



“The day centres are inadequate. They lead to segregation and the creation of “eternal children”. Young people with special needs need more opportunities in post-school education and training (The recommendation is) for a person-centred approach rather than a building-based “specialist” service.”

[Scottish Human Services].



“The provision is particularly inappropriate for people with complex learning difficulties. More coherence from 16-25 and the sole involvement and commitment of the Social Work Department is required.”

[Association of Directors of Education in Scotland].

“People with more severe, complex and continuing needs, in particular those with severe communication difficulties, are under-represented. As a result, there is a danger that policy development on post-school transition is formulated on the basis of a rather narrow set of needs, but applied to all.”

[Sense Scotland]

9 Improving Provision

Enhancing Learning Opportunities for Young People in Resource Centres

The Issue

9.1 In setting out our vision of how Inclusiveness would work in practice we have made a number of proposals and recommendations for the development of an Inclusive approach in further education and training. In line with our remit, many of the recommendations are geared towards helping young people to improve their skills and capabilities to obtain, and sustain, employment. In Chapter 13 we discuss a range of employment opportunities that may open up access to employment for many young people who require additional support. However, if we accept that, for some young people, employment is less likely to be a future option - at least in the early years after leaving school - it opens up a debate about the nature and purpose of post-school learning.

9.2 The issue is how, within a culture of Inclusiveness, we can recognise and acknowledge that for some young people the purpose of post-school learning is to improve the quality of life experience; and enhance the range of post-school learning opportunities to satisfy those continuing learning needs.

The Committee's View

9.3 There are learning opportunities in colleges for young people who require a high level of additional support through special programmes or extended learning support although such opportunities are not available to all young people. We are also aware that there are training providers who are funded through the European Social Fund or by Social Work Departments to offer training designed to help the individual to achieve a better quality of life experience. Such providers are mainly in the voluntary sector, e.g. Capability Scotland, The Scottish Association for Mental Health and the Head Injury Trust for Scotland. A number of young people, however, on

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leaving school or college will attend a Resource Centre where their social support and health needs can be met. Resource Centres provide a base for day activities for adults with a learning disability and are usually managed by Social Work Departments.

9.4 The Committee has received strong representations from parents and parents' groups, and from a number of organisations, about the current lack of continuing learning opportunities for young people in Resource Centres. Some of these young people may have profound learning disabilities, multiple disabilities or emotional or behavioural problems. Others will have less complex needs but may be attending a Resource Centre with a view to receiving training, perhaps following a course at a further education college. The evidence given to the Committee strongly suggests that Resource Centres do not fully meet the learning needs and aspirations of this group of young people. There is also evidence that many young people who enter Resource Centres in their late teens or early 20s spend most of their adult life in that setting. Although they may have experience of a range of training, with a view to future employment, the majority of people never achieve employment.

9.5 There is a range of views about the current and future purpose of Resource Centres. Many Centres organise attendance at colleges, often on a part-time basis, or provide other training but our evidence suggests that the quality of experience varies considerably. Although there is scope to do so, community care plans rarely detail how the education and learning needs of young people will be met. There is now a widely held view that Resource Centres are not designed or funded to meet the continuing learning needs of young people. The provision of social, recreation, social work support and health care may be seen as the main objectives. There is also a view that Social Work Departments, may not be the appropriate body to have responsibility for education and training. These are not areas within the Social Work Departments' core responsibilities and there may be limited knowledge of learning opportunities.

9.6 There are concerns that the current range of learning opportunities available in many Resource Centres limits the potential of young people. One example of good practice is the Opportunities for Training Towards Independence (OFTTI) project at Lews Castle College where people with profound and complex needs have been supported so that they can participate in college learning. The OFTTI project works specifically with people who were formerly in a Resource Centre. The Social Work Department, supported by the European Social Fund, funds the project but the college delivers the education. Many of the students have made considerable progress. Notably, college staff themselves acknowledge that they have benefited from the experience despite initial reservations about how they and the students would cope with demands for adaptations to teaching and learning styles. We are also aware of the experience of a 3 year SOEID funded project at Telford College in which the college worked with the social work department and the health board to deliver education provision for young people with severe and complex disabilities.

Learning Disabilities Review

9.7 The Scottish Executive Social Work Services Group, in conjunction with the Department of Health, is taking forward a review of social and health care for adults and children with learning disabilities. Their remit recognises the importance of accessing housing and education and employment opportunities. The Learning Disabilities Review is also looking at the nature of day activities and has had a number of representations on this point. A range of views has been offered about different aspects of the service provided by Resource Centres but concerns about learning opportunities have also emerged from that consultation.

Continuing Learning Opportunities

9.8 The wider range of social support and health care offered by Resource Centres falls outwith the Committee's remit. However, in the context of an overall Inclusiveness approach, we have considered continuing learning opportunities for young people who are attending Resource Centres, and in particular, those who may have difficulty in pursuing learning because of profound and complex needs. Some of the evidence that we have received suggests that there may be specific learning needs for young people in the post-school period when the young people themselves are still developing and maturing. We are aware that, as in the example of the people being helped by the OFTI project, the development of the skills of independent living and employability may come later. The ECHO (Employment Challenges and Opportunities) and PEP (Partnership Employment Projects) projects in North Lanarkshire also show that people can be helped to move from Resource Centres to employment. Using a supported employment model (vocational profile, job matching, job negotiation, on the job coaching) a number of people have entered employment. In addition to the benefits of increased self-esteem, opportunities for personal growth and disposable income for the individual, there are significant benefits for the parents/carers. These projects require an intensive level of time and support but there is now evidence that the costs associated with job finding and coaching are less than the cost of maintaining a place in a Resource Centre.

9.9 We believe that consideration should be given to promoting and enhancing continuing learning opportunities in the setting of a Resource Centre. It is our view that all the agencies – FE and training, voluntary sector, Social Work – who design and deliver post-school provision for young people with additional support needs should review and examine, as a matter of priority, the continuing learning opportunities available in Resource Centres. Under the current funding and management arrangements, we accept that it may not be possible for staff to provide "in-house" an appropriate range of learning opportunities. This means that there is scope for joint working with colleges and training providers to review existing arrangements and develop more innovative approaches. There are examples of good practice to build on, such as the OFTI project. **We therefore recommend that Social Work Departments should work with other agencies to refocus and re-orientate Resource Centre provision to give a higher priority to addressing the continuing learning needs of young people, either in the Centre or through attendance at a college or training provider.**

9.10 We have also considered the role of the further education and training sectors. "Opportunities for Everyone", the Further Education Strategic Framework published in March 1999, specifically highlighted the function of colleges to provide general education for the local community and it recommends that this role should be strengthened. The Framework emphasised the need for close collaboration with community education. This should be clearly set out by local authorities in the development of their Community Learning strategies as called for in the SOEID Circular 4/99 "Communities – Change through Learning". If further education colleges were to take a more pro-active role in providing post school education for young people with a high level of support needs it would fit with this new strategic direction. The FE sector has also been given funding specifically to pursue the widening of access to under represented groups. In line with these objectives, **we recommend that the SFEFC should examine the case for enhancing and extending the range of continuing learning opportunities in colleges to meet the needs of young people who have a high level of learning and support needs.** There should be flexibility in offering the best learning environment. There is scope for staff from colleges to deliver learning in the Resource Centres as well as attendance at college. This already happens in a number of areas. The flexibility in learning provision would have to be matched by flexibility in timetabling and in the transport and personal care arrangements or other support.

9.11 There may also be scope for further extension of the learning opportunities available from training providers who offer life skills programmes (including confidence building and independent living skills). We have discussed elsewhere in the report the enhanced assessment programmes which are designed to help young people with the most disordered lifestyles to build up a range of personal, social and life skills. It seems possible that this type of training could benefit young people who experience difficulty in taking their part in society because of learning disabilities, mental health problems and emotional and behavioural problems.

9.12 One of the main factors to be taken into account in examining the options for future provision is the length of time a young person may need to spend in post-school further education or training. Some young people may require a period of years before they attain a level of competence and capability in dealing with the "adult " world, or perhaps developing skills suitable for employment. What is needed to support this kind of provision is a systematic approach to setting learning goals and measuring progress. In Chapter 7 we recommended that, for young people with a high level of support need, there should be an assessment, action planning and review system which takes into account the likelihood of a slow rate of progress in small stages. We believe that this system could apply to young people who have learning disabilities, mental health problems, or emotional or behavioural problems.

9.13 In Chapter 2, the Committee set out its view that a continuum of learning opportunities was an essential part of Inclusiveness. This should apply equally to young people whose learning needs in the immediate post-school years are more related to "general" life skills than to the acquisition of vocational skills and qualifications. If Inclusiveness is to be put into practice, the lead agencies must give consideration to the nature, purpose and scope of learning opportunities

which should be available to **all** young people. **We, therefore, recommend that the Implementing Inclusiveness networks at national and local level should give specific consideration to developing and co-ordinating enhanced learning and support opportunities for young people with a high level of support needs arising from disabilities, including young people in Resource Centres.**

Funding

9.14 We are fully aware that there would be some resource implications in enhancing the nature and scope of continuing learning opportunities. The Social Work Department already funds learning provision in Resource Centres and the FE sector has funding for widening access. Elsewhere in the report we are recommending a review of the arrangements for Group 18 and Extended Learning Support which are the principal methods of funding courses for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in further education. The challenge is for SFEFC, the Scottish Executive and local authorities to develop new funding arrangements which make more effective use of these existing resources. This may be an example of how to promote joint or pooled funding to ensure that the needs of the individual are met. The possibility of legislation for pooled budgets between Health and Social Work was raised in the "Aiming for Excellence" White Paper and may offer a way to address this issue.

9.15 The ideas which we have outlined would require further consideration by all the agencies, particularly Social Work Departments and education and training providers. In Chapter 4 we have proposed that the key task for the Area Strategy Groups should be to ensure that all young people in the area receive the learning and support provision that they need. This should apply no less to young people who are attending Resource Centres, including those with more profound and complex needs. **We, therefore, recommend that the Area Strategy Groups should pay specific attention to developing and co-ordinating enhanced learning and support opportunities for this group of young people.**

9.16 We have also discussed another approach to developing a more adequate and appropriate range of continuing learning opportunities. We wish to propose that the National Action Group set up a challenge fund to support and pilot work on ways of improving access to continuing learning for people who have high levels of support needs. Bids into a challenge fund would have to demonstrate that they were based on good practice and ideally that they were linked to multi-agency planning groups who were promoting some form of integrated funding. In the light of the work currently underway by the Learning Disabilities Review, we would wish them to review this proposal before any final recommendation is made.

Summary of Recommendations

The Committee recommends that:

- Social Work Departments should work with other agencies to refocus and re-orientate Resource Centre provision to give a higher priority to addressing the continuing learning needs of young people, either in the Centre or through attendance at a college or training provider. (Paragraph 9.9);
- the SFEFC should examine the case for enhancing and extending the range of continuing learning opportunities in colleges to meet the needs of young people who have a high level of learning and support needs. (Paragraph 9.10);
- the Implementing Inclusiveness Network at national and local level should give specific consideration to developing and co-ordinating enhanced learning and support opportunities for young people with a high level of support needs arising from disabilities, and including young people in Resource Centres. (Paragraph 9.13);
- the Area Strategy Groups should pay specific attention to developing and co-ordinating enhanced learning and support opportunities for this group of young people. (Paragraph 9.15).

