



**Response of the Ulster Teachers' Union
on the Draft Framework for Specialist Provision in
Mainstream Schools.**

The Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation on the Draft Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools. The UTU represents approximately 6,500 members of the teaching profession including Principals, Vice-Principals, Teachers and Trainee Teachers. UTU members are employed across all the sectors in nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools and support service.

1. Name/Organisation/School.

Ulster Teachers' Union.

- 2. Please select the category that best describes you as a respondent (please choose one option only):**

Other: Trade Union

- 3. Please indicate the local government district area to which your response refers (you may choose more than one):**

General response

- 4. Please select the category which best represents your sectoral interest:**

Other, the UTU represents many educational sectors.

- 5. Please select the category which best represents your interest:**

Other, the UTU represents many categories mentioned here.

Comments

The Ulster Teachers' Union can generally see this draft as a positive way forward for provision for SEN in mainstream schools. We are also supportive that specialism provision should be piloted initially before being rolled out in the future.

There is a clear need for provision, and this is contained in the document with a vision and rationale detailed. The UTU would note that the Primary Schools involved in the pilot are three schools in Belfast and one in Lisburn. It would have been welcomed if this could have been planned to allow some schools in the North West, North East or West of the province to have been involved.

The Post-Primary schools appear to have been distributed across the province in a slightly more equitable manner.

The UTU also would like to note that it appears schools involved in the pilot are all new builds and question why they have been chosen because of this. There are many schools often in the primary sector where accommodation could have been provided and so they could have been involved in this pilot scheme.

We would also like to point out that we require highly skilled professionals able to provide for the needs of the children. Urgent upskilling of staff will be required and a substantial investment both financially and in time will be required to ensure that the strategies and provision in this document can be provided.

The Ulster Teachers' Union would like to note that our trainee teachers must be prepared with a broad base of knowledge and a toolbox of available techniques so when meeting pupils with identified needs they can be given the support in the classroom. It is also essential that experienced and sufficiently upskilled staff should provide these roles. Reference needed – is it only PGCE at QUB / practical experience of working with SEN / optional – compulsory classes for SEN – every teacher is a teacher of SEN – prepared.

We wish to note that the broad based and at times provision that this document sets out will only be achieved when the specialist provision is adequately resourced across all mainstream schools.

One concern that has been raised by UTU members is that at times pupils are inappropriately placed in mainstream. We recognise and understand that a mainstream setting is often a choice parents wish for their child. It will be important that the voice of the professional is adequately heard when decisions are being made on placements. It is important that children are placed in appropriate educational settings and the Education Authority must also ensure that places in specialist settings are available. Pupils must not be forced into mainstream schools because of distance to a specialist unit, rather in seeking to secure fully appropriate educational provision for all learners which will enable each individual to reach their potential—both those with SEN and their typically developing peers. UTU is mindful to give due consideration to the appropriate education of all children and placing in a pupil in the wrong setting may have an impact on other children. It is important that no child's learning is restricted. There must be an encouragement to have the right setting for

the child at that time, with this in mind children may move from mainstream to special school provision or vice versa as the needs of the child changes with time. The SEND Act (2016) was a chance to raise the educational opportunities for pupils however there are too many and often vast gaps in the system at present.

12. Do you agree that the current governance arrangements for specialist provision meet the needs of pupils of an area?

The UTU wish to note that we need governors to champion all pupils and especially those with SEN. Although training has been provided in recent years it will be important that this can continue, ensuring governors are aware and supported in fullfilling their duties.

14. Do you agree that the draft framework explains why change is required to:

Meet the increasing demand for places in specialist provision in mainstream schools?

The need for change is clear. The system we have at present is not fit for purpose.

16 Do you agree that the draft framework explains why change is required to: Address the pressure on special schools due to the lack of specialist provision?

The UTU are alarmed with regards to the state of the sector at present. The pressure across our special schools must be addressed urgently. Simply moving pupils from our special schools to ones with specialist provision must be done in the best interests of the child and not simply to alleviate the pressure on one underfunded and highly stretched sector. This would simply hide the problems and would fail our young people both those with the need and also those in mainstream who could have their education impacted as a result of the mainstream school having to divert resources and support to children who should not be in that school.

18. Do you agree that the draft framework explains why change is required to: Provide equity and consistency in the type of provision offered across the region?

The UTU welcome this statement and it is a position we very much would like to see, pupils of any ability accessing mainstream school life. We do note that the pilot is certainly not going to provide this at this time. The pilot should have had a broader scope geographically especially regarding the primary schools involved.

24. Do you agree that the draft framework clearly outlines the EA's vision for specialist provision: Close to where children live?

We are undecided. Unless extra finance, staffing and resources are provided across the sectors this will not be possible. Although a child lives close to a school this may not be the best provision for a child.

41. Do you agree that the pilot paper explains why change is required?

The Ulster Teachers' Union are under no illusion to why change is required. The sector has been underfunded and poorly managed over recent years.

45. Do you agree that establishing, closing or changing specialist provision in mainstream schools should no longer be seen as a significant change and therefore should not require a development proposal?

The Ulster Teachers' Union disagree with this. Change such as indicated should still require a development proposal.

47. Do you agree that an annual published plan of arrangement for SEN, in line with requirements under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) NI Act (2016), offers a more agile process to establish, close or change specialist provision in mainstream schools?

The UTU broadly welcome this change. We have at present a system that needs a huge overhaul and we need in place provision for SEN pupils.

49. Do you agree with the pilot objectives: To develop a new more streamlined and efficient process to establish, close or change specialist provision in mainstream schools.

We broadly support this point in the pilot objectives indicated.

55. Do you agree with the criteria used by the EA to identify schools: Existing temporary provisions established for more than four years, with proven demand and delivery of a high quality specialist provision in a mainstream setting.

The UTU welcome the increase in provision for children with SEN. While there are 1,096 mainstream schools in Northern Ireland, only 93 schools have approved specialist provisions. Indeed, it is acknowledged in this report that regionally, this represents less than 10% of mainstream schools. Demand across the province is there and can only be met with the increased provision, appropriate accommodation, financial support, staffing and the adequate resources to meet the challenges that years of inadequate funding has caused.

57. Do you agree with the criteria used by the EA to identify schools: Major capital announcements, with existing provision, which provide the opportunity for enhanced provision in modern purpose-built accommodation.

We disagree with this statement. If we are going to have to wait for major capital announcement to provide enhance provision this will disadvantage very many pupils across the province. A major financial package is needed where the needs of pupils are greatest. Waiting is not an option. The area of Special Educational Needs has been under resourced and under financed for too long.

61. Please use the space below to comment further on the new process to facilitate the establishment, closure or change of specialist provision in mainstream schools in an efficient and expedient manner without the requirement for a Development Proposal but taking account of the EA's Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools.

The statutory Development Proposal requiring any significant changes to provision is enshrined under Article 14(1-9) of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986. It would be the UTU position that this should not be removed. Even though the consultation sets out how this could be achieved under the SEND NI Act (2016) and it seeks to set up a new and robust framework we would have concerns. We agree that the time delays at the moment on delivering a service to children can be damaging. Resources must be increased to ensure that no matter what system is in place stakeholders have a chance to inform and influence the decision-making process to ensure that when processes are in place they meet the needs of all involved.

The Ulster Teachers' Union also have concerns about the Learning Support Co-Ordinator's role. Already we find that in some schools they are often overstretched in the many facets that their role contains. In small schools the LSC may find even more bureaucracy forced upon them.

Their role is to co-ordinate and the Education Authority must have support in place for them when it is required, we would feel that at the moment the capacity would not be in place for this.

Response from Ulster Teachers' Union via office@utu.edu

94 Malone Road, Belfast, BT9 5HP

028 90662216



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