agreed or strongly agreed that they had the choice between Welsh and English medium provision. Substantial minorities did not know (11%) or were neutral (11%) about this. Only one person strongly disagreed that this choice of provision was available. This apparently positive finding regarding access to Welsh medium education needs to be regarded with some caution however, given the findings of other commentators. In the 2004-2005 annual report on special schools (ESTYN, 2006) for example, Susan Lewis, HMCI of Education and Training in Wales, noted that 'The amount of Welsh or bilingual teaching in colleges of further education is still small and too few colleges offer enough courses in Welsh' (p.22). This shortfall was also noted in relation to adult community-based learning and work-based learning schemes.

6. Moving on to the groups of parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties; the large majority of those who answered the question concerning post school destinations gave FE college as an option being considered (n=15, 88%). Far fewer were considering employment alone (n=6) or combined with education (n=7).

7. In response to a question at our oral presentation to the EOC committee (14 June 2006) we have scrutinised Welsh medium considerations with reference to these post school transition groups. Note that Welsh medium provision (shown in bold in Table 1 above) was a consideration for a significant minority of the parents overall.

8. Looking only at parents of children with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties in our Wales region and only those with children in years 11,12 or 13, numbers are inevitably small (n=32). However only one of these parents cited Welsh medium provision as being a consideration in post school options for their child.

4.3.4 Post school options- choice and information

1. All parents were asked whether they felt they had sufficient information on which to decide about their child's post school options. The majority of parents felt they had sufficient information (n=16, 67% of parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties and n=55, 65% of

other parents). Interestingly, parents of children with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties were more likely than other parents to strongly agree that this was the case. However 6 parents (24%) of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties disagreed with this; reflecting a numerically small but strong set of negative responses concerning adequacy of information. A large minority of other parents (n=19, 22%) gave a neutral response to this question.

2. A further question invited a 5 point response rating to the statement 'We/I am able to choose what to do next'. Again, the overall response was positive with most (n=18, 72% of parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties and n=66, 80% of other parents agreeing or strongly agreeing).

3. Similarly, asked whether the child went to the type of the school the parent desired, the overwhelming majority (n=107, 90%) affirmed this. Eleven parents (9%; 4 parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties and 7 other parents) said that this was not the case. Open responses clarified the reasons for dissatisfaction here and varied widely encompassing finance (1 parent), lack of choice (2 parents), inappropriate facilities (3 parents) and type of school (5 parents).

4.3.5 Satisfaction with schools by parents of young people in Years 11,12 and 13

1. As noted in our main report, there were generally very high levels of satisfaction with schools. However parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties tended to be slightly less satisfied with the school than were other parents. This showed up across a range of indices including ratings in relation to:

- how settled the child felt in school (84% of parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties agreed that the child felt settled in school compared with 95% of other parents holding this view).
- the child was making good progress (75% of parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties agreed that the child was making good progress compared with 89% of other parents holding this view).
- being satisfied with the way the school treated their child (66% of parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties were satisfied with the way the school treated their child compared with 83% of other parents holding this view).

but in relation to the child looking forward to going to school:

- 66% of parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties agreed that the child looked forward to going to school compared with 65% of other parents holding this view.

Only parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties were asked for a rating of how well the school was doing in helping their child. Nearly two thirds (n=20, 63%) of these parents

felt that the school was doing well in helping their child in the pre/post school transition years. While six parents (19%) disagreed that this was so. Interestingly, 11 parents (34%) had asked the school to make a change in order to help the child with their difficulties. Cross tabulation of responses from the 26 parents who responded to both these sets of questions, suggests (pleasingly) that schools' responsiveness to change tended to be associated with satisfaction with the school.

4.3.6 Aspirations of parents of young people with general difficulties, disabilities and/or special needs (Years 11,12 and 13)

(Note-the questions referenced in this section were asked only of the parents of pupils with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties; not the total parent sample.)

1. Considering responses from only these parents of young people with disabilities, special needs or general difficulties in the post school transition years:

- over half felt that teachers encouraged their child to aim high (n=18, 56%)
- just over one third (n=12, 38%) thought that the child's difficulties stopped him/her doing well at school.
- virtually the same number (11 parents) thought that these difficulties prevented the child from learning in school
- most of these parents (n=17, 53%) disagreed that the child's difficulties stopped him /her taking part in extra-curricular activities run by the school
- just over one third (n=12, 38%) thought that the child's difficulties would prevent the child from getting a good job although 8 parents disagreed that this was the case.
- most disagreed that the child's difficulties would prevent the child from continuing in education (n=13, 41%)

2. These data suggest that in general this parent group had high aspirations for their children although a substantial minority were more pessimistic. Further research within Wales is needed to clarify whether there are systematic associations with, for example, school placement (by type or region etc) or the nature of the child's difficulties. Reports and systematic data from key bodies such as Estyn may shed light on likely associations.

4.4 Phase 2: Experiences of disabled children and young people - Case studies

1. Our case studies included 12 pupils in Wales (Welsh medium school) of whom six were near, or at, post school transition phases (three in mainstream schools, years 11-12; and three in a special school, years 10-12). Their additional needs spanned dyslexia, MLD, SLD, a degenerative disorder and behavioural difficulties. For two of these young people, their parents were also interviewed as part of the case studies. The case studies also included school-based observations as well as discussion with

the young person's teachers/ support workers.

2. These case studies supplemented the parent survey data summarised above and provide further insights concerning post school transition issues for these young people. We report this material only briefly here as at the time of writing our final report on the case studies has not been submitted to the funder (the DRC).

3. Several pertinent themes in the context of this report recurred in these case studies:

a. Communication. These young people talked of the importance of being trusted and kept informed about what was happening, what the choices were and the repercussions of these choices. Parents, caught in a wider web of communications, referred to the complex network of communications in which they were involved as parents of a disabled child.

b. Support. Knowing who was available for support at times of post school transition was important to these young people. Families recurred as the most significant source of support but they were not the sole source of information and advice. Friends featured prominently and were preferred to adult support. Two of these six young people explicitly mentioned, positively, support from Careers Wales. Less directly, support was also provided through having known (or being themselves) role models to other disabled young people who were anticipating post school opportunities and setting aspirations. This pointed to recognition of disability but only as one feature of who they were. These various layers of valued support point to the need for a range of explicitly complementary support mechanisms meshing coherently with those accessed by parents at post school transition.

c. Disabled identity. None of these young people conveyed a strong sense of disability being a centrally defining aspect of their identities and hence post school opportunities. They accepted their disabilities, condition or special needs phlegmatically and opportunities were not seen as intrinsically more limited for them because of their disabilities. Several described others, but not themselves, as being disabled.

There was ambivalence about the public face of disability which might be disliked or seen as irrelevant (e.g. having to record their disability on formal forms). However there was also a recognition that such status could be beneficial (e.g. receiving free transport; benefiting from Welsh medium lessons, perceived to be both easier than English for dyslexics and better supported because less in demand; and receiving preferential treatment in relation to university applications 'because the university's going to get extra money (for having disabled students)').

d. Independence and access concerns. One young person mentioned implied anxieties and /or irritation about access with reference to examples of when disability access strategies had been flouted. These are important because they are, or imply, a threat to desired independence. Such limits to access and hence independence included disabled parking spaces taken by non-disabled drivers; a personalised wheelchair being unavailable; wheelchair ramp access blocked; door handles and locks placed at too high a level; uncovered disabled parking areas; doors being too heavy to open; lifts broken, unavailable or unreliable; unreliable computer-based support; and inaccessible disabled toilets. These related to past/ current situations but their vivid, and unprompted, recall implied latent

concerns about such issues in relation to transition to unknown contexts.

4.5 Phase 2: Experiences of disabled children and young people - advisory group work

4.5.1 Young people in Wales contributed to work of the project's advisory group. This group advised the research team throughout the project and submitted its own report to the Disability Rights Commission (Lewis et al 2006c). The group, included a core group of disabled adults with experience of all phases of mainstream and specialist (special school/college) educational provision. The work of this group was complemented by advisory contributions from disabled young people in Scotland and Wales. These contributions were facilitated through voluntary sector organisations working in the field of disability advocacy and support.

4.5.2 In Wales, the link organisation was the Wales Network for Young Disabled People, an advocacy group working across Wales with support from Children in Wales and the Disability Rights Commission (Cardiff). One of the researchers was able to meet over 40 young people, including visitors from Scotland, at one of their regular residential conferences held at the Stackpole Centre, Pembrokeshire and to listen to their views on education, and in particular their accounts of school and further education college provision.

4.5.3 Some of the young people identified good practice in terms of interesting and good quality learning experiences. These were considered to be successful because of committed and interested teachers/tutors, but also because of supportive friends. Educational transitions were highlighted as problematic in instances where a change of provision (eg from school to college) was not carefully planned. This led to bullying or to joining courses that were not well matched to individual needs. More successful transitions were also identified by some young people who felt that attending college gave them new opportunities, and encouraged greater independence. Post-school and post-college transitions that lead to the 'adult world' of employment, supported living and training, were identified as particularly difficult and characterised by a distinct lack of opportunity. Too often it seemed young people had to rely on the support of their families to help them participate in any aspect of adult activity.

4.5.4 More positively, advocacy and support organisations who are involved in the Network for Young Disabled People make a significant contribution to service provision that enables young disabled people to make successful transitions from formal education to adulthood. Furthermore, these organisations clearly 'house' significant experience and expertise in the field of transition and this could be capitalised on by statutory service providers. Finally, member organisations of the Network for Young Disabled People, and the network itself exemplify how young disabled people can participate fully in all aspect of advocacy and self-advocacy work, and this kind of authentic participation is increasingly being regarded as central to the planning of educational transitions (Disability Rights Commission 2006).

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 We draw some cautious conclusions given both the small numbers involved (Wales post school

transition groups only) within a much wider study and that this focal group has been extracted for the WA ELL committee 'post hoc'.

- Young people with disabilities or special needs in Wales and their parents had reasonably high expectations about post school options. However, importantly, there was an anticipation, by a large minority of the parents, that their child's disabilities or special needs would adversely affect employment opportunities.
- Given this, models of peers or slightly older disabled young people in Wales who have had very positive experiences are likely to be particularly powerful. Dissemination of these across a range of media and audiences is vital.
- There is a need for a clear and systematic audit of (potentially very diverse) options available to individual young people post school and for this information to be communicated appropriately to these young people and their parents. There is potential experience and expertise already in place (e.g. young people and advocacy/support organisations) to support young people through the transition process which needs to be included in such an audit and good practice built upon.
- Autonomy and independence, but not disability identities, were prime motivators and concerns for young people in Wales with disabilities or special needs.
- We found no strong evidence that Welsh language provision was generally a major concern or consideration in relation to post school options for young people with disabilities or special needs. However it may have been a factor 'further down the line' once other priorities had been addressed (e.g. provision required within a certain travelling distance).

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7.0 References

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