ENABLE Scotland

Introduction

ENABLE Scotland is the largest voluntary organisation in Scotland of and for children and adults who have learning disabilities and their families. We have a strong voluntary network with around 4000 members in 46 local branches as well as 500 national members throughout Scotland. Around a third of our members have a learning disability. ENABLE Scotland campaigns to improve the lives of people who have learning disabilities and their families and carers.

ENABLE Scotland operates a range of initiatives which support young people with learning disabilities to work, campaign and participate in community life. These include a number of training and employment projects including government funded programmes such as Workstep, Work Preparation and Get Ready for Work and Supported Employment programmes in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde. We also have active partnerships with schools and further education colleges which support young people to gain work experience and make successful transitions.

In addition we support young people to develop self-advocacy skills and to be consulted about policy developments at a local and national level that affect their lives. We believe that young people should have the opportunity to lead ordinary lives, to develop friendships and natural networks of support. To facilitate this in local communities we have developed a number of ENABLElink projects across Scotland which support young people to access leisure and social opportunities and build capacity in their communities to include young people with learning disabilities on an on-going basis.

This response is based on our experience of delivering transition programmes for young people who have learning disabilities in schools across 11 Local Authority areas in Scotland, and our work in partnership with the Further Education sector.

Responses to Consultation Questions

ENABLE Scotland has shown that with support for transition, Further Education can be an effective way for people with learning disabilities to progress into employment. In 2009 we launched the Transitions to Employment project with five partner colleges, in order to mitigate the ‘revolving door’ that impacted upon many students with learning disabilities. As colleges were unable to access or deliver effective transition, students with learning disabilities accessed college for several academic terms and became over-reliant on the support they got there.
Our Transition to Employment programme, now in its fourth year, has been hugely successful and with the New College Learning Programme launched by Skills Development Scotland in 2012, we were able to share our learning with two new colleges in Fife and Glasgow.

We broadly support the Scottish Government changes in further education, believing that programmes focussed on employability outcomes and transition will enable colleges to focus their resources more effectively to support more people into work. We would, however, like to reiterate our stance that colleges are community resources and consideration should be given to actively include people with learning disabilities within these programmes.

With regard the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill, we would like to proffer the following comments. We have limited our comments to those aspects of the bill that will have a direct impact on the people we support in the Further Education sector:

10. Regional strategic bodies: functions

23D (1) Regional Strategic Bodies should make provision for colleges to provide fundable further and higher education to people with learning disabilities. The changes to the funding structure may mean that a considerable number of people may lose their place at college. In particular a lack of travel support may prevent people from attending the college course of their choice. Colleges that are reducing the number of places available should be required to produce a report on the impact this will have on students who have disabilities.

23E (2) The monitoring and assessment of performance and quality should recognise work experience that is vocationally focussed and delivered in a real working environment outwith the college, and should measure defined outputs in terms of employment gained and employment sustained. There are sophisticated systems already in place for training providers and others to track leaver destinations from their programmes. There is no reason why colleges cannot carry out a similar process that will demonstrate if their provision is achieving its intended objectives.

23J (1) Regional Strategic Bodies should be encouraged to collaborate with local specialist providers in order to exercise its functions with regard to student support and employability. Consideration should be given to specific funding that allows colleges to successfully partner and remunerate external training partners in order to fulfil the best outcome for the student. Experience tells us that funding that is intended to improve the employment prospects of students is too often used in ways that are inappropriate and do not achieve this. Colleges who wish to retain the employability function ‘in-house’ should be required to demonstrate their past experience of achieving job outcomes for their students and the results that their intended approach is likely to produce.
11. Regional Boards: constitution

23M (4) Regional Strategic Bodies should actively seek to engage students from disadvantaged groups to be nominated and appointed as student members on strategic boards. Organisations such as ENABLE Scotland can support this.

Conclusion
We are hopeful that the changes proposed in the Bill will enable more people who have learning disabilities to prepare for a life that includes real participation and economic activity in their local community. In particular the changes to the Further Education sector represent an opportunity to change the current offer for people who have learning disabilities and to arrive at a model of provision which allows people to use the skills and talents they possess to achieve a life of paid work. We are keen to work with partners in government and the education sector to make this a reality for everyone who wants to work.